



**15 November 2023**

<b>Title</b>	Strategic Transport Schemes Update
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To note the report for information
<b>Report status</b>	Public report
<b>Report author</b>	Chris Maddocks, Strategic Transport Manager
<b>Lead Councillor</b>	Cllr John Ennis, Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport
<b>Corporate priority</b>	Healthy Environment
<b>Recommendations</b>	The Committee is asked to: 1. Note the progress made on delivery of the current programme of strategic transport schemes as summarised in this report.

## **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the latest progress with the delivery of the programme of strategic transport schemes in Reading. This programme includes major enhancements to public transport and active travel facilities, aimed at encouraging more healthy lifestyles and helping to address the Climate Emergency.
- 1.2. The current programme includes the following schemes and initiatives:
  - Bus Service Improvement Plan Programme
  - South Reading Bus Rapid Transit
  - Reading West Station Upgrade
  - Tilehurst Station Upgrade
  - Shinfield Road Active Travel Scheme
  - Bath Road Active Travel Scheme
  - Active Travel Behavioural Change Programme
  - School Streets Programme

## **2. Policy Context**

- 2.1. The Council's current Local Transport Plan (LTP) sets the transport strategy for Reading up to 2026. Development of a new LTP, the Reading Transport Strategy 2040, has progressed with the core principles of the strategy linked to wider objectives including health and wellbeing, economic growth and social inequalities, improved air quality and the Climate Emergency. The strategic transport schemes included within this report are fully aligned with both the existing and new LTP, with the delivery of each individual scheme a key component of achieving the overall vision and objectives of the strategy.
- 2.2. The LTP sets the context and overarching vision for future transport provision in Reading, with sub-strategies providing more detailed implementation plans for specific topics. These form the basis for preparing funding proposals to deliver key elements of each sub-strategy, including the Bus Service Improvement Plan, Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan and the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

### 3. The Proposal

#### Bus Service Improvement Plan Programme

- 3.1. The Council adopted its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in October 2021, setting out plans to enhance services and encourage more people to travel by bus in Reading. The BSIP was fully aligned with the objectives of the National Bus Strategy 'Bus Back Better'. Following a thorough review and detailed discussions with officials from the Department for Transport (DfT), the Council was awarded £26.263m grant funding in January 2023, which was the third highest funding award (per head of population) in the country.
- 3.2. As required by Government, the Council subsequently developed an Enhanced Partnership (EP) agreement with all local bus operators; and convened an EP Board with the major operators to oversee the development and delivery of the BSIP programme. Essentially the EP agreement sets out our commitment to deliver, in partnership with the operators, the schemes that the Council has been awarded grant funding for from Government.
- 3.3. The BSIP programme includes a range of both capital and revenue measures, with the funding award consisting of £15.939m capital and £10.324m revenue grant funding. The key elements of the programme are set out below:

#### Capital schemes:

- Phase 5 of the South Reading BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) scheme.
- Programme of new bus lanes on key routes in the Borough.
- Improvements to passenger facilities at MereOak Park & Ride site.
- Package of town centre public transport enhancements, bus signal priority measures and improvements for passengers at bus stops.

#### Revenue initiatives:

- Introduction of a multi-operator fares discount scheme.
  - Programme of bus service enhancements including for Route 9, Buzz 42 and park & ride services.
  - Comms and engagement programme to publicise the enhancements delivered through the BSIP programme.
  - Development of initial proposals for future bus priority measures in the borough.
  - Management of the EP arrangements and programme delivery support.
- 3.4. Delivery of the BSIP programme commenced with the launch of the Reading All-Bus ticket discount scheme in March 2023. This sets a daily cap for travel within Reading to ensure no one pays more than a set fare for unlimited travel undertaken in a day. The offer includes travel on services operated by Reading Buses, Thames Travel, Arriva and Thames Valley Buses. In addition, tap-on tap-off contactless payment on all the main operators has been introduced from 1 November 2023, with an introductory offer of £3 for all-day travel until 31 December 2023 which is funded by the BSIP grant. The All-Bus ticket scheme has proved extremely popular to date, with over 730k tickets sold in the first 6 months of operation, saving residents in Reading over £500k in fares as a result. The all-day discount scheme also complements the Government's national £2 single fare scheme.
  - 3.5. Enhancements to bus services have been progressed, with the operation of Route 9 services awarded to Reading Buses in September 2023 following a competitive procurement process. This contract includes the provision of services between Whitley and Green Park Station to ensure local residents can fully benefit from the new station facility which was delivered by the Council and opened in May 2023. A procurement

process is currently underway for the provision of enhanced BUZZ 42 services that are currently fully funded by special ringfenced private sector contributions secured through the planning process. The BSIP funded enhancements will provide an improved service connecting the significant residential developments at Kenavon Drive, the town centre, new Rivermead leisure centre and the forthcoming secondary school on Richfield Avenue.

- 3.6. Development of the programme of capital schemes is being progressed, with detailed design completed and a competitive procurement process undertaken to appoint a contractor to deliver the next phase of works for the South Reading BRT scheme. An initial public consultation has been undertaken on the concept designs for the proposed programme of bus lanes for the Oxford Road (x2), Bath Road, Southampton Street and London Road (x2). Feedback from this consultation is being incorporated into the detailed designs prior to a statutory consultation being undertaken, which will ultimately inform the decision on whether to proceed with each scheme. In addition, design work for the passenger enhancements at Mere oak Park & Ride site is being undertaken and delivery of the programme of bus stop passenger enhancements is on-going.

#### South Reading Bus Rapid Transit

- 3.7. The South Reading Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) scheme is a series of bus priority measures on the A33 growth corridor, with the overall vision of creating a dedicated fast-track public transport priority route between Mere oak Park & Ride and Reading town centre. The current scheme which is being delivered in phases as external funding is secured, which in future has the potential to become a guided-bus, tram or autonomous shared vehicle system.
- 3.8. The first four phases of the scheme have been delivered with over £15m external funding secured from the Local Growth Fund and fettered developer contributions secured through the planning process. Phase 4 was constructed last year, which includes an outbound bus lane between Rose Kiln Lane and Lindisfarne Way (Kennet Island), and the upgrade of the traffic signals to an intelligent Microprocessor Optimised Vehicle Actuation (MOVA) method of control at the Bennet Road gyratory to improve traffic flows on this key corridor.
- 3.9. Funding for phase 5 of the scheme has been secured as part of the overall BSIP grant as set out above. This phase will link up existing outbound bus lanes delivered through previous phases through the construction of an additional lane over the River Kennet, between the junctions with Rose Kiln Lane (South) and Kennet Island. This will complete the outbound section of the scheme, which would enable future funding bids to focus on delivery of the remaining inbound sections, which could logically be split into four distinct phases depending on the level of funding available through individual funding opportunities. The future potential adaption of the scheme into a guided bus or tram system would require further investment in the necessary infrastructure and vehicles at that time.

#### Reading West Station Upgrade

- 3.10. A Masterplan setting out a vision for significant enhancements to Reading West Station and the wider interchange has been prepared by the Council, in partnership with GWR and Network Rail. This includes enhanced passenger facilities, security improvements and enhancements to both the Oxford Road and Tilehurst Road station entrances.
- 3.11. External funding of over £4.5m has been secured to deliver the first phase of the Masterplan works, which includes grant funding from the Local Growth Fund, developer contributions secured through the planning process and funding directly from Great Western Railway (GWR). The current phase of works includes provision of a new station building on the Oxford Road with associated interchange works, increased cycle parking and a new ticket barrier at the Tilehurst Road station entrance. The scheme will provide safety and security improvements at both entrances through enhanced CCTV coverage and lighting, which have been designed with input from the British Transport Police.

- 3.12. Construction of the highway alterations and interchange improvements on the Oxford Road to accommodate the new station building are complete and subsequently GWR's contractors took possession of the southern footway for construction of the new passenger building. Works for the new building are substantially complete by GWR and it is anticipated that the footway will be reopened and traffic management measures removed imminently, with the new station building opening once the railway industry sign-off process have been completed by GWR and Network Rail. The new entrance and gateline at the Tilehurst Road entrance has been completed and opened by GWR.
- 3.13. The current scheme includes passive provision for accessibility enhancements within the new station building, however Network Rail's position is that lifts cannot be delivered at the station until a full platform rebuild is undertaken to deliver the necessary minimum platform widths to meet accessibility requirements. Therefore, the Council will continue to work with railway partners including Network Rail to seek opportunities to secure funding for these key elements of the overall Masterplan for the station.

#### Tilehurst Station Upgrade

- 3.14. The Council is working with Network Rail and GWR to develop a series of proposals to upgrade passenger facilities at Tilehurst Station, and funding is being sought to develop an agreed Masterplan. This would include enhancements within the station and for the wider interchange, including improved access arrangements to/from the station.
- 3.15. Network Rail has secured £4m funding from Government for the first phase of works to deliver accessibility improvements through the installation of lifts at the station. They will be installed within the existing station footbridge which had been designed with passive provision for lifts. When complete, these works will provide step free access to all platforms at the station.
- 3.16. A prior notification application was submitted to the Council by Network Rail in May 2023 and subject to securing the necessary consents, it is anticipated that construction works will commence on-site by Network Rail's contractor in the new year.

#### Shinfield Road Active Travel Scheme

- 3.17. Delivery of the Council's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) is being undertaken in phases as external funding is secured. The Shinfield Road active travel scheme is a key element of this plan; which will provide segregated cycle facilities and pedestrian improvements on a key route between residential areas in south Reading, the University of Reading, Royal Berkshire Hospital and the town centre.
- 3.18. External funding of £1.4m has been secured to deliver the scheme, including grant funding from Active Travel England. An initial consultation on the concept designs for the scheme was undertaken in autumn 2021, which included a public drop-in event held at the University of Reading. Feedback from this consultation was incorporated into the final detailed designs and the statutory consultation on the required Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) to implement double yellow line parking restrictions along the route was approved by the Council's Traffic Management Sub-Committee in March 2022.
- 3.19. Construction of the scheme is being undertaken by the Council's in-house Highways team, with a degree of sub-contracting which is being managed by the Highways department. Construction works commenced at the University / Christchurch Green end of the route and works are due to be completed in the new year.

#### Bath Road Active Travel Scheme

- 3.20. The active travel scheme on Bath Road is another key element of the Council's LCWIP, which will provide a segregated cycle route and pedestrian improvements on this key route between residential areas in west Reading and the town centre.
- 3.21. External funding of £2.5m has been secured to deliver the scheme, including grant funding from Active Travel England. An initial consultation on the concept designs for the scheme was undertaken in summer 2022, which included a public drop-in event held at the Reading Association for the Blind on Carey Street. The detailed scheme designs have

been prepared to incorporate feedback received through this consultation, including elements of the scheme that require a TRO statutory consultation which was approved by the Council's Traffic Management Sub-Committee in March 2023.

- 3.22. A competitive procurement process is currently being undertaken to appoint a contractor to deliver the scheme, with construction works due to commence on-site early in the new year.

#### Active Travel Behavioural Change Programme

- 3.23. The Council has secured over £370k revenue grant funding from Government to deliver an active travel behavioural change programme, aimed at supporting a shift in travel behaviour to walking, cycling and scooting. This programme complements the segregated cycle routes and enhanced pedestrian facilities being delivered through the active travel capital schemes on Shinfield Road and Bath Road.
- 3.24. Delivery of this programme of initiatives is on-going, including the provision of adult cycle training and cycle maintenance courses in addition to the training being provided to children in schools through the Bikeability programme. The Council is working in partnership with Sustrans to deliver behavioural change initiatives through a dedicated officer as a joint Sustrans resource in partnership with Bracknell Forest Council. Activities undertaken to date include provision of led rides and walks, supporting schools with the delivery of Modeshift STARS travel planning activities, and working with partners to support events including Reading Cycle Festival and the Sustrans Big Walk and Wheel.
- 3.25. This programme of initiatives includes support for the delivery of secure cycle parking facilities in the town centre, following representations to the Council from local groups with a strong desire to be involved in the delivery and on-going management of such a facility. Despite good progress being made and arrangements agreed with Primark for a secure cycle parking hub to be located in their premises at West Street, Primark subsequently pulled out of the agreement and therefore the Council is currently seeking a new partner and premises for this facility.

#### School Streets Programme

- 3.26. The Council launched a School Street application process and guidance in spring 2020, after securing £175k revenue grant funding from Government. To date, School Street schemes have been implemented at Park Lane Primary Junior School (Downing Road and Lambourne Close), Wilson Primary School (Wilson Road), Thameside Primary School (Harley Road) and most recently on Crescent Road in east Reading. The scheme on Crescent Road is a joint scheme for Maiden Erleigh School in Reading, UTC Reading and Alfred Sutton Primary School.
- 3.27. The School Street schemes have been initially established as trials under an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO), which includes a 6-month statutory consultation period to provide the opportunity for comments and objections to the scheme to be submitted to the Council. The Council's Traffic Management Sub-Committee provided approval for the schemes at Park Lane Junior, Wilson and Thameside Primary schools to be made permanent in June 2022, and the Crescent Road scheme in June 2023.
- 3.28. Applications to establish new School Street schemes are being encouraged and a public drop-in event for a potential scheme for Civitas Academy (Great Knollys Street) took place in September 2023 as part of a wider consultation with parents and local residents. In addition, monitoring of the existing schemes to identify any improvements which can be made to help encourage walking and cycling for children, parents and carers is being undertaken.
- 3.29. In conclusion, this report provides the Committee with an overview of the latest position with the delivery of individual schemes and initiatives which make up the programme of strategic transport schemes in Reading. The Committee will be kept informed of the latest developments through regular progress reports to future meetings.

## **4. Contribution to Strategic Aims**

- 4.1. The Council's new Corporate Plan has established three themes for the years 2022/25. These themes are:
- Healthy Environment
  - Thriving Communities
  - Inclusive Economy
- 4.2. These themes are underpinned by "Our Foundations" explaining the ways we work at the Council:
- People first
  - Digital transformation
  - Building self-reliance
  - Getting the best value
  - Collaborating with others
- 4.3. Full details of the Council's [Corporate Plan](#) and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the [Council's website](#). These priorities and the Corporate Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.
- 4.4. The delivery of the programme of strategic transport schemes will help to deliver the three service priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan of Healthy Environment, Thriving Communities and Inclusive Economy by providing high-quality, affordable transport options which will help to reduce congestion, improve air quality and help to encourage more healthy lifestyles.

## **5. Environmental and Climate Implications**

- 5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers). Transport is the biggest greenhouse gas emitting sector in the UK accounting for around 27% of total carbon emissions. As set out in our Climate Emergency Strategy this figure is lower in Reading with transport accounting for around 20% of carbon emissions, however significant investment in sustainable transport solutions is vital in order to respond to the Climate Emergency declared by the Council in February 2019 and to help achieve our target of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.
- 5.2. The Climate Impact Assessment tool has been used to assess the full programme of works as set out within this report, resulting in an overall Net Medium Positive impact. This is due to the programme being focused on encouraging the use of sustainable transport, walking and cycling as attractive alternatives to the private car. The programme will enhance facilities to encourage more use of sustainable transport and active travel options, and therefore reduce the use of the private car and resulting congestion, carbon emissions and other air quality issues. There are inevitably emissions associated with the construction of these major schemes, however we are working to reduce these short-term impacts in order to achieve the longer-term modal switch benefits.
- 5.3. In addition, the delivery of the major transport schemes as set out within this report form a vital part of our overall transport and climate emergency strategies, which has achieved considerable success in recent years including bus usage in Reading being the second highest in the country outside of London, having increased by 23% since 2010, and around 35% of trips into Reading town centre being made by pedestrians and cyclists.

## **6. Community Engagement**

- 6.1. The schemes included within the current major transport scheme programme have and will be communicated to the local community through public exhibitions, consultations and Council meetings.

- 6.2. Statutory consultation will be conducted in accordance with appropriate legislation, including Traffic Regulation Orders as appropriate. Notices will be advertised in the local printed newspaper and will be erected on lamp columns within the affected area.

## **7. Equality Implications**

- 7.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

- 7.2. The Council, and where appropriate partner delivery organisations, have carried out an equality impact assessment scoping exercise on all of the projects included within the current major transport scheme programme.

## **8. Other Relevant Considerations**

- 8.1. There are none.

## **9. Legal Implications**

- 9.1. The creation of and changes to existing Traffic Regulation Orders will require Cemex advertisement and consultation, under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and in accordance with the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996. These procedures have been and will continue to be completed at the relevant time.

## **10. Financial Implications**

- 10.1. The capital schemes included within the strategic transport schemes programme are included in the Council's Capital Programme which includes the funding profile for each scheme. This programme of works is funded by external grants and funding contributions which have been secured from various external sources as set out within the report. Both the capital and revenue schemes and initiatives within this programme are monitored regularly as part of the Council's internal budget monitoring processes.

- 10.2. Specific grant conditions are attached to the individual external grants which have been secured to fund the delivery of the programme of schemes and initiatives as set out within this report. These conditions relate to both the type of works that the grants can be used to fund and the timescales within which the funding needs to be spent. Failure to meet these conditions may result in the Council being required to repay the grant funding, either in part or in full.

## **11. Timetable for Implementation**

- 11.1. The latest timetables for implementation of the individual schemes and initiatives which make up the full programme are set out within the report.

## **12. Background Papers**

- 12.1. There are none.