

# Traffic Management Sub-Committee

11 January 2024



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
Working better with you

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>Title</b>                 | BSIP Bus Lanes – Statutory Consultation Results   |
| <b>Purpose of the report</b> | To make a decision  |
| <b>Report status</b>         | Public report   |
| <b>Report author</b>         | Grace Atherton, BSIP Project Manager  |
| <b>Lead councillor</b>       | Cllr John Ennis, Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport   |
| <b>Ward(s)</b>               | Abbey, Battle, Norcot, Southcote, Katesgrove, Redlands and Park   |
| <b>Corporate priority</b>    | Healthy Environment   |
| <b>Recommendations</b>       | <p>The Sub-Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Note the content of this report.</li><li>2. Approve the recommendation to construct each of the schemes contained within this report, subject to available funding.</li><li>3. Approve an experimental Traffic Regulation Order, permitting motorcycle access to each of the bus lanes contained within this report.</li></ol> <p>And that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>4. The Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to approve the proposed traffic restrictions for each of the schemes contained within this report, in accordance with the Local Authorities Traffic Orders Procedure (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.</li><li>5. The Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to make the Traffic Regulation Order and no public inquiry be held into the proposal.</li></ol> |

## 1. Executive summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Sub-Committee of the feedback from the Statutory Consultation relating to the six proposed bus lanes. Members are asked to note the Statutory Consultation results and agree for officers to proceed with construction of the bus lanes, subject to available funding.

## 2. Policy context

- 2.1. The recommendations within this report support the objectives of the Council's new Corporate Plan for the years 2022/25, and contribute towards the key themes of:
  - Healthy Environment
  - Thriving Communities
  - Inclusive Economy

- 2.2. 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.
- 2.3. The National Bus Strategy 'Bus Back Better' was published in March 2021 as part of a £3 billion funding package aimed at building back Britain's bus services. It sets out how the Government intends to deliver on its commitment to achieve ambitious and far-reaching reform of the bus services sector. As part of this funding, the Council were awarded £26m to improve the Bus Services and infrastructure, and to support growth of the public transport network.
- 2.4. The Council published its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in October 2021 and established an Enhanced Partnership (EP) with all local bus operators. The EP sets out the schemes and measures to be delivered through the BSIP funding and formed our funding bid to DfT. The content of the EP was approved by the Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee in March 22 and November 22.
- 2.5. The BSIP is a sub-strategy and core element of our emerging Reading Transport Strategy, which sets a vision to make Reading a greener and healthier town by providing better sustainable travel choices, including buses. The transport strategy also contributes towards the vision of a net zero carbon Reading by 2023, as set out in the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy.
- 2.6. The Berkshire West Health & Wellbeing Strategy (2021-2030) sets out the cross-borough priorities to deliver positive health outcomes to residents within Reading, Wokingham and West Berkshire. The implementation of the schemes detailed within this report, and through promoting the use of Public Transport (as well as Active Travel initiatives) can directly support positive outcomes, particularly for those residents and visitors living and walking alongside busy roads.

### **3. The proposal**

- 3.1. Designs have been developed for six bus lanes across the borough (see Appendices for drawings) and have been identified as areas where bus services suffer delays as a result of traffic congestion, particularly at peak times. Therefore, there is a need to introduce greater priority for buses on key routes to improve services for bus users, specifically journey times and reliability which in turn encourages modal shift and supports the environmental benefits of public transport.

The proposed bus lanes are as follows:

- A329 Oxford Road – Outbound bus lane between Zinzan Street and George Street
  - A329 Oxford Road – Outbound bus lane between Pangbourne Street and Norcot Junction
  - A4 Bath Road – Outbound bus lane from Circuit Lane to Granville Road
  - A327 Southampton Street – Inbound bus lane from Pell Street to The Oracle roundabout
  - A4 London Road – Inbound bus lane between Sidmouth Street and London Street
  - A4 London Road – Inbound bus lane between Liverpool Road and Cemetery Junction
- 3.2. During the Period of April 2022 to March 2023, 17.5 million passenger journeys were made across the Reading area. Based on current projections for the Council is expecting this to increase to approximately 20 million passenger journeys by March 2024. Continuing to develop Readings transport infrastructure supports the Councils ambitions (as detailed within its RTS), where it is aiming to increase passenger journeys to 28 million by 2040.

- 3.3. The main benefits sought from these proposals are to make travelling by bus in Reading easier, cheaper, quicker and more reliable. If more people choose to travel by bus this will result in reduced congestion, reduced carbon emissions, better air quality, and improved health and wellbeing. Bus services, including community transport and school services, provide vital access to opportunities such as education, training, employment, essential services including healthcare and social events. These proposals seek to maximise opportunities to provide bus priority on key routes, whilst recognising that car trips are still required for some journeys and therefore minimising the impact of these schemes on general traffic flows where feasible.
- 3.4. An initial 4-week informal consultation was run from 19 May to 16 June 2023, seeking views on the initial bus lane proposals. Plans and information were available on the RBC Consultation webpage, allowing members of the public to show their level of support and to comment on the proposed schemes. Feedback and comments received have been assessed, and where possible amendments were made to the proposals, further details of which were provided during the statutory consultation process.
- 3.5. Due to limited road space in Reading, it is acknowledged that some of the proposals will have an impact on traffic flows and further traffic modelling has been undertaken and is detailed within Appendix 1 to this report. Whilst the traffic modelling has identified areas where congestion may increase in the short-term, this is based on current travel patterns. As a result of the various complementary measures introduced through the Councils BSIP and supported by the increase in recent bus passenger figures, this continued modal shift should result in longer term improvements to traffic flows.
- 3.6. A formal statutory consultation followed, which ran from 9 November to 7 December 2023 and included where possible scheme design changes following consideration of the informal consultation. The consultation link was shared on social media, the RBC Consultation webpage and the local press. Drop in events were held for the Reading Transport Strategy 2040 consultation, and drawings of the bus lane schemes were on display with officer's present to answer questions.
- 3.7. A summary of the statutory consultation results can be found in the table below:

|                                  | Support |        | Object |        | No Response |       |
|----------------------------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|-------|
|                                  | No.     | %      | No.    | %      | No.         | %     |
| <b>Oxford Road (Town)</b>        | 117     | 43.98% | 149    | 56.02% | 0           | 0%    |
| <b>Oxford Road (Norcot)</b>      | 122     | 45.85% | 141    | 53.01% | 3           | 1%    |
| <b>London Road (cemetery)</b>    | 85      | 31.95% | 172    | 64.66% | 9           | 3.38% |
| <b>London Road (London St)</b>   | 77      | 28.95% | 184    | 69.17% | 5           | 1.88% |
| <b>Bath Road</b>                 | 121     | 45.49% | 133    | 50.00% | 12          | 4.50% |
| <b>Southampton St Roundabout</b> | 115     | 43.23% | 138    | 51.88% | 13          | 4.89% |

- 3.8. It should be noted that the above is an un-sanitised version of the results. Examination of the responses identified a large number of responses (41) from RG1 that were submitted within a short time frame. It is assumed that these were collated from a local group and so have not been discounted.
- 3.9. One of the main areas of feedback to the consultation was the use of the bus lanes by private hire vehicles and motorcycles. Of the 266 responses received, officers note that a total of 50 objections were directly related to motorcycles not being permitted to use the proposed bus lanes. Whilst officers are not discounting the comments raised in these responses, given that these comments do not object to the principle of the bus lanes, an alternative version of the results has been presented below:

| Excluding motorcycle objections  | Support |        | Object |        | No Response |       |
|----------------------------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|-------|
|                                  | No.     | %      | No.    | %      | No.         | %     |
| <b>Oxford Road (Town)</b>        | 117     | 54.17% | 99     | 45.83% | 0           | 0.00% |
| <b>Oxford Road (Norcot)</b>      | 122     | 57.28% | 91     | 42.72% | 3           | 1.41% |
| <b>London Road (cemetery)</b>    | 85      | 41.06% | 122    | 58.94% | 9           | 4.35% |
| <b>London Road (London St)</b>   | 77      | 36.49% | 134    | 63.51% | 5           | 2.37% |
| <b>Bath Road</b>                 | 121     | 59.02% | 84     | 40.98% | 12          | 5.85% |
| <b>Southampton St Roundabout</b> | 115     | 56.37% | 89     | 43.63% | 13          | 6.37% |

3.10. Due to the timescales associated with the grant funding of the BSIP schemes, officers did not bring forward proposals to allow motorcycles (or private hire vehicles) as this requires a full policy review of all bus lanes within the borough to ensure consistency. This review would require specific surveys and safety assessments prior to a recommendation being brought forward to Committee.

3.11. The consultation responses raised a number of common themes, including:

### Negative Responses

| Consultation Response  | Council Response / Mitigation   |
|--|---|
| The perception that the introduction of the bus lanes will create further traffic and congestion.                    | <p>Whilst the traffic modelling has identified areas where congestion may increase in the short-term, this is based on current travel patterns. As a result of the various complementary measures introduced through the Councils BSIP and supported by the increase in recent bus passenger figures, this continued modal shift should result in longer term improvements to traffic flows.</p> <p>Without making significant changes to transport infrastructure and providing suitable and sustainable transport alternatives, such as mass transit/public transport and Active Travel, car usage will continue to grow, generating greater levels of congestion.</p>  |
| The perception that bus lanes sit empty for a large proportion of time or that buses actively avoid using the lanes. | <p>The perception that bus lanes are empty can be due to buses not being held up by traffic and therefore travelling along bus lanes in a shorter timeframe than the corresponding traffic in adjacent lanes. The bus lanes being proposed are in areas with a reasonable frequency of services and will therefore be well used.</p> <p>Bus lanes will enable bus operators to improve frequencies using the same number of vehicles as buses are able to undertake their journeys quicker. This will increase the frequency that buses use the bus lanes. Enhanced frequency of services will also encourage more passengers which in turn will improve the economic case for providing more services. This will also lead to more buses using the bus lanes, although this intervention will only be felt following the introduction of the bus lane.</p> <p>Buses only avoid using bus lanes when there is a more direct route. Bus lanes are designed to enable buses to avoid traffic and at certain times of the day there may be no traffic and therefore the bus can retain a position in the general carriageway which will negate the need to re-join the carriageway at the end of the bus lane.</p> |

| <b>Consultation Response</b>  | <b>Council Response / Mitigation</b>   |
|---|--|
| Concern that existing traffic will be displaced onto residential routes.                | <p>The ambition of the Reading Transport Strategy is to provide a variety of transport options and promote modal shift to public transport and active travel. The introduction of these bus lanes, alongside the various other complementary measures introduced through the Councils BSIP will support this modal shift which should result in longer term improvements to traffic flows and mitigate the risk of traffic displacement.</p> <p>As has been recommended as a result of the traffic modelling undertaken during the bus lane design, the Council intends to monitor the traffic on the adjoining residential streets and if necessary review what measures could be introduced to mitigate any displacement that occurs, with particular emphasis on safety on these residential streets.</p> |
| Concern regarding the impact on vehicles entering Reading from the east of the borough. | <p>Vehicles entering Reading borough from the east on the London Road currently have two lanes approaching the Cemetery Junction. The introduction of a bus lane will reduce this to one lane for much of this section however there is significant capacity for two lanes outside of the borough on the A3290 and A4 and will move the traffic away from high density residential area.</p> <p>The London Road bus lane will provide priority for a number of services that enter Reading from the east including, two park and ride services, which will be a more attractive option for some people currently choosing to drive in from the east and therefore result in fewer private vehicles entering Reading.</p>   |
| Concern that the bus lanes are not being made available for motorcycles.                | <p>Following the consultation process, officers have recommended that an experimental order be made, granting motorcycles access to each of the bus lanes proposed in this report.</p>   |

### Positive Responses

- Reduce delays in peak times.
  - Support the promotion of more dependable bus journeys that also open a lane to be used for active travel.
  - Support of policies and plans that disincentivise people from using their cars and support having a great bus, cycling and pedestrian network.
  - Support of bus lanes being a great way to improve congestion problems and reduce carbon emissions.
- 3.12. Another theme related to the bus services available to/from Park and Ride sites, and commonly related to the reduction in services currently available and the importance of improving these services to make Park and Ride a viable option. Officers were pleased to see limited services recently reinstated from Winnersh Park & Ride, as well as the ongoing Hospital Park & Ride services from Thames Valley Park. The bus lane improvements being recommended will support the efficiency and reliability of all services from the east of Reading, which should support the future growth of these and other bus services.
- 3.13. The full consultation results can be found in Appendix 3a/3b.

## Outcomes and Recommendations

- 3.14. The Council has undertaken a detailed review of consultation results, and whilst it acknowledges the concerns raised by consultees, particularly around the perception of increased congestion, without making significant changes to transport infrastructure and providing suitable and sustainable transport alternatives, such as mass transit/public transport and Active Travel, car usage will continue to grow, generating greater levels of congestion.
- 3.15. The schemes consulted on contribute to the strategic aims of the Council and support the Councils proposed Reading Transport Strategy (RTS), and in particular promoting the use of alternative and sustainable transport modes, which also supports the long-term ambitions of the Councils Climate Strategy. It is recognised that the success of public transport strategies rely on modal shift and as part of the wider strategy, it will be important that neighbouring Councils support their residents so that they can share in the benefits.
- 3.16. An assessment of each of the schemes has been undertaken against key themes to demonstrate the recommendations as noted below:

|                                  | Support RTS | Buses per hour | Traffic Model | Public Support | Cost | Overall |
|----------------------------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|------|---------|
| <b>Oxford Road (Town)</b>        |             |                |               |                |      |         |
| <b>Oxford Road (Norcot)</b>      |             |                |               |                |      |         |
| <b>London Road (cemetery)</b>    |             |                |               |                |      |         |
| <b>London Road (London St)</b>   |             |                |               |                |      |         |
| <b>Bath Road</b>                 |             |                |               |                |      |         |
| <b>Southampton St Roundabout</b> |             |                |               |                |      |         |

- 3.17 Inflationary pressures have had a significant impact on the cost of the overall BSIP package since funding was awarded, therefore whilst the recommendation is to deliver all six schemes this will be kept under review as procurement is undertaken and costs are clarified. It is therefore recommended that the above assessment is used as a basis for prioritising scheme delivery.
- 3.18 In acknowledging the comments that were received relating to the use of bus lanes by motorcycles, Officers would propose an experimental order be made for each of the bus lanes subject to this report, permitting their use by motorcycles.
- 3.19 The previous concerns outlined above in paragraph 3.10 relates to the wider use of bus lanes by various vehicle types, and the potential conflicts this could create. In the case of Motorcycles only, Officers are satisfied that collision risks are low, and the inclusion of motorcycles in the bus lane would not have a detrimental impact on the bus movements.
- 3.20 Officers will carry out a further assessment during the period that the experimental order is in place and revert back to the Sub-Committee with a future recommendation on whether the experimental order should be made permanent.
- 3.21 The Council does not currently intend to permit the use of these bus lanes by any private hire vehicles or by any Taxis unregistered within the borough of Reading. This would result in an increase in lane usage which may have a detrimental impact on bus movements and reduce the capacity and benefits intended by these schemes.

## 4. Contribution to strategic aims

- 4.1. The proposals as set out within this report will help to deliver the following strategic aims of the Council through the delivery of a thriving public transport network in the town:

### ***Health Environment***

- The implementation of bus lane will help alleviate delays to services along main corridors into the town centre. This can lead to a reduction in motor-vehicle journeys, which can reduce emissions and improve air quality.

### ***Thriving Communities***

- The bus lanes will improve accessibility and journey times for those using the bus, making it a more appealing option than using a private vehicle

### ***Inclusive Economy***

- The bus lane proposals will encourage bus usage and reduce congestion. They can offer equality of access to the town centre and other areas of employment.

## 5. Environmental and climate implications

- 5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 5.2. Transport is the biggest greenhouse gas emitting sector in the UK accounting for around 27% of total carbon emissions. As set out in the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25, 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.
- 5.3. A Climate Impact Assessment has been conducted for the recommendations of this report, resulting in an overall ***Medium Net Positive***. It is expected that the introduction of additional bus lanes will see a shift from private vehicle usage resulting in less emissions and air pollution. There will be an improvement to air quality by providing a more efficient and attractive way to travel.

## 6. Community engagement

- 6.1. A 4-week informal consultation detailing the 6 bus lane schemes was run from 19<sup>th</sup> May to 16<sup>th</sup> June 2023. The consultation link was shared on social media and on the RBC Consultation webpage. An update on the feedback received during this consultation period was given verbally at the meeting.
- 6.2. A formal statutory consultation detailing the bus schemes ran from 9<sup>th</sup> November to 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023. The consultation link was shared on social media, the RBC Consultation webpage and the local press. Drop in events were held for the Reading Transport Strategy 2040 consultation, and drawings of the bus lane schemes were on display with officer's present to answer questions.
- 6.3. Traffic Management Sub-Committee is a public meeting. The agendas, reports, meeting minutes and recordings of the meetings are available to view from the Council's website.

## **7. Equality impact assessment**

- 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. It is not considered that an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is required at this time as the proposals are not deemed to be discriminatory to persons with protected characteristics, and the proposals will help the travel needs of users. The Statutory Consultation provided an opportunity for the content of objections/support/concerns to be considered prior to a decision being made on whether to implement the proposals.
- 7.3. Further EIA assessments, where necessary, may be undertaken once the schemes are developed in detailed design.

## **8. Other relevant considerations**

- 8.1. None

## **9. Legal implications**

- 9.1. New, or changes to existing, Traffic Regulation Orders require 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. The resultant Traffic Regulation Order will be sealed/revoked in accordance with the same Regulations.

## **10. Financial implications**

- 10.1. Funding for the detailed designs and statutory consultation has been funded through the BSIP funding allocation.
- 10.2. The Council has secured £15.9m in capital funding through its BSIP, however inflationary pressures have had a significant impact on the cost of individual schemes within the overall BSIP package.
- 10.3. As a result of the detailed design and having prepared updated cost estimates, the total cost of the 6 bus lanes is projected to be between £4.5m and £5.1m.
- 10.4. Further to the assessment carried out in section 3.16, Officers are recommending that implementation of Bath Road be delayed until such time as actual costs of the remaining 5 schemes can be confirmed, and subject to suitable additional budget being secured from Department for Transport.

## **11. Timetable for implementation**

- 11.1. The Council has been progressing the detailed design in parallel to the consultation process and in line with the conditions of the grant funding. Subject to there being no further amendments as a result of this report, the detailed design is due to be completed by January 2024.
- 11.2. Subject to the decisions of this report, the Council intends to commence construction of the bus lanes from Feb 2024, with the indicative programme noted below:



| <b>Activity</b>                     | <b>Start Date</b> | <b>Finish Date</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Oxford Road (Town) Construction     | Feb-24            | Apr-24             |
| London Road (Cemetery) Construction | May-24            | May-24             |
| Southampton Street Procurement      | Apr-24            | May-24             |
| Southampton Street Construction     | Jul-24            | Sep-24             |
| Oxford Road (Norcot) Procurement    | Jun-24            | Jul-24             |
| Oxford Road (Norcot) Construction   | Sep-24            | Nov-24             |
| London Rd (London St) Procurement   | Apr-24            | Jul-24             |
| London Rd (London St) Construction  | Aug-24            | Dec-24             |
| Bath Road Procurement               | Jul-24            | Oct-24             |
| Bath Road Construction              | Jan-25            | Sep-25             |

- 11.3 The above programme is subject to change and will consider local events and constraints that may result in a negative short-term impact on the highway network.
- 11.4 The Council is proposing commencing with the Oxford Road Street between Zinzan St and George Street as another scheme, delivering pavement improvements, is due to commence from January 24. Combining these two schemes will reduce the impact on people travelling via Oxford Road, and will deliver project efficiencies and savings in construction costs.

## **12. Background papers**

- 12.1. BSIP Bus Lanes – Statutory Consultation – 14<sup>th</sup> June 2023

### **Appendices**

- 1. Appendix 1 – Traffic Modelling Summary**
- 2. Appendix 2 – Bus Lanes Consulted on**
- 3. Appendix 3a – Detailed Consultation Results**
- 4. Appendix 3b – Detailed Consultation Results**