



20 November 2024

Title	Strategic Transport Schemes Update
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Report author	Chris Maddocks, Strategic Transport Manager
Lead Councillor	Cllr John Ennis, Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport
Corporate priority	Healthy Environment
Recommendations	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 and initiatives in Reading. This programme of approximately £40m over the next 2-3 years includes major enhancements to public transport and active travel facilities; aimed at encouraging more healthy lifestyles, helping to address the Climate Emergency and improve air quality in the borough.
- 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
 - School Streets Programme
 - Active Travel Behavioural Change Programme

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. The Council adopted its new Local Transport Plan (LTP), the Reading Transport Strategy 2040, at the meeting of full Council on 15 October 2024. The Strategy sets out an ambitious vision to create healthier, greener and more equal communities through the future provision of travel options in Reading. The Strategy is focused on promoting sustainable transport options as a realistic alternative to the private car, setting out how transport facilities and services will be developed to 2040 to help achieve our wider objectives for the town. These include 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 the new Strategy, with the delivery of each individual scheme a key component of achieving the overall vision and objectives.

- 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, Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Plan and the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

3. The Schemes

Bus Service Improvement Plan Programme

Supports LTP Objectives: Creating a Clean and Green Reading, Enabling Sustainable and Inclusive Growth, Connecting People and Places and Embracing Smart Solutions.

Delivery Timeframe: On-going over the next 2 years.

- 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 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 and Buzz 18 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 was introduced from 1 November 2023, with an introductory offer to encourage the usage of this facility which will speed up boarding times funded by the BSIP grant. The All-Bus ticket scheme has proved extremely popular to date, with over 3 million tickets sold up to August 2024, saving residents in Reading over £4 million in fares as a result. The all-day discount scheme also complements the Government's national single fare scheme, which will increase to £3 from January 2025.
- 3.5. Enhancements to bus services have been progressed, with the new Buzz 9 services commencing in January 2024, including services between the town centre and Whitley Wood as normal, with the additional BSIP funded services to Green Park Station. This will ensure local residents can fully benefit from the new station facility which was delivered by the Council and opened in May 2023. In addition, enhanced Buzz 18 services commenced in April 2024, with the BSIP funded enhancements providing an improved service connecting the significant residential developments at Kenavon Drive, the town centre, new Rivermead leisure centre and the new River Academy secondary school on Richfield Avenue.
- 3.6. Development of the programme of capital schemes is being progressed, including approval being granted from the Council's Traffic Management Sub-Committee in January 2024 to proceed with delivery of new bus lanes in the borough. The inbound bus lane on London Road, between the junctions with Liverpool Road and Cemetery Junction, was delivered in August 2024. The Council worked with Wokingham Borough Council and Reading Buses to reinstate Monday to Friday Park and ride services from Winnersh Triangle into Reading to coincide with the introduction of the new bus lane, alongside the introduction of a £1 park & ride ticket funded by the BSIP grant. We are also continuing to work with Wokingham to implemented enhancements to the bus lane outside of the borough to improve the situation for both buses and general traffic. In addition, two new bus lanes have recently been introduced on Oxford Road. In October, the outbound bus between the junctions with Zinzan Street and George Street was delivered, and in November the outbound bus lane between the junctions with Pangbourne Street and Norcot was opened.

South Reading Bus Rapid Transit

Supports LTP Objectives: Creating a Clean and Green Reading, Enabling Sustainable and Inclusive Growth, Connecting People and Places, and Embracing Smart Solutions.

Delivery Timeframe: Current phase due for completion Spring 2025, future phases subject to funding.

- 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 MereOak Park & Ride and Reading town centre. The current scheme which is being delivered in phases as external funding is secured, has the potential to become a guided-bus, tram or autonomous shared vehicle system in the future.
- 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 of works 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.
- 3.10. Delivery of the scheme commenced on-site in March 2024, following a competitive procurement process to appoint a contractor to undertake the works. Construction works for this phase of the scheme are anticipated to be complete in Spring 2025.

Reading West Station Upgrade

Supports LTP Objectives: Creating a Clean and Green Reading, Enabling Sustainable and Inclusive Growth, and Connecting People and Places.

Delivery Timeframe: Current phase substantially complete, future phases subject to funding.

- 3.11. A Masterplan setting out a vision for significant enhancements to Reading West Station and the wider interchange was prepared by the Council, in partnership with GWR and Network Rail. This included enhanced passenger facilities, security improvements and enhancements to both the Oxford Road and Tilehurst Road station entrances.
- 3.12. External funding of over £4.5m was 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.
- 3.13. Delivery of the scheme, including the highway alterations, interchange improvements and the new passenger building on Oxford Road, is complete. The new building opened in April 2024. In addition, the new gateline facilities at Tilehurst Road entrance have also been completed and brought into use.
- 3.14. The 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 this key element of the overall Masterplan for the station.

Tilehurst Station Upgrade

Supports LTP Objectives: Creating a Clean and Green Reading, Enabling Sustainable and Inclusive Growth, and Connecting People and Places.

Delivery Timeframe: Current phase due for completion Spring 2025, future phases subject to funding.

- 3.15. 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.
- 3.16. 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.
- 3.17. Network Rail has undertaken a mailshot to local residents and held a public drop-in session at the station in January 2024. Construction works are now underway, with the lift installation process commencing in October with the lifts for individual platforms scheduled through November and December.

Shinfield Road Active Travel Scheme

Supports LTP Objectives: Creating a Clean and Green Reading, Supporting Healthy Lifestyles, and Connecting People and Places.

Delivery Timeframe: Current phase substantially complete, future phases subject to funding.

- 3.18. 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.
- 3.19. 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.
- 3.20. Construction works for the scheme commenced at the University / Christchurch Green end of the route in October 2022, on the outbound section between Chancellor's Way and Pepper Lane junction and then continued on the opposite side to complete the section from Pepper Lane through to Christchurch Green. Following completion of this section, work commenced in the summer of 2023 on the other side of the Pepper Lane junction on the section next to Leighton Park School. This section included the longest continuous and uninterrupted cycle track to the junction with Cressingham Road which was completed in summer 2024. In addition, traffic restrictions in the form of double yellow lines have been installed along the entire route between Christchurch Green and Shinfield Rise to address a longstanding issue of parking on the section next to the University of Reading which was causing obstruction to general traffic, with the required TROs approved in June 2022. The Council is now seeking further funding to deliver the remaining phases of the scheme to Shinfield Rise.

Bath Road Active Travel Scheme

Supports LTP Objectives: Creating a Clean and Green Reading, Supporting Healthy Lifestyles, and Connecting People and Places.

Delivery Timeframe: Construction due to commence during 2025.

- 3.21. 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.
- 3.22. 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.
- 3.23. Following feedback, a design review of the scheme is currently being undertaken to consider opportunities to add further cycle measures at the Castle Hill roundabout, which will be subject to future public consultation and approval if significant changes are proposed to the existing scheme.

School Streets Programme

Supports LTP Objectives: Creating a Clean and Green Reading, Supporting Healthy Lifestyles, and Connecting People and Places.

Delivery Timeframe: On-going.

- 3.24. 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.
- 3.25. 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 was approved to be made permanent in June 2023. Most recently, in September new schemes were introduced for Civitas Academy (Great Knollys Street) and Geoffrey Field Junior, Geoffrey Field Infant and Christ the King (Exbourne Road).
- 3.26. Applications to establish new School Street schemes are being encouraged, alongside monitoring of the existing schemes to identify any improvements which can be made to help encourage walking and cycling for children, parents and carers.

Active Travel Behavioural Change Programme

Supports LTP Objectives: Creating a Clean and Green Reading, Supporting Healthy Lifestyles, Connecting People and Places, and Embracing Smart Solutions.

Delivery Timeframe: On-going, subject to funding.

- 3.27. 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.
- 3.28. 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.

- 3.29. 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 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.

- 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.