

Traffic Management Sub-Committee

27 November 2024



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	Petition – Reading Hackney Carriage Vehicle Access to A33 Bus Lanes
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	James Clements, Transport Programme Manager
Lead Councillor	Cllr John Ennis – Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport
Ward(s)	Coley , Katesgrove and Whitley
Corporate priority	Healthy Environment
Recommendations	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Note the content of this report.2. Agree that for the reasons set out within this report, that the request of the petition, not be implemented.3. Agree that the lead petitioner be informed of the decisions of the Sub-Committee, following publication of the agreed minutes of the meeting.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. A petition was reported at the June 2024 Sub-Committee meeting requesting that Reading Borough Council licenced hackney carriage vehicles be granted access to use the A33 bus lanes.

The petition contained 231 indications of support.

- 1.2. The Committee approved the recommendation that appropriate officers consider the request in the context of local and national strategic policies and the ongoing South Reading Bus Rapid Transit scheme (funding and delivery) and report recommendations to an appropriate committee meeting.
- 1.3. This report sets out the officer recommendation not to implement the proposals as set out in the petition.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. The recommendations of this report do not lead to changes being introduced.
- 2.2. The request has been considered in the context of the Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP), Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), Climate Emergency Strategy and Health and Wellbeing Strategy by removing barriers to the greater use of sustainable, healthy transport options. It has also been considered in the context of the criteria for the funding received and required for the continued delivery of the South Reading Bus Rapid Transit scheme.

- 2.3. As identified in similar requests and other bus lane reporting, officers recognise that further work is required to develop a Boroughwide Strategy for bus lane access, notwithstanding any site-specific factors that may additionally influence decisions, and this remains a commitment of officers, once this work can be resourced.
- 2.4. Implementation of the requested access change would be expected to align most closely with the following theme in the Council's Corporate Plan for the years 2022/25:

a) Healthy Environment

- 2.5. With regards to Reading Borough Council licenced hackney carriage vehicles being granted access to the A33 bus lanes, introducing the alteration should improve the ease of travel for them, however this report raises concerns that this could have a detrimental impact on the ease of travel for buses and may have a negative impact on road safety.

3. The Proposal

Current Position

- 3.1. As reported to the June 2024 Traffic Management Sub Committee Reading Borough Council received a petition requesting access to the A33 bus lanes by Reading Borough Council licenced hackney carriage vehicles containing 231 indications of support.
- 3.2. The petition reads:
We the undersigned are licensed by READING BOROUGH COUNCIL as HACKNEY CARRIAGE DRIVERS request that all HACKNEY CARRIAGE VEHICLE licensed by READING BOROUGH COUNCIL are given permission to use the A33 BUS LANE We have use of all other bus lanes in Reading apart from A33. By allowing Hackney Carriage Vehicle to use this bus lane, will not affect Reading Buses operations
- 3.3. For context, Reading Borough Council has undertaken major schemes to install additional traffic lanes along sections of the A33, from south of M4 Junction 11 to north of Rose Kiln Lane. These have been funded and delivered as part of the strategic South Reading Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) scheme and the latest phase of delivery is currently in progress between Rose Kiln Lane (South) and Rose Kiln Lane (North). The additional traffic lanes on the A33 are bus only lanes.
- 3.4. Officers understand and sympathise with the issues that have been raised through this petition and understand the rationale for the requested alteration to the bus lane restriction. However, there are many factors that need to be considered with such a requested alteration, and a holistic professional recommendation made.
- 3.5. The previous sections of the A33 Bus Rapid Transit were delivered using funding secured through the Local Enterprise Partnership.
- 3.6. Reading Borough Council has been successful in its Government bid to fund its ambitions within the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and was awarded £26 million. The Council's BSIP proposals include expansion of the bus lane network within Reading through the continued development of its South Reading Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) scheme as well as the delivery of a further 6 additional bus lanes throughout Reading and improvements to MereOak Park and Ride site.
- 3.7. The Council's BSIP plans also look to encourage greater use of bus services on the existing network, through improvements to bus shelters, bus accessibility and subsidising bus fares.
- 3.8. The South Reading BRT scheme has delivered a series of bus priority measures on the A33 Relief Road between MereOak Park and Ride and the town centre since the first section opened in 2016. The latest phase of delivery is currently in progress between Rose Kiln Lane (South) and Rose Kiln Lane (North).

- 3.9. The South Reading BRT lanes on the A33 are characterised by the provision of an additional lane for buses to the current dual carriageway and therefore does not result in any loss of capacity for regular vehicles. The scheme has been designed as a Bus Rapid Transit scheme to mirror the priority afforded to either a light tram or guided bus way system whilst also enabling the flexibility that the use of regular bus vehicles provides.
- 3.10. Therefore, in order to maintain this characteristic, the South Reading BRT lanes do not provide permanent access for any other vehicles than bus services including taxis, motorcycles or cyclists who are able to use the dedicated cycle paths along the A33.
- 3.11. The design of the South Reading BRT is that there are bus stops within the South Reading BRT lanes without any lay-bys meaning buses will, from time to time, be stopping at these bus stops to pick up and drop off passengers. By allowing use of the bus lanes by other vehicles, such as hackney carriage vehicles, this would result in these vehicles looking to merge into the regular traffic lane where vehicles can be travelling at up to 40 miles per hour (mph) to pass these buses. This would represent a safety hazard should vehicles look to leave the bus lane, which would also be an illegal manoeuvre, as it would involve vehicles crossing the solid bus lane road markings.
- 3.12. It should be noted that the speed limit on the highway at all the other bus lanes in Reading, which do allow access for licensed hackney carriages, is either 20mph or 30mph.
- 3.13. Since its introduction the South Reading BRT has delivered faster journey times and passenger growth on this important corridor into central Reading. Journey times for buses using the corridor have reduced by 24% from 2015 making these services among the most reliable in the Reading area. Average passenger numbers increased by 62% between 2015-2019.
- 3.14. In addition to the above, the sub-committee is asked to note that the bus lane, and particularly where the bus lane merges with general traffic, has been designed on the basis of only buses being permitted to use these lanes. For locations where this merge is supported by traffic signals, it is very likely that the timings would need to be altered to support the additional vehicles in the lane, to the detriment of traffic flow on the A33. A full review of the bus lane would be required, as well as new Road Safety Audit to ensure that the highway remains safe for all road users. It is likely that physical works would be required to address the potential risks created by this proposal.
- 3.15. For the reasons outlined in this report, it is officers recommendation that the requested alteration to access along A33 Bus Lanes not be agreed.

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:
 - a) Healthy Environment
 - b) Thriving Communities
 - c) Inclusive Economy
- 4.2. These themes are underpinned by "Our Foundations" explaining the ways we work at the Council:
 - a) People first
 - b) Digital transformation
 - c) Building self-reliance
 - d) Getting the best value
 - e) 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. In the context of Reading Borough Council licenced hackney carriage vehicles, introducing the alteration should improve the ease of travel for them through central Reading. However, this report raises concerns that this requested alteration to the bus lane restrictions could have a detrimental impact on the ease of travel for other users of the bus lane – particularly buses – and on road safety.

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. The recommendation of this report does not directly deliver changes, so a Climate Impact Assessment has not been considered necessary at this time.
- 5.3. The process of making the requested restriction alterations will result in wastage of old signage and visits to the site to erect/remove consultation notices and implement the changes.
- 5.4. The longer-term impact of introducing the requested alterations is difficult to predict but would inevitably lead to increased traffic volumes within the bus lane, with potential impact to the reliability and attractiveness of bus use.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. The lead petitioner will be informed of the decision of the Sub-Committee, following publication of the meeting minutes.
- 6.2. Any Statutory consultation will be carried out in accordance with the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996, advertised on street, in the local printed newspapers and on the Council's website (the [consultation area](#)).
- 6.3. Meeting reports and minutes are published on the Council's website and Traffic Management Sub-Committee is a public meeting that can be attended. Recordings of the meetings are also available via the Council's website (www.reading.gov.uk).

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
- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c) 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 is relevant at this time as the report recommendation does not directly lead to any physical change. Assessment will be considered should the Sub-Committee agree to pursue the change of access to the bus lane. Furthermore, the processes involved in developing the change will require statutory public consultation, which will provide an opportunity for feedback to be provided and considered by the Council, ahead of an implementation (or otherwise) decision.

8. Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1. None expected from the recommendations and decisions for this report.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1. Pursuant to the recommendation of this report there are no foreseen legal implications.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1. None arising from the recommendation of this report.
- 10.2. Should the Sub-Committee not agree with the officer recommendations and wish to proceed with development of the requested changes, funding will need to be identified. This funding will need to cover the costs of undertaking a full review of the existing road layouts, as well as preparing updated designs and undertaking a Road Safety Audit. Further to this, costs associated with advertising the draft Traffic Regulation Order, the 'made' Order and for the signing alterations, as applicable, will also need to be funded.

11. Timetable for Implementation

- 11.1. Not applicable

12. Background Papers

- 12.1. There are none.