

Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee



Reading
Borough Council

Working better with you

26 June 2025

Title	Strategic Transport Schemes Update
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
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	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Note the updates with the delivery of the Council's programme of strategic transport schemes and initiatives as summarised in this report.2. Provide scheme and spend approval for the additional £1.3m grant funding the Council has secured from Government to increase the roll-out of electric buses in Reading by a further 8 electric buses and the associated charging infrastructure.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on progress with delivery of the Council's programme of strategic transport schemes and initiatives. This programme of approximately £40m over the next 2-3 years includes public transport and active travel enhancements; aimed at encouraging more healthy lifestyles, reducing pollution and carbon emissions and supporting sustainable economic growth in the borough.

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 a 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 the Council's wider objectives for the town as set out in the Council Plan. 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.
- 2.2. The LTP sets the overarching vision for future transport provision in Reading, with sub-strategies providing more detailed implementation plans for specific topics. These include the Bus Service Improvement Plan, Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan, Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Plan and the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

3. Progress Updates

Public Transport Programme – Electric Buses

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

Delivery Timeframe: First electric buses due to start use in Summer 2025, then on-going delivery over the next 2 years.

- 3.1. The Council, in partnership with Reading Buses, successfully secured £4.7m grant funding from the DfT through the ZEBRA (Zero Emission Bus Regional Area) fund in March 2024 for the provision of 24 electric buses in Reading, and the associated installation of charging infrastructure.
- 3.2. This initial programme, which includes match funding from Reading Buses, includes the provision of 17 double deck electric buses for Purple Route 17 which runs between Earley and Tilehurst; 7 double deck electric buses for Claret Route 21 which runs between Reading town centre, the University of Reading and Lower Earley; alongside the provision of the required upgraded electricity supply and charging infrastructure at the Great Knollys Street bus depot.
- 3.3. Progress to date includes civils work for the charging infrastructure which is now complete and the first charging points which have been installed. Orders have been placed with the manufacturer of the electric buses and work is on-going with the Distribution Network Operator (DNO) to ensure the required power supply is available for the first buses which are due to start running in Reading from this summer.
- 3.4. The Council has recently secured an additional £1.3m grant funding for a further 8 electric buses and additional chargers from Government through the ZEBRA fund. Reading Buses plan to deploy these buses on the Yellow 26 route, which runs between the town centre, Southcote, Ford's Farm and Calcot.
- 3.5. The Committee is asked to provide scheme and spend approval for this additional £1.3m grant funding the Council has secured from Government to increase the roll-out of electric buses in Reading by a further 8 electric buses and the associated charging infrastructure.

Public Transport Programme – Bus Service Improvement Plan

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 2-3 years.

- 3.6. The Council commenced delivery of its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in January 2023, following the award of £26.263m grant funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) for the period until March 2025, which was the third highest funding award (per head of population) in the country. Funding of £2,463,311 has recently been allocated for the continued delivery of this programme during 2025/26.
- 3.7. As required by Government, the Council has 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.
- 3.8. The BSIP programme includes a range of both capital and revenue measures, including a fares discount scheme; enhancements to Buzz 9 services (between the town centre and Whitley) and Buzz 18 services (between Kenavon Drive and Tilehurst); phase 5 of the South Reading BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) scheme on the A33; improvements to passenger facilities at Mereoak Park & Ride site; a package of new bus lanes on key routes; and a programme of at-stop enhancements to passenger facilities.
- 3.9. The latest progress with delivery of this programme includes changes to the Reading All-Bus and park & ride fares discounts which are currently being agreed with operators

following the ending of BSIP funding for this purpose in March 2025; the on-going provision of enhanced Buzz 9 and 18 services; on-going delivery of phase 5 of the South Reading BRT scheme which is due to finish in the summer; and on-going work with Wokingham Borough Council to develop enhancements outside of the borough for the inbound London Road bus lane, with Wokingham planning to undertake a consultation on scheme options later in the year.

Public Transport Programme – Tilehurst Station Accessibility Enhancements

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 Summer 2025.

- 3.10. The Council is working with Network Rail and GWR to develop a series of proposals to upgrade passenger facilities at Tilehurst Station, including £4m funding which Network Rail has secured from Government for the first phase of works to deliver accessibility improvements through the installation of lifts within the existing station footbridge.
- 3.11. The lifts have been installed by Network Rail's contractor and the power supply was upgraded in April by the Distribution Network Operator (DNO) to provide sufficient power to accommodate the new lifts. Final works to be undertaken include the installation of a new power meter and testing of the lifts with the new power source, with the lifts due to open for public use in the summer.

Active Travel Programme

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

Delivery Timeframe: On-going over the next 2-3 years.

- 3.12. Delivery of the Council's adopted Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) is being undertaken in phases as external funding is secured. The current programme includes delivery of segregated cycle facilities and pedestrian improvements on key routes through funding secured from Active Travel England; alongside delivery of a comprehensive programme of initiatives aimed at encouraging walking and cycling.
- 3.13. The latest progress with the delivery of this programme includes on-going engagement with local interest groups regarding the redesign of the Bath Road / Castle Hill active travel scheme, which will be subject to further public consultation later in the year; and design work to develop future schemes for Christchurch Green and Sidmouth Street, to develop plans for an enhanced cycle route linking the existing Shinfield Road scheme to the town centre via Christchurch Green, Redlands area and Royal Berkshire Hospital.
- 3.14. Delivery of the active travel initiatives programme continues with revenue grant funding secured from Active Travel England, including the existing school streets schemes; provision of adult cycle training and cycle maintenance courses in addition to the training being provided to children in schools through the Bikeability programme; and the development of a series of 'Wellbeing Walks' to promote different areas and key features of the town, aimed at encouraging regular exercise with the associated health benefits.
- 3.15. In conclusion, this report provides the Committee with an overview of the latest updates with the delivery of the programme of strategic transport schemes in Reading.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1. The delivery of the programme of strategic transport schemes will help to deliver the five priorities in the Council Plan to promote more equal communities in Reading; secure Reading's economic and cultural success; deliver a sustainable and healthy environment

and reduce Reading's carbon footprint; safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children; ensure Reading Borough Council is fit for the future.

4.2. Full details of the Council Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the [Council's website](#). These priorities and the Council Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.

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 one quarter of total carbon emissions, therefore 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, therefore reducing 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; although 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 third 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 for the projects included within the current programme of transport schemes.

8. Other Relevant Considerations

8.1. There are none.

9. Legal Implications

9.1. No Traffic Regulation Order is required based on the recommendation outlined in this report. However, where schemes are being developed and there is a need to create new and/or change existing Traffic Regulation Orders, this will be done in accordance with the provisions of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and 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. A report will be presented to the relevant committee for approval pursuant to our constitutional arrangement where any new or changes to existing traffic regulation orders are proposed.

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 are set out within the report.

12. Background Papers

12.1. There are none.