

**OXFORD CITY COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE BOARD
10TH January 2005**

Report of: Michael Crofton-Briggs
Business Manager,
Planning Services

Title: Consultation on Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan

Ward: All

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Key Decision: No

Lead Member: Councillor Turner

Scrutiny responsibility: Environment

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive Board agrees to endorse the comments in paragraphs 4.3 – 4.14 of this report as the views of the City Council to be forwarded to Oxfordshire County Council.

1 Summary

- 1.1 Oxfordshire County Council is reviewing its current Local Transport Plan and has launched a consultation exercise to inform this review process. At this stage the consultation is fairly general in nature, with views and ideas being sought based on the themes of congestion, road safety, accessibility and air quality.
- 1.2 This purpose of this report is for Members to consider and agree the City Council's response to the consultation exercise. Comments are sought by 10th January 2005, but the Planning Services Business Manager has requested an extension of time to enable consideration of this matter by the Environment Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.3 The County Council intends to carry out a second round of consultation in the spring, following preparation of a draft version of the new LTP.

2 City Council's Vision and Strategic Aims

- 2.1 One of the City Council's strategic aims is to "improve transport and mobility". Underpinning this is a recognition that transport in Oxford is always going to be about balancing different needs, together with the statement that "by providing alternatives to the private car for those that can use them we aim to ease traffic congestion and the problems that it causes". The comments in this report reflect the Council's vision.

3 Background and Context

- 3.1 The Transport Act 2000 requires local transport authorities to produce a Local Transport Plan (LTP), which sets out a five-year strategy for the co-ordination and improvement of all forms of transport, together with a programme for the provision of transport infrastructure improvements and for prioritising future capital investment.
- 3.2 The first LTP's were produced in July 2000, covering the period April 2001 – March 2006. These will be replaced in April 2006 by new plans for the next five years, until 2011. Replacement LTP's have to be submitted to Government in provisional form by the end of July 2005, although authorities will have the opportunity to produce revised and finalised LTP's by the end of March 2006.
- 3.3 The Department for Transport (DfT) recommends that authorities, in their new LTP's, should demonstrate the benefits of their local transport programmes and policies in terms of the four key areas of accessibility, congestion, air quality and road safety. The DfT guidance also stresses the need for transport planning to be joined up with other policy frameworks at the corporate level; for the development of longer-term transport strategies that look beyond the 5-year LTP period; and for LTP's to be prepared in the wider context of objectives and policies for developing the economic, social and environmental well-being of the region.
- 3.4 Amongst the main changes from the first round of LTP's is the introduction of a new requirement to produce accessibility strategies, which will look at ways of improving access to jobs and services, particularly for those most in need, in ways that are sustainable. Another significant change is the Government's recommendation that Air Quality Action Plans should be integrated into the LTP where transport is the primary factor in the designation of Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA's).
- 3.5 Much of the context for the new Oxfordshire LTP is provided by the Oxfordshire Transport Networks Review (TNR), which was published by the County Council in October 2004. The TNR Study looks at the strategic transport network across the county, and the pressures upon that network. It devises standards for different parts of the network and sets out a 15-year strategy and capital programme, covering the period 2006-2021.

- 3.6 Members may also be aware that, in the light of its decision not to proceed with the GTE proposals, the County Council's Executive resolved in September 2004 to approve the principle of an "Access to Oxford" Strategy to be developed for inclusion in the next LTP. This Strategy is to be based on the concept of high quality public transport provision along the key radial routes.

4 Options and Key Issues

- 4.1 The consultation exercise being undertaken by the County Council at present is broad brush in nature, with no specific proposals being put forward at this stage. The consultation booklet is called 'transaction', the name by which the new Oxfordshire LTP will be known. The booklet is based on the Government's four priority areas of congestion, road safety, accessibility and air quality. It briefly summarises existing problems, describes measures already taken to address those problems and outlines some of the things that may happen next. The booklet includes a short questionnaire, which can also be found on the related website www.transaction.org.uk.
- 4.2 In response to this consultation, it is considered that the primary message that should be conveyed to the County Council is the need for all options to be examined at this relatively early stage in the process. It is also considered that the County should be advised of the broad thrust of the City Council's thinking regarding the key transport issues facing Oxford. The second phase of the LTP consultation will enable more detailed consideration of these issues in the light of the County's draft proposals. The comments in paragraphs 4.3 – 4.13 below form a suggested response to the County's consultation:
- 4.3 The City Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the key transport issues facing the City and to put forward its ideas for consideration by the County Council as part of the development of the new LTP. In the City Council's view, it is necessary to examine the advantages and disadvantages of all the possible options and not to prematurely rule out options at this stage in the process, even if those options may not be feasible to implement over the lifetime of the next LTP.
- 4.4 It is vital to the further development of Oxford as a successful sub-regional centre and as a 'regional transport hub' that public transport improvements and other complementary measures are planned and delivered over the period of the next LTP and beyond. The County Council's intention to prepare an "Access to Oxford" Strategy for inclusion in the LTP is therefore welcomed. It is hoped that this Strategy will be bold and forward-thinking, whilst also knitting together the various elements of new bus routes and links, parking controls, information systems etc. into a coherent overall package.

- 4.5 The Access to Oxford Strategy should take account of the need for convenient access for residents and others seeking to travel within and around the City, as well as the need for improved accessibility into the City centre for those travelling from outside Oxford. In this regard, there is a need for the exploration of more radical approaches to improving accessibility to the Headington area given the current significant congestion problems and the further pressures that will arise during the LTP period from the relocation of the Radcliffe Infirmary to the John Radcliffe and Churchill sites, together with the cumulative impact of other healthcare and education developments. It is recognised that the London Road Corridor Study is underway, but it is felt that major improvements to public transport accessibility to the hospitals and other services in Headington need to be brought forward and integrated with the wider Access to Oxford Strategy.
- 4.6 The City Council welcomes the decision of the County Council Executive not to proceed with the core GTE scheme as previously envisaged, and will not support schemes which have such a detrimental environmental impact as the GTE proposals. However, it is clearly important that the opportunity is now taken to look at a range of alternatives for improving accessibility and addressing congestion on the radial routes.
- 4.7 The City Council supports in principle the development of a high quality, branded Premium Routes bus network, backed by additional bus priority measures where necessary. All forms of bus priority should be examined, including conventional bus lanes and gates, the use of 'Intelligent Transport Systems' that adjust timings at traffic signals to favour buses, or even the development of two-way 'tidal' bus lanes that enable buses to have priority during the morning and evening peak periods. Premium Routes must be complemented by a better service to some outlying areas of the city that are not currently well served by public transport, e.g. Old Marston and Risinghurst.
- 4.8 The City Council also supports the formation of a Statutory Quality Bus Partnership (QBP) involving all the bus operators, which should be used as a mechanism for the introduction of important initiatives such as real time information, and improved and integrated ticketing. Methods of pre-payment for bus travel should be encouraged, and the potential for single ticketing at Park and Ride needs to be explored. The QBP could also be used to set targets for the minimum proportion of buses for each operator that conform to the highest emission standards, as recommended recently by the Air Quality Management joint Review Group.
- 4.9 Given that air quality is one of the four shared priority themes highlighted by the DfT and is a matter of significant local concern, it is important that the second Oxfordshire LTP incorporates statutory air quality targets and makes a concerted attempt to tackle the nitrogen dioxide problem in parts of central Oxford and at busy ring-road

junctions. The City Council believes that the recommendations of the Air Quality Management joint Review Group should be implemented as far as possible. It is suggested that the LTP should also keep under review the option of pursuing more radical longer-term measures (e.g. use of hybrid and alternative fuel buses and the introduction of a Low Emission Zone).

- 4.10 Linked to the issue of air quality, but also to accessibility, road safety and wider health objectives, is the need for a proactive approach towards the promotion of cycling and walking. It is important that the relatively high levels of cycling and walking in Oxford do not lead to any public perception of complacency by the County and City Council's in this regard, particularly as the local targets in the first LTP for increasing the proportion of trips to work by cycle and on foot are currently not on track to be met. The promotion of greater use of Oxford's waterways is also encouraged.
- 4.11 With regard to the use of the car, in a city like Oxford with constrained road capacity it is inevitable that some form of demand management measures will be needed to enable the maximum number of people to travel as conveniently as possible. The City Council is looking at the issue of City centre parking charges, but other options such as congestion charging or introducing a workplace parking levy are not supported at the present time. Such schemes can be seen as regressive, since poorer and richer motorists pay the same. Nevertheless, it is suggested that further work on the costs and benefits of either approach be undertaken for potential consideration as part of a future LTP submission. By the time of the third LTP submission in 2010, it is likely that technology will have significantly advanced in this field, and there may well be charging schemes in operation in other cities outside London from which lessons could be learnt about the practicality of such a scheme in Oxford.
- 4.12 The expansion of Controlled Parking Zones (CPZ's) is strongly supported in areas of the City where residents have requested such zones. It is noted that there are a growing number of areas where such zones exist, but that there is also currently a backlog in progressing many proposed schemes. The County Council is urged to attach greater priority to these schemes than at present.
- 4.13 Alongside any measures that restrain private car use, it will be important to ensure that sufficient, well-located information is made available to motorists, for instance through the use of Variable Message Signing on the ring road to indicate whether any spaces are available at City centre car parks.
- 4.14 The expansion of Park and Ride, either through new 'remote' sites at the Country Towns or additional capacity on the edge of Oxford, is supported in principle although the potential planning and land ownership constraints are recognised. A wide range of options should

be explored, including the potential for expanding provision on the outskirts of the City through the identification of a new site as an alternative to extending existing sites. In addition, the potential for developing one or more of the Park and Ride sites into a wider transport interchange (with facilities for freight transshipment or accommodating coach services displaced from the City centre) should be actively explored as part of work on the LTP.

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications for the City Council arising from this report.

6 Legal Implications

- 6.1 There are no legal implications for the City Council arising from this report.

7 Staffing Implications

- 7.1 There are no staffing implications for the City Council arising from this report.

8 Timetable

- 8.1 It is understood that the County Council's Executive will consider a consultation draft version of the new LTP in March or April 2005, followed by a further 6-week consultation period. It is hoped that there will be an opportunity for Area Committees and the Environment Scrutiny Committee to consider the consultation draft as well as the Executive Board within the timescales set. The County Council will then approve the plan for submission on a provisional basis to the DfT by the end of July 2005.

THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY:
Councillor Ed Turner - Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, Housing and Economic Development:
Sharon Cosgrove – Strategic Director, Physical Environment
Legal and Democratic Services: Lindsay Cane
Financial Management: Penny Gardner

Background Papers: None