

Planning

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Your reference:

Our reference: Reading Transport Strategy
2036

Date: 4th September 2020

Dear Sir/Madam,

Response to consultation on Reading Transport Strategy 2036

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the current consultation for the draft Reading Transport Strategy 2036, which will become your fourth Local Transport Plan in due course. We responded to your previous consultation in September 2019 and much of our response below builds upon our position then.

We note that this current consultation includes detail on proposed schemes and measures, framed within an overall vision and objectives including addressing climate action, tackling congestion, and improving air quality. This is similar to the current and proposed approach to transport in Oxfordshire.

We have reviewed the consultation documents and consultation questions, and wish to make the following comments. Given the comments we wish to make we have not specifically answered the consultation questions. We would also welcome the opportunity for further discussion and will continue to positively engage with you to seek to address the points raised below.

We welcome many of the principles, objectives and policies set out in the draft, including those supporting active and healthy travel and public transport improvements. This will provide a good basis for continued partnership working on planning for cross-boundary travel between Reading and South Oxfordshire.

However, we are particularly concerned about the approach proposed to developing large-scale 'multi-modal schemes' to the north of Reading, in particular the proposed Thames Crossing, Reading Orbital Route and North Reading Park and Rides. We believe that development and delivery of these major schemes is inconsistent with

the objectives and many of the policies of the plan, they will not be effective in managing cross-boundary travel movements, and are likely to have significant negative impacts on South Oxfordshire.

We consider that to maximise effectiveness and success, there needs to be a joined-up and holistic strategy involving, for example, bus, taxi and cycle lanes and corridors, and improved bus shuttle services with serviced bus stops. We continue to recognise that there are challenges to providing bus services from South Oxfordshire to Reading and particular consideration of this issue continues to be needed.

We continue to support the strategy to increase the number of journeys made on foot or by bike, by improving the quality and safety of pedestrian and cycle routes and how well they are connected, particularly through the provision of dedicated spaces for walking and cycling that are free of cars. We encourage the development of cycleways, in particular segregated cycleways, where this is possible and appropriate. We support your objective to reduce emissions and improve air quality to create a carbon neutral town.

More specifically, as stated in our 2019 response, we are aware that during the Reading Festival a temporary pedestrian footbridge is constructed across the Thames connecting the Mapledurham campsite with the main festival site at Rivermead. Our residents have commented that this bridge is useful during the festival and would be of benefit all year round. Could consideration be given to a permanent pedestrian footbridge to allow a new sustainable travel option between South Oxfordshire and Reading?

Proposed Third Thames Crossing

The Reading Local Plan identifies the potential to build a new bridge over the River Thames at Caversham. The proposed bridge would land in South Oxfordshire, with one of the proposals being near to Playhatch and would be located largely in South Oxfordshire and Wokingham. To date, there has not been enough work undertaken on the impact that this new road bridge would have on the Oxfordshire road network or the necessary mitigation measures. It is also not clear how the bridge and suitable road connections will be funded. Therefore, we are concerned with the approach of including this large-scale scheme in the draft Transport Strategy in the absence of sufficient assessment.

Earlier this year we objected to the Wokingham's Draft Local Plan, in respect of their emerging Policy SS11. The basis for our objection was that it predetermines ongoing Options Appraisal work and other related work streams currently being undertaken in relation to the new river crossing by WSP on behalf of Wokingham and Reading Borough Councils, with support from the Thames Valley and Berkshire LEP and Oxfordshire County Council. South Oxfordshire District Council is now also a funding contributor and stakeholder in this work.

We noted in our response to the Wokingham draft Local Plan consultation that the Feasibility Report dated June 2019 prepared by Scape and Balfour Beatty, which predetermined the location of the proposed third Thames Crossing, had not involved any consultation with South Oxfordshire District Council officers or councillors and yet had been formally submitted to the Department of Transport.

Earlier this year the Department for Transport graded the project as Amber and have required Wokingham Borough Council and Reading Borough Council to undertake further work including an up-to-date detailed Options Appraisal to assess the potential route options for a third Thames Crossing including considering alternative options such as demand management, sustainable transport options, and improving air quality. However, we are very concerned that the output of this study is already predetermined, as demonstrated by Policy SS11 in the Wokingham Draft Local Plan and now the references made in the draft Reading Transport Strategy. In respect of the Reading Thames Crossing, South Oxfordshire District Council has specifically agreed a motion setting out its concerns, which is included at Appendix 1.

The Options Appraisal process needs to be robust and fair. At this stage, the business case for a third Thames Crossing is not yet agreed and the Department of Transport have not yet agreed to fund further work.

The Options Appraisal should be complemented by comprehensive up-to-date transport modelling, planned development, and an assessment of planned infrastructure. The Appraisal should be an unbiased document that includes consultation with relevant local authorities, statutory consultees and communities that these proposals may impact upon and should ensure that the proposed route has minimal impact on the natural and physical environment. This includes the nationally protected landscape of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which falls close by in South Oxfordshire and could see changes to levels of traffic routing through it, with impacts on its air quality, character and tranquillity.

It is concerning that draft Transport Strategy does not make reference to the majority of the crossing being located within South Oxfordshire or recognise that there will be impacts upon the South Oxfordshire road network and local communities.

Any current and future work that is carried out needs to consider the contents of the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan (which is currently at examination) including the related evidence-based documentation. This includes the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan and the committed external funding streams.

We would like to clarify that a third Thames crossing is not needed to mitigate the growth proposed in the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan. While the our emerging Local Plan includes high levels of growth, the vast majority of the proposed housing is far from Reading and the location of the proposed river crossing. As such the map on page 9 of your consultation document may be misleading as it could be interpreted to show the location of the growth rather than the annual amount across all of South Oxfordshire. If the map is still included in the final version of the Strategy then it should be expanded to show all of South Oxfordshire and indicate where the growth is located. Please note that the annual housing requirement the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan proposes is a stepped trajectory with 900 dwellings per year in the period to 2025/26, and not 990 as currently shown.

Given the recent Climate Emergencies declared by both our Councils we would encourage you to give greater prioritisation to more sustainable approaches for tackling road congestion, in particular a focus on increased connectivity rather than movement, and demand management solutions such as dedicated bus lane management to key facilities and employers, and the delivery of active travel

alternatives. The delivery of a car-based third Thames crossing conflicts with your vision and objectives, particularly your aspiration to achieve a 'carbon neutral' future, which we fully support.

Other comments

We do not currently consider that there is justification for development and delivery of the proposed North Reading Orbital Route, Third Thames Crossing or North Reading Park and Rides. It is unclear from the information provided of their impact and outcomes. We object to the name North Reading Park and Rides since these appear likely to be in South Oxfordshire which is not 'North Reading', and the lack of recognition that these are likely to be outside Reading's boundary in South Oxfordshire. We do not agree that we are 'delivery partners' for these schemes at this time. We also do not consider the text in this section properly recognises the following key issues associated with these schemes:

- The high cost for delivery of these schemes, meaning that the economic viability for their delivery is uncertain.
- That these schemes do not link well with helping to deliver the objectives and policies set out elsewhere in the draft strategy.
- That these schemes will have significant and currently unknown environmental impacts, on South Oxfordshire, that need further careful study. This is recognised in the associated Integrated Impact Assessment document, which notes in section E.2 of the technical appendices that, 'No detail is given to the exact infrastructure requirements, land take, routing or associated physical environmental effects of the proposed Thames Crossing (and orbital route). Therefore, specific effects cannot be identified in the assessment.'

Figure 33 references the potential for three Park & Ride schemes to the north of Reading (clarification is sought on whether or not these are proposed in South Oxfordshire) to be primarily served by the 'Orbital Fast Track Public Transport Corridor'. To deliver this approach, a new Orbital Route road route, linked to the proposed new Thames Crossing is required which at present we believe may not be financially viable, and we believe could have significant environmental impacts on surrounding areas. We have concerns regarding the impact on the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty arising from these schemes.

We are also not clear from this draft Strategy about the viability and deliverability of three major additional Park and Ride sites to the north of Reading. There is little detail on the proposed exact locations or size of these sites, or of how bus services would be changed/impacted to serve these sites.

We support the development and delivery of Active Travel Schemes, including those identified in the LCWIP network. However, it would be beneficial to identify how opportunities to expand the network across the administrative boundaries, into South Oxfordshire will be established and delivered.

Section 7: Funding and Implementation - We have reservations that the larger-scale transport schemes such as the North Reading Orbital Route, the Thames Crossing and the three North Reading Park and Ride sites can be funded and delivered in the timescales outlined, particularly given the significant detailed work that is needed to

progress these schemes, and that in our view they are not currently justified as part of the overall strategy.

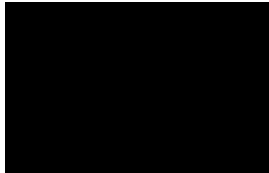
Section 8: Partnerships and Stakeholders - As noted above, we do not currently see ourselves as 'delivery partners' for the large-scale transport schemes proposed to the north of Reading, some of which are located in South Oxfordshire, and would want much further detail on implications for South Oxfordshire and assessment of alternative sustainable transport options before engaging in any more detailed feasibility work on these schemes.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic it would appear too soon to plan for the proposed large-scale transport schemes. There would be potential benefit in gaining a greater understanding of changing transport patterns to ensure plans are appropriate for the future.

South Oxfordshire District Council is keen to work with your Council and others to understand further and in more detail the specific locations and justification for any major cross boundary or sub-regional infrastructure that will impact upon South Oxfordshire. To this end the Council has joined the Working Group. The contents of the draft Reading Transport Strategy 2036 is premature given this ongoing work.

We look forward to continuing to engage with you regarding your Local Transport Plan, and trust that there will be further opportunities to expand on our comments above.

Yours faithfully,



Andrew Lane
Senior Planning Policy Officer

**Appendix 1: Copy of Motion Agreed by Full Council at both Oxfordshire County Council and South Oxfordshire District Council.
Motion by Councillor David Bartholomew**

“Reading Borough Council is proposing to build a vast new bridge to alleviate Reading’s traffic problems. It is included in their Draft Local Plan as a top priority. The bridge would take off at the Thames Valley business park near Reading and land near Playhatch in Oxfordshire. The only onwards option for traffic would be through the congested streets of Henley or along the narrow B481 country road through Oxfordshire villages.

Reading and the other Berkshire councils supporting the scheme are focusing almost entirely on the costs of building the bridge and the benefits it will bring to Reading. They recognise that the bridge would have a substantial impact on the Oxfordshire road network, but blithely state this will be dealt with by unspecified and uncosted ‘mitigation measures’.

This council calls on the Leader to write to council leaders at Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell, plus MPs John Howell, John Redwood, Matt Rodda and Theresa May, stating that:

- a) In the context of the Climate Emergency a car-based solution to a car-based problem that would pour thousands of cars and HGVs into Oxfordshire is totally inappropriate and should a new bridge be built it should be restricted to public transport, cyclists and pedestrians;
- b) Notwithstanding the above, if a car-based solution is pursued, the bridge and necessary mitigation measures (i.e. improvements to the Oxfordshire road network) must not considered as two separate projects, but as one project so that the benefits, disadvantages and costs of the scheme can be holistically assessed.”