

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Neighbourhoods & Community Services **DATE:** 6 March 2013
Scrutiny Panel

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WARD(S): All

PORTFOLIO: Councillor Sohail Munawar (Commissioner for Social and
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PART I **CONSIDERATION & COMMENT**

TRAFFIC CONGESTION ON THE STRATEGIC ROUTE NETWORK IN SLOUGH

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present information on the current and future situation regarding levels of traffic using Slough's strategic route network and to discuss possible areas for investigation to deal with the issues identified.

2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

- 2.1 That the Panel consider the issue of traffic congestion on the strategic route network in Slough, what is currently being done to combat these issues and what the next steps should be.
- 2.2 That the Panel recommend to Cabinet:
- a) the formation of a Working Group to investigate possible solutions and report back on its findings;
 - b) that this Group include the relevant Cabinet Member and a Representative from the Scrutiny Function; and
 - c) that the Group's Terms of Reference are published, for information, in the next agenda of the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel.

3 Sustainable Community Strategy Priorities

- 3.1 Work to improve traffic congestion in Slough contributes to the delivery of the following of Slough's Sustainable Community Strategy's priorities:
- Economy and Skills – providing access to jobs through improvement on the network, as well as attracting businesses to the Borough through journey time reliability
 - Safer Communities – ensuring residents have safer crossing facilities at junctions and locations where there is a demand

- Health and Wellbeing – encouraging sustainable transport modes includes walking and cycling, which contribute to the improvement of health in the Borough
- Regeneration and Environment – reducing congestion, pollution and CO2 emissions, thereby resulting in better air quality for residents and the attainment of local carbon reduction targets

Cross Cutting themes:

Civic responsibility – success at reducing traffic congestion in Slough will require engagement by those using the strategic route network in order to bring about the modal shift in transport habits that is required.

Improving the image of the town – improving levels of traffic congestion will improve the image of Slough and help make it an accessible, safe, economically vibrant and healthy place to live, work and visit.

4 **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

The Intelligent Transport System is funded through various streams including the Council, Better Bus Fund and the Local Sustainable Transport Fund.

There are no other financial implications.

(b) Risk Management

There are no reported risks associated with the recommendations contained within this report.

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights Act or Other Legal Implications related to the recommendations in this report.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

There is no identified need for the completion of an EIA related to the recommendations in this report.

5 **Supporting Information**

- 5.1 At its meeting on the 10 January 2013, the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Committee agreed Terms of Reference to review the issue of traffic congestion on the strategic route network in Slough. The Terms of Reference are attached as Appendix A.
- 5.2 In order to do this, the Panel will look at the current situation in Slough and proposals for future development, commercial, residential and educational in Slough. This report looks to set these out, and then put forward current schemes aimed at reducing congestion, before bringing forward future proposals for discussion.

6 Introduction

- 6.1 It is a recognised issue that during peak times, there is a significant amount of traffic using Slough's strategic route network. On a typical weekday, approximately 40,000 people commute into Slough, with 25,000 Slough resident's commuting out of the town to work elsewhere.
- 6.2 If, through various schemes, we could look to reduce the level of traffic on the road during the morning and evening peaks by 10% that could have a dramatic effect on the flow of traffic through the Borough.

7 Strategic Planning

- 7.1 The Core Strategy sets out the Council's strategic planning policies, including a number of Strategic Objectives for Slough, a Spatial Strategy and a number of Core Policies which are designed to deliver these.
- 7.2 The Strategic Objectives are:
- Meeting Slough's housing allocation
 - Maintaining a sustainable buoyant and diverse economy; and
 - Encouraging the regeneration of the town centre, district centres and the existing business areas
- 7.3 In order to meet these objectives, the Spatial Strategy establishes the principle that "concentrating development but spreading the benefits to help build local communities." The effect of this will be to focus future development on the town centre, which is the most accessible location for public transport and provides the best opportunities for carrying out more than one activity in a single journey.
- 7.4 A key reason for development in the town centre is that it can take place with much lower levels of car parking. This will allow for maximum restraint to be applied to parking for residential schemes, and the principle of there being no overall increase in parking within any commercial redevelopment schemes. The Core Strategy also endorses the limit of 5,000 public car parking spaces set out in the Town Centre Parking Strategy. And whilst this does not address the issue of through traffic, the use of parking restraint is intended to reduce the level of car trip generation.
- 7.5 Town centre residential developments would restrict the ability of those residing to own cars, through car parking space restrictions. These would then be aimed at those who are seeking the accessibility of public transport through the bus and train station.
- 7.5 One of the most significant developments outside of the town centre in terms of traffic generation is SEGRO's new commercial hub for the Trading Estate. This is the subject of a parking spaces cap, which means that parking levels of the trading estate must remain at current levels, and supports the introduction of a package of public transport improvements to ensure that there is no increase in car commuting to the Estate.
- 7.6 The Strategic Objectives, along with the natural growth of the town means that there is likely to be a gradual increase in car ownership within the town, however, moves

towards encouraging journeys to be made by public transport rather than cars through car parking restrictions can help mitigate some of the effects of this growth.

8 Business Impact

- 8.1 As has previously been explained 65,000 people commute into and out of Slough every day, including 7,200 who work at Heathrow. Of those commuting into Slough, many are destined for major concentrations of employment in the town centre, along the A4 Bath Road corridor, Poyle Trading Estate and Wexham Park Hospital. Slough Trading Estate is a key destination, currently home to approximately 17,000 employees.
- 8.2 The private car is the most common mode of travel to work, albeit less dominant amongst those who both live and work in Slough, for those who are likely to have shorter commuting distances. Indeed, for this group, walking is the second most popular mode of travel to work at 20%. The most popular method of public transport used by those commuting into Slough is train, predominantly through Slough station.
- 8.3 Therefore, travel in Slough is dominated by the car, with 450 million vehicle kilometres travelled in the Borough each year (excluding M4 traffic). This results in severe peak period congestion on the principal road network. It is estimated that congestion costs the town £34 million each year in wasted travel time alone, reducing average speeds by 8%. During the morning peak the average speed on the strategic road network falls below 20 miles per hour.
- 8.4 Without further action, traffic levels could increase by at least 20% by 2026 and congestion on the A4 during peak hours is predicted to reach stress levels by 2021.

9 Education Impact

- 9.1 Currently, schools travel can account for a significant share of traffic and already contributes towards congestion. For example, traffic levels during the morning peak hour on Wexham Road and the A4 are typically 10% lower in school holidays. Nationally, during the morning peak time one in five journeys is taking a child to school; in Slough this is one in three journeys. There are journeys where parents are taking children to school by car and going on to work is one aspect, but there are also a significant proportion of parents who drive their children to school and immediately return home.
- 9.2 As the Local Education Authority, Slough Borough Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places available in Slough.
- 9.3 Slough has one of the fastest growing birth rates in the country, with a 48% increase in the number of births since 2001/2. This has led to an increasing demand for school places initially in reception, but shortly in secondary schools as well. This increasing demand will require an additional seven to 10 classes in primary schools by 2015/16 and up to six additional secondary schools (34 classes) by 2019/20.
- 9.3 This expansion and the numbers accessing these schools, on top of the current levels, will have an impact of the ability of the strategic route network to cope.

10 Network Management

- 10.1 As a Council, we have recognised the problem this level of traffic poses for Slough. The third Local Transport Plan (LTP3) focuses on encouraging economic growth sustainable. The LTP3 contains 12 objectives for transport, each of which relate to one or more of the five themes of our Sustainable Community Strategy, for example:
- a) Objective – to ensure that the transport system helps Slough sustain its economic competitiveness and retain its position as an economic hub of the South East (Economic & Skills);
 - b) Objective – to facilitate the development of new housing in accordance with the Local Development Framework (Housing)
 - c) Objective – To reduce transport's CO2 emissions and make the transport network resilient to the effects of climate change (Regeneration & Environment)
 - d) Objective – To mitigate the effects of travel and the transport system on the natural environment, heritage and landscape (Regeneration & Environment and Health & Wellbeing).
- 10.2 Traffic congestion already has an adverse impact on business efficiency and inward investment and therefore is a threat to the future economic viability of Slough. In June 2012 the Council was awarded an additional £4.305m, through the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF), over three years (ending in March 2015). The outcomes from this award are aimed towards modal shift and congestion reduction through encouraging behavioural change, not just within the community but with visitors to the town, by providing suitable attractive alternatives.
- 10.3 The objectives of the LSTF funding are:
- to improve the efficiency of Slough's businesses;
 - to support retention and growth of employment in Slough by protecting and enhancing the connectivity advantages which make Slough a good place to do business and a focus on future inward investment;
 - to reduce CO2 emissions from road traffic; and
 - to improve the health of our residents by improving air quality and encouraging active travel.
- 10.4 The LSTF package contains six elements designed to achieve these objectives by delivering changes in travel behaviour:
- coordinating an employer shuttle bus club to rationalise existing services, and provide supporting infrastructure, to generate a mode shift from car to rail/shuttle bus;
 - a step-change in cycling infrastructure, in particular a new east-west cycle spine route, two new cycle hubs, match-funded employer cycle grants, and a bike share scheme;
 - improvements to local walking and cycling networks to improve access to employment locations and schools. In particular measures to improve safety, security and permeability to and from key destinations;
 - broadening the Intelligent Transport System (ITS) and Split Cycle Offset Optimisation Technique (SCOOT) network coverage to enhance traffic management, bus priority and real-time information on the strategic road network, together with greater parking enforcement;

- a major workplace behavioural change programme in the key employment sites in Slough; and
- a focused schools' behavioural change programme.

10.5 The Better Bus Fund is one element in this process. The Council was awarded £1.415m in March 2012 for the improvement of the No.78 service. In real terms this award improves not only the No.78 service, but congestion in general. The award concentrated on the specific roads causing congestion to the No.78 route, namely Farnham Road and the A4. This will entail the improvement of a number of junctions along Farnham Road and A4 with SCOOT.

10.6 The Better Bus Fund is part of a broader requirement that future growth is sustainable through ensuring that the bus is a transport mode of choice for people who live and work in Slough. In 2011 over 5 million people travelled on buses in Slough. The Council is committed to delivering the necessary infrastructure to facilitate more reliable and attractive transport corridors for bus operators, through infrastructure projects such as selected bus lane implementation; filling in bus stop lay-bys to reduce delays at stops; and a highway widening scheme to improve link capacity and thereby reduce bus journey times along with those for other vehicles.

10.7 The Urban Traffic Management Control (UTMC) and Common Database is new to Slough, and is in the process of being finalised. However, the system is able to assist the signals team in dealing with complex issues on the network through advance planning. This means that the team are able to develop strategies for dealing with planned or non-planned events, such as processions or motorway closures, through providing changes to signal timings if certain thresholds are triggered by heavier traffic. This system also enables us to set up, through Variable Message Signs in the Borough, advice to motorists if there are delays.

10.8 These are the mitigation measures currently being worked on, but there are still others that could be investigated and tested for viability.

Businesses:

- a) peak spreading – this would entail working with businesses to stagger working hours. Whilst this might expand a one hour peak time to two hours, the levels throughout would not reach stress levels;
- b) parking place levies – this would expand on the current strategic planning principle that parking places are restricted;
- c) guided bus ways – these are used elsewhere and provide a more reliable (time-wise) route for buses to travel, but are restricted by space and cost.

Schools:

- a) in order to lessen the impact of school runs on the morning peak, in particular, whether there are options for staggering start/finish times of schools across the Borough;
- b) changing school term dates;
- c) looking at how effective school travel plans are, such as where journeys are of a short distance; could there be options for incentivising walking instead.

11 Conclusion

- 11.1 Despite the dominance of the car there is potential to increase the share of travel by sustainable modes of transport, as many car journeys are relatively short: over a third of the employees on the Slough Trading Estate live within five kilometres of work; whilst, for the town centre, the comparable figure is 68%. There is also potential to encourage many of the 40,000 people commuting into Slough each day from further afield to car share or switch from car to other modes, in particular rail through the improvement of links between the stations and employment clusters.
- 11.2 In addition to this, there is significant potential to build on successes to date by increasing the percentage of school journeys made on foot, by bicycle, by public transport or by car share.
- 11.3 Most of the traffic on Slough's strategic road network starts or ends its journey in Slough. For example on the A4 west of the town centre only 9% of traffic in the morning peak has both its origin and destination outside of Slough. Therefore, we have the opportunity to influence the vast majority of car traffic by 'nudging' short trips to walk or cycle and longer trips to use public transport. Recent surveys have shown that many car commuters are willing to consider alternative modes of travel, and some of the schools contributing most to car traffic are keen to implement measures to reduce car dependency such as more environmentally friendly travel options.

12 Appendices Attached

A - Terms of Reference

13 Background Papers

None.