

Regeneration, Major Infrastructure Projects

Significant Decision

Bus lane introduction along A4 with supporting cycling measures

Prepared by:

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Purpose of Significant Decision:

To seek approval to implement a shared bus and cycle lane under a temporary traffic order, Post Covid, to support public transport users, cyclists and pedestrians as part of social distancing.

Introduction

The Council has during the Covid-19 lockdown recorded, like many other authorities, a significant drop in traffic flows and measurable improvement to air quality. There has also been an increase in cycling and walking levels. Emerging evidence suggests that once restrictions start to ease, there will be an upturn in car use and decrease in public transport use.

We know that active travel is affordable, delivers significant health benefits, can improve wellbeing and improves air quality. Similarly, we also know that local bus services provide a vital means of accessing services for many of our residents. Within Slough, over a quarter of households do not have access to a car, this ranges from 10% of households in Cippenham, Colnbrook and Langley to over 40% in Upton, Chalvey and Burnham. (Local Transport Plan 3)

We need to lock in the benefits that have been realised during this lockdown period and therefore; a dedicated bus lane with supporting cycling infrastructure along the A4 is proposed. The A4 bus lane will be designed to reflect better cycling infrastructure, enabling cyclists to be separated in the short/medium term from pedestrians. In addition, public transport users will have more room near bus stops and other parts of street furniture. Pedestrians will have additional space which was used by cyclists.

We recognise that adapting road space can influence modal choice. Where Government has indicated that additional funding will be released to support walking and cycling aspirations, there may be scope, at a later stage to introduce segregated cycle lanes, dependent on feasibility studies and funding coming forward.

Background

The current status on traffic flows are included in the attached appendices and report that approximately 70% traffic reduction around the Huntercombe Spur junction and around a 50% reduction near to Brands Hill/Junction 5. This reduction has then been compared to the air quality modelling undertaken looking at the five AQMA's.

The five AQMA's have indicated that in terms of NO₂ there has been a reduction of between 30%-41% and in respect of NO_x there has been a reduction of between 45%-59% these are modelled scenarios based on data available to the environmental quality team.

The rise in numbers cycling and walking locally has not been included here. We have four permanent cycle counters located in the borough along the Bath Road, Salt Hill Park, Cinder Track near and the Footpath near Kedermiser Park however these locations would not pick up the local journeys to services/shops undertaken by cyclists during this lockdown period. Walking numbers are not monitored.

Government Guidance Covid 19

A primary aim is to support social distancing as per the current legislation (of 2m distance). The proposed changes to the A4 are designed to help residents make trips by bicycle or foot while maintaining social distancing and to support bus services.

The scheme is proposed under the new legislation for introducing traffic orders. A temporary traffic order will be introduced, which can remain in place for up to 18 months. Where this will be introduced to put the proposed measure in place, it will also allow us to monitor both positive and negative impacts and adjust the scheme accordingly. Traffic signs will be needed to inform users of the changes to road layouts.

Officers are working on surveys and designs to help support this undertaking and will be engaging with stakeholders over the design process. Large stretches of the A4 already have bus lanes.

Proposal

The new bus/cycle lanes are proposed from east of the Huntercombe Roundabout through to the Sainsbury's roundabout both on the east and westbound carriageways. A small section east of the Sainsbury's roundabout to Lynwood Avenue will not have new bus lanes due to the single lane approach after which the bus lanes will connect with the existing SMaRT bus lanes which were implemented two years ago.

In respect of cycling along the A4 there have been concerns raised by residents about social distancing with pedestrians on shared-use paths. By introducing bus /cycle lanes we will be able to reduce the conflict by providing cyclists an on-road facility which will have less traffic and no interaction with pedestrians except at junctions. This will also mean that cyclists will have less interaction with street furniture on the footways such as bus stops (with passengers boarding/alighting), streetlighting columns/sign poles etc.

Risks

It should be noted that although we are introducing public transport improvements, capacity on buses will be reduced up to potentially only one tenth of previous

capacity being available, when social distancing rules are applied. Within Slough, it's recognised that many residents are reliant on bus services. We will work with operators to maintain bus services. It should be noted however that certain routes may be considered unprofitable and no longer provided. Should this occur, an additional cost to the Council may be incurred.

It is anticipated that the proposed infrastructure will have a negative impact on private vehicle journey times and may increase congestion along some points. Due to the urgency of this work to introduce protective measures in response to Covid-19, there will be limited mitigation packages that will alleviate congestion on the highway although work is being undertaken to adjust signal timings where possible.

Businesses have already responded quickly to establishing working from home practices. It is considered likely that this will continue to be maintained even after the lockdown eases. In addition, in order to manage social distancing within the workplace, it is unlikely that a *business as usual* model will be reinstated in the short term. The negative impact of increased congestion is therefore unlikely to be felt immediately and will permit an incremental 'bedding in' period.

A safety audit will be undertaken to ensure the A4 bus lane with cycling improvements meets the necessary requirements.

It is likely that increased rat-running will occur, as drivers attempt to avoid the A4. We are reviewing known sites where this may happen and will seek to introduce supportive measures to address this issue. This may be cost prohibitive and we may have to implement a capped offer to reduce negative impacts, if we unable to remove them.

Local businesses may be impacted with concerns raised that their staff are unable to travel to work easily, or that their deliveries to site have been negatively impacted.

Not all cyclists will be confident sharing a lane with a bus. The bus lane will be introduced which may improve bus movements, it may not support cycling growth. A phased approach is recommended which builds in the option of creating a segregated cycle lane as funding comes forward. It is unlikely that there will be significant increase in cycling until a segregated option is built.

Monitoring

Although supporting social distancing is central to this proposal, we will not be reporting on this - as guidance changes from central government we will need to respond accordingly. However, the Council do need to demonstrate that these proposed measures are worthwhile. An aim of this work is to ensure we do not return to pre-covid air quality measures. We will therefore continue to assess the impact of the proposed measure has on air quality and local pollution levels through monitoring and modelling.

Journey times will be reviewed periodically during this period to measure impacts. We will also be speaking to local businesses to collect qualitative data.

Supporting Local Policies

The scheme will help deliver the following key actions from the Five Year Plan and the Major Infrastructure Projects Service Plan 2020-21.

- 1.2 Ensure a fit for business transport infrastructure – by reducing congestion and making journey times more reliable and safer.
- 1. 4. Build on success in making Slough safer - by incorporating road safety measures into all engineering schemes delivered across the Council.
- 5.1 Enable children and young people to lead emotionally and physically healthy lives – by improving air quality through schemes that reduce congestion and improve safety at key locations

Financial Implications

- Dedicated bus lane and markings for cyclists.
- Advance stop lines to be introduced along the entire route to accommodate cyclists at junctions.
- Review of traffic signals to reduce journey times for drivers.
- Review of areas to prevent rat running with supporting measures

The cost of undertaking this work is expected to be in the region of £60k subject to level of signal modifications that are required and the amount of traffic management required. This cost will be met through the existing LTP capital budget and Highway Maintenance capital budget.

Supporting measures to prevent rat running will be reviewed in line with the total budget of £60k.

Equalities Impact Assessment

An equalities impact assessment has not been undertaken. However, the expectation is that there will be no negative impacts for any specific group. Positive impacts are expected in terms of reduced pollution, controlled social distancing and improvements to passenger transport.

Legal Implications

Ensuring Slough's roads are safe continues to be a key local priority which is also determined by the Statutory Duty to promote road safety and to act to reduce the likelihood of road casualties occurring (Section 39, Road Traffic Act 1988). The guidance on social distancing and the expectation that pedestrians/cyclists and public transport users will come into closer proximity helps support the councils position to provide this new infrastructure.

The Network Management Duty requires local traffic authorities to manage their networks with a view to securing the movement of traffic on the authority's road network. In this instance, 'traffic' is explicitly defined as including pedestrians, cyclists and motorised vehicles.

Conclusion

In line with support from the political administration and in view of the potential benefits that are expected to arise from the implementation of bus lanes in the forms of better social distancing, better cycling facilities, improved journey times for public transport users and improvements to air quality it is proposed that bus lanes are introduced along the A4 from Huntercombe Rbt to east of the Sainsbury's roundabout, starting first with the deployment in the town centre.

Recommended Decision

It is recommended that the following proposals are approved:

- That new bus lanes on the eastbound carriageway from east of the Huntercombe Rbt to east of the Sainsbury's Rbt. be implemented
- That new bus lanes on the westbound carriageway from east of the Sainsbury's rbt to east of Huntercombe Rbt. be implemented
- That Cycle provision be included within the design including advanced stop lines and future proofed to accommodate segregated cycle lanes where possible.
- That signal timings are adjusted to help reduce congestion where possible.
- That Temporary Orders are implemented to ensure that the bus lanes are enforceable.
- That air quality monitoring/assessment be undertaken following the implementation.
- Reviews are undertaken after an initial three month period but also as and when circumstances change.

Approved:

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| Steven Gibson Interim Director – Regeneration | Signature redacted | Date 15/05/20 |
| Savio DeCruz Head of Major Infrastructure Projects | Signature redacted | Date 14/05/20 |
| Kam Hothi Network Manager | Signature redacted | Date 14/05/20 |
| Misha Byrne Senior Transport Planner | Signature redacted | Date 14/05/20 |