

DARLINGTON TRANSPORT FORUM

6th February 2006

PRESENT - Councillor Wallis (in the Chair); Councillors S.J. Jones, Lewis and Ruck.

APOLOGIES - Councillors Harker, Hartley and The Mayor.

Officers in Attendance – The Assistant Director of Development and Regeneration, Transport Policy Manager and the Highways Manager and the Youth Participation Officer, Darlington Borough Council and the Assistant Director of Health Improvement, Darlington PCT.

Representing Outside Organisations –

Alheimers Disease Society –
J.P. Rodwell

ARRIVA North East Limited –
T Batty, K. Poskett and T. Stevens

Bus Buddies –
A. Trevarrow

Darlington Association on Disability –
G. Pybus

Darlington MENCAP –
M. Richardson

Darlington Senior Citizens' Association –
P. Eastwood

Darlington Independent Taxi Traders Organisation –
N. Nevison

Durham Police –
S. Collingwood and M. Staugheir

Durham Tees Valley Airport –
G. Smith

Growing Older Living in Darlington (GOLD) –
B. Hoy

Investing in Children –
L. Finlay and K. Malcolm

Low Dinsdale Parish Council –

T. M. O'Neill

Middleton St. George Parish Council –

C. Sirrell

Motorcycle Action Group –

S. Hill

Rail Future NE

C. Hawkes

Stagecoach North East –

D. Elphee

Youth Transport Representative –

C. Smith

Independent Member –

K. Frid

23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

24. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Forum held on 10th October, 2005.

IT WAS AGREED – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

25. MATTERS ARISING – Pursuant to Minute 13/Oct/05, the Assistant Director of Development and Regeneration advised the Forum that following a recent recommendation from the Regional Transport Board that the plans for the Eastern Transport Corridor had been identified as a priority scheme and recommended to Government.

26. TRANSPORT AND YOUNG PEOPLE – Libby Finlay and Kim Malcolm, Investing in Children addressed the Forum to outline the findings of a research group used to determine young people's views on public transport in Darlington.

Discussion ensued on bus fares for young people over the age of 16 who were still in full-time education; accessibility of buses for young people with pushchairs; the number, frequency and timeliness of buses and taxis, as well as operators' policies in respect of consuming food and drink whilst on board on vehicles.

In response to the issues raised, it was reported that as part of the Town on the Move Project, work was ongoing to address the cost of travel for young people and it was envisaged that a multi-operator ticket would be available at a lower price in the near future. It was also noted that under 16 bus fares had been reduced to a half-fare.

Members and Officers of the Council and the bus operators welcomed the views of young people in planning and developing services and encouraged an ongoing dialogue in future.

IT WAS AGREED - That the findings be noted.

27. TOWN CENTRE ON –STREET PARKING – UPDATE – The Director of Development and Environment submitted a report (previously circulated) briefing members of the Forum on the current position regarding the operation of on-street charges for car parking.

Following the introduction of on-street car parking charges in November 2004 it was reported that a monitoring package had been implemented in order to refine the system, where appropriate, to address the issues raised by local residents and businesses.

Discussion ensued on the surveys undertaken to identify use and length of stay on street; footfall past local businesses; the ability to park; and the equity of enforcement. It was reported that substantially less vehicles were occupying the parking spaces beyond the time-limited period and therefore the turnover of spaces had increased; the monthly amount received from excess notices has fallen as the level of parking abuse reduced; and that the Council had now standardised the maximum period allowed for parking at two hours in response to concerns by traders, particularly on Grange Road and Duke Street.

It was reported that the introduction of on-street charges had coincided with a national downturn in retail sales and it was hoped that once recovery in retail trade took place, that traders would be in a better position to benefit from the improved availability of short stay parking spaces for their customers. It was noted that monitoring of the scheme would continue and further updates provided to the Forum as necessary.

Further to comments and questions from members of the Forum it was suggested that a reduction in charges be considered for selected streets in the pedestrian heart during the period of disruption and that better information to advise blue badge holders of their entitlement to park on-street for free should be considered.

With regard to the revenue generated from excess notices it was noted that this revenue was reinvested back into Darlington's transport infrastructure, in line with statutory provisions and it was generally accepted by the Forum that the introduction of on-street car parking charges had been beneficial in preventing parking abuse.

IT WAS AGREED- That the progress of and modifications to payments for on-street car parking in Darlington be noted.

28. DARLINGTON – CYCLING DEMONSTRATION TOWN – The Director of Development and Environment submitted a report (previously circulated) informing members of the Forum on the appointment of Darlington Borough Council as a Cycling Demonstration Town and outlining plans for spending the award.

It was reported that Darlington had been awarded £1.5 million over three calendar years, which would be matched by developer contributions, Local Transport Plans and other external funding. This funding would be used to continue to develop the Cycle Network in line with the second Local Transport Plan (2LTP), to address the shared priorities of accessibility; quality of life; congestion; road safety and air quality.

In addressing road safety, in particular, safe routes to schools, it was noted that national best practice guidelines were being followed where cycle lanes were sited along radial routes; a number of toucan crossings would be used to assist both pedestrians and cyclists; and that cycling training would be made available as Darlington was one of five nationally approved cycle training trainers.

IT WAS AGREED – That Darlington’s prestigious and unique status as both a sustainable travel town and a cycling demonstration town be noted.

29. HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF THE SECOND LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN – The Assistant Director of Health Improvement, Darlington Primary Care Trust (PCT) presented the findings of a report (previously circulated) providing members of the Forum with an overview of the purpose of Health Impact Assessments (HIA) and how the results would be applied to inform the second Local Transport Plan.

It was reported that the HIA was a process aimed at understanding the positive and negative impacts on health of a given policy or proposal through a two-stage process of screening and scoping. Members’ attention was drawn to the scoring matrix (also previously circulated) through which the six strategy objectives in the provisional 2LTP and the six sections of the Accessibility Strategy had been screened against the criteria of health impact; inequality impact; impact on access to health services; and health policy.

As a result of the screening it was reported that two potential areas for further scoping had been identified, namely; the health impacts of introducing area-wide 20mph zones and implementing travel plans with employers across the Borough in conjunction with JobCentre Plus, in assisting people back into work.

Further comments were welcomed as the proposals develop and it was noted that the implementation of the recommendations was key in targeting those people in most need and so as not to widen the gap in health inequalities further.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the results of the Health Impact Assessment (HIA) be noted.

(b) That members of the Forum consider the health impact of other policies and processes and how these could be changed to improve the health of those that live, work and visit Darlington.

30. ASSESSMENT OF ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 2004/05 – The Director of Development and Environment submitted a report (previously circulated) updating members of the Forum on the assessment of the Local Transport Plan Annual Progress Report for 2004/05.

It was reported that feedback from the Government Office North East and the Department for Transport had assessed Darlington as making ‘good’ progress towards implementing the first Local Transport Plan and scored the Authority at 87 per cent, the 12th highest of all scores nationally.

It was noted that this assessment had resulted in an additional 5 per cent reward funding (£78,000) for other schemes, however the planning guidelines for future years showed £1.28 million less funding over the next five years, meaning that only by achieving the highest possible assessment will Darlington be able to achieve the funding levels on which the second Local Transport Plan is set.

IT WAS AGREED – That a proposed programme for schemes using Department for Transport Funding be discussed at a future meeting of the Forum.

31. ASSESSMENT OF PROVISIONAL SECOND LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN – The Director of Development and Environment submitted a report (previously circulated) updating members of the Forum on the assessment of the Provisional Second Local Transport Plan.

It was reported that Darlington's provisional second Local Transport Plan had been assessed as 'promising', and was one of the best Plans in the region. In developing the final Plan for submission on 31st March 2006, it was noted that a number of areas would be expanded on to provide further clarification, but that the amendments related to detail rather than overall strategy.

Discussion ensued on the contribution that powered two-wheelers could make to the Local Transport Plan strategy and the need for further detail on this issue within the Plan.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the assessment of the Provisional Second Local Transport Plan be noted.

(b) That the thanks of the Council be extended to the Forum for its meaningful comments and suggestions in compiling the Plan.

32. PRINTED BUS TIMETABLE INFORMATION – Pursuant to Minute 16/Oct/05 and further to members of the Forum sharing their views on the best solution for the 2005/06 Darlington bus timetable literature, a draft of both a full-size leaflet and credit card sized version of bus service information was circulated at the meeting for information and comment.

IT WAS AGREED – That the format of the bus timetable information for 2005/06 be noted.

33. BUS STOPS AND THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED – Gordon Pybus, Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) addressed the meeting to highlight the problems being experienced by a number of visually impaired bus users, following the introduction of request only bus stops in the town centre, especially on Bondgate.

Discussion ensued on potential solutions ranging from the use of cards with bus numbers on, to real time information to advise passengers of forthcoming buses. It was noted that this issue would be taken forward by the bus operators out with the meeting.

IT WAS AGREED – That the position be noted.

34. LET'S GET CRACKING – The Highways Manager updated members of the Forum on the development of the work programme to spend £2.5 million over the next 18 months to improve roads and pavements across the Borough, following consultation with residents on their areas of concern/priority.

It was reported that six external contractors had been shortlisted to undertake the works, which would include, full reconstruction, drainage works and hardening of verges. Further details would be published in the Town Crier, on the website and provided to a future meeting of the Forum.

IT WAS AGREED – That the report be noted.

35. BEACON BID – ROAD SAFETY – The Highways Manager advised members of the Forum on the Council’s bid for Beacon Status for Road Safety, along with 31 other Councils in the County. It was reported that Darlington had been shortlisted down to 11 authorities and expected a final announcement in mid-March, 2006.

IT WAS AGREED – That the position be noted.

36. TAXIS IN THE TOWN CENTRE – The Director of Development and Environment submitted a report (previously circulated) outlining proposals to improve taxi access to the Town Centre, following suggestions received from taxi users and dialogue with taxi operators.

Members of the Forum were pleased to note that total daytime taxi stand capacity had increased by one space and that the evening capacity had increased by 39 spaces to a total of 93 spaces. However, concern was raised over the loss of two disabled parking bays on Grange Road to accommodate 6 extra taxi spaces and the hours of parking available for blue badge holders in this area was also queried.

IT WAS AGREED – That the proposals be noted.

37. QUESTIONS – Kenneth Frid requested an update on the position regarding concessionary fares and it was noted that an announcement on the Council’s policy would be made over the next few days.

The Chair also asked members of the Forum to consider holding Transport Forum meetings at the earlier time of 6.00 p.m. from the new Municipal Year 2006/07 and it was noted that this proposal would be discussed further at the next meeting.