

CHAPTER 4 : STRATEGIC CHOICES

Summary

Chapters 1,2 and 3 detail the national, regional and local context to Darlington's Second Local Transport Plan.

This chapter takes that information and sets out the strategic choices to be made by this Plan in delivering the Council's Transport Strategy.

The first part of the chapter reminds the reader of the key issues facing Darlington and the context within which the Council must deliver its services: the shared priorities agreed by national and local government, the Tees Valley sub- region's issues and local priorities detailed in the Community Strategy.

From this we generate six transport objectives and outline a series of key choices for the delivery of the second Local Transport Plan. The strategic options for this Plan are assessed using an approach based on the New Approaches to Appraisal.

These will help determine the appropriate delivery programme, to be set out in Chapter 6. Targets for the outcomes associated with the objectives are set in Chapter 7.

Key Messages

Through our Strategy for Transport we aim to:

- Support the economic regeneration of Darlington and make a positive contribution to Quality of Life – one of the Government's Shared Priorities.
- maintain, or preferably improve Darlington's high accessibility to services and opportunities by providing travel options so that all may participate in the life of their community.
- Tackle traffic congestion and its associated effects on local communities through a focus on sustainable travel choices, continuing to manage demand and, where appropriate, enhancing capacity thus contributing to residents' quality of life.

Continued

- Continue to tackle road safety and improve perceptions of safety.
- Deliver solutions to travel needs in partnership with local people, businesses and other providers.

The analysis of strategic choices for this Plan shows that to deliver quality of life we need to:

- Accessibility to local and facilities in surrounding areas should be the focus of what is being delivered through the Plan.
- Traffic congestion should be tackled through the provision of alternatives to the car, as well as continuing with those demand management measures already in place under a process of continual review.
- The Town on the Move 'smarter travel choice' measures currently being implemented with Department for Transport funding be continued in years 4 & 5 of the Plan
- The mix of schemes and initiatives delivered should realise the potential for encouraging more cycling and walking.

Strategy Response

National Priorities

- 1 In developing strategies and delivering services Darlington Borough Council will adhere to the shared priorities that Government agreed with the Local Government Association in 2002. The Shared Priorities are:
 - raising standards across our schools;
 - improving the quality of life of children, young people, families at risk and older people;
 - promoting healthier communities by targeting key local services, such as health and housing;
 - creating safer and stronger communities;

- transforming our local environment;
 - promoting the economic vitality of localities; and
 - meeting local transport needs more effectively.
- 2 The transport shared priority, which also contributes to the others, has a number of elements as follows:
- reducing problems of traffic congestion;
 - improving access to jobs and services, particularly for those most in need, in ways that are sustainable;
 - improving road safety;
 - improving air quality; and linked to these
 - improving the local quality of life.

Tees Valley issues

- 3 As identified in **Chapter 1**, the Tees Valley sub-region is lagging far behind the national average in terms of the key indicators underpinning the Shared Priorities. In summary, transport investment can help remedy this situation by tackling traffic congestion, improving accessibility and making transport more sustainable both physically and socially.
- 4 The key implications for Darlington are:
- Darlington's role as a strategic public transport interchange linking County Durham and the Tees City Region and promoting bus and rail services as viable alternatives to the car through the Tees Valley Bus Network Review;
 - Accessibility issues for those accessing training and employment opportunities across the Tees Valley, in particular in existing and new major development sites;
 - Accessibility issues for access to health care that may arise as part of health service reorganisation and the Choose and Book initiative;
 - Demand management measures must be appropriate to tackle congestion, both locally and sub-regionally, without having a negative

impact on regeneration;

- Extending the cycle network, in particular National Cycle Network Routes 14 and 52, to support the tourism strategies across the Tees Valley;
- Continuing to work in partnership across the Tees Valley on key initiatives, including the development and implementation of the Network Management Plan, Transport Asset Management Plan, Demand Management Framework and sharing best practice on travel awareness, road safety, cycle infrastructure design and travel plans.

Local Transport Issues

5 The key local transport issues identified in **Chapter 2** (from the Community Strategy, those identified by local people, those resulting from current travel patterns and those deriving from the vision for 2011) can be summarised as:

- supporting the broad vision of the Community Strategy to improve quality of life in Darlington;
- maintaining and improving where possible accessibility to services for all people, including those with mobility and sensory impairments and those in danger of social exclusion;
- tackling traffic congestion by:
 - providing realistic travel alternatives to the private car; and
 - making the existing transport network more efficient by maximising its capacity for all, through removal of some delays through the Corridors of Certainty programme;
- making the transport network safe and secure for all, including addressing perceptions of safety; and
- providing high quality information which helps people make informed travel choices.

6 Therefore, to address the common local issues and Government remit, the following vision has been developed for Darlington's Transport Strategy (2006–2030):

- to support the economic regeneration of, and quality of life in,

Darlington;

- to maintain and improve where possible, local peoples' accessibility to services and opportunities by providing travel options, so that all may participate in the life of their community;
- to tackle traffic congestion and its associated effects on local communities through a focus on sustainable travel choices and where appropriate enhancing capacity or managing demand, thus contributing to residents' quality of life.
- continue to tackle road safety and improve perceptions of safety;
- to deliver solutions to travel needs in partnership with local people, businesses and other providers.

(The full strategy document is **Annex 3**.)

- 7 The vision sets out to underpin the Community Strategy and related strategies delivering economic regeneration, quality of life and social inclusion. The achievement of the vision is to be realised through the following six strategy objectives, which provide the outworking of the national shared priorities in the Darlington context (**Table 3.1**). Each objective is linked back to the Community Strategy and is cross-referenced both by that and the elements of the Shared Priority for transport. The table also shows how the Tees Valley objectives have been built into the objectives for this Plan.
- 8 Targets for the outcomes associated with these objectives are set in Chapter 7.

Table 4.1 - Strategy Objectives

Strategy Objective	Transport Shared Priority	Tees Valley objective	Community Strategy	Corporate & Best Value Performance Plan
A To provide the framework for sustainable development of new and existing businesses, housing and services in Darlington.	Accessibility Quality of Life	Tees Valley Vision Rail use Traffic Congestion Quality of Life	Improving the local economy Enhancing the environment	Shaping a better Darlington Providing excellent services Enhancing our capacity to improve
B To improve access to employment and education, particularly for those without access to a private car, those with a disability and those that have greatest need.	Accessibility	Accessibility Bus use	Promoting inclusive communities Raising educational achievement Stimulating leisure activities Improving the local economy Improving health and well-being	Ensuring access for all Shaping a better Darlington
C To tackle traffic congestion on key corridors and its potential impact on the economy and environment by making the most effective use of the transport network.	Congestion Air quality Quality of life	Tees Valley Vision Bus use Rail use Traffic Congestion Air Quality Quality of Life	Develop an effective transport system	Shaping a better Darlington Ensuring access for all
D To improve travel safety and security for all by addressing the real and perceived risks.	Road Safety Quality of life	Road Safety Quality of Life	Promoting community safety	Putting the customer first Ensuring access for all
E To provide and promote travel choices to all, in particular to reduce the proportion of car driver trips.	Congestion Accessibility	Accessibility Bus use Rail use Traffic Congestion Road Safety	Promoting inclusive communities Developing an effective transport system	Putting the customer first Ensuring access for all

				Continued ...
Strategy Objective	Transport Shared Priority	Tees Valley objective	Community Strategy	Corporate & Best Value Performance Plan
F To improve the health of the community through increasing levels of sustainable travel and improving access to health, leisure and fresh food.	Quality of life Accessibility	Accessibility Traffic Congestion Road Safety Air Quality	Improving health and well-being	Shaping a better Darlington Ensuring access for all

Second Local Transport Plan Key Strategic Choices

9 The Second Local Transport Plan is the delivery mechanism for the Transport Strategy in the years 2006 to 2011. It is therefore the co-ordinating focus of all monies used for transport investment by the Council, be they derived from Government, the Council or partners. In considering how to formulate the Plan to deliver this Strategy and the above objectives - in the light of the analysis in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 - **five key, strategic questions** on how transport investment should be made arose and have been considered with partners. These were:

- Should accessibility to local facilities be the focus of what is being delivered?
- Should traffic congestion be tackled solely through the provision of alternatives, or should there be additional measures to restrain car use over those already in place?
- Should the smarter travel choice measures currently being implemented with Department for Transport (DfT) funding also be implemented in years 4 and 5 of the Plan?
- Should the mix of schemes and initiatives delivered concentrate on trying to encourage more use of cycling than at present?
- Should public transport improvements be delivered locally or through a joint Tees Valley wide strategy?

- 10 The **strategic options**, which lie behind those questions, have been appraised as part of the Strategic Environmental Assessment process.

Choice 1 : Should accessibility to local facilities be the focus of what is being delivered?

- 11 As outlined above, accessibility for all (including those with a mobility and sensory impairment) is one of the key cross-cutting issues facing Darlington and one raised by local people. Those that are unable to access key services, for whatever reason, are unable to take an active role in their community and can suffer disadvantage on many levels. This may result in lower levels of employment, lower educational or training attainment, and poorer health and well being. This is therefore at odds with improving quality of life in Darlington. Whilst Darlington is a small Borough, with a good bus network and all key services being delivered within the urban area, there are still some minor accessibility issues, which may be very local in nature, but key to small groups of residents.
- 12 In Darlington, in the past, land use planning has not always had a strong connection to transport planning and vice versa. Yet, since most people travel to get to an activity, not because of the means of transport itself, land use is inextricably linked to transport provision. This connection between transport use and journey need is being made in more recent developments such as that at West Park, for example, where a housing development also includes retail facilities, a biodiversity park, a primary school and a pub to reduce the need to travel, as well as extensive footways and cycle paths directly linking to the cycle network and nearby bus stops to encourage sustainable travel. This same approach is being applied to Central Park, a major mixed-use development, ideally located to take advantage of local and mainline rail services, existing bus services and within walking distance of the town centre. In addition the design of the site and how it connects to existing residential and retail areas will ensure opportunities for walking and cycling to local facilities, including Darlington College.
- 13 An Accessibility Checklist, developed initially by the Transport for Health Group¹, has been adapted for use by land use planning and development control, to ensure that accessibility issues are considered in parallel to more traditional transport assessments. Details of the checklist are in the Accessibility Strategy in **Annex 12**. This Checklist is also being used corporately to aid with decisions within the Authority on how, where and

¹ County Durham and Darlington Transport for Health Partnership, Accessibility Sub Group, December 2005.

when services are delivered, Leading Edge projects and corporate project methodology.

14 During the consultation for the Second Local Transport Plan improving accessibility to key services was deemed to be the most appropriate aim of the Plan. To reflect the fact that people travel to access facilities or activities, it is proposed to group schemes and initiatives in the Second Local Transport Plan in a co-ordinated manner, under an effective performance management regime, using six main reasons for travel:

- travelling to work;
- doing business in Darlington;
- going to School or College;
- shopping for food and goods;
- leisure and recreation; and
- access to Health services and caring for others.

15 Whilst access to local services is the focus for the Borough, and the majority of trips are within the Borough, there are wider accessibility issues, which involve trips to and from neighbouring areas. Chapter 1 describes the sub-regional context and the focus on regeneration and creation of employment opportunities across the Tees Valley. Darlington needs to ensure that its residents are able to access job opportunities, in particular at the new development sites, and that local employers are able to recruit employees both from the Borough, but also from further afield if necessary. In 2001 over 4,600 people travelled to the Tees Valley for employment and over 4,300 travelled into Darlington from the Tees Valley every day. This picture is repeated with travel to work journeys to County Durham (over 4,600 people from Darlington to County Durham and 7,400 into Darlington from County Durham). Darlington is therefore in a unique position of needing good accessibility by public and private transport both to the North and the East and will be involved in the major scheme public transport developments for both areas. (There are similar accessibility issues relating to acute health service provision in James Cook University Hospital, Middlesbrough, Darlington Memorial Hospital and Bishop Auckland General Hospital).

16 This delivery strategy means that accessibility is the bedrock of all actions taken in the Second Local Transport Plan due to the consideration of the reason for travel. This is a change from the practice in the First Local

Transport Plan which was primarily focused on types of transport (bus, car, rail etc). This change in approach is recommended as being more effective in delivering the outcomes that Government, the Council and the general public want from transport over the next five years. It will necessitate partnership working, using the strong Darlington Partnership structure described in Chapter 3. The Partnership's Themed Groups will bring together representatives from health, education, employment, community and retail sectors to ensure that basic access needs are met. In addition, full use will be made of the existing Transport to Health Partnership where appropriate.

- 17 This approach is encapsulated in the Accessibility Strategy in **Annex 12**, which encompasses all other elements of the Council's work that have a spatial implication for local people including land use planning, economic regeneration, social inclusion, neighbourhood renewal and provision of education facilities.

Choice 2 : Should traffic congestion be tackled solely through the provision of alternatives, or should there be additional measures to restrain car use over those already in place?

- 18 In the research into local peoples' travel behaviours and opinions discussed above, the consensus of opinion was that traffic congestion should be primarily tackled through the provision of effective alternatives, such as public transport facilities, rather than through restricting the use of the private car. Most of the respondents favoured investment in bus services, cycling and walking. This said, significant majorities of respondents accept that decisions may have to be made that disadvantage the user of a private car.
- 19 Government guidance for the Second Local Transport Plan indicates that it will take a close interest in each plan's proposals to deal with traffic congestion, with an expectation that each plan will demonstrate that all aspects of how to deal with traffic congestion have been considered. The promotion of alternatives alone, rather than a mixture of those and existing demand management measures, is considered nationally not to be sufficient to achieve the outcomes set by the objectives. In consequence, the Darlington approach sets out a suite of demand management measures that are consistent both with national and sub-regional guidance, yet are appropriate to the local context. The local economy, our regeneration aims and our desire to promote travel choice (as set out in chapters 1 & 2), are the fundamental considerations behind our approach.

- 20 In the first Local Transport Plan, Corridors of Certainty were one of the key delivery processes for achieving outcomes. Despite detailed issues that have significantly delayed the delivery of this group of schemes, the principle behind Corridors of Certainty is valid today. This was to improve travel conditions for all users and residents along key radial routes through an integrated approach to the whole corridor, rather than the implementation of individual schemes. It is proposed to continue implementing this comprehensive approach in the Second Local Transport Plan, but to concentrate first on sections where congestion most needs tackling and on where facilities for other modes can most be improved, and further widen it to include accessibility issues in formulating specific schemes and initiatives.
- 21 The Council has recently commissioned a series of studies looking at how to improve facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport passengers and how best to tackle traffic congestion.
- Capita Symonds Limited, the Council's consultancy term partner, has carried out phase 1 of a study into traffic congestion in Darlington. The initial finding is that most consultees believed that the Council had the right approach to traffic congestion by encouraging the use of alternatives, whilst tackling local "hotspots" in conjunction with management of car parking. A number of small low cost measures to alleviate congestion have been identified including lane discipline measures, parking control, bus priority, reallocation of road space, signal timing and on-street parking.
 - Phase 2 of the traffic congestion study will use an enhanced section of the Tees Valley Multi Modal Model to generate a tactical model of junction congestion using Paramics software. Additional work has been carried out to provide mode choice coefficients for park and ride, as a new mode for Darlington Borough. In modelling the transport network, to such a fine level of detail, we anticipate being able to make informed judgements about the precise effect of proposals brought forward by this Plan, including those measures identified in Phase 1 of the congestion study.
 - Living Streets have undertaken a series of Community Street audits looking at key local walking routes to the town centre and to the Cockerton district centre. Darlington Association on Disability have provided information on key accessible routes that exist or need to be provided.
 - Through a partnership involving Sustrans and our Tees Valley local authority partners, Cycle City Guides have recently completed a cycle audit looking at the whole of the highway network and identifying a

range of short, medium and long-term improvement measures for cyclists. This work will also form the basis of the information required for an on line cycle journey planner and underpins the development of the cycle network.

- Public transport punctuality surveys and journey runtime surveys are being completed to provide additional information on congestion points.
- 22 The Council will continue to ensure that the road network operates efficiently through meeting its new duties under the Transport Act, 2004. The Council's Traffic Manager role has the dedicated task of tackling day to day traffic congestion and delay by co-ordinating the activities of all those involved in, or affecting the, operation of the local road network under normal conditions and during exceptional circumstances such as public events or emergencies. In addition the Traffic Manager has a more strategic role in land use planning, road space reallocation and parking enforcement. (**Annex 19**).
- 23 The Council already has strong and appropriate demand management measures in place that manage the use of the private car, whilst protecting local quality of life. Behavioural travel research has shown that 44% of all local residents' car trips have no alternative, and it remains important that this Plan helps provide transport solutions for such trips, whilst helping those trips that can be made by alternative means. The Council supports the ethos of the Tees Valley Demand Management Strategy and has, as shown below, made substantive progress.
- 24 In summary, the Council:
- is managing car use to the town centre through careful management of supply;
 - is managing the use of car park spaces in the town centre, through the application of a tiered system of charges, both on and off street; at a level which contributes to demand management,
 - is implementing a ring of residents' parking zones in locations where conflict exists between competing needs;
 - is on course to introduce decriminalised parking enforcement throughout the Borough by 2007;
 - is re-allocating roadspace for use by buses at key congestion points, as part of the Corridors of Certainty;

- is promoting the use of alternative means of transport where suitable, through information provision, signage and publicity; and
 - is improving the quality of alternative means of transport through investment in buses, security, bus stops, cycle routes or lanes, cycle parking and general improvements for pedestrians.
- 25 Historically, there have been fewer car parking spaces available in the town centre, than that permitted by current Government guidance. Planning Policy Guidance Note 13 (PPG13) implies that there could be 5,150 car park spaces within the inner ring road, compared to the actual supply of 2,397 off-road and 375 on-road short stay spaces. This has contributed to the reduction of traffic volumes approaching the town centre (down 6% from 22,788 base in 2003/04) – not a reduction in overall traffic volumes in the urban area. In accordance with the 2000 edition of the sub-regional demand management strategy, the Council will continue to carefully manage the supply of town centre parking, ensuring that its policy objectives are met including increasing the supply of short stay spaces in the town centre. In addition, more parking has been, and will be, provided for cycles and motorcycles.
- 26 Darlington, as one of the four regional/sub-regional centres in the Regional Spatial Strategy, has a wide catchment area; much of this area outwith the Borough to the south and west is more rural with fewer bus services, so car access to the centre is important to regional planning and economic aims. As a consequence, this Plan will explore the feasibility of a Park & Ride scheme to complement town centre parking provision and maintain the high proportion (currently 49%²) of town centre users who either walk, cycle or use the bus.
- 27 Car parking in the town centre is currently charged for; both on and off street. The standard short stay parking rate is 80p/hour with a premium rate applied to the Abbots' Yard car park, to reflect its prime location. Disabled parking is free in all car parks for up to 3 hours, (with charges applying in some locations after this time) reflecting the transport constraints of those who are eligible for a blue badge.
- 28 The level of charges applied are consistent with the larger centres in the sub-region (2005 values), and represent significant commitment to demand management by the Council. In terms of long stay parking, the day charge has increased 66% since 2000 – again demonstrating the Council's ability to implement difficult decisions and its commitment to demand

² Darlington Retail Study 2004

management.

- 29 In November 2004, charging was introduced for on-street short stay parking in and around the town centre, in line with off-street charges. This charging scheme is now enforced by the Council and has resulted in a substantial reduction in the number of vehicles exceeding the limited parking restrictions. Spaces are being utilised more efficiently, supporting local businesses and reducing circulating traffic. In a survey in June 2005 the percentage of vehicles overstaying the limited waiting areas had reduced by between 68% and 75% across the 4 areas surveyed compared to June 2004³.
- 30 Residents' Parking Zones have been introduced in five areas around the town centre, with a sixth scheduled for implementation in 2006. A review of these schemes, which help provide local residents' with opportunities to park is ongoing. This is especially important to local quality of life, especially where properties do not possess off street parking.
- 31 In an associated initiative, the Council is pursuing the introduction of decriminalised parking enforcement by 2007 (**Annex 17**). This intervention is seen as a vital part of the work to tackle traffic congestion and travel safety. This will provide a greater focus on enforcement of waiting restrictions, addressing quality of life issues, in particular for residents and vulnerable road users in particular pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists. The Traffic Manager will have a key role to play in ensuring that the decriminalised parking enforcement initiative supports the expeditious use of the network, assisting all road users and assisting local residents and businesses.
- 32 The Council has re-allocated roadspace at key locations to bus lanes. In 2005/06, further bus lanes were implemented in Parkgate and Northgate approaching the inner ring road, whilst a third lane was designated at Stonebridge – an important junction on the ring road. Such work will be continued under the proposals laid out in this Plan. These bus lanes can also be used by cycles. Taxis will also be able to use bus only areas in the town centre, subject to a safety audit, on a trial basis. Road space is also being reallocated to cycle lanes as part of the ongoing development of the cycle network.
- 33 Darlington's unique status as a sustainable travel demonstration and, in 2005, a Cycling England town has allowed it to devote considerable

³ On street car parking surveys 2004 and 2005

resources to information and publicity promoting a cultural change by local people. For example, in 2005, 89% of all bus stops in the Borough have up to date stop specific travel information and separately maps showing the bus and cycle networks have been distributed to local households. This work is been complemented by year one of the Individualised Travel Marketing Campaign, in which all households in the town will be contacted with an offer of information relevant to householders individual needs. To date 11, 500 households have been contacted with approximately half requesting information about their travel options.

- 34 Given the needs of the economic regeneration strategy (increasing levels of employment, promoting business growth and attracting investment) it is considered that existing demand management techniques, some recently strengthened, are appropriate for the next five years' delivery of Darlington's proposed Transport Strategy. These measures include:
- selecting the most appropriate use of road space for all modes (as in Corridors of Certainty);
 - continuing to provide short stay town centre parking both on and off street, provide residents' parking zones and decriminalised parking enforcement;
 - charging prices appropriate to demand management and economic regeneration policies,
 - continuing to limit long stay car parking supply in the town centre to 2000 levels whilst examining the feasibility of Park & Ride;
 - continuing to provide better facilities for pedestrians, bus users, motorcyclists and cyclists where needed;
 - continuing to introduce and promote travel plans; and
 - encouraging the development of land in accessible locations.
- 35 More stringent demand management measures, such as road pricing or workplace parking levies, implemented in isolation (to other towns) are considered to be detrimental to the achievement of the economic regeneration strategy, and are felt to be unnecessary given the policies in place. (See **Chapter 1**). Therefore, it is appropriate that Darlington's Second Local Transport Plan continues to apply the current demand management measures already in place (or proposed), including improving the quality of alternative means of travel to the private car. Nevertheless, the Plan will continue to make it easier for those trips by car that have no

other reasonable alternative means of transport (44% in the urban area by local people), through investment in junction improvements and better road network management.

- 36 Darlington and the other Tees Valley authorities will continue to monitor the impact of the demand management measures and review them as appropriate throughout the life of the Plan.

Choice 3: Should the smarter travel choice measures currently being implemented with Department for Transport (DfT) funding also be implemented in years 4 & 5 of the Plan?

- 37 Currently, the Council has received the sum of £2.03m from the DfT for delivering smart travel choices in the years 2006 to 2009. The initiative focuses in on helping people make more informed travel choices by providing better travel information, promoting travel choices (for example via the use of travel plans) and improving the operation of the transport network. In simple terms, the initiative takes care of elements of transport investment that are not to do with significant physical investment.
- 38 The choice arises because of the mismatch between the funding period for Town on the Move (ending March 2009) and the end of the Second Local Transport Plan (ending March 2011).
- 39 It is proposed that those smarter travel choices, which have by 2009 been shown to be effective in delivery outcomes, are also delivered between 2009 and 2011 through the Plan. This is because smart travel choices have been proven (through national research (Cairns et al, 2004⁴)) to maximize the benefits obtained from physical infrastructure delivered through Local Transport Plans. For example, in terms of traffic congestion, smarter travel choices have been shown to deliver congestion reduction benefits of 10 pence for every 1 penny spent; and even higher in heavily congested areas (this benefit to cost ratio of 10 to 1 compares to a benefit to cost ratio of 5 to 1 or less for many capital schemes). The research also found that smart travel choices can reduce urban traffic levels by 21% in peak periods (approximately the same as the reduction in school holidays) and 13% off peak when given priority for funding. The actual cost depends on the size of the population covered, but 'smarter choice' measures, where appropriate, can be better value means of tackling congestion than capital schemes.

⁴ 'Smarter Choices – Changing the way we travel' Cairns et al 2004

- 40 Such a choice does not mean that the Second Local Transport Plan is detracting from car use – instead it will see the car as one of several ways of travelling around Darlington. The essential thrust of smarter travel choices is to give the user the means to best decide how they travel on the local transport network. However, the baseline research shows that 44% of all car trips have no other option than to use a car, either because of personal circumstances or the nature of the trip that people are making. Therefore, the Plan needs to help people make realistic changes in travel behaviour, and does not apply to a proportion of journeys, which have to be made by car.
- 41 We propose to continue to “lock in” the benefits obtained through conventional Local Transport Plan schemes through the use of successful interventions trailed through the sustainable travel demonstration town. These interventions will be directly linked to appropriate individual schemes to make sure that we achieve the Government’s and our outcomes. They will also ensure that we do not waste the investment made by Government through the sustainable travel initiative and achieve value for money on capital investment. This will be required to meet the local targets set out in Chapter 7 relating to reducing car driver trips and increasing the number of trips undertaken by walking and cycling.

Choice 4 : Should the mix of schemes and initiatives delivered concentrate on trying to encourage more use of cycling (with additional benefits for pedestrians) than at present?

- 42 The baseline travel research for Darlington: A Town on the Move reveals that the biggest potential to change travel current behaviour, on trips that realistically could be undertaken by an alternative means of travel is from car use to cycling. This potential for change is 34% of all trips currently made by car in Darlington (or 21% of all trips). This would be over 19 million trips per year that could potentially change (although it is not suggested that all would). It is important to stress that this potential is for realistic changes in travel behaviour and not, for instance, where the user cannot cycle or needs to transport heavy luggage.
- 43 This potential for change is greater than the other changes identified in the research. The potential for change from car to walking is 21% of all car trips (or 13% of all trips), and from car to public transport 26% (or 16% of all trips). These percentages amount to over 11 million and about 14 million trips per year respectively (although there is some overlap, because some trips could change to bus or cycle for example). It is worth noting that the 38% of all trips currently made on foot, by bike or by bus (over 20 million trips per year) could switch to private car use in future, with direct effects on

traffic congestion, social inclusion and health, unless steps are taken to retain the market share of these means of transport.

- 44 Cycling is currently a very minor method of getting around (1% of all trips) and yet in a compact, relatively flat town like Darlington, could significantly contribute to the strategic objectives of reducing traffic congestion, improving health, giving low cost access for those without a private car and providing travel choices. Cycling has a poor image in the Borough, possibly due to a lack of cycling tradition and an aspiration for car ownership.. It is anticipated that extensive, expanding cycling training schemes in many of Darlington's schools and other action on anti-social behaviour will address this issue in the medium to long term. It is important to implement schemes that encourage the other potentials for sustainable trip making as well, but cycling is the most under-represented mode at the moment. Improving conditions for cyclists would also benefit pedestrians as many schemes involve improvements to road crossings and provision of new off-road shared use pedestrian and cycle paths. (A recent example of this is the re-surfacing of Cemetery Lane and installation of a toucan crossing).
- 45 Whilst it could take many years to reach the levels of cycling in somewhere like York (10%), small increases in cycling could make a difference to traffic. For example, if another 1% of trips within Darlington were made by cycle, this could contribute to congestion relief by reducing car trips by nearly 1 million a year.
- 46 In the Provisional Plan Darlington outlined that it would like to spend European levels of funding on cycling (£4-£5 per head) in order to achieve a modal shift to cycling. Since the submission of the Provisional Plan Darlington has been selected as a Cycling Demonstration Town. An additional £1.5m of matched funding has been made available over the 3 years from October 2005 to develop an extensive cycle network – this equates to up to £10 per head. The network will concentrate on providing links into the town centre from the main arterial roads, as well as links to key destinations such as schools, employment sites, leisure facilities and green spaces.
- 47 The Local Transport Plan integrated transport block funding will still be spent on cycling as this will be used as a match. In addition funding will be sought from developers, businesses, schools and other funding streams such as Safer Communities.
- 48 This enhanced scenario would allow the Council to spend at European best practice levels on cycling and walking; releasing more of the potential for

switching trips from car to these two modes, as demonstrated in the Darlington Travel Behaviour Survey.

Choice 5 : Should public transport improvements be delivered locally or through a joint Tees Valley wide strategy in response to the decline in bus patronage?

- 49 As outlined in chapter 3, we have been unsuccessful so far in reversing the downward trend for bus patronage within the Borough. In Darlington bus patronage has historically been high, accounting for 10% of all trips (compared to 6% nationally). The decline in bus patronage has lagged behind other parts of the UK but the last 4 years have seen decline, and the rate of decline is increasing. 2004/05 saw a 4.7% decline from the previous year and early indications for 2005/06 are that the decline will be at a similar level. Whilst Government policy and indeed our own aspirations are to halt this decline, it has to be recognised that this is not an easy or quick process. It is therefore planned to get back to 2004/05 levels by the end of the Plan period.
- 50 The Potential for Change research undertaken by Socialdata in Autumn 2004 highlights the fact that there is some potential to increase bus patronage. However of the 88% of trips that are currently not undertaken by bus, 29% could not be made by bus because of constraints (e.g. need to use a car for business travel) and a further 41% of trips could not be made by bus because the system is not sufficient (e.g. no bus available at the right time). There are also 2% of trips where people have 'free choice' and could use the bus but choose to use their car instead. This leaves only 18% of trips that could be taken by bus and we will concentrate on interventions that cater for these by addressing lack of information about the available services, perception of public transport by non-users and by physical improvements.
- 51 The Council, along with other Tees Valley local authorities and local bus operators has commissioned a study to report on how best to improve bus use across the sub-region. The draft findings of the Study, which have yet to be adopted by this Council, are that:
- there should be more use made of traffic signal priority to help buses when they are running late and similar measures;
 - there should be more attention paid to removing operational reasons for lateness such as poor timetabling;

- further work is required on providing fully segregated busways where appropriate (no routes were identified in Darlington);
 - implementing measures that help buses, but continue to provide servicing and access to frontage land uses;
 - Route Action Plans (in Darlington these are known as Corridors of Certainty), where all sources of delay to all traffic are identified and tackled;
 - implementation of Performance Improvement Partnerships – Darlington is in the process of developing one for approval; and
 - installation of “bus gates” and bus only roads where appropriate – the “Priestgate Loop” in the Pedestrian Heart scheme will be reserved for buses, taxis and disabled drivers during core hours. Bus gates are also planned for Tees Valley Regeneration’s major development, at Central Park.
- 52 The choice concerns whether they should be delivered to common standards throughout the Tees Valley, as directed by a Stakeholder Board with the ability to fund further research, as well as promotional and ticketing schemes from a levy placed on each partner. Or, alternatively, should they be delivered through a two tier Quality Bus Partnership between the Council and local bus operators?
- 53 It is felt the way forward lies in improving the existing partnership working between the Council and local bus operators via the introduction of a two tier Quality Bus Partnership at both a Borough level and on a route-by-route basis. This approach would recognise the need for local solutions to local issues under direct local control. It would also build on the excellent progress already made in improving bus travel information, bus priority measures and bus infrastructure. The first route based improvement package incorporating vehicle improvements, infrastructure improvements, routes specific information and individualised travel marketing will be delivered in partnership with an operator in 2006.
- 54 Whilst it is likely that much of the work would be integrated with that delivered in the rest of the Tees Valley, the Darlington approach gives us greater flexibility in responding to the needs of bus passengers travelling between Darlington and County Durham or North Yorkshire. However, we will work with bus operators, local authorities and other partners in the development of the Tees Valley Bus Network Review from outline proposal to major scheme status, as endorsed by the Interim Regional Transport Board.

- 55 This action builds on policy 54 in the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East, which identifies Newcastle, Sunderland, Durham City , Middlesbrough and Darlington as strategic public transport interchanges, with high levels of accessibility at a strategic level. The links between these interchanges form the core public transport network. Darlington therefore has a key role to play at a sub-regional and regional level to develop high quality express services to Middlesbrough.
- 56 In addition, Darlington will work in partnership with Durham County Council on the Transit 15 proposal to provide high quality, frequent services between Durham City and Darlington via Netwon Aycliffe, as well as direct links to Barnard Castle. This will support access to health (in particular for those living in South Durham that need to access the Memorial Hospital in Darlington) and access to employment and leisure opportunities in both Darlington and County Durham areas.
- 57 This “parallel path” is not seen as prejudicial to the realisation of the Tees Valley objectives (chapter 1). Rather it is seen as a more appropriate process solution to achieving the common aim of the sub-region, in the context of Darlington’s unique travel patterns and needs, including those generated by residents of County Durham and North Yorkshire.
- 58 In the longer term, such an approach could provide the basis for the Council to seek the imposition of a Quality Bus Contract, whereby the Council determines the necessary levels, fares and standards required for local bus services, in order to meet its transport strategy. Such an action can only be taken where clear proof exists that other methods have either not been successful or are not appropriate to meeting the needs of the strategy, and so is not an option in the short term. Were an application to be made in the future, and were the Secretary of State for Transport to agree it, then the Council would take on the duties of the Traffic Commissioners and also be able to let contracts for the provision of all bus services in the Contract area for up to 10 years (in two blocks of 5 year contracts).
- 59 Therefore the Darlington Bus Strategy (**Annex 10**) contains proposals that are based on system of local decision making, via a two tier Quality Bus Partnership to achieve the output of stabilisation of the current rate of decline and the wider outcomes contained in chapter 4. Darlington will also be a partner in the public transport major bids in the Tees Valley and County Durham for services linking Durham to the Tees City Region.

Summary

60 The key strategic choices on which the delivery of our Transport Strategy through this Plan needs to be based are therefore that:

- **accessibility to local facilities should be the focus of what is being delivered through the Plan;**
- **traffic congestion should be tackled through the provision of alternatives to the car, physical improvements at key junctions, with those demand management measures already in place;**
- **the Town on the Move ‘smarter travel choice’ measures currently being implemented with Department for Transport funding be continued in years 4 & 5 of the Plan;**
- **the mix of schemes and initiatives delivered should include a focus on encouraging more public transport and cycling with associated benefits for walking using match funding from Cycling England; and**
- **public transport improvements benefiting Darlington should be delivered locally with local decision making, whilst working strategically with other Tees Valley Authorities, County Durham and North Yorkshire.**