
STONE BRIDGE JUNCTION AND INNER RING ROAD PROJECT

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor David Lyonette, Transport Portfolio

Responsible Director - Richard Alty, Director of Place

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To advise Members of the detail of the Inner Ring Road and Stonebridge junction project and the associated consultation.

Summary

2. The Inner Ring Road was completed in the early 1970s and over the last 40 years traffic levels have more than doubled. A number of junctions are reaching capacity at busy times of the day and busy periods of the year.
3. Stonebridge Roundabout is a point where a number of main traffic routes meet and compete for priority. The roundabout arrangement works well when traffic is balanced and traffic volumes are at a certain level. However, it is obvious that the roundabout is showing signs of failing to cope at busy times of the day and busy periods of the year
4. Predicted growth and development aspirations are predicted to impact on the frequency and level of congestion, which will mean the roundabout will become frequently unreliable and more congested.
5. It is an important moment in the development of Darlington and a time to consider the infrastructure to support and manage growth. If Darlington is to thrive in the current difficult climate and provide economic stimulus and jobs we must encourage and promote growth. With this comes the need to tackle issues and consider the changes necessary to support the right conditions for growth.
6. The work on the inner road is the start of a series of building blocks in the Town Centre Fringe (TCF) Master Plan that will help deliver: -
 - (a) Managed performance of highway network to accommodate desired growth.
 - (b) Improved connectivity between the Town Centre and Fringe for Pedestrians.
 - (c) Improvements to the “public realm” and River Corridor “linear park”.

7. It is appropriate that a project is considered that can manage the existing issues and growth in a controlled way and ensure its delivery is considered alongside the development to ensure access into the town centre does not hinder further growth.
8. The results from investigating many options have helped to develop an option that provides better management of the existing and predicted traffic levels at Stonebridge junction, whilst also delivering improvements for public transport and pedestrians.
9. Plans of the proposal taken forward to public consultation are shown at **Appendix 1**, the main work involves the conversion of Stonebridge roundabout to a traffic signal controlled junction. A series of minor amendments at other locations around the inner ring road are also planned as part of this scheme and outlined in the main report.
10. There are some proposals to the way the junction works that will mean drivers will have to change their route into and out of town. They are necessary to make the junction work as effectively as possible. The changes are explained in the main report. Options were investigated to keep all movements available to all traffic, but it reduced the efficiency of the junction and led to significant additional queuing.
11. The impacts were outlined in the consultation process and the legal orders associated with the proposals have been advertised to ensure all the impacts are understood as part of this decision making process. There have been no objections to the proposals enabling the traffic regulation orders to be made if the scheme progresses. The outcome of consultation is included at **Appendix 2**.
12. The general consultation and the formal advertising of the Traffic Regulation Orders have not identified any issues that would prevent officers from recommending the scheme progressing to procurement and construction.
13. The scheme forms part of the wider £57m Tees Valley Bus Network Improvement Project (TVBNI) with the scheme budget of £3.7million allocated from this programme. The Council has to match fund an element of this budget but this is being matched from the Department for Transport (DfT) - Local Transport Plan funding. If the scheme does not progress the TVBNI funding element, which is £3.045m of the £3.7m must be returned to the programme for delivery on other bus network improvement projects within the Tees Valley.

Recommendation

14. It is recommended that:-
 - (a) Members consider the comments received during the consultation period.
 - (b) Members note that there were no objections to the Traffic Regulation Orders associated with the Project.
 - (c) Members agree that the scheme should now proceed to procurement and construction.

Reasons

15. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-
- (a) To enable investment in the local transport network to deliver the Local Transport Plan outcomes.
 - (b) To better manage performance of key highway network junctions to accommodate desired growth.
 - (c) To deliver the Projects identified in the Tees Valley Bus Network Improvement initiative.
 - (d) To enable delivery of the Town Centre Fringe Master Plan

Richard Alty
Director of Place

Background Papers

The TVBNI Project has been the subject of a number of Cabinet approvals at its various stages of development and delivery. Reports were prepared for the following Cabinets: 5 June 2007, 12 February 2008, 3 November 2009, 2 March 2010, 8 March 2011, 7 February 2012 and 19 February 2013.

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LC

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no direct implications.
Health and Well Being	The scheme set out in this report facilitates more sustainable and active travel so contributing to general public health and accessibility. Improve travel for bus passengers, pedestrians and cyclists.
Carbon Impact	Improving the sustainable transport options and encouraging use will have a positive impact on Carbon reduction.
Diversity	The Local Transport Plan was assessed in principle through the Council's equality scheme in 2011 to make sure that its impact was understood. In addition, the project management process requires a more detailed understanding of potential impacts where this is necessary.
Wards Affected	Project is located within Central Ward. However, the operation of the town centre and inner ring road impacts on residents and businesses in all Wards of the Borough.
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	This decision does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This is a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The scheme contributes to the delivery of a more sustainable transport network, commences delivery of the Town Centre Fringe Master Plan to help facilitate growth.
Efficiency	The scheme will replace significant amounts of aging highway assets and improve the public realm.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Existing Situation

16. The Inner Ring Road was completed in the early 1970s and over the last 40 years traffic levels have more than doubled. A number of junctions are reaching capacity at busy times of the day and busy periods of the year.
17. Stonebridge Roundabout is a point where a number of main traffic routes meet and compete for priority. The roundabout arrangement works well when traffic is balanced and traffic volumes are at a certain level. However, it is obvious that the roundabout is showing signs of failing to cope at busy times of the day and busy periods of the year, causing congestion and leading to lengthy traffic delays on all of the approaches.
18. In recent years there have been some modifications to improve capacity, but the engineering scope for increasing capacity as a roundabout have been exhausted.
19. Predicted growth and development aspirations are predicted to impact on the frequency and level of congestion, which will mean the roundabout, will become frequently unreliable and more congested.

Ambition and Growth

20. Ambition and opportunities for growth in Darlington are strong and are coming to fruition with the development of the Leisure and Cinema complex and Department for Education offices imminent. Traffic levels are predicted to increase and this will compound the issues already being experienced on the inner ring road.
21. Further growth and development at Central Park and around Darlington is excellent news but will also impact on traffic levels on the inner ring road.
22. The Town Centre Fringe is identified in the adopted Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy as a sustainable strategic location, where development and regeneration activity will be concentrated over the next 15 years. It is proposed that new homes and more commercial space will be brought forward, redeveloping the area to be an accessible and vibrant addition to the housing, employment and commercial offer of the town. It will also provide the opportunity to extend and enhance the urban green infrastructure network; develop low carbon energy generation and distribution networks.
23. In the LDF, the Town Centre Fringe is a key regeneration priority, following the development and regeneration of the Town Centre and Central Park.
24. A number of key issues were known at the beginning of the master plan process such as flood risk, issues around poor quality housing stock, viability and low land values and the impact that the development of the area would have on traffic movement. These issues have been explored and considered through a number of

technical reports commissioned from specialist consultants.

25. The master plan is intended to provide certainty to the private sector that will stimulate the development of the area in a managed way. It will also provide a framework for long-term public investment decisions, to unlock further development opportunities and economic growth. The master plan will help to co-ordinate development, ensuring that developments positively contribute to the required infrastructure and sense of place and in so doing deliver the long-term vision for the area.
26. The work on the inner road is the start of a series of building blocks in the Town Centre Fringe (TCF) Master plan that will help deliver: -
 - (a) Managed performance of highway network to accommodate desired growth.
 - (b) Improved connectivity between the Town Centre and Fringe for Pedestrians.
 - (c) Improvements to the “public realm” and River Corridor “linear park”.
27. It is an important moment in the development of Darlington and a time to consider the infrastructure to support and manage growth. If Darlington is to thrive in the current difficult climate and provide economic stimulus and jobs we must encourage and promote growth. With this comes the need to tackle issues and consider the changes necessary to support the right conditions for growth.
28. It is appropriate that a project is considered that can manage the existing issues and growth in a controlled way and ensure its delivery is considered alongside the development to ensure access into the town centre does not hinder further growth.

Proposals

29. The Stonebridge roundabout was chosen as the first priority for development because:-
 - (a) The roundabout is failing to cope with traffic volumes at certain times of the day.
 - (b) It is an important Bus Access Point (TVBNI) and Pedestrian desire line.
 - (c) Further significant development is proposed in the Town Centre and Fringe in the immediate future and longer term.
 - (d) Doing nothing will result in more frequent delays and uncertainty around travel times.
 - (e) Link to Stonebridge structural investigations and programme of works on bridges in Town Centre.
30. The objectives of this scheme are:-
 - (a) Improve bus access, reliability and journey times. Bus operators will be able to better programme timetables.
 - (b) Manage traffic movement at the junction and provide certainty for all road users. This will help mitigate against additional development traffic in future years. Drivers will be able to plan journeys with certainty.

- (c) Traffic signals will be able to manage and regulate traffic movement providing certainty and control.
 - (d) Provide more direct formalised crossing points for pedestrians and cyclists.
 - (e) Give land back to the river environment as part of the wider town centre regeneration plans.
 - (f) The river corridor and inner ring road public realm will be able to be improved.
31. Many different options have been considered using sophisticated computer programmes that can model the predicted traffic on the proposed layouts. The existing design is complex to resolve the stagger between Stonebridge and Parkgate means the junction operates poorly as a traditional roundabout. The options investigated range from keeping the existing roundabout, signalling the roundabout, either full time or part-time, to a range of traffic signal junctions.
32. The results from investigating many options have help to develop the option that we are proposing, which provides better management of the existing and predicted traffic levels at Stonebridge junction, whilst also delivering improvements for public transport and pedestrians.
33. The proposals taken forward to public consultation are shown at **Appendix 1**, with the main works being the conversion of Stonebridge roundabout to a traffic signal controlled junction. Key features include:
- (a) Improving the management of journey times for cars and buses using the inner ring road by managing the balance of flows by traffic lights.
 - (b) Improved pedestrian crossing facilities to improve the connection between the Town Centre and Parkgate areas.
 - (c) Improving public transport access into and out of the town centre with improved punctuality and reliability for buses and taxis.
 - (d) Increased lanes on approach and exits to junctions at Stone bridge and Freemans Place
 - (e) To ensure congestion is managed and the traffic signals work efficiently there are some necessary features that will mean drivers have to change their routes in and out of the town centre.
 - (f) Essential maintenance work is required on Stonebridge and if feasible this will be considered as part of the project.
34. There are some proposals to the way the junction works that will mean drivers will have to change their route into and out of town, but these are necessary to make the junction work as effectively as possible. Options were investigated to keep all movements available to all traffic, but it significantly impacted on the predicted traffic signal times. The banned movements are:-
- (a) General traffic from the Ring Road cannot turn right into Stonebridge i.e. traffic from the Haughton Road direction.
 - (b) General traffic will have to turn left out of Stonebridge – only buses will be allowed to turn right or go straight on.
35. The proposed banned movements will mean some movements will change and there will be additional journey time to reach the destination. However, they are

necessary to allow the majority of movements to be accommodated in the proposed junction and manage the increased traffic levels for the majority of traffic.

36. A series of minor amendments at other locations around the inner ring road are also proposed. Key features: -
- (a) Additional lane capacity on Parkgate.
 - (b) Changes to the Pedestrian crossing and Footways outside the Theatre to improve the crossing safety and footway capacity.
 - (c) A lane will be created on the Ring Road to allow traffic wanting to turn left into Parkgate to by-pass the signals.
 - (d) General traffic turning left out of Stonebridge will bypass the traffic signals.
 - (e) A left turn filter lane will be created from Freemans Place to the Inner Ring Road to help traffic join the inner ring road from the Haughton area.
 - (f) Space will be created for the development of the Linear Park and flood defences.
 - (g) The pedestrian crossing on St Cuthberts Way will be altered to create two traffic lanes to improve capacity to Northgate Roundabout.
 - (h) Improved cycle and Pedestrian facilities will be included at the junction to aide all movements on a more direct desire line.
 - (i) The removal of the roundabout at Stonebridge has required the banned right turns to be removed from Park Place and Hargreave Terrace.
 - (j) The public realm will be renewed improving the aesthetics in the area and reducing future maintenance liabilities of aging assets.
37. A series of Questions and Answers were published to help explain how the junction proposal has been developed and how it will work. These are included in **Appendix 1**.
38. If Cabinet progress with the proposals it is inevitable that there will be some disruption to traffic and bus services during the construction period. It is envisaged that construction would commence in the first quarter of 2014 with completion prior to March 2015.
39. Every effort will be made to ensure disruption is minimised as far as possible and regular communications and advance notice will be given as the works progress. The Council has good project management expertise and delivers a large programme of projects every year to time and budget. The scheme to improve the junction at North Road/Whessoe Road was part of the Tees Valley Bus Improvement Project and was delivered on time and within budget. This project is part of a £10m investment programme in Darlington that is on programme and budget.

Financial Implications

40. The junction proposal forms part of the wider Tees Valley Bus Network Improvement Project and the project budget of £3.7million would be funded from part of the £57 million Department for Transport Tees Valley Bus Network Improvement Project.

41. The North Road junction at Whessoe Road was one large capital project from this programme, which has been successfully delivered to cost and programme, with the anticipated improvements to traffic and pedestrian flows.
42. The programme funding was approved by the Department for Transport and delivery of the programme commenced in April 2010 and is in place until 31 March 2015.
43. The programme identified funding to deliver some of the key infrastructure improvements around the inner ring road to manage buses and general traffic.
44. The Council has to match fund an element of this budget but this is being matched from the Department for Transport - Local Transport Plan funding and the Capital was released at the Special Cabinet of 19 February 2013. The release of capital for the highways programmes is always subject to satisfactory scheme development.
45. If the scheme does not progress the funding must be returned to the programme for delivery on other bus network improvement projects within the Tees Valley.

Legal Implications

46. The legal orders associated with the scheme have been advertised and are considered within consultation section of this report.

Procurement Strategy

47. The Council's Contract Procedure Rules require that all contracts in excess of £75,000 be considered by Cabinet for designation as either strategic or non-strategic based on value and significance to the authority. The contract for construction of the scheme was considered by Cabinet on 3 September 2013 and deemed non-strategic.
48. If Cabinet approves the progression of the scheme to the implementation stages the letting and management of any contracts would be managed by the Council's Capital Projects team. A procurement strategy would be developed with sign-off required from the Council's Asset Management Group chaired by the Director of Resources. There have been no substantive changes since the designation by Cabinet as non-strategic and so it is appropriate for the procurement strategy to be signed off at Asset Management Board level as suggested. The approach will also require approval by Procurement Board.

Equalities Considerations

49. The Third Local Transport Plan seeks to enable everyone to be able to travel to access employment, healthcare and other services and particularly notes the needs of older people and people with disabilities. Multi-strand Equalities Impact Assessments and Disability Impact Assessments have been undertaken as part of the development of the 3LTP (Cabinet 8 February 2011).

50. The scheme has been designed to meet Department for Transport Guidance notes regarding provision for mobility impaired users. The scheme offers additional and improved controlled pedestrian crossing facilities. We have consulted DAD and will incorporate any practicable changes.

Consultation

51. The consultation was designed to serve two purposes:-
- (a) Promote the proposals and seek views on the scheme.
 - (b) Advertise the Legal Traffic Regulation Orders associated with the scheme to ascertain whether there were any formal objections to the proposals.

General Consultation

52. Consultation commenced week commencing 16 September 2013 and closed on Friday 11 October 2013.
53. As part of the consultation briefings were given to Members, Town Centre Board and the information was sent to other interested parties including the emergency services and Arriva.
54. The proposals were also advertised on the Council's website with an option to comment on the proposals.
55. In addition, a press release was issued and the Northern Echo and Darlington and Stockton Times covered the proposals in articles advertising the web link.
56. A public drop-in session was organised on 25 September 2013 in the Dolphin Centre between 1.30pm and 6.30pm, where Members of the public could drop-in to ask questions and comment on the proposals.
57. The plans, general information and frequently asked questions were also available at the Town Hall reception during the consultation period.
58. All of the comments received are summarised at **Appendix 2**

Traffic Regulation Orders

59. As mentioned previously in the report a series of traffic regulation orders are required to modify existing regulations and propose new banned movements.
60. The legal orders associated with the proposed scheme have been advertised to ensure all the impacts that the proposals could have are understood as part of the consultation process.
61. The notice for the requisite Traffic Orders was placed in the Northern Echo on 26 September 2013 and the closing date for objections was 17 October 2013.

62. There was one objection received but upon clarification this was later withdrawn. Therefore, there are no unresolved objections to the proposals enabling the traffic regulation orders to be made if the scheme progresses.
63. The general consultation and the formal advertising of the Traffic Regulation Orders have not identified any issues that would prevent officers from recommending the scheme progressing to procurement and construction.