
TOWN CENTRE TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Nick Wallis,
Leisure and Local Environment Portfolio**

Responsible Director - Ian Williams, Director of Economic Growth

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide details on traffic management around the town centre and investigate a number of measures to address concerns in relation to pedestrian movements and vehicle speed.

Summary

2. Designing a place to thrive that enables the economy to grow is a priority for the Council. The town centre is a busy place where people come to work, visit and shop and in recent years major development has been attracted to the town centre.
3. In all locations, there is a need to achieve an appropriate balance of traffic management arrangements to create the right environment that meets a multitude of demands. Creating the right environment from a traffic and transport perspective is a complex mixture of arrangements that are kept under continual review.
4. There were major changes to arrangements in the town centre around ten years ago when the Pedestrian heart was introduced and it is normal practice to keep arrangements under continual review and modification.
5. The Council has undertaken a wider review and consultation and made changes including:
 - (a) Hackney Rank Review
 - (b) Town Centre Strategy
 - (c) Arriva Bus Service Review
 - (d) Parking Strategy
 - (e) Town Centre Walking and Cycling Review
 - (f) Major Junction Improvements and Bridge Strengthening
6. These changes and reviews have required significant investment and there is a continual drive to improve and accommodate demands. However, with all town

centres, there is a finite amount of space to accommodate all these needs and getting the balance right is critical.

7. Evidence from analysis of Police casualty data shows that Darlington is becoming a safer place with reducing numbers of casualties on our roads and casualties in the town centre, since the introduction of the Pedestrian Heart. The 2015 National Highways and Transportation Survey on public satisfaction placed Darlington as the highest in the Country for road safety.
8. The Council has sought to continually review and improve arrangements but there remains some concern within the town centre over pedestrian movements and a perception of excess vehicle speed. In partnership with the Police, Bus Operators and other stakeholders the Council is proposing to investigate a package of measures outlined in this report to try and address these concerns.

Recommendation

9. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (a) Approve the investigation of a package of measures outlined in this report to address pedestrian movement and vehicle speed concerns in the town centre in partnership with the Police, bus operators and other stakeholders.
 - (b) Delegate authority to Director of Economic Growth in consultation with the portfolio holder for Leisure and Local Environment to vary the Transport Capital Programme to fund and deliver any measures identified.

Reasons

10. The recommendation is supported so as to continue to improve the environment and conditions to support a place designed to thrive and where people come to work, visit and shop.

Ian Williams
Director of Economic Growth

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

DW : Extension 6618
LC

S17 Crime and Disorder	This decision will not have an impact on Crime and Disorder
Health and Well Being	The continual review of the town centre environment and reduction in accidents improves people's health and wellbeing.
Carbon Impact	This decision will not have a direct impact on the Council's carbon footprint.
Diversity	The package of measures to be investigated may have a positive impact.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	Any proposed measures would be funded from a review of Local Transport Plan funding and committed schemes.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Town Centre Traffic Management supports the overarching aims of One Darlington: Perfectly Placed.
Efficiency	There are no direct efficiency savings.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Town Centre Traffic Management Arrangements

11. Designing a place to thrive that enables the economy to grow is a priority for the Council. Darlington town centre is a busy place that people want to visit for leisure, shopping and business. There has been significant growth in the town centre in recent years with the Department for Education relocating into the town centre and the Feethams Leisure development opening.

12. Achieving an appropriate balance of traffic management arrangements is required to create the right environment to satisfy the needs of visitors, shoppers, business and statutory requirements. This is a complex mixture of arrangements, which can include:
 - (a) Car Parking, both on and off street, short stay and long stay parking places
 - (b) Bus Access and Stops
 - (c) Waiting and Loading Restrictions
 - (d) Loading Arrangements
 - (e) Bus Lanes and One-way Streets
 - (f) Access Control
 - (g) Disabled Parking and Access
 - (h) Walking and Cycling arrangements
 - (i) Taxi Rank Provision

13. There was a major change to the traffic management arrangements when the Pedestrian Heart was introduced and it is normal accepted practice to keep arrangements under continual review and modification. However, the principles set for the town centre are that:
- (a) The main vehicular access points into the Town Centre are from Stonebridge, Feethams and Bondgate.
 - (b) Secondary accesses are at Grange Road, Commercial Street and East Street.
 - (c) Access points feed cars into the Council and privately operated major car parks such as the Feethams multi storey car park, Cornmill, East Street and Commercial Street car parks.
 - (d) Car parks are generally located close to the Inner Ring Road and on the outskirts of the main retail areas to reduce the number of cars that travel into, through or adjacent to the main shopping areas. This limits the number of vehicles using the areas where pedestrian flows are at their highest around Priestgate, Prebend Road, the top of Tubwell Row and Bondgate.
 - (e) Access through Northgate, during the day (10.00am – 5.00pm) is restricted to buses, hackney carriages and other limited uses such as post office and bullion vehicles, which helps to restrict the level of traffic passing through this area. Outside of these hours servicing is permitted.
 - (f) Buses pass through the town centre along the same route – Northgate, Crown Street, Priestgate, Prebend Row, Tubwell Row and out through Stonebridge enabling passengers to be dropped off and picked up in the heart of the retail areas (some services leave via Feethams).
 - (g) The main pedestrianised area has very strict access restrictions which are managed by the use of rising and lowering bollards with limited access for markets, bullion and events vehicles permitted between 10.00am and 5.00pm. Outside of those hours servicing vehicles are also permitted.
 - (h) Disabled parking, Hackney ranks and loading facilities have been provided as close as possible to main retail areas.
 - (i) Where it is not safe or appropriate to allow parking waiting and loading restrictions have been introduced.
 - (j) People are permitted to ride their bikes in the pedestrianised area. Outside of this area they should cycle on the roads, not the pavements. Cycle routes using off road cycle routes and quiet roads enable cyclists to reach the town centre from most parts of town.

What has changed?

14. A number of changes to traffic management arrangements has taken place in the Town Centre. These arise from:

- (a) Specific matters or changes of circumstance that are treated as business as usual on an individual basis; and,
- (b) Wider interventions where the Council has undertaken reviews consulted upon views and made changes.

15. A number of wider interventions and reviews have taken place since the introduction of the Pedestrian Heart demonstrating a process of continual review, which include:

Hackney Carriage Review

16. The Hackney Carriage Rank Review was completed in 2011 and there were changes introduced on East Row 2012 to improve rank capacity, reduce obstructive parking and reduce risk to pedestrians. This also introduced improved operation of existing disabled parking bays in the vicinity.

Town Centre Strategy – Bus and Coach Waiting Facilities

17. In 2012/13 the Town Centre Strategy was developed and there was specific consultation on bus and coach passenger facilities. Surveys identified two main areas for improvement:-

- (a) Too many people waiting at stands F and G on Prebend Row, blocking the pavement for pedestrians trying to get to and from the shops (outside Waterstones).

“To address this an agreement was reached with bus operators to relocate out of town services from stands F and G on Prebend Row to stands H and I on Tubwell Row and high frequency town services were moved onto Prebend Row. This has reduced the number of people waiting at any one time on Prebend Row and freed up the pavement space for pedestrians.”

- (b) Not enough room for passengers waiting at stand M on Tubwell Row (outside Joseph Pease pub).

“To address this Stand M has been relocated to outside of the Town Hall on Feethams and an additional stop has been created (Stand T). This in turn has created more road space on Tubwell Row to assist the flow of the traffic on Tubwell Row for all traffic.”

18. As part of this work it was found that the majority of coach passengers were content with the location of the coach stop on Feethams. However, they wanted to see improvements to the waiting environment. A scheme is currently underway to provide better waiting facilities including more shelter, seating, signing and better lighting.

19. Buses are an essential element of every town’s economy and in Darlington they provide people with access direct into the heart of the town centre to shop and access services. There are around 80 buses an hour into the town centre with

public transport bringing around a ¼ million people per month into the town centre. This is vital to the town centre economy.

20. Integrating bus services into the town centre was a specific feature of the Pedestrian Heart design stages over ten years ago. The question of a bus station was raised as part of the Pedestrian Heart consultation and again during the development of the Town Centre Strategy in 2012/13. The conclusion reached was that a bus station was not the most appropriate solution for Darlington.
21. One key but important was the location of a possible bus station in reaching this conclusion.
 - (a) Numerous sites of the required size to accommodate a bus station were assessed. None would provide the same direct access into the centre of the town centre that exists under the current arrangement.
 - (b) Each could potentially disadvantage certain parts of the town centre depending on where it was located. For example;
 - (i) If located in the Feethams area it would take circa six-ten minutes to walk to Northgate.
 - (ii) if located in the Commercial street area it would take a similar time to get to Blackwellgate.
 - (iii) These walking distances were considered unacceptable.
 - (c) The current arrangements maximise the accessibility to all parts of the town centre enabling the extremities to remain equally viable and busy.
 - (d) Under the current arrangements circa three million people a year are dropped off and picked up in the heart of the town centre maximising footfall for business.
22. People respond and advise the Council they want to be dropped off in the centre of town and the design of the bus services has been developed in this way to offer the maximum flexibility for the passenger to ensure they can be as close as possible. Improvements have been made and these include:
 - (a) A significant proportion of the services now have two identified stopping locations in different parts of the town centre. This is something that has been developed in partnership with Arriva following passenger feedback.
 - (b) All services heading past Northgate but not scheduled to pick-up, will stop to drop off only.

Arriva Bus Service Review

23. In 2012 the bus services operated by Arriva were criticised and Arriva were invited to Place Scrutiny in 2012 to discuss poor performance issues.
24. The Council has developed a strong partnership with Arriva. The company has responded by making significant investment in driver training, services and their

fleet. This has been matched by Council investment in infrastructure and marketing.

25. Regrettably, austerity and financial constraints have resulted in the removal of subsidies for bus services and this has had an impact on the locations, frequencies and times bus services operate. All services in Darlington now operate on a commercial basis. This means that the bus companies decide whether it is viable for them to run a service.
26. Significant investment and improvement was noted by Place Scrutiny in 2015 when Arriva provided an update on their progress in addressing concerns highlighted in 2012. This improvement has been recognised within the transport industry with numerous awards for partnership in 2015/16 and nominations in 2016/17.

Parking Strategy

27. The long term Parking Strategy was completed following a consultation process in 2013 and delivery of this strategy is underway: Actions undertaken to date include:-
 - (a) Delivery of the Multi-storey car park (MSCP) to provide capacity for the town centre on a pay on exit basis.
 - (b) Rationalisation of parking facilities to provide more opportunity to bring development and business into the town centre.
 - (c) Improvement and upgrading of Town Centre Parking Facilities:
 - (i) Commercial Street (x2)
 - (ii) Kendrew Street (x2)
 - (iii) Archer Street
 - (iv) Beaumont Street West (contract)
 - (v) Barnard Street (x3)
 - (vi) Park Place West (completed in September 2016)
 - (d) Development of contract parking for businesses.
 - (e) Seasonal Parking promotions.
 - (f) Flexible parking “season” tickets.
 - (g) Increase in number of motorcycle bays.
 - (h) Flexible tariffs and payments.

Cycling and Walking in the Town Centre

28. Darlington has led the way in development of Sustainable Transport and Travel Behaviour programmes with the Local Motion programme and more recently working across the Tees Valley with Connect Tees Valley.

29. Darlington was the only area to be both a Sustainable Travel and Cycling Demonstration Town nationally.
30. Cycling in the Pedestrian Heart has been under continual review:
- (a) During the consultation on the Pedestrian Heart in 2004 Cabinet agreed to allow cycling for a six month trial period on completion of the physical works in the town centre.
 - (b) The six month trial period began in June 2007 and ran until December 2007. During this period evidence was collected including cordon counts, accident statistics and an attitude survey. The trial period was subsequently extended by Cabinet to carry out further monitoring of the situation and also produce a code of conduct for cyclists, carry out a Disability Impact Assessment and carry out some intergenerational work.
 - (c) A report was presented to Cabinet committee in February 2009 regarding the extended trial period and approval was given to continue with cycling through the pedestrianised area indefinitely.
 - (d) Cycling in the town centre was referred back to a Place Scrutiny meeting on 5 February 2015 for further consideration and an improvement action plan was produced and delivery of the actions are underway. Progress will be reported to a future Place Scrutiny meeting.
31. The additional funding secured from the Department for Transport has enabled the support of a wide variety of walking and cycling initiatives but also other travel related initiatives such as the DAD accessible taxi and community transport to Sadberge, Bishopton and Great Stainton.
32. It has also supported a programme of infrastructure works to improve walking and cycling networks into the town centre to encourage more sustainable journeys in the town. This has continued this year with footpath improvements to Chancery Lane, Feethams and Beaumont Street. A segregated walking and cycling route now extends along the Inner Ring Road from Russell Street to Victoria Road roundabout and a new link will be constructed this financial year to Park Place.

Stonebridge Junction and Bridge Strengthening

33. A significant investment in the junction at Stonebridge has seen improved traffic management and the recent strengthening of the bridge has secured access and removed the need for weight restrictions securing access into the town centre for the future.

Road Safety Facts

34. The Council has a statutory duty to examine evidence analysing Police accident records:

- (a) In the **North East** there were 7,332 road user casualties in 2015. This is **4% lower** than in 2014 (7,602) and **26% fewer** than the 2005 to 2009 baseline average (9,938).
- (b) Across the whole Borough of **Darlington** there were 274 road user casualties in 2015. This is **15% lower** than in 2014 (322) and **35% fewer** than the 2005 to 2009 baseline average (422).
- (c) Accident levels in the whole **town centre** (i.e. within the inner ring road) for the last full five years are **lower** than the five years before the Pedestrian Heart. This monitoring and analysis in partnership with the Police has not identified the need for any specific interventions in the town centre from an Engineering or Enforcement perspective.

Five Years PRIOR to Pedestrian Heart (2001-2005)	Last five full years (2011-2015)
35 accidents resulting in 38 casualties	26 accidents resulting in 30 casualties
Average of 7.6 casualties/year	Average of six casualties/year
In the last five years:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically 1.9% of casualties per year in the Borough occur in the town centre. • These occur at various locations throughout the town centre with no identifiable pattern. • Six accidents (seven casualties) involved a bus and only one involved a bus striking a pedestrian in the carriageway. Six of the casualties were classified as Slight Injury, with one being Serious. 	

35. Creating a safer place is a key priority for the Council and Partners and we work together to try to reduce casualties on our roads year on year.
36. The Council operates a number of road safety programmes aimed at ensuring children grow up with road safety skills to ensure they have the life skills they need when walking, cycling and eventually become drivers to keep them safe. These programmes form a long term investment ensuring children have the best start in life and ensuring we are working to build a safer community.

Public Satisfaction

37. Each year the Council is encouraged by the Department for Transport to take part in a National Highways and Transport Public Satisfaction Survey. This has been used by over 100 Highway Authorities since it first started in 2008 and provides national benchmarks of customer issues and satisfaction in the Highways and Transport Sector.

38. In terms of public satisfaction those completing the independent survey rated Road Safety in Darlington very high and the Council won the national Outstanding Achievement Award for the Road Safety theme.

Overall

39. The town centre traffic management arrangements are under continual review and there has been significant investment and work undertaken to continually improve. One of Darlington's key assets is its connectivity.

- (a) The town centre has national accessibility:
 - (i) by Road via the A1(M) and A66.
 - (ii) by Rail with Bank Top Station being on the East Coast Mainline for North South connectivity and the Local Tees Valley line between Bishop Auckland and Saltburn.
- (b) The Tees Valley Combined Authority recognises the importance our strategic transport position and wants to enhance this.
- (c) Darlington will be served by HS2.
- (d) Since the Economic Strategy was adopted in 2012, the local economy has seen significant growth with over £150 million of physical development.
- (e) The town centre has around 2700 car parking spaces.
- (f) A network of walking and cycle routes has been developed to provide sustainable options for people. The seventh radial route from the edge of town to the town centre will be completed in Spring 2017.
- (g) A public transport system that brings circa ¼ million people per month into the town centre.
- (h) 80 buses an hour go into the town centre from within Darlington and between neighbouring towns.
- (i) Road Casualties are reducing and public satisfaction with Road Safety in the Borough is very high.
- (j) National Coach services operate from Feethams.
- (k) Local Rail Stations are being improved to encourage people to travel into Darlington by train.

Further Work

40. Members will of course be aware of the tragic death of Mrs Brennan in the town centre and the horrific injuries suffered by others on 7 July 2016. Council officers have assisted the Police in their review of the traffic circumstances, road layout and

road condition and these aspects do not form part of the ongoing Police investigation.

41. As part of the continual review and channels of stakeholder engagement the Council is aware that there are those who remain concerned about pedestrian movements and perception of excess vehicle speed in the town centre despite the work done to date and the safety record.
42. In partnership with the Police, Bus Operators and other stakeholders the Council is proposing to investigate a package of measures that such as:
 - (a) Introducing a 20mph speed limit in town centre locations. This is the lowest speed limit that can be introduced on UK roads.
 - (b) Work to develop an advisory speed limit that is lower than 20mph at agreed locations with road users. For example bus operators, hackney carriage drivers, delivery drivers and others.
 - (c) Investigate the introduction of signs to encourage slower speeds that monitor speed and provide a visual indication to both drivers and pedestrians.
 - (d) Improve the conspicuity of uncontrolled crossing points.
 - (e) Develop a campaign to address concerns.
43. As with all previous reviews and improvements outlined in this report there is a role for Place Scrutiny Committee as part of the continual review of Town Centre Traffic Management. The Police investigation is still ongoing and we cannot and must not prejudice this process. Therefore, any further work needs be considered after the investigation and due process is complete.

Financial Implications

44. There will be financial implications in relation to the delivery of some of the measures identified in the action plan if they proceed. It is envisaged that this would be funded from a review of Local Transport Plan funding and committed schemes. Approval is sought to delegate authority to Director of Economic Growth in consultation with the portfolio holder for Leisure and Local environment to vary the Transport Programme.