
OVERVIEW OF TRANSPORT PORTFOLIO

Purpose of Report

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work that have been undertaken under the Transport Portfolio.

Highway Maintenance Schemes

2. Ongoing schemes:

Brankin Road – footway refurbishment

Inner Ring Road/Stonebridge Junction Project

3. The scheme to remodel the Stonebridge Inner Ring Road junction has commenced. The scheme which is funded by Tees Valley Bus Network Improvement Project, involves removing the existing roundabout and replacing with a traffic signal controlled junction.
4. First phase commenced on 17 February 2014 and involved changes to the approach to Freemans Place roundabout creating two through lanes in each direction and removing the widened central reserve that reduced the carriageway to one lane in the direction of Northgate roundabout. The changes required the temporary removal of the pedestrian traffic signal controlled crossing but the crossing will be reinstated once the works are complete.
5. There are also works around the Parkgate junction close to the Magistrates Court to enable statutory undertakers (gas, water, electric etc) to protect their equipment prior to the road being widened at the point.
6. The scheme is being constructed on a phased approach with a total of nine phases having been identified. We have taken this approach to minimise traffic disruption and to maintain alternative pedestrian and cycle routes through the construction period. Traffic management will be in place throughout the project and will be regularly reviewed to ensure that it is both safe and serviceable.
7. The proposals form part of the longer term vision for delivery of the Town Centre Fringe Regeneration including improving pedestrian connections across the ring road and the aspiration to create a pleasant riverside walk along the banks of the River Skerne as it passes through the town and help create opportunities for improved flood defences. The scheme will be particularly beneficial in accommodating additional traffic associated with developments such as the cinema and the DfE building.

A67 Carlbury Banks Landslip

8. The Council received good news in December 2013 when it was announced that we had been successful in bidding for £2.445m from the Government's Pinch Point Fund. The Council are required to provide a local contribution of £0.875m, with Northumbrian Water Limited (NWL) also contributing £0.595m to the scheme.
9. The extent of the work needed to provide a permanent solution was identified earlier this year after detailed geo-technical explorations. These showed that a 387m stretch of the embankment was unstable and in need of being stabilised.
10. NWL carried out further investigative work between 10-20 February 2014, this involved unearthing the water mains in two locations at the points where they proposed to divert the pipeline away from the road. This was required so that they can carry out further detailed design work for their diversion works. The road was closed while the works were ongoing but it opened again on 21 February 2014.
11. NWL's main diversion works are currently programmed to commence in May 2014 and should be complete by the end of September 2014. The Council has issued a tender for the main slope stabilisation works. These works are programmed to commence upon completion of the NWL diversion works and it is anticipated that they will be complete by April/May 2015.
12. Officers have held consultation events in High Coniscliffe and Gainford to explain the nature of the works, the length of time the road will be closed and what alternative arrangements in terms of diversion routes and what public transport will be available. This follows on from similar meetings held in 2013 when the landslip was initially identified and the road closed.
13. There is a Carlbury landslip webpage on the Council website which is updated regularly. There is also an opportunity for members of the public to provide comments or ask questions through a monitored email address.

Town Centre Car Parks

14. We have started to implement the Car Parking Strategy. A number of car parks were resurfaced in 2013 including Commercial Street East, Kendrew Street and Archer Street. We are proposing to resurface two more car parks in May 2014, Commercial Street West and Park Place West. These works are timed to be complete prior to the cinema development commencing which will of course result in the loss of the former bus depot temporary car park.

Safe Routes to School

15. Darlington School of Maths and Science (DSMS) - A new cycleway/footway connection into the former Branksome School has been constructed and a new lighting scheme has been implemented in the Cockerbeck area to provide a safe, lit route between Staindrop Road and the school.

16. Harrowgate Hill - A section of highway verge has recently been surfaced to provide approx. 20 car parking spaces for parents of children attending Harrowgate Hill Primary school. The school have opened a rear access on to North Park which will enable children a more direct route from areas to the south of the park around Westmoreland Street as well as serving this new road side parking on Whessoe Road.
17. We also propose to introduce a one way system in the back lane that leads to the school to improve road safety. We have consulted affected residents and there was a majority in favour. The requisite legal order for the one way system was advertised in local press and has received formal objections which will be considered by Cabinet in April 2014. If Cabinet are minded to set aside these objections we would look to implement the scheme within the Easter holidays, time permitting.

Bus Stop Improvements

18. The Council has received funding through Tees Valley Bus Network Improvement to improve and upgrade a number of stops on our busier bus routes. The majority of the stops on these routes now have raised platforms to assist people with mobility issues and the remainder will be improved over the coming months.
19. We also proposed to replace a number of bus shelters, the first phase of which was carried out on Woodlands Road. The further phases proposed on North Road and in Branksome. It is intended that all Council owned shelters will be replaced as part of the programme which should be complete by the end of the summer.

Local Sustainable Transport Fund

20. Department for Education Travel Information Days - Local Motion Travel Advisors visited Mowden Hall on 18 and 19 February to give travel information to members of staff in preparation for their move to the DfE building in the town centre in early 2015. The aim of the event was not only to get staff to think about their current journeys but also to give them the opportunity to discuss how they will travel to their new workplace.
21. MEGA Motion - Darlington schools are continuing to participate in MEGA Motion with Mount Pleasant Primary, High Coniscliffe CE Primary and Heathfield Primary School all having a MEGA Friday walk. Approximately 2000 pupils involved in MEGA Motion have collected their bronze award for collecting 30 MEGA Minutes since the project began in October 2013.
22. Cycle security sessions - Local Motion teamed up with the Anti-Social Behaviour team and the town centre PCSO to deliver a cycle security and considerate cycling event during the February half term. Members of the Local Motion team gave out information on cycling and also free bike locks whilst the PCSO was on hand to give out advice on how to cycle safely and considerately and also security mark bikes as part of Operation Spoke, a Durham Constabulary led project aiming to reduce cycle theft.

23. Community Audits - The phase two final report has now been received from Groundwork North East. The report covers engagement and suggestions for capital and revenue projects in Lingfield, Central, North Road, Harrowgate Hill and Sadberge and Whessoe wards. The report is currently being analysed with a view to identifying viable projects that can be delivered in the future.
24. Winter Walks Programme - The winter walks programme that ran from 13 November to 19 February has now been completed. Over 13 Wednesdays, residents took part in guided walks on each of the 13 Local Motion self-guided walks. After a slow start, each walk had between ten and 15 participants with a core group of regular walkers. Discussions are currently taking place about maintaining this group and potentially expanding on the walks. As part of this, the Sports Development Team delivered Walk Leader Training to residents on 7 March.
25. Individualised Travel Marketing - The 2014 ITM programme began on 4 March. This year the project will cover Hummersknott, College, Park West, Park East, Lascelles, Bank Top, Eastbourne and Hurworth wards between March and July before moving to deliver the final part of our contract in South Durham. The eight Travel Advisors will target approximately 16,000 households in Darlington with tailor-made travel information and advice.
26. The Area Watt Bike championship was held at Carmel College on 29 January with three Darlington schools and two Durham secondary schools involved. Feedback from the schools has been very positive and the schools will use the Watt bikes throughout the year to prepare for next year's re-match.
27. Scooter training has now been delivered in four primary schools and there has been some good feedback from parents with the majority stating that their child's scooter skills had improved and that the children were more confident and more aware of others when using their scooter. Early indications are that more pupils are using their scooters to travel to school since the training.

Strategic Transport Network – Rail

28. The Leader of the Council and Officers attended an East Coast Mainline stakeholder event in Newcastle on 24 January. This was one of a series of events held along the route of the ECML to raise the profile of the work the East Coast Mainline Authorities (ECMA) are doing to develop a business case for investment in the ECML. The event was attended by leading business representatives from throughout the region, with presentations from Nick Forbes (Newcastle City Council), Heidi Mottram (Northumbrian Water Limited) and David Robinson (PD Ports). Councillor Dixon closed the event, summing up with the need for the ECMA to work together to influence government on the importance of the ECML to the nation's economy and that of the regions. Key issues being to improve the quality and reliability of services, to future proof the line for higher speed trains and ensure that connectivity with local rail services is retained.

29. The Department for Transport (DfT) is planning to issue the formal invitation to tender to the shortlisted operators at the end of February. The successful bidder is due to take over the franchise in February 2015.
30. The winner of the franchise will be the operator of the new Intercity Express fleet which has been ordered from the Hitachi-led consortium Agility Trains by the DfT for the East Coast and Great Western Main Lines, and which will be assembled in Newton Aycliffe.

Tees Valley Bus Network Improvement

31. A mini digital marketing campaign was rolled out during February targeting young people. The campaign utilised the same artwork that was nominated for a public sector communications award to capitalise on the investment made in this high quality artwork
32. Catch the Bus Week – A joint TVBNI/LSTF Marketing Campaign - Planning is underway on this spring campaign targeting non-bus users. The campaign will run in the four week period before national 'catch the bus week' (week commencing 28 April). The campaign includes a launch event promoting catch the bus week, an outdoor/digital media campaign and possibly ticket giveaways by the operators. Both Durham and Darlington LSTF projects are co-developing the campaign which will run in both areas, as well as in the wider Tees Valley.
33. Great Days Out – A joint TVBNI/LSTF Marketing Campaign - planning has begun for this year's 'Great Days Out' campaign. Repeating last year's successful campaign, it aims to encourage more leisure travel on public transport over the Easter, Whit and summer school holiday periods. Again it is likely that Durham and Darlington LSTF projects will co-develop the campaign and we are in talks with Nexus to see if we can turn into a regional campaign.

Tees Valley Rail

34. The Station Improvement Project at Dinsdale Station in Middleton St George has been completed. The first phase of work completed in May 2013 included new shelters with seating, CCTV, Customer Information Screens (with live departure information) and a new Public Announcement system, new signs and information. This was completed in time for the introduction of the new timetable which sees a half hourly service in both directions (Darlington to the west and Middlesbrough, Redcar and Saltburn to the east). The second phase of work was completed in February 2014 and included resurfacing the ramps down on to each platform, new handrails on each side of the ramps and cycle parking. The large conifer trees alongside both platforms have been removed, improving visibility and lighting along the platforms. Over the last 12 months patronage has been 25 per cent higher than the same period the year before.

Changes to Transport funding

35. The mechanism for allocation of transport funding to local authorities is changing, from April 2015 onwards, funding for transport schemes will be split into :

- (a) Predominantly capital funding from the Local Growth Fund (LGF), for which funding priorities are agreed by Local Enterprise Partnerships. To be eligible for funding schemes will need to demonstrate their strategic importance to the Tees Valley and to relate to national economic targets. The Government have committed £2.19Bn to the national LGF budget in 2015/16, but as yet have made no firm commitment to funding levels in future years.
 - (b) Integrated Transport Block (ITB) allocation made direct to local authorities. From April 2015 the Department for Transport are introducing a new formula for allocation of ITB funds. Overall the national ITB budget has reduced by £200M, with that sum redirected into the LGF.
 - (c) Highway Maintenance Block Funding made direct to local authorities. The Department for Transport are proposing to introduce a new formula for allocation of Highway Maintenance funds from April 2015, including an element of challenge funding, where up to £200M of the national £770M budget would be awarded on a competitive basis.
 - (d) £100M in Local Sustainable Transport Funding has been made available for one year (2015/16). Local Authorities are encouraged to bid, individually or as part of a consortium for up to a maximum of £1M per local authority from this fund.
36. The impact of these changes on transport funding for Darlington, is not yet fully apparent. Officers are working with the Department for Transport and Tees Valley Unlimited to try and maximise the level of funding available to Darlington. This includes funding for projects identified within the Strategic Economic Plan, mentioned below, and a Tees Valley bid for LSTF grant, on which Darlington is leading.

Strategic Economic Plan/Strategic Infrastructure Plan

37. Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) submitted the draft Strategic Economic Plan to government in December. Tees Valley Unlimited have received feedback on the draft plan and will submit the final document to government at the end of March.
38. The Strategic Economic Plan sets out our Economic Growth ambitions for the Tees Valley as a whole, sets out our Economic strengths, and actions for achieving growth, including investment in strategic infrastructure (transport, flood defence, broadband, utilities and energy).
39. Key infrastructure schemes across the Tees Valley have been identified and prioritised through work with ARUP consultants to develop the Strategic Infrastructure Plan
40. Darlington transport projects which have been identified as suitable for inclusion within the Strategic Economic Plan, which will then go onto be included in bids to the Local Growth Fund include:

- (a) Construction of new junction and access road linking Central Park to Yarm Road. Enabling further economic development on Central Park is the priority for funding in 2015/16, the first year of the LGF programme.
 - (b) Funding to support work on easing congestion on the A66 east of Darlington, this is subject to detailed work the Highway's Agency are undertaking, looking at options for the Morton Palms and Little Burdon roundabouts.
41. It is proposed that there is also be a Tees Valley wide funding package for Sustainable Transport and Strategic maintenance schemes.
42. A decision of how much Local Growth funding the Tees Valley will receive is expected in July 2014. Initially the allocation will be for just one year, 2015/16.

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Transport Portfolio