

**EXETER CITY COUNCIL****SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ECONOMY  
13 NOVEMBER 2008****PLANNING MEMBER WORKING GROUP  
25 NOVEMBER 2008****DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL'S TRANSPORTATION PROPOSALS  
FOR THE EXETER PRINCIPAL URBAN AREA****1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 This report advises Members of the County Council's progress in preparing a major schemes bid for transportation enhancements in the city to help tackle congestion and improve air quality. The scheme is called the Exeter Principal Urban Area Scheme.

**2.0 INFORMATION**

- 2.1 The government introduced a system of funding several years ago which sets out regional priorities and funding of transport enhancements via the Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) system. Major schemes are the subject of outline bids for the provisional allocation of funding and then detailed submissions have to be made to the Department for Transport in order for funding to be confirmed and allocated to each transportation authority where value for money and alignment with transport policy is demonstrated.
- 2.2 The County Council has been working for some time on a series of bids and has already submitted a bid to secure cash to enhance junctions 29 and 30 on the M5. There is a provisional allocation in the RFA for a scheme made up of a package of highway improvements in Exeter.
- 2.3 Proposals, which are put forward by highway authorities for RFA funding, need to be a carefully balanced package whereby congestion is not simply tackled by seeking to build extra highway capacity throughout the system. What is required is a more balanced approach that provides for targeted enhancement to highway capacity combined with improved facilities for public transport, cycling and walking, wherever possible. The EPUA scheme follows these general principles and the various components of the package are outlined below.

**Alphington Road Corridor**

- 2.4 The key design principles for the enhancement of this corridor are to improve outbound capacity and as part of this to improve priority for public transport and to encourage modal shift by the provision of a new park and ride facility at the end of the Alphington Road corridor.
- 2.5 Dealing first with the outbound traffic from the city centre, one key challenge is to improve the flow of buses and all traffic to the Exe Bridges system, so there are proposals to enhance the ability to get onto the Exe Bridges by providing two lanes all the way down Western Way from the Acorn Junction to Exe Bridges. Exe Bridges becomes very congested at times of peak traffic flow so the

objective has been set to improve outbound capacity along the Alphington Road route is to unlock congestion at Exe Bridges and beyond. The package for this route includes:

- o improved capacity at the Haven Road junction by creating a dedicated left turn lane from Alphington Street into Haven Road. This will provide a significant benefit to park and ride buses servicing the Matford P&R site and city centre, as well as to local traffic in the Haven Road area.
- o There is no further scope for enhancement until the Marsh Barton Road junction, where the intention is to put in place two outbound lanes all the way through to the Alphington Cross junction. This can be accommodated by small scale physical works, re-lining and the use of space which has been reserved for some time through previous planning consents.
- o The Alphington Cross junction will be the subject of limited re-design such that it will be ready to deal with the traffic management consequences of creating the Grace Road link, as and when a successful scheme is promoted opening up the land at Grace Road.

2.6 The above measure will take out a number of key pinch points and will thereby enable a reduction in outbound queuing and provide improved services for buses at several key locations.

2.7 The other element of the proposals for this corridor involves the provision of a new park and ride site for this approach to Exeter. It has long been acknowledged that the city lacks a park and ride site on the west of the city to pick up the A30 approach and indeed it is City Council policy to provide such a facility. Established research on park and ride demonstrates that the optimum location for a park and ride site for an historic city is on the inside of the city's by-pass, at the point where a key radial route intersects with the by-pass. Furthermore, the economics of operation are such that the target number of spaces should be in the region of 1000 parking spaces and an absolute minimum of 750 spaces. For the site to be effective, it also needs to be close to principal traffic flows and therefore the only practical proposition is identification of a site at, or very close to, the Ide intersection as there are no further intersections on the A30 anywhere adjacent to the built up area of Exeter.

2.8 The County Council has conducted a detailed site assessment of all the potential options and concluded that part of the Oaklands Stables site bounded by the A30 and the Alphin Brook to the north of the Ide intersection is the only viable option. Sites to the west of the A30 have very unattractive topography in terms of creating an effective park and ride site with gradients of 1 in 10 or worse. Sites to the east of the A30 are very limited – they are either built up or have poor access to the highway network. This leaves only the Oaklands Stables site as the viable option. Intensive work has been undertaken with the Environment Agency on flood modelling and the County Council have concluded that the minimum of 750 spaces could be achieved. However, the debate continues with the EA regarding the interpretation of data which could release the remainder of the land west of the Alphin Brook and the current proposals are to enhance tree planting in this area to improve the screening of the site from adjacent residential areas.

- 2.9 A sustainable drainage system will be required as part of the design in order to minimise run off from the site and it is proposed to use permeable surfaces in the parking areas to achieve this. Bus priority would be provided from the site along the Alphington spur to the Alphington Cross junction to separate the buses from other traffic and improve their journey time and reliability.

### **Topsham Road/Bridge Road Corridor**

- 2.10 The key focus here is the provision of two lanes outbound from School Lane, through the Tollards Road junction to the Countess Wear roundabout and then along Bridge Road to the Matford roundabout. The County Council propose to widen Topsham Road on the north side to provide a shared footway/cycleway and to provide two traffic lanes outbound on the approach to the Countess Wear roundabout junction. A cycle route through King George V is also under consideration, although detailed proposals are not yet available.
- 2.11 The County Council has assessed a range of options for revising the Countess Wear junction but concluded that only limited re-modelling is practicable and beneficial.
- 2.12 Key measures on the Bridge Road corridor are to provide an extended bus lane inbound from just beyond Countess Wear Road to the Countess Wear roundabout. Two outbound traffic lanes are proposed on Bridge Road and can be achieved by moving the footway and cycleway out on the west side of Bridge Road on to new structures. The new structure would be attached to the stone listed bridge across the river and a separate structure would be attached to the railway bridge further down this corridor. By virtue of this re-engineering, the whole of the corridor could be restored to two traffic lanes in both directions with a separate, segregated pedestrian and cycling facility.

## **3.0 KEY ISSUES**

- 3.1 Members are asked to consider the strategic and detailed issues that are raised by these proposals. In strategic terms there would appear to be a comprehensive package for these two corridors. Taken together the proposals will cost in the region of £35 million and will go some way to addressing congestion on the corridors and, through unlocking Exe Bridges, to reducing congestion in the city centre. By cutting congestion, air quality problems in the Air Quality Management Zone identified by the City Council, will be reduced. The scheme will also have safety benefits and improve journey time reliability for all traffic, particularly buses. The package will make sustainable modes of travel more attractive and by increasing bus use, walking and cycling, will help to control congestion and improve the City Centre environs. Of major benefit will be the provision of a new park and ride facility on the west side of the city which will have substantial benefit in terms of modal shift on this corridor. There is no intention to increase in-bound capacity which would run the danger of being more attractive to drive into the city centre.
- 3.2 Nevertheless, Members are likely to have some concerns in a number of areas as follows. The most significant one is the matter of policy regarding the proposed Ide Park and Ride site, which is a designated Riverside Valley Park, which has been protected for development under successive policies of the Council. Development would normally be resisted in any Valley Park location. The assessment by the County Council has included a wide ranging search for a site to the west of the City and this shows that there is no viable alternative to

the proposed site. This is often a dilemma faced by historic cities where provision by park and ride has, in many instances, been on land which is protected by formal Green Belt and authorities have recognised that those sites constitute the only practicable solutions. Members are not asked to take a view on this at the present time, as the planning application is in preparation by the County Council and will be submitted for consultation with the City Council in the near future.

- 3.3 There are a number of other impacts that will cause significant local concern where highway improvements can only be achieved by the significant loss of a number of trees. This particularly affects a range of trees on Western Way, Topsham Road and Bridge Road. Officers have already indicated the need for careful design to minimise tree loss and the need for flexible engineering standards to protect as many trees as possible. There will also be limited impacts on King George V playing field with the provision of a cycle route running inside the playing field parallel to Bridge Road with a likely future proposal for a link between the cycle route and the gates to King George V playing field on Topsham Road, to provide a safe and attractive means for cyclists to avoid the Countess Wear roundabout.
- 3.4 These proposals have recently been the subject of public consultation in Alphington and Countess Wear and also by using a mobile exhibition in the city centre and at Matford P&R site. The County Council have asked for feedback by 20 November. Bearing in mind the City Council's Committee timetable, it has been agreed that late comments will be submitted by the City Council to the County Council prior to their consideration by the County Council's Executive on 16 December.
- 3.5 Work would then be undertaken on scheme details with the bid submitted to the Department for Transport in March 2009, with an expected outcome from the submission in Autumn 2009. Whilst Members will undoubtedly have some concerns about specific aspects of these proposals, they are part of a comprehensive package of measures which form a rational and comprehensive approach to the city's transport challenges.
- 3.6 It is also worth bearing in mind that a number of other elements of work which the County Council has set out in its Local Transport Plan are also being working on and, taken together, they constitute a comprehensive strategy for addressing the city's transportation problems. For example:
  - o Proposals are either in place or are being finalised to address key junctions of the M5 to improve connections to the New Growth Point to the east of the city.
  - o Work is on-going on a scheme to provide a showcase high quality public transport network, which would act as a catalyst to upgrading bus services across the city network.
  - o Work continues on the enhancement of a range of cycling facilities around the city.
- 3.7 Members are accordingly asked to support the proposed Exeter Principal Urban Area Package scheme.

**4.0 RECOMMENDATION**

- 4.1 It is recommended that Members give their support to funding bid from Devon County Council.

**JOHN RIGBY  
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**ECONOMY & DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE**

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)**

***Background papers used in compiling this report:-***

None