

Traffic Congestion Review - Final Report

Background to Scrutiny Review

1. This topic was originally registered by Cllr Tracey Simpson-Laing in April 2005 in order to assess the draft of the second Local Transport Plan (LTP2) prior to its submission. It was envisaged that the scrutiny process would ensure that LTP2 met the aspirations of the Planning & Transport Panel and allow time for the Executive Member to be questioned on issues of concern. A decision was taken to defer the topic and LTP2 was subsequently submitted without any pre-decision scrutiny.
2. In November 2006 Scrutiny Management Committee (SMC) reconsidered the topic registration suggested by Cllr Simpson-Laing, together with a draft remit for a revised scrutiny review focusing on tackling traffic congestion. After due consideration, SMC agreed an initial timeframe of six months for the review (subsequently extended), and the following amended remit was agreed:

Aim

To identify ways including Local Transport Plans 1 & 2 (LTP1 & LTP2) and other evidence, of reducing present levels of traffic congestion in York, and ways of minimising the impact of the forecast traffic increase.

Objectives

Having regard to the impact of traffic congestion (based on external evidence and those measures already implemented in LTP1 or proposed in LTP2), recommend and prioritise specific improvements to:

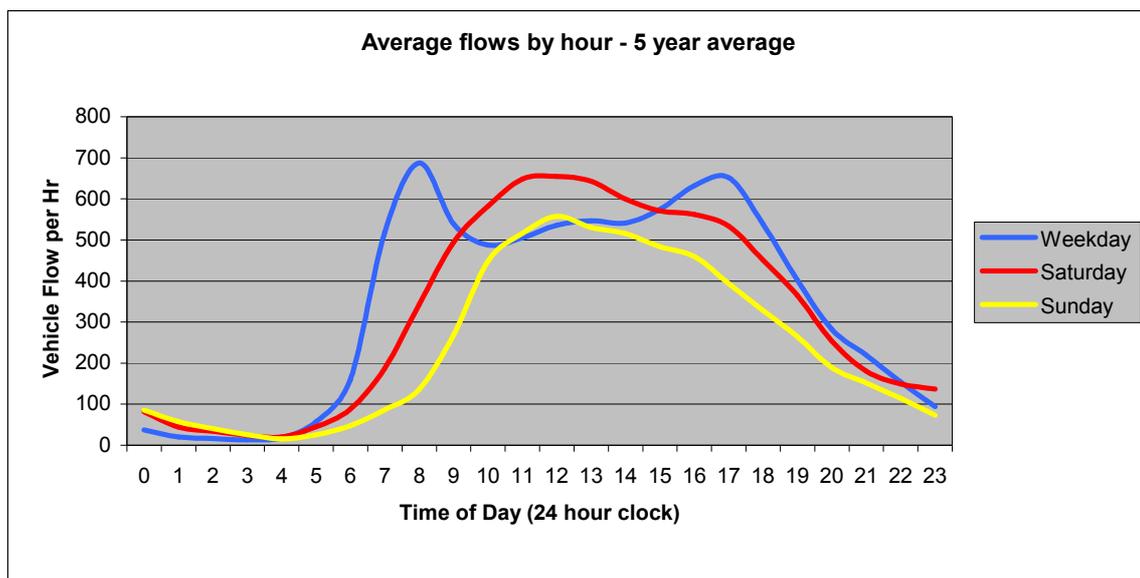
- i. Accessibility to services, employment, education and health
- ii. Air Quality, in particular looking at the five hotspots identified in the LTP2
- iii. CO₂ Emissions
- iv. Alternative environmentally viable and financially practical methods of transport
- v. Journey times and reliability of public transport
- vi. Economic Performance
- vii. Quality of Life
- viii. Road Safety

Background to Congestion Issues

3. Officers gave a number of briefings to the Committee on the congestion issues faced in York. For practical purposes, congestion was defined as 'where traffic flow

exceeds 85% of the road / junction capacity'. This definition was adopted as below that level traffic generally flows smoothly but above that level flow becomes unpredictable causing disruption leading to reduced or no free flow.

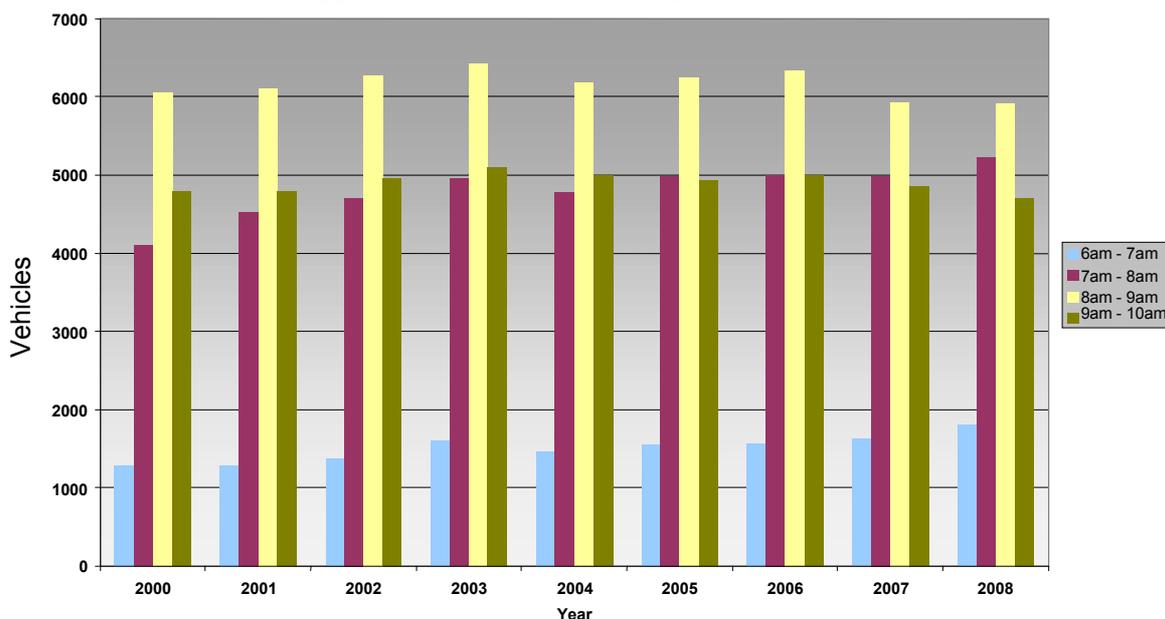
4. By 2011 traffic levels [above 2005 levels] are forecast to increase by 14%, with this figure doubling by 2021. This will affect not only the quality of life for the residents of York, but also the ability of the city to attract new jobs, investment and tourism. To understand the serious growth and spread of congestion on the principal road network in York, the Committee was presented with information on the modelling work undertaken by Halcrow in 2005 for the LTP2 submission. This work was initially produced using the older versions of the council's Saturn model, which was later replaced by a new Saturn/multi-modal model in 2006. Within the model were the projected new developments and infrastructure improvements expected to be delivered through LTP2 and its successors, and any additional infrastructure delivered through major scheme bids such as Access York or through developer led initiatives. It allowed different development scenarios to be tested at both a macro and micro level and new developments were assessed to identify their impact upon the road network, which was very much driven by the type, content and extent of the development proposal. The modelling looked at the peak traffic flow (weekday mornings 7am – 9am). It compared the traffic levels for 2005, against the projected 2011 LTP2 based do minimum, the 2021 do minimum & the 2021 do something – as shown on the maps at Annex A.
5. The future projections took into account both the additional traffic from anticipated employment and residential development such as York Central, University Campus 3, Germany Beck, Derwenthorpe, and Hungate etc and the LTP2 congestion tackling measures i.e. outer ring road junction improvements, Park & Ride expansion, and network management improvements for bus and cycle routes. It did not take into account York Northwest (i.e. York Central plus the British Sugar works) or more recent development opportunities such as Terrys and Nestlé's.
6. In common with most other cities, traffic flows in York (and associated congestion levels) vary greatly by time of day, and by weekday . The graph below shows the typical traffic flow patterns for weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays over a selection of main roads in the City.



7. It is generally accepted that the worst periods for traffic congestion are during the early morning and late afternoon periods on weekdays, as the highest flows show in the graph below. However, there are now similar levels of flow experienced on Saturdays, from late morning to early afternoon. These average results hide particular hotspots on certain days and at certain times. There is also evidence of the peak period spreading as a result of drivers responding to congestion:

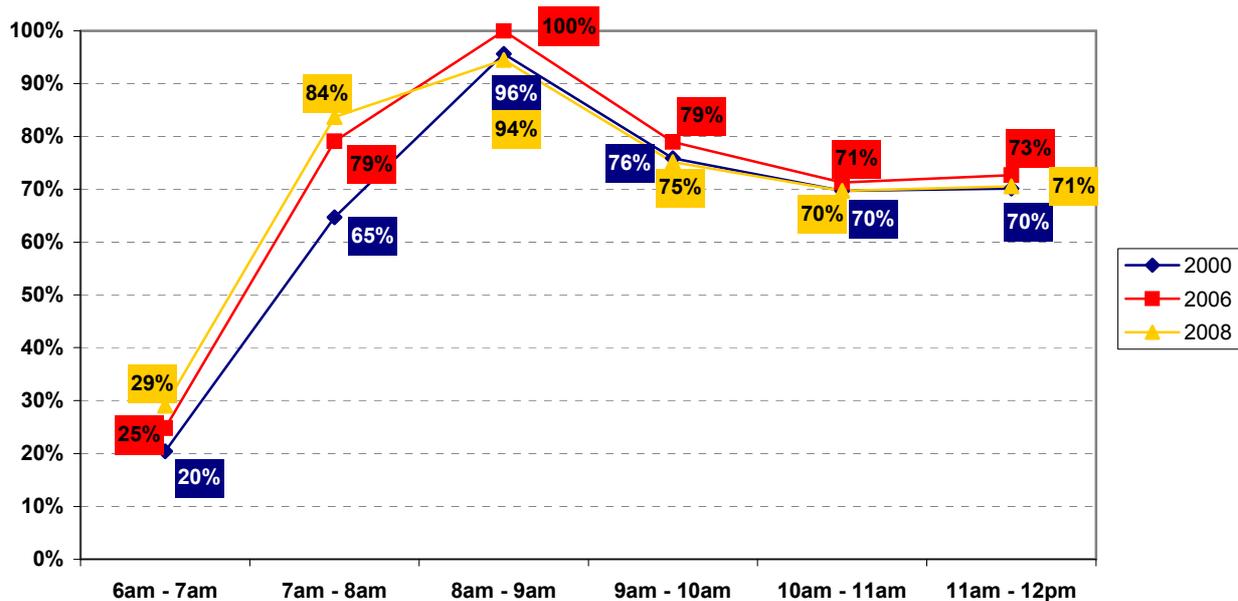
Peak Spreading - based on average hourly weekday counts
(Data from 11 inbound automatic Traffic Counters)

Hull Rd, Fulford Rd, Bishopthorpe Rd, Tadcaster Rd, Wetherby Rd, Boroughbridge Rd, Shipton Rd, Wigginton Rd, Haxby Rd, Huntington Rd, & Malton Rd



Inbound flow levels by hour of AM traffic levels in the City of York in 2000, 2006 & 2008

(in comparison to the highest flow level recorded - set at 100%)
(data taken from 11 Inbound Automatic Traffic Counters)



8. In order to fully investigate and understand the effects that congestion has on the improvement areas identified within the remit shown at paragraph 2, Members held a series of meetings between November 2006 and October 2009, as listed in Annex B, together with the Committee's initial findings.

Consultation

9. This scrutiny review has been progressed in consultation with the Assistant Director of City Development & Transport, the Environmental Protection Manager and other key officers in City Strategy. Representatives of the local bus service providers and the Chair of the Quality Bus Partnership were also consulted in relation to Objective (v) - Journey times and reliability of public transport. In addition, reference was made to national Government policy documents and the Council's mid-term reports on LTP2.
10. A number of consultation events were also held:
 - 'Road User Charging' (presented by Capita Symonds)
 - 'Broad Strategic Options Available to York' Report (presented by the Assistant Director of City Development & Transport)
 - 'Quality of Life' (presented by Professor John Whitelegg)
11. The presentations are shown as background papers to this final report - copies can be obtained by contacting the report author or viewed online at: <http://democracy.york.gov.uk/ecCatDisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=12836&path=0>
12. Finally, the Committee considered the findings from previously completed consultation surveys carried out at the time of LTP1 & LTP2. They also agreed that given the need to both obtain wider public understanding of the increasing transport problems facing the city and the transport choices required to respond to those problems, it would be beneficial to carry out a further citywide consultation exercise to gather residents views on the findings of this scrutiny review and the broad strategic options available to the city, as set out in this report. The city-wide consultation survey is being sent out in February 2010 - see copy at Annex E, and the combined results will be analysed and made available by the end of April 2010.

Information Gathered

13. A full breakdown of the information gathered in support of each of the identified objectives for this scrutiny review is detailed in Annex B. In regard to the residents survey, the Committee intend adding a summary of the collated results to this final report at paragraph 50 of Annex B, once the results are known.

Analysis & Review Conclusions

14. The Committee have comprehensively reviewed the Council's current transport policies as expressed through LTP2 and the 'Access York' initiative, and their impact on meeting anticipated traffic growth (including from the continued economic success and housing expansion of York) against the objectives of this review and against the views of York residents.

15. Their analysis of the information gathered, together with a matrix outlining the issues, potential solutions, impacts and draft recommendations is included at Annex C. In regard to the residents survey, the Committee intend adding their analysis of the findings to this final report at paragraph 24 of Annex C, once the results are known.
16. Overall, the Committee noted that transport policy figures very little in the current Sustainable Community Strategy vision, despite its importance in delivering much of its ambitions, and in terms of the feedback from York resident's surveys on the importance of tackling congestion.
17. The Committee acknowledged the continuing priority that York residents place on tackling congestion, their mixed views on adopting differing solutions, and the need for continuing substantial engagement with residents and businesses to gain mutual understanding of:
 - the potential future problems
 - what may or may not work, and scale of benefit
 - what the appropriate policy trade offs may be
 - the need to act in advance given ongoing traffic growth and delivery time lags
18. It was recognised that whilst many positive initiatives and measures are being undertaken, they will not be sufficient to avoid significantly worsening traffic and congestion problems over the next decade or so, notwithstanding the short term effects of the current recession, which could both adversely affect quality of life in York and undermine the City's future economic success and well-being. Also, the anticipated growth in motorised traffic and congestion, despite vehicle efficiency improvements and modal shift, will lead to continuing air quality problems and increases in greenhouse gas emissions, against the EU health based air quality standards and the recent government act target of an 80% cut in emissions by 2050.
19. The Committee have therefore concluded that the broad overall solution to both congestion and the climate change challenge is a concerted approach using the hierarchy of measures outlined below:
 - 1st Reduce the need to travel, and the length of journeys (through IT, land use planning policies and other solutions)
 - 2nd Undertake the maximum proportion of journeys by green and environmentally friendly modes
 - 3rd Optimise the uptake of car sharing
 - 4th In short term, switch to lower carbon emission fuels, maximise engine efficiency and lower embedded carbon model
 - 5TH In medium term switch to non-carbon based fuels (although need to be mindful of recent evidence that suggests growing crops for bio-fuels may be contributing to third world deforestation and food shortages, hence affecting food prices)
 - 6th Improve driving standards / training (for fuel efficiency and safety, and to make roads safer and more attractive to green travel modes)
 - 7th Reduce congestion delays and engine idling in traffic queues to reduce fuel wastage

20. Whilst improving engine efficiency and switching to lower/ non carbon based fuels is primarily nationally driven, all of the hierarchy of measures can be progressed locally to varying degrees and with 56% of York's commuting journeys being less than 5km, there is clearly a lot of room to move in terms of undertaking more journeys by green and environmentally less damaging modes, car sharing and reducing congestion delays.
21. There is also a need to persuade individuals to make socially informed choices too, with the 'Smart Choices' approach being key, which have proven effective elsewhere and high in value for money terms. This will need a very specific on-going public engagement and promotional strategy around 'Smart Choices', including reinvigorating the Green Travel Plan approach with York employers and institutions.

Implications

22. **Financial** – most of the short term recommendations can be implemented administratively and through the third Local Transport Plan. Some, such as Smart Choices and revised Travel Plans, will require additional revenue funding commitments. There are financial implications associated with implementing the suggested long term transport strategy, as outlined in paragraph 10 of Annex C. However in order to pursue these funding streams the preferred scenarios identified as a result of the city-wide residents survey, will need to be tested rigorously to confirm the validity of their strategy. This would require Council funding but at this stage exactly how much is unclear. This would need to be considered before a decision was taken on how to proceed.
23. **Legal** – As Local Highway Authority, Local Planning Authority, Local Environmental Health Authority and Road Traffic Authority, the Council has a wide range of functions it is able to discharge and powers it can exercise in dealing with congestion. In so acting it must adhere both to its own necessary authorisation procedures and all formal statutory requirements.
24. There are no known HR, Equalities, Crime & Disorder, Property or Other implications arising from the recommendations agreed to date. However, there are likely to be some HR implications associated with any additional recommendations around the testing of the preferred scenarios, which will be made once the survey results have been analysed.

Risk Management

25. There are risks to the Council associated with not adhering to all the legislation associated with the statutory functions listed within the legal implications paragraph above. There is also a potential risk to the Council's reputation if it fails to implement the necessary measures to address the expected increase in congestion levels.

Corporate Strategy

26. The implementation of the recommendations arising from this review will support a number of the corporate priorities contained within the Council Corporate Strategy i.e. they support the council's aim of making the city a healthier, more sustainable

and thriving city, where residents have improved access to education, employment and health services.

Recommendations Arising From The Review

27. The Committee agreed a number of recommendations as result of their investigative work for this review. These were split into two parts:
- those that in the Committee's view need to be implemented in the short term and included in LTP3 and;
 - those that make up a long term strategic response to tackling congestion from LTP3 onwards.
28. **Short/Medium Term Recommendations** - The following key priorities for the Council should be set and appropriately incorporated into LTP3:

Overall

- i. Strengthen the place of transport policy in future versions of York's Sustainable Community Strategy to recognise its importance in the life of the city and the importance of tackling congestion to its' residents
- ii. Commission a detailed study involving stakeholders, of a long term Transport Strategy to 2025 and beyond based around the scenarios emerging from the consultation.
- iii. Adopt an on-going public engagement strategy in terms of the future transport strategy and solutions for the City
- iv. Adopt the transport hierarchy detailed in paragraph 19 above
- v. Fund the development of a comprehensive 'Smart Choice' package including personalised journey planning to maximise modal shift together with a re-invigoration of 'Travel Plans', ensuring they are implemented, monitored and periodically updated
- vi. Re-acknowledge the role of city centre car park availability and fee levels relative to bus fares in influencing modal choice, whilst taking account of the short term economic situation and recognising the importance of both imperatives. Remove car park charges from the budget process entirely and set them as part of a longer term policy approach to both transport and the city centre economy
- vii. Ensure the current local development control policies on limiting city centre car parks are enforced and further tightened up within the new Local Development Framework
- viii. Seek an agreed traffic enforcement strategy with North Yorkshire Police for the York area and establish an on-going delivery partnership arrangement to address issues including:
 - bus priorities
 - road safety
 - on-street parking
 - school no parking zones

- considerate road user campaigns across all modes
- ix. Make representations to Government in relation to the roll out powers to non London authorities on enforcement issues possibly through sustainable communities act

Public Transport

- x. Undertake an early comprehensive review of the current bus network in terms of appropriate changes to match changing development patterns and gaps etc, since the 2002 review
- xi. Undertake an urgent review of the Council's bus strategy, taking into account the new powers in the recent transport act, so as to move towards a bus network that is completely integrated from the bus users point of view, including integrated ticketing and day round services, to include:
- Examining how the current stagnation in overall bus usage, decline in non-concessionary usage, and in the conventional bus network can be reversed
 - Ensuring positive promotion of bus network and bus usage including passenger information
 - Improving the quality of interchange points between public transport modes and between routes with designated interchange stops, and co-ordinate bus timings
 - Prioritising the provision of timetable displays and bus shelters at all bus stops
 - Requesting that local bus companies continue to revise bus timetables to provide more accurate and credible timings, and work to them
 - Improving access to York District Hospital from all parts of the city, which may involve route revisions and through ticketing. Demand for parking at and around the Hospital as well as improved access can be achieved by ensuring the extension of Park & Ride services to include the Hospital
- xii. Introduce a Bus Champion for the City to support City Strategy and bus operators in re-invigorating the Quality Bus Partnership, and use them to:
- Examine and implement ways of improving bus boarding times, whilst avoiding penalising occasional and less well off bus users
 - Identify underused bus services and undertake those measures that would most effectively stop the current decline in bus usage i.e. ticketing and marketing measures for all services, holding down bus fare levels, increased non-concessionary bus priorities, influencing public attitudes and tackling outstanding issues from the 2001 Steer Davies review
 - Review the operation and delivery of the BLISS real time bus information display system and agree a comprehensive programme for its early roll out across the whole network, with local bus operators
 - review loading and parking restrictions and their enforcement on bus routes with bus operators and the Police
 - work with partners in the wider York area
- xiii. Drive through early implementation of full DDA compliance for all Council vehicles used by social services, and council procured bus services, and CCTV in taxis and private hire vehicles

Walking & Cycling

- xiv. Ensure better pedestrian priority at traffic signals and in road & junction layouts to simplify and speed up pedestrian crossing times whilst minimising the knock on consequences
- xv. Tackle road safety issues and help to make roads more attractive to green modes by undertaking 'Considerate Road User' campaigns
- xvi. Reinvigorate cycling in York using the 'Cycling City' initiative and funding by:
 - tackling key gaps in the network and difficult locations i.e. bridges, key radials and junctions, as identified by the 2003/4 cycling scrutiny review but as yet not implemented
 - improving planning processes to ensure adequate consideration is given in new designs to cycling
 - relaunching the Cycling Forum with a view to giving stakeholders the opportunity to shape future cycling policies and proposals, and to encourage partnership work
- xvii. The Cycling Champion for York to:
 - ensure cycling measures are focused around what will make a difference
 - promote considerate road user behaviour by cyclists
 - engage the business community to encourage the provision of cycling facilities for both employees and visitors/customers

Air Quality

- xviii. Undertake an urgent review of the Air Quality Management Plan with a view to taking more radical action to eliminate the health risks associated with York's NO₂ hotspots, by the EU deadline of 2010. This should include:
 - examining the progression of low emission zones
 - queue relocations using ITS/UTMC
 - further tightening of the Euro-emission vehicle requirements on the Council's own and its partner's vehicle fleets, tendered transport services and licensed vehicle services, given that buses account for 42% of road traffic emissions
 - promoting electric vehicles and the servicing infrastructure to support their roll out
 - consideration of a new city centre servicing plan, particular where traffic flows are frequently interrupted, and the introduction a local freight transshipment centre
 - working with the PCT to increase understanding of the associated health issues
- xix. Undertake a short term project to measure the levels of the most harmful PM2.5 carcinogen carrying particles to understand if there is a problem in York

30. Strategic Recommendations

- xxi. The Council and Local Strategic Partnership to adopt the following long-term vision for transport in the City, complementing the city's Sustainable Community Strategy, giving a clear direction to what the city's transport will look like in the future:

'A city which has transformed itself in traffic terms and reasserted its human scale and environmental credentials, through its residents being able and

positively choosing to travel less by car and more by foot, bicycle and public transport with little delay, so as to be individually healthier and collectively to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve local air quality, noise levels and quality of life, and where business, leisure and other activity is thriving because of good affordable quality and easy access by a choice of travel modes'

xxii Given the key importance of public transport within the above, the following subsidiary vision for public transport should be adopted:

'By 2026 York is benefiting from one of the best and most popular local bus services in the country outside London, offering a seamless passenger experience, with a single competitively priced ticketing system, high frequency daytime services to all key destinations in the city, recognised interchange points with well timetabled connections where bus transfer is required, non carbon fuelled fully disabled accessible vehicles, friendly and welcoming staff who drive considerately of passengers and other road users, good bus stop facilities and reliable interactive timetable information.'

xxiii. Ensure Council and its partners work consistently towards the implementation of the two visions

xxiv In regard to buses, the Council to:

- Ensure further comprehensive 5-yearly reviews of the bus network are carried out to optimise the network and service frequency, to take into account new housing and other developments

xxv. In regard to freight, the Council to:

- Continue to keep the issue of providing a freight transshipment centre for the City under review if a suitable site and funding mechanisms come forward
- Lobby government (national and EU) to improve standards for HGV engine efficiency and emissions
- Ensure council owned and partners vehicle fleets, and tendered delivery vehicles move rapidly towards the most up to date emission and efficiency standards

31. Further recommendations around the testing of the preferred scenarios will be agreed by the Committee, once the responses from the consultation have been analysed.

Contact Details

Author:

Melanie Carr
Scrutiny Officer
Scrutiny Services
Tel No. 01904 552063.

Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Alison Lowton
Head of Civic, Democratic & Legal Services
Tel No. 01904 551004

Final Report Approved



Date

22 January 2010

Wards Affected:

All



Implications

Legal – Martin Blythe, Senior Assistant Solicitor – Tel No. 01904 551044

For further information or hard copies of the background papers listed below, please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

- 1 – Road User Charging Presentation by Capita Symonds
- 2 – Broad Strategic Options Report
- 3 – Quality of Life Presentation by Professor J Whitelegg
- 4 – LTP2 Strategy for 2006-11
- 5 – Summary of Regional and Local Transport Policy

These background papers can also be viewed online at:

<http://democracy.york.gov.uk/ecCatDisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=12836&path=0>

Annexes

- Annex A - Maps showing congestion levels in 2005, 2011 & 2021
- Annex B - Information Gathered In Support of Review
- Annex C - Analysis of Findings Including Table of Issues/Findings, Identified Solutions, Possible Impacts & Draft Recommendations
- Annex D - Broad Strategic Options - Individual Scenarios To Complement LTP2

Committee Members

Councillor D Merrett (Chair)
Councillor B Hudson (Vice-Chair)
Councillor T Holvey
Councillor K Orrell
Councillor R Pierce
Councillor T Simpson-Laing
Councillor C Vassie
Professor M Smith (Co-optee)
Mr M Page (Co-optee)

Previous Committee Members

Councillor D Livesley
Councillor R Moore
Councillor J Morley
Councillor C Hogg