
MEETING	TRAFFIC CONGESTION AD-HOC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE	16 OCTOBER 2007
PRESENT	COUNCILLORS MERRETT (CHAIR), HOLVEY, HUDSON , MOORE, PIERCE, SIMPSON-LAING MR M SMITH (CO-OPTED NON-STATUTORY MEMBER)
APOLOGIES	COUNCILLOR MORLEY MR M PAGE (CO-OPTED NON-STATUTORY MEMBER)
IN ATTENDANCE	COUNCILLOR D'AGORNE

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were invited to declare, at this point in the meeting, any personal or prejudicial interests they might have in the business on the agenda.

Councillor Merrett declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in agenda item 4 (Interim Report for Traffic Congestion Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Committee) as an honorary member of the Cyclists' Touring Club and a member of Cycling England.

20. MINUTES

It was agreed that the minutes from the meetings held on 4th September 2007 and 25th September 2007 would be approved at a later meeting.

21. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

It was reported that there had been no registrations to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme

22. INTERIM REPORT

The Assistant Director of City Strategy presented a report to the Committee that outlined some of the issues that cause impediments to traffic flows on the highway network. He reported that some measures had more impact on traffic flows than others. He also stated that the Traffic Management Act 2004 imposed a network management duty on all Local Traffic Authorities.

“ It is the duty of a local traffic authority to manage their road network with a view to achieving, so far as may be reasonably practicable having regard to their obligations, policies and objectives, the following objectives:

- a) Securing the expeditious movement of traffic on the authority's road network; and
- b) Facilitating the expeditious movement of traffic on road networks for which another authority is the traffic authority."

The report was split into the following sections:

- Traffic Management
- Utility Works on the Highway
- Road Works on the Highway
- Accidents on the Highway
- Junctions
- Signals and Crossings
- Traffic Calming Measures
- On Street Parking
- Public Events, School Terms
- Inner City Goods Deliveries

Traffic Management

Members asked for clarification in relation to the Freeflow project mentioned at paragraph 11 of the circulated report and the Co-opted Member explained that it was aimed at curing congestion by:

- improving bus journey times
- better use of information
- better use of traffic lights and more subtle use of signage

The project involved several cities, universities and businesses and had the potential for drawing in a tremendous amount of expertise that would not usually be available to York. It was hoped that York would be able to profit from the various methodologies the project would offer. The funding for the project would be a public/private collaboration.

It was noted that day to day traffic management in the city relied upon a complex system of information gathering and control. There were two main components of the management of traffic flows, urban traffic control (UTC) and urban traffic management and control (UTMC). At the moment York's links with external sources were fairly basic and therefore there was plenty of room for improvement and development.

Members discussed the use of CCTV as a tool for traffic management and it was noted that it was primarily used for policing. The cameras were not necessarily in the most beneficial places to aid traffic management and there were no CCTV cameras on the outer ring road. Staff from the traffic team monitored the cameras at peak times but not at non-peak times. CCTV could be more beneficial to traffic management if the CCTV screens could be monitored on a more frequent basis. There were also arguments for monitoring traffic during non-peak times, such as Saturdays and Sundays, although it had to be realised that traffic flow problems may

occur in different places at the weekend compared to those during weekday peak times.

There were opportunities to use more intelligent traffic signal strategies and the variable message signs around the city were modest in size so there were limitations as to what kind of messages could be displayed. The Assistant Director of City Strategy reported that more use could be made of the variable message signs to inform and warn road users; but they had to rely on the information that they were given; for example the Police updating them promptly on accidents. Some Members suggested the introduction of a telephone number that the public could ring to report accidents or traffic flow problems. The Officer agreed that this could be a way of obtaining information but stressed that it had to be the 'right information', especially if the Council were going to act on it immediately. There were strict guidelines about the information that could be displayed on the variable message boards and the wording used was very important. New initiatives needed to be properly resourced and the Officer indicated that installation of the variable message boards was relatively easy but running and operating them on a daily basis was much more difficult and resource consuming.

Utility Works on the Highway

The Officer reported that the Utilities Companies had improved with regard to 'opening' and 'closing' on the highways and co-ordination meetings were in place to ensure any future work caused the minimum of disruption to the travelling public. There were, sometimes, still problems with the quality of the reinstatements and the Council did 'default' the companies if the workmanship was sub-standard; but the Officer pointed out that the Council's ability to check and influence the Utilities Companies was fairly limited. It was noted that the Highways Authorities and Utilities Committee (HAUC) set the standard for reinstatements and City of York Council applied this. It was costly and time consuming to challenge Utility Companies if they did not make good their work. Some Members felt that it may be worth the cost and time if it led to an improvement in the quality of the reinstatements.

The Assistant Director of City Strategy said that they checked a sample of the reinstatements but as they had at least 5,000 'notices of opening' per year it was impossible to check the quality of them all. It was also noted that poor quality reinstatements did not always show immediately.

Road Works on the Highway

It was reported that the Highway Authority also carried out works on the highway and the Local Authority needed to be notified of these. This currently included planned schemes of a significant nature such as resurfacing or improvements. There was a well established procedure in place and highway works within the city centre were not carried out in the two weeks leading up to Christmas, the two weeks immediately after Christmas, race days or school holidays. Every effort was made to be mindful of traffic flow patterns and where possible major works were carried out overnight but each situation was judge on its own merits. From

April 2008 the Traffic Management Act will require the Council to notify the co-ordination team of small scale works on the highway such as reactive maintenance. This will almost certainly mean that arrangements for carrying out this work will need to be modified.

Accidents on the Highway

The report noted that the Police had a major influence upon the management of road traffic accidents as they took the responsibility for the scene. The Local Authority had reasonably good levels of communication with the Police but there was room for improvement in co-ordinating joint responses.

Members felt that the Police were taking a more leisurely approach and were closing roads more frequently and for longer after accidents. The Officer thought this may be due to the need for more investigation at the scene, especially if it were thought that a crime or driving offence may have been committed. If this is the case then the highway would become a 'crime scene' and the handling of the situation by the Police would be more rigorous.

Junctions

The Assistant Director for City Strategy reported that junctions were a key factor in congestion management and various control measures could be employed to enhance traffic flow with a view to minimising traffic congestion. However, main road junctions also tended to be a focus for pedestrian, cyclist and public transport movements and were the best place to be able to give some priority to these categories of road user. Members discussed the fact that some Local Authorities were removing traffic lights as it was thought to improve traffic flow but it was felt by some that this was dangerous for cyclists especially if the sightlines at the junction were not good. The possibility of adjusting the traffic lights to 'blinking amber' during night time periods was discussed but it was not clear if this could be implemented at local level or whether it would have to be at national level.

Signals and Crossings

The term 'controlled crossing' covered facilities where pedestrians and sometimes cyclists were given priority over traffic to enable them to cross a road in safety. The common examples were Zebra, Pelican, Puffin and Toucan crossings. Members felt that these were lacking in some parts of the city. It was suggested that a database of how the different crossings were set up and their response rates would be a useful tool. The Officer said that it depended on the type of signal; pelican crossings had to be set to a certain cycle but if a more intelligent crossing was needed then a puffin crossing should be used. Members asked if there would be a significant cost in switching from one type of signal to another and the Officer said that it would depend on the age and type of the crossing already in place. The Officer agreed that investigation into this should be a priority but suspected that a complete change to puffin crossings would be very costly.

Traffic Calming Measures

Traffic calming was specifically aimed at getting motorists to drive at lower and steadier speeds but it was noted that it was difficult to provide traffic calming that suited everyone. Members discussed the effectiveness of speed tables, removable speed ramps that can be screwed into the road surface and the materials of which they were made. The Officer commented that traffic calming was becoming more accepted by road users.

On Street Parking

It was agreed that inconsiderate and often illegal parking could be a major source of interruptions to the flow of traffic on the Network.

Public Events, School Terms

It was recognised that school related travel could account for up to 20% of traffic during school term times. The City actively encouraged working towards minimising the impact of the 'school run' and encouraged alternative modes of transport such as walking and cycling. The Officer said that the main aim was to promote healthy ways of getting to school. Some Members felt that if this did not work then parking tickets should be issued to those that flouted the rules by parking illegally and unsafely outside or near schools. Members agreed that they would like to know what schools were taking action to encourage alternative methods of transport to and from school including the adoption of green travel plans and walking buses. The Officer said that this would be a significant piece of work but Members felt that the issues around 'school runs' were very important and they needed to look at the details surrounding driving, walking and cycling to school. It was realised that the Children's Services department within the Council may already have some of this information and the Scrutiny Officer agreed to look into this.

It was noted that the faith schools tended to have larger catchment areas and, therefore, it might be that a larger proportion of the students were driven to school as they had longer journeys to make.

Inner City Goods Deliveries

Inner city goods deliveries had a significant impact on the activities and operation of the city centre.

Having discussed all aspects of the briefing note on Traffic Management and Impediments to Traffic Flow Members considered how they could make significant changes to the traffic flow and which of the above categories were the most important in terms of reducing congestion.

The Assistant Director for City Strategy believed that the city was doing well in terms of network management but there was still room for many improvements in the use of technologies and the impact they could have on traffic management. The possibility of more bus priority signals, giving

signalling advantages to preferred modes of transport and improved reliability of public transport could all be factors that could have a possible impact on traffic flow. It was acknowledged that relationships with the Police could be improved; especially in terms of reporting accidents and road closures. Improvements could be made to junctions and it would be possible to look at adapting or upgrading some of the older signals to puffin signals. Improvements could be made to on-street parking and it was a matter of having the right number of parking attendants in the right places at the right time. He did, however, feel that York should be a welcoming and not an aggressive place to visit. The Officer felt that the most significant impact that could be made was on the 'school runs'. Some Members felt that occasionally there could be a 'parking blitz' outside a particular school whereby all or many parking attendants were sent to one school one day and another the next to see if issuing parking tickets would help to discourage parents from driving their children to school. The Officer felt that it was the continual pressure on the schools to encourage alternative modes of transport that would be the most successful with occasional 'blitzing' from parking enforcement.

Discussions were had around the idea of setting up league tables for schools to indicate where they were in terms of how the children got to school. It was also noted that one of the largest impediments was parental attitude and the perceived belief that it was safer to drive children to school.

Members then went on to discuss objectives (vi) and (vii) and recommended that the consultants be asked if they had any information, drawn from either national or local data, as to what was meant by 'quality of life'. There were discussions around what Members hoped to gain from the report; some thought that there was a need to focus on more specific questions whilst others thought that a general overview that focussed on the economic impact of traffic congestion on York would be more useful.

Members had expressed an interest in attending the second annual Road User Charging Seminar. It was accepted that no one was available to attend this but Members felt that it would be useful to see the papers from the Seminar. The Assistant Director of City Strategy agreed to coordinate this.

It was agreed that the following would be discussed at the next meeting:

1. The cost of the use of consultants
2. The costs of carrying out a survey of residents views; the Scrutiny Officer and the Assistant Director of City Strategy agreed to produce a brief report regarding this)

RESOLVED: That Members will consider and discuss the following at the next meeting:

1. The revised quote from the consultants in regard to objectives (vi) and (vii)

2. To further consider the cycling issues raised at the meeting held on 4th September 2007
3. Receive an update from the Scrutiny Officer regarding:
 - a possible survey of residents' views.
 - schools' approaches to the use of alternative transportation.

REASON: To ensure full consideration of all the objectives.

Councillor D Merrett, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.20 pm and finished at 7.25 pm].

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