

Denton and Westerhope Joint Ward Committee

30 April 2009

(6.00 - 7.45 pm)

Meeting held in West Denton Association, Hillhead Road, Newcastle upon Tyne

Present:

Councillor: Hamilton (Chair)

Councillors: Arnold, Donnelly, Hillicks, G Middleton and S Middleton

IN ATTENDANCE

D Procter - Denton and Westerhope Ward Co-ordinator
L Couch - Democratic Services
E Bulloch - Neighbourhood Response Manager
R Hibbert - Strategic Planning and Transportation
G Grant
S Jefferson } Transportation Officer, Newcastle City Council
J Higgins }
M Williams - Nexus

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

RESOLVED – That Councillor Hamilton be appointed Chair for the meeting.

2 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Councillors and Officers present were introduced.

3 WEST ROAD TRANSIT CORRIDOR

Submitted: Report of the Director of Strategic Housing, Planning and Transportation (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

R Hibbert introduced the report and outlined the purpose of the meeting and consultation process. Background plans had been displayed at the meeting and a drop in session held between 5.00 pm and 6.00 pm. The aim was to introduce the proposals relating to ideas to improve the way the West Road works. At this stage, no plans were fixed and the purpose of the meeting was to listen to any comments received relating to the proposals as currently displayed.

R Hibbert outlined the background to the proposals in the wider context and in relation to the key elements of the proposed scheme. Details were included in the West Road Transit Corridor Scheme proposals and A1/A69 Junction Improvement briefing note attached to the submitted report. Different parts of the West Road would be treated differently in view of the different characteristics, no widening proposals were included in the scheme and the shopping centre would also be treated differently. The overall aim would be to make the buses more reliable with quicker journeys for users, improve the arrangements for the shopping centre and ensure a continued car route through. There was no intention to close the West Road to traffic in any form. He gave further details of how this might be achieved in relation to limited areas of bus and cycles lanes, traffic management proposals, bus links to traffic lights, incorporating new technologies to improve the position for buses. It was not proposed that any bus lanes would be introduced in the shopping centre area. Arrangements were in place to talk to local traders separately to provide for loading bays and short term parking bays for shoppers whilst creating an improvement to the shopping centre area, with provision of seating, street trees and encouraging use of both sides of the West Road shopping centre area. He also gave further information relating to the proposed timescale and next steps. Once the outcome of the consultation had been considered, any revision to proposals could be brought forward and a report submitted to the Council's Executive in July 2009 for decision. Any further consultation relating to a revised scheme would then take place prior to a bid being made to the Government Department for Transport. The outcome of the bidding process would be known during 2010, with work completed during late 2011/12. The outcome would rely on a successful bid being approved and further consultation on details of the proposals would be also be necessary.

Comment forms were available which incorporated the option of providing contact details so that residents could be notified of responses or proposed changes to the schemes. He recognised that many local issues to the Westerhope and Denton Wards would also form part of the discussions as well as the Nexus bus network plan and any broader traffic issues in relation to Ward plans could also be raised during the following discussion.

The Chair then opened the discussion and questions and comments made were raised and responses made as indicated as appropriate.

- It was confirmed that police and ambulance vehicles could have access to the traffic light technology, but realistically any emergency situation could bypass the traffic lights system.
- The proposals would produce savings of up to four minutes off bus journey times. The priority would be to provide a bigger improvement to buses, although overall all traffic would benefit. The aim would be to achieve the best balance between the bus and car use without adversely affecting any traffic.
- Provision of pedestrian crossings was also outlined. Currently, not all traffic light junctions had pedestrian phases. The intention would be to provide spaces for crossing, bring footpaths together to provide crossing spaces without cars parked and between traffic light junctions.

- In relation to accessing bus services from Westerhope to the West Road Crematorium and Newcastle General Hospital, unfortunately, Robin Knight of Stagecoach was not in attendance. Providing a more reliable bus service overall may free up buses and provide further opportunities for additional services.
- In relation to influencing the bus services, the Network Plan Partnership would provide further opportunities and new powers provided for by the Tyne and Wear Integrated Transport Authority were available should the partnership arrangements not be successful.
- A Denton resident expressed concerns at possible impact of diverting traffic through the housing estate to avoid the West Road.
- A Westerhope resident expressed concern relating to the impact on the Westerhope Village area and current rat runs through Langdon and Downend Road and issues relating to the access from Stamfordham Road and Westerhope to the A1.
- A Denton resident stressed the need for greater reliability of bus services rather than small time savings. Further comments related to the extension of the Metro service to the Outer West area.
- In response, R Hibbert, stated the need to balance managing the road network and working with Department of Transport funding rules. The development of a scheme with which the Council and residents were content and which would attract the funding to undertake the work. Current rules were weighted in favour of cars rather than buses and the need to achieve a sympathetic balance was recognised by the majority of road users. In relation to the possibility of a Metro extension, this was highly unlikely. Nationally, funding levels would not be forthcoming. Any concerns relating to rat runs, traffic diversions, could be assessed. Measures were proposed which would encourage the use of Scotswood Road by signage and traffic calming and speed limit reductions could also be considered.
- Use of Thorntree Drive by buses when not a bus route. Concerns would be passed to Stagecoach – or necessary bus company – there was some debate as to which bus company ran these buses as it was not a route subsidised by Nexus.
- Hillheads Estate residents, Bamburgh House Bungalows. Consideration could be given to the introduction of a residents parking scheme in view of increased traffic to the nursing home. The Council's new role in relation to direct management of such issues may be of benefit. Transport Strategy also agreed to go to see residents of Bamburgh House to discuss their transport issues directly.
- Concerns relating to lack of access to any hospital and buses physically not being low liners. Access to Morrisons new store, bus terminus for 71/72 and 87/88 at Newgate Street restricting access to shopping areas on

Northumberland Street. Less space between bus stops, for example on Rogerson Terrace.

- Councillor S Middleton confirmed that talks were ongoing with Morrisons regarding local access to the new store.
- A Lemington resident expressed concern that increased car parking charges in the city centre redirected shoppers to the Metro Centre where parking was free.

A Denton resident - the provision of bus lanes would restrict parking availability of the West Road in the vicinity of the shops.

- R Hibbert responded indicating that operators were under an obligation to provide low liner buses by 2012. In view of the large number of comments relating to bus services in the area, he suggested that a more detailed report on the bus network plan would be helpful for local residents and arrangements would be made for such a visit to take place. In relation to provision of a bus lane on the West Road, this would be adjacent to the cricket ground hill to achieve free flowing traffic. Currently traffic was becoming worse. The imposition of a bus lane before any real problems occurred would give car users a choice providing an alternative would be more difficult when the road was considered to be full of traffic. The impact of fewer bus lanes may be the reduction of bus services by companies. With regard to parking restrictions in back lanes, there was often a need to keep these clear for delivery and refuse vehicles. Better management of the West Road in the area of the shops would, he considered, relieve some of the existing pressures. Parking in the vicinity of the shops would be examined at detailed design. The plans on show illustrated that at shopping areas parking provision would be maintained and at certain points extra parking provided.
- In response to a Lemington resident R Hibbert explained the emphasis on buses was in view of the number of passengers which average 30, as opposed to cars with one passenger. He was unable to comment on the level of fares.
- A resident of South West Denton expressed concern at increasing the bottleneck problems at Scotswood Bridge and whether the option of a park and ride could be considered further.
- In response, it was indicated that alternative options had been considered, but none were reasonable or viable. Improvements to the traffic light scheme and better signing would be tackled in relation to Redheugh Bridge and Western Bypass and new Scotswood Road, although no charges at this stage to Scotswood Bridge were proposed. In response to a further comment relating to the Scotswood Bridge, Redheugh Bridge roundabout, he indicated that improvements were included in the plan, but not within the timescale of completions by 2012. They were not essential for the current traffic levels until extra usage was introduced by the Benwell and Scotswood Redevelopment proposals.

- He further responded to comments from a Councillor relating to the distribution of leaflets in the affected Wards. The main aim had been to alert residents to the public meetings, whilst balancing the costs involved. Executive members would have been consulted rather than all Ward Councillors regarding the production of the leaflets. In relation to whether the project provided value for money, this needed to be demonstrated to Government in relation to time to travel buses and car drivers and time savings balanced against the cost of the scheme. This scheme produced a fairly high cost benefit and he considered that there was a good chance of success. The £13m funding was not available for other purposes and if Newcastle did not benefit than another North East authority would receive the funding. The Councils contribution was 10% of the scheme, approximately £1.25m however, this would not be funded from council tax, but from other sources such as developers.
- Currently Stagecoach were very interested in developing a statutory partnership. Any contractual issue would also have obligations on the Council which may involve financial penalties and fines. The contractual position was an option, which would need serious consideration. The issue of contracts remained unproven in that none were operating nationally.
- Further comments related to the standard of buses provided on the 72 service, provision of low liner buses was required by 2012.
- The issue of provision of a bus lane at St Mary's Place was highlighted in relation to value for money – this had been a road widening scheme involving tree replacement which was not the case with the West Road project.

The Chair drew the meeting to an end, indicating that all comments had been recorded.

4 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The date and time of the next normal Ward Committee meetings for Denton and Westerhope Wards had been detailed on the agenda.

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