

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**ENVIRONMENT
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY 29 JUNE 2004 AT 10.00 AM

Agenda Item No.

3

TOPIC GROUP REVIEW OF CONGESTION

Report of the Director of Environment

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1. Purpose of the report

To advise the Scrutiny Committee on the recommendations of the Congestion Management Scrutiny Topic Group

2. Summary

- 2.1 At the Environment Scrutiny Committee on 18 March 2003 it was agreed that the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Labour Spokesman would hold a separate meeting to discuss the future work programme. This meeting was held on 10 April 2003 and it was at this meeting that it was agreed the Congestion Topic Group would be set up to look at the items referred from the Resources, Prosperity, Partnership and Consultation Scrutiny Committee. These items are detailed below:

Paragraph 26 of the CPA – Plans to Reduce Congestion

Residents recognise few plans to reduce congestion on the roads, address the transport needs of those without or unable to use a car, or influence the behaviour of those who use cars explicitly. This issue is not included as one of the county's 23 promises to citizens.

Paragraph 10 of the CPA – Public Transport Objectives

Inform the public of the council's key public transport objectives and targets to ensure greater clarity of what to expect from these services.

- 2.2 The Topic Group has considered a national and county analysis of the issues within its remit and worked closely with a wide variety of stakeholders and partners in arriving at its recommendations.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 Congestion and its management is an issue that has significant national implications. It is of concern to the public. There is, however, no simple solution to the problem. Due to its geographic location and social and economic profile, parts of Hertfordshire experience periods of considerable congestion. Such congestion is evidenced across all major modes of travel and has an impact on the quality of life of our residents and the prosperity of our economy. Although congestion in Hertfordshire may be considered mainly a peak period and urban problem, there is still a vital need to address general traffic growth across the whole of the county.
- 3.2 Members consider that whilst there is no single comprehensive definition of congestion, the public's perception being widely varied. However the Topic Group considered that from the County Council's perspective, the key dimension was to secure improvements in the predictability of travel time.
- 3.3 The Committee is invited to consider the recommendations proposed by the Topic Group.

4. Background

- 4.1 Congestion is not solely limited to roads, car travel, peak travel or urban journeys.
- 4.2 Road capacity in the county cannot be sufficiently increased to accommodate the projected increase in traffic. It is also evident that major highway improvements on non HCC roads alone, will not solve the problems of congestion on the UK highway network which will, in turn, seriously affect the local roads in the county. Nor will enhanced investment in other modes of travel, should this ever be achievable given the levels of funding required.
- 4.3 Problems associated with the growth of traffic impact on the quality of life. It impacts on the economic growth and prosperity of the county whilst that growth itself generates more traffic. The safety of all road users continues to be a concern.
- 4.4 As it assessed the scope of the task, and the predicted growth of transport and travel volumes, the Topic Group considered that the strategic focus of its work should be on the management of congestion rather than its reduction, which is more appropriately addressed through local solutions.
- 4.5 The challenge for Hertfordshire County Council is, therefore, to establish an overall policy and supporting strategies that seek to manage, rather than reduce, the growth in traffic without reducing accessibility. Clearly, volume of traffic is not just a shire county problem and it is therefore important to continue to work alongside government whilst developing county strategies if travel behaviour is to change.
- 4.6 In order to achieve this balance, the Topic Group agreed to consider a wide range of issues in developing recommendations that sit under the four key headings of:

Demand Management – including the issues relating to parking, development control and land use planning.

Providing Alternatives to the car (mode share) – developing the capacity of other modes of transport other than the car, alongside workplace and school travel planning, and a programme of targeted campaigns to measure real changes in behaviour.

Supporting Passenger Transport – identifying more effective ways of promoting bus and rail travel and improving accessibility for all users.

Traffic Management – developing the necessary measures to help maximise the capacity of the current road network.

5. Programme of work

5.1 The Topic Group set itself the following programme of work :

- Establishing a definition of congestion that can be accepted by all major stakeholders
- Reviewing the key transport policies to ensure that they seek to reduce the growth in traffic without reducing accessibility
- Improving the alternatives to car travel whilst minimising the ever increasing constraints on that mode
- Continuing to improve and adopt systems that are designed to improve the management of the road infrastructure
- Maintaining and supporting parking controls and the decriminalised parking enforcement programme
- Maximising the use of bus quality partnership and quality contracts
- Continuing to invest in a comprehensive package of “soft” measures including workplace travel plans, school travel plans and other TravelWise marketing programmes
- Encouraging increased access to our services through Herts Direct other than face-to-face

5.2 The Topic Group met on five occasions from July 2003 to March 2004. They sought comment from the Hertfordshire district and borough councils and from the Joint Member Panels. They also met a range of groups of stakeholders in order to gauge opinion as to their key issues and possible solution to help manage congestion. These groups included representatives from:

- The Education Sector
 - Secondary headteacher
 - Primary headteacher
 - Special school headteacher
 - Parent/governor
 - PTA Representative
 - CSF Senior officer
- The Business Sector
 - Hertfordshire Prosperity Forum
 - Hertfordshire Business Link
 - Chambers of Commerce
- Other Transport User Groups
 - Association of British Drivers
 - British Motorcycling Federation
 - Friends of the Earth
 - Campaign to Protect Rural England
 - Association of Parish and Town Councils

5.3 Throughout the work written submissions were also received and the results of the annual MORI survey on county council and environment priorities were used to gauge public opinion.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Throughout the Topic Group's work, draft recommendations that addressed the particular issues raised, were agreed at each of the meetings in order for them to be best shared with stakeholders. These draft recommendations address particular issues in detail and are set out in Appendix A. Supporting and contextual information is available in the minutes of the Topic Group's meetings.

6.2 Overall the Topic Group agreed that the County Council should make a clear policy statement that it recognises that there is no single solution to the problem of congestion that suits all transport users and that any approach will be multi-faceted. All transport users need to consider how best as organisations and individuals they can contribute to more sustainable patterns of travel. The recommendation set out below should, therefore, be considered within the context of the priorities of partnership solutions and layer-form societal and individual behaviour change.

6.3 The Topic Group considered that for its work to be of most value to the County Council, the strategic themes that emerged from its work should form the framework for its recommendations to the Environment Scrutiny Committee.

6.4 Recommendations

The final recommendations outlined below have therefore been drawn from the draft recommendations considered at each meeting and relate to the four key themes.

Overarching recommendations

The Topic Group recommended that the County Council should:

- Make a clear policy statement that it recognises that there is no single solution to the problem of congestion that suits all transport users and any approach will be multi-faceted.
- Develop appropriate strategies to address the problems posed in particular hot spots around the county, which could include consideration for Park and Ride schemes, road user/area charging and other such programmes.
- Focus further policy and campaign work on local solutions, or amelioration, and on changing attitudes and behaviours.

Demand Management

- Ensure that more attention across the county council is paid to land use strategies that are compatible with congestion management and minimisation.
- Review the Section 106 agreement procedures to ensure maximum and consistent benefits are negotiated for road improvements.
- Review current parking policy guidance at both county and district levels.

Traffic Management

- Continue to prioritise safety of pedestrians and transport users in the county's transport policies.
- Develop a telematics strategy for the county that co-ordinates current and future IT solutions to improve strategic utilisation of the transport network and develop a business case for an integrated management approach to the network.
- Develop a county wide speed strategy, which identifies how best to balance traffic speeds against traffic flows.

Mode Share

- Review and revitalise HCC travel campaigns by considering alternative marketing approaches such as niche and direct individualised marketing techniques focusing on specific issues e.g. promoting healthy alternatives to the car for short journeys.
- Further develop the school travel plan programme to include:
 - Strategies that address the overall transport needs of schools in close geographic proximity and to encourage schools to work together in developing transport solutions.
 - Redesigning access routes and developing recommended urban journey routes.
 - Sharing facilities and producing co-ordinated travel plans.
 - Staggering school start and finish times.
 - Re-launch/promote cycle proficiency test.
 - Escorting younger pupils from bus drop off points into the school grounds.
 - Incorporation of non-car transport into School-home agreements. Reviewing the cost of travel permits for Sixth Formers.
- Extend the Business TravelWise programme to further engage and influence the wider business sectors. This could include:

- Promotion of flexible working practices across HCC.
 - Annual business awards for good practice in travel planning production.
 - More robust, outcome focussed indicators for business travel plan development
- Continue to develop and broaden the county cycling strategy.
 - Create a countywide motor cycle forum to address not only the increasing numbers of fatalities but also the role safe motor cycling could play in helping to reduce traffic congestion.

Passenger Transport

- Provide more targeted information for bus and rail users.
- Incorporate bus priority measures into area plans.
- Maximise the use of bus quality partnerships particularly in relation to integrated ticketing services.
- Secure better bus infrastructure through S106 agreements.
- Improving accessibility and increase patronage to public services through more user-friendly public transport facilities.
- Incorporate into reviews of school transport schemes means to implement bus priority measures.

7. Monitoring and Reporting

7.1 The attached flow diagram (Appendix B) illustrates how this multi-faceted approach relates to the recommendations.

7.2 In creating the diagram, reference has been made to the emerging guidance from DfT which suggests strongly that Local Authorities from 2005/6 are likely to be asked to report back on the following key performance indicators through their Local Transport Plans:

- Road casualty rates
- Bus patronage
- Number of school and business travel plans
- Road maintenance
- Public satisfaction of key services
- Peak hour flows
- Modal split
- Air quality

7.3 On this basis it has therefore been acknowledged that sufficient performance **indicators will be in place to monitor progress towards reduction in congestion.**

8. Access to Service Implications

In taking forward the recommendations outlined in this report, the resulting improvements in the management of congestion should lead to positive benefits, both in terms of the physical access to services and the reduction of traffic volumes in peak periods.

Adoption of new techniques to help manage the county's road infrastructure should also help to improve accessibility, although whether this would apply equally across all groups will take longer to assess.

9. Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications. Further consideration needs to be given to the financial implications as these recommendations are taken forward into a costed implementation plan for any future budget consideration.

Background papers used by the author in writing this report:
Minutes of the congestion management Topic Group

Draft Recommendations From Each of The Meetings**1. EDUCATION SECTOR**

- 1.1 That parental perceptions of children's safety is a key determinant in changing travel modes for the school journey. Actively addressing their concerns needs to be central to HCC's operational work and its travel campaigns.
- 1.2 There are differences in safety concerns between summer and winter and between primary and secondary school aged pupils. Special schools have unique requirements. It is important that these variables are taken into account in HCC's work and that closer working between CSF and Environment in addressing these issues is important. They cannot be left to School Travel Plans.
- 1.3 Environment should progress evaluation of :
- Enhance working between CSF and Environment in the delivery of Safer Routes to School.
 - Producing guidance for the LEA and schools health and safety responsibilities for traffic within school sites
 - the routing and design of cycle routes
 - Providing safe and secure cycle storage
 - Relaunch and promotion of the cycling proficiency test
 - Same bus driver policies
- 1.4 Strategies should be developed that address the overall transport needs of schools in close geographic proximity and to encourage schools to work together in developing transport solutions. These may include:
- Redesigning access routes and developing recommended urban journey routes
 - Sharing facilities and producing co-ordinated travel plans
 - Staggering start and finish times
- 1.5 Private and foundation schools should be encouraged to develop school Travel plans. To ensure consistency with the approach taken by the County Council for LEA schools, District councils should be requested to include the requirement for an HCC approved Travel Plan as a condition for granting planning applications.
- 1.6 There should be further investigation of incentives for pupils and parents to use alternatives to car transportation. These may include:
- Escorting younger pupils from bus drop off points into the school grounds
 - Incorporation of non-car transport into School-home agreements

- Review of the cost of travel permits for Sixth Formers
- 1.7 Priority should be given to the reduction in car usage by parents, particularly to reduce school gate congestion. Actions should be taken to:
- Seek early discussion with district councils to seek enforcement of parking restrictions
 - Evaluate best practice with regard to enforceable car parking restriction Zones, chargeable car drop-off permits and car sharing schemes, PTA organised transportation
 - Incorporate into reviews of school transport schemes means to implement bus priority measures
- 1.8 Review the contract specification for school buses to ensure that they operate in the most effective manner and offer a service that reduces the attractiveness of car transportation. Measures may include staggered bus times.

2. **BUSINESS SECTOR**

- 2.1 There is no single solution to congestion problems and any solutions are likely to be effective only if they are widely owned. Further policy and campaign work should focus on local solutions, or amelioration, and in changing attitudes and behaviours.
- 2.2 Businesses need to find their own solutions – with the help of HCC and its partners. HCC should work closely with business partners, including Hertfordshire Prosperity Forum, Hertfordshire Business Leaders Group, Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Business Link to develop and promote Business TravelWise to the business community as a joint solution to congestion management.
- 2.3 Further recommendations could be divided into short and longer term timescales:
- Short term
- 2.3.1 HCC should set a leadership example as one of the county's largest employers by further encouraging staff working and commuting patterns that minimise congestion through the promotion of flexible working practices.
- 2.3.2 Joint lobbying of central government and decision-makers, such as MPs, should take place to secure the necessary investment in the county's transport infrastructure.
- 2.3.3 Business TravelWise is a successful campaign that represents a good investment. It needs to ensure that the benefits are expressed as the values held by business. Annual business awards for good practice in travel planning production could also be part of this programme.

- 2.3.4 It is too simplistic to measure the success of Business TravelWise by the number of Plans adopted. However, this will be one of the mechanisms used by government to help track progress. Environment should develop robust, outcome focussed indicators.
- 2.3.5 Attention should be paid to addressing the problems posed in particular hot spots around the county, which could include consideration for Park and Ride schemes and other such programmes.

2.4 Long term

- 2.4.1 Across HCC more attention should be paid to ensuring that strategies are compatible with congestion management e.g. economic development and retail development in town centres should be consistent with congestion minimisation.
- 2.4.2 Attention needs to be paid to the environment that will attract future generations of employees into Hertfordshire, of which transport options is an element. Consideration should be given to minimising travel to work distances.

3. TRANSPORT USER GROUPS

- 3.1 The County Council should make a clear policy statement that it recognises that there is no single solution to the problem of congestion that suits all transport users and any approach will be multi-faceted.
- 3.2 The county council should continue to place the highest priority on the safety of pedestrians and transport users.
- 3.3 Much of the improvements will be through local changes that should be addressed through scheme design, local area plans and better utilisation of planning permissions and S106 agreements.
- 3.4 Particular attention should be paid to securing better bus infrastructure, secure cycling and motorcycling facilities through S106 agreements with retailers and retail site developers.
- 3.5 The following strategic issues that should be addressed through further studies:
 - 3.5.1 Assessing the value of using technology better to address congestion through improved strategic utilisation of the transport network and developing a business case for an integrated management approach to the network.
 - 3.5.2 Building a baseline from the information from better network management to assess the effectiveness of road user charging schemes.
 - 3.5.3 Improving accessibility to public services and to rail services through increased public transport patronage and more user-friendly public transport facilities.

- 3.6 In reviewing and revitalising HCC travel campaigns, consideration needs to be given to alternative marketing approaches such as niche and direct individualised marketing techniques and focus on specific issues such as promoting healthy alternatives to the car for short journeys.
- 3.7 DfT guidance should be sought as to whether national guidance on motorcycle targets are to be set, with a view to setting up a Motorcycle Forum as soon as possible following their publication.