

Shrewsbury North West Relief Road and Shrewsbury Transport Strategy

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Summary

This paper sets out the current position regarding possible funding for a Shrewsbury North West Relief Road (NWRR).

As there is very little prospect of securing sufficient funding for the NWRR in the short to medium term it is recommended that no further work should be undertaken on the scheme at this time. It is further recommended that in order to address Shrewsbury's identified traffic problems that a more affordable package of transport measures is pursued as part of a Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Strategy.

The paper outlines the measures to be included within a Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Strategy which would aim to reduce traffic in the town centre through a combination of improvements to the capacity of alternative routes, a parking strategy focused on maximising park and ride and edge of town parking, improvements to sustainable travel modes and a gradual reduction in traffic within the river loop over a period of 10-15 years linked to greater pedestrian priority and environmental improvements.

The policy position set out in this cabinet paper, to be incorporated into the draft Local Transport Plan (LTP) Core Strategy will be subject to stakeholder and public consultation between January and March 2011.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- A. Approve the policy position on the Shrewsbury North West Relief Road and Shrewsbury Transport Strategy, for consultation purposes.
- B. Agree to set out the policy position in the draft Local Transport Plan Core Strategy for consultation with stakeholders and the general public.

Report

Background

1. At its meeting on 18 November 2009, Cabinet received a report on Shrewsbury North West Relief Road (NWRR) and agreed a project business case should be prepared, that public consultation should be carried out and that it should receive a further report in July 2010 prior to submission of the business case to the Department for Transport (DfT).
2. Public consultation was subsequently carried out in April and May 2010. The consultation showed that a clear majority of people found traffic in and around the town centre to be a problem. A small majority (59%) of people agreed with the construction of the NWRR and 38% supported the use of other measures to manage traffic.
3. In late April 2010, the DfT wrote to all scheme promoters advising them that it would not consider business cases for future major schemes until after the new Government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR).
4. Because of the uncertainty in future programme, the council decided, in response to that letter, to complete the NWRR consultation but to stop any further development work on a NWRR, until after the CSR.

Future Funding for Major Transport Schemes

5. In November 2010 the DfT published its new statement on 'Investment in Local Major Transport Schemes'. This statement makes it clear that there will be no Major Scheme funding from the DfT for Shropshire within the lifetime of this parliament. Only schemes which had a full business case submitted to the DfT before June 2010 will be considered for funding in the period to 2014/15.
6. From 2015/16, there will be a new 'bottom up' system of prioritisation for major schemes that will be based on the new Local Enterprise Partnerships.
7. The estimated construction cost of the NWRR (based on construction in 2014-2016) was £102M. We had previously anticipated that the DfT would fund in the region of £90M (90% of the cost).
8. In the 4 years from 2011-2014 the DfT have a total of £1.5bn available nationally (higher than the average amount over the last 10 years). The NWRR would require around one 15th of this funding pot. There are currently 65 submitted schemes competing for that money. Around half of these schemes will not be funded in the next four years and may still be priorities for funding in future years.
9. The scale of funding required for the North West Relief Road, in the context of the levels of funding the DfT has available for local major transport schemes, means that unless there is a substantial step change in funding availability, that even post 2015 it may prove very difficult to obtain the funding required for the road from this source.

10. It is therefore likely that some other significant sources of funding will need to be required if the NWRR is to be constructed in future.

Other Potential Sources of Funding for Major Transport Schemes

11. **Developer Contributions and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** – Contributions from new development, whether through 106 agreements or a new CIL, could go some way towards funding a transport major scheme or package of transport measures. However, the scale of potential developer contributions for Shrewsbury would only sustain a relatively small contribution towards the overall costs of a NWRR.
12. **Regional Growth Fund (RGF)**. This national £1.4bn fund is available from 2011 to 2014 to stimulate enterprise by providing support for projects and programmes with significant potential for creating long-term private sector led economic growth and employment. It will be particularly focused on areas of the country with high dependency on the public sector.
13. Part of the funding for the RGF has come from the Department for Transport and transport schemes should be eligible for consideration. However, it would be challenging for the NWRR or other transport schemes, to demonstrate the key criteria of job creation, and private sector partnership and funding. Also; seeking funding in the region of £100M for a NWRR from a £1.4bn fund would be very challenging.

Proposed Approach

14. In the current financial climate it is concluded that there is no scope of funding for the Shrewsbury North West Relief Road before 2015; and the prospects of obtaining the scale of funding required for the new road in the medium term also appear to be limited.
15. However, the public consultation for the North West Relief Road, and the recent consultation for the Shrewsbury Vision Strategy both demonstrated the scale of public option that traffic in and around Shrewsbury town centre is a significant problem for the town, and is stifling the town from fulfilling its full potential.
16. The consultation identified very strong concerns about traffic and congestion in and around the town centre and its negative impact on the town. 83% of respondents agreed that through traffic should be discouraged from entering the town centre and 88% strongly agreed that increased priority should be given to pedestrians and cyclists in the heart of Shrewsbury.
17. There will also be a need to accommodate the travel demands that will result from new housing and increased population of Shrewsbury set out in the emerging Local Development Framework.
18. Therefore, it is proposed that Shropshire Council actively pursues affordable solutions to Shrewsbury's traffic and access issues, as set out in the outline of the Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Strategy (SITS) below.

19. The NWRR scheme would be shelved, albeit possibly for a significant period, rather than fully abandoned. We will retain the ability to construct the full NWRR in future if funding becomes available.
20. In order to retain the ability to construct the full NWRR in future, if development of a Shrewsbury West Urban Extension goes ahead (as identified in the Shrewsbury Local Development Framework Core Strategy) we will require construction of a new local distributor road to the appropriate standard to form part of a future NWRR.
21. The proposed elements of the SITS are estimated to cost in the region of £30M, substantially less than the NWRR. It is proposed that a start is made on the implementation of this package in 2011, funded through a combination of Integrated Transport Block capital funding, Local Sustainable Transport Fund, for which £560 million has been set aside in the 4-year period to 2014-15, developer contributions and possibly RGF.
22. We would then anticipate seeking major transport scheme funding for further significant implementation of the SITS package in the medium term (2015-2026).

Shrewsbury Transport Strategy

23. The strategy would aim to:
 - Facilitate levels of growth set out in the Local Development Framework
 - Significantly reduce levels of traffic using the town centre (river loop) – enabling environmental and pedestrian enhancement helping the town centre to fulfil its potential
 - Increase reliability of journey times
 - Continue the change in travel behaviour with greater use of foot, cycle and bus for journeys within Shrewsbury; and more use of rail, bus and park and ride as a means of travel to Shrewsbury.
24. The strategy consists of a package of interrelated measures that would be implemented in stages over the next 10-15 years to enable gradual change in travel habits. The package of interventions would include:
 - Urban Traffic Control - Introduction of the most advanced traffic signal control system, which would enhance junction capacity by enabling traffic signals to be co-ordinated and to respond intelligently to traffic conditions.
 - Junction enhancements - on both inner ring road and outer by-pass to enhance the capacity and reduce congestion on these routes to make them more attractive and reliable routes than across town.
 - Phased downgrading of the Smithfield Road route, enabling better linkages with the river, a more attractive environment and better provision for buses, cyclists and pedestrians. The aim would be to permit essential access but encourage traffic that could use alternative routes to do so.

- A gradual increase in the level of pedestrian priority including High Street, initially through temporary closures.
 - A parking strategy implemented gradually over time, which encourages those who can use park and ride, or park in edge of town car parks to do so, rather than in the river loop. There would be a very gradual reduction in parking availability in the river loop linked with further expansion of park and ride, with a new eastern site, and a balancing of the availability and pricing of parking on the east, west and northern approaches to the town centre.
 - Real time traffic and car park vacancy information available to help road users choose the most appropriate route and/or car park
 - Further development of the cycle network in Shrewsbury, and improvements for pedestrians.
 - Further developments of the bus network and provision of bus priority at signal controlled junctions
 - Development of a Parkway Rail Station at Preston Boats, linked to a new bus based park and ride site.
 - Information and promotional measures to encourage more sustainable travel patterns in the town
26. The Strategy does **not** include the introduction of road use charging.

Draft Local Transport Plan

27. It is proposed that the approach set out above is included with the draft Local Transport Plan (LTP) Core Strategy.
28. The draft LTP Core Strategy will be subject to stakeholder and public consultation from January to March 2011. The LTP consultation process will enable and encourage feedback on the policy outlined in this report, i.e. putting further development of the NWRR on hold and instead pursuing the implementation of a more affordable package of integrated transport measures for Shrewsbury.
29. The LTP consultation results will be reviewed, changes made as necessary and a further report will be brought to cabinet in April/ May 2011 prior to adoption of the LTP.

Financial Implications.

30. The Council will cease expenditure on the NWRR.
31. Development of a Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Strategy bid will be undertaken using existing staff and expertise provided by Mouchel, the Councils term contractor for highway design. Mouchel have indicated their willingness to discount their rates to progress with this initiative.

32. Design work and construction would only proceed on the basis of securing funding from the sources identified in this report in particular through a bid to Local Sustainable Transport Fund, to be made early in 2011.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Shrewsbury North West Relief Road, Shropshire Council Cabinet 4th August 2010
SNWRR, Shropshire Council Cabinet, 18 November 2009
Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Strategy – progress report, Development Services Scrutiny Committee, 14 September 2010

Human Rights Act Appraisal

The recommendations contained in this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights act 1998

Environmental Appraisal

Detailed environmental appraisals will be required for any particular element of the strategy however overall the proposal is to move towards more sustainable transport, with positive environmental implications.

Risk Management Appraisal

Delivery of SITS is entirely funding dependent. The Government has confirmed the funding available and outlined the process for bids to that fund. Shropshire Council is well advanced with the work on developing SITS that will form a coherent and affordable bid. The projects under the strategy could be re-profiled or rescaled depending on the funding available.

Community / Consultations Appraisal

Initial consultation has already taken place on the NWRR and desired outcomes of SITS. The specific programme would be subject to wide scale consultation through the Local Transport Plan development process.

Cabinet Member

Martin Taylor Smith

Local Member

All Shrewsbury and surrounding area members

Appendices

None