

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

Question 33

The Draft Durham City Sustainable Transport Strategy identifies the following infrastructure measures which would create a more sustainable transport network in the city. Which measure or measures do you believe are important and why?

- a. A new crossing of the River Wear through the provision of a Northern Relief Road;*
- b. Improvements to the existing city centre transport infrastructure such as to the bus station and stops;*
- c. Pedestrian improvements linking the University to the city centre.*
- d. Improving missing links for sustainable transport modes in and across main roads and junctions at Aykley Heads, Sniperley, Framwellgate Moor and Newton Hall;*
- e. Reducing congestion by making appropriate improvements for all transport modes in Gilesgate, Dragonville, Carrville and Belmont; or*
- f. Any other suggestions.*

We welcome the Council's recognition in this new County Plan of the importance of sustainable transport. This conforms with national guidance and with principles that the County Council had previously acknowledged in LTP3 but had previously largely failed to implement through its land use planning and transport authority functions.

However, the report referred to in this section of the *Issues and Options* document and previously issued for consultation as the Durham Sustainable Transport Plan does not yet amount to either a strategy or a plan. We shall be commenting more fully in our separate response to this consultation, but the key shortfall is that the document as issued does not contain costed, prioritised and phased proposals for remedying the deficiencies in current provision which it clearly identifies and for implementing either the general principles of good practice described within in it or the menu of suggested schemes. Inevitably, it also cannot refer to other more recent but highly relevant documents which have been issued since JMP completed their assignment for the Council last year. These include the recent consultation document issued on behalf of the North East Combined Authority about the future of Metro and other local rail services in the north east of England.¹

Our answer to Question 32 comments adversely on the Council's apparent wish to make the delivery of sustainable transport in the city conditional upon the provision of addition capacity for motor traffic, and our view remains that this demonstrates that in its drafting of a supposedly new local plan the authority has not yet moved on from its previous prioritisation of unsustainable modes in its transport planning. Our specific responses to Question 33, listed below against the

¹<http://democracy.newcastle.gov.uk/documents/s95737/Metro%20Fleet%20and%20Infrastructure%20Renewal%20Appendix.pdf>

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sub-heading letters in this question, should therefore be read in conjunction with that on Question 32.

- a. We remain totally opposed to the construction of a new river crossing of the River Wear through the construction of a Northern Relief Road. It is **not** “impossible” to deliver the benefits of a sustainable transport strategy for the city without this investment, and the way the Council makes this claim in paragraph 4.100 is in clear contradiction of paragraph 4.93, which correctly identifies the conditions that would need to be satisfied before such a scheme could even be considered for inclusion in the local plan. Paragraph 4.100 also repeats the erroneous claim that a northern relief road was a priority of the previous local authorities, when the Inspector at the Durham City Local Plan inquiry in 2001 indicated in his 2002 report that the proposal was unlikely to find justification. A subsequent version of the scheme was abandoned when it failed to meet the requirements for funding prioritisation.

Paragraph 4.94 of the previous section of the consultation document quotes directly from the Sustainable Transport Strategy in claiming that 35-40% of the vehicle trips across the Milburngate Bridge have no origin and destination in the city, implying that these could be diverted to an alternative route. The Council has issued at a very late stage in the consultation process a report by Jacobs on the roadside interviews that were carried out last year to gain updated information on the origins and destinations of car journeys entering and leaving a tightly-defined boundary around the city. The summary format of the data published in this report restricts its usefulness, and the Council’s consultation deadline has not allowed sufficient time for full analysis of even this limited dataset. Nevertheless, the Jacobs report is unequivocal that it is not actually possible with the data available to establish the origins and destinations of traffic using Milburngate Bridge.² The claim made in paragraph 4.94 about the proportion of “through” traffic using the bridge therefore lacks any evidential base, and the inference drawn in that paragraph, in paragraph 4.100, and in the Sustainable Transport Strategy that this volume of traffic could be diverted to a new route is completely unwarranted.

Furthermore, as the present Council’s own evidence for the previous iteration of the County Plan clearly demonstrated, construction of a northern relief road would add significantly to total traffic volumes on the city’s road network, and would create severe congestion hot-spots where it connected into the existing network to the north-west of the city. The proposed road would also have a severe adverse effect on the tranquil countryside on both sides of that section of the river gorge, and its construction would cause the destruction of ancient hedgerows and the severance of a well-used active travel route which preserves the alignment of a mediaeval pilgrims’ way. Detailed modelling of the relief road’s interaction with existing flows on the A(1) M shows that its construction would inevitably lead to more road accident casualties within the county, by diverting a significant volume of traffic away from the motorway north of Junction 62 onto the county all-purpose A-road network. Finally, the

² Jacobs, *Durham City model rebase: review of 2015 data & key trends* (July 2016), paras 4.4.1-2.

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location of the scheme's easterly start-point less than four miles from the county boundary at Rainton makes it likely that a high proportion of the immediate road-user beneficiaries of the relief road would be residents of the Sunderland local authority – those from Durham County areas immediately east of Belmont would be handicapped in accessing a northern relief road by the severance caused by the motorway and the lack of direct local road linkages with the Belmont interchange.

- b. While agreeing that some improvements to city centre bus stops are required – particularly improvements which would provide better interchange for bus passengers travelling between the north-east and the south of the city – we remain completely **opposed to** the proposal described in paragraph 4.83 for **relocating the bus station** from its present site to a position further up North Road at the A690 junction. This proposal is unimportant and irrelevant to a sustainable transport strategy – it would take terminating bus services further away from the main retail core of the city; would be less effective in overcoming the existing severance between bus and rail services than reinstatement of the previous direct route via Station Bank and Tenter Terrace that was severed by the realignment of the A690 and the ill-considered layout of the eventual footbridge crossings of that road; would cause operational difficulties for the bus companies and associated traffic congestion, particularly at peak times; and would make it even more difficult for pedestrians and cyclists to negotiate the A690/North Road intersection and the hazardous Sutton Street/Station Approach junctions. In terms of conservation area policies and the setting of the World Heritage Site, the loss of the present green vista that is provided by the mature planting on the North Road roundabout would be a disastrous reduction in the visual quality of this important key entry to the city through the railway arches.

Durham City has no market requirement for the additional retail or entertainment floorspace that might be supplied by changing the use of the bus station site. Since this scheme was first conceived by the Council, planning applications for The Gates and Milburngate House sites, together with the Council's own plans for reconfiguring the Gala theatre, have greatly extended the potential supply of city-centre entertainment facilities, while the closure of BHS will create a major void in the Prince Bishops shopping centre. It is vital for the city's retail future that the successful re-use of this strategic site should not be compromised by the possibility of further speculative development outside the core shopping area.

The Council should therefore desist from persevering with this totally unwanted scheme, which is evidently driven more by the prospect of capital gains from the bus station site than by any real commitment to improving public transport infrastructure in the city. The latter would be far more cheaply and effectively achieved by a sympathetic rebuilding of the bus station on its existing site.

- c. We support and acknowledge the importance of improving pedestrian links between the University and the city centre. The pedestrian links between the University and the

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concentration of student accommodation in the Viaduct area are also sub-standard, and similarly require improvement. In addition, the Durham City Sustainable Transport Strategy also notes the need to improve conditions for cycling to the University, which we would also support.

- d. We also support and acknowledge the importance of filling missing links in sustainable transport access at Aykley Heads, Sniperley, Framwellgate Moor, and Newton Hall, together with junction and crossing improvements at these and other key sites to give better priority to pedestrians and cyclists.
- e. Without further evidence, we cannot support the prioritisation of congestion-reducing interventions for all modes of transport at Gilesgate, Dragonville, Carrville and Belmont, and certainly not in preference to targeted improvements for sustainable modes to overcome, for example, the extremely poor non-car access to Belmont Business Park. It is notable that work on the southern half of Dragon Lane (completed within the last five years) has resulted in poor quality provision for cycling despite being part of a supposed National Cycle Network route. Much better provision could have been made at little additional cost to the overall works. The Council must in future make appropriate improvements for sustainable transport modes, rather than improvements only to motor traffic, if a more sustainable modal share is to be achieved.
- f. Among other suggestions:
 - i. We would advocate the importance of early action to develop a more consistent and continuous network of safe walking routes across the city. There is a lack of continuous and adequate footways on many routes that makes walking unsuitable for many people including those serving the University, discussed at (c) above. This programme should include the western side of North Road between the Albert Street junction and St Leonards School, and the south-western side of Southfield Way.
 - ii. We also suggest that at an early stage suitable cycle routes covering the last mile into the city from each suburb should be identified, designed and constructed, including links through the city centre, to create the core of a network serving the main transport, education and employment destinations. This should be done before any further road junction remodelling or major resurfacing, to ensure space is allowed for high quality cycling provision in all future works while making best use of Council spending.
 - iii. The Nexus 'pop' smart card, now available for use on Park and Ride services, should be extended as soon as possible to all bus operators in the city.
 - iv. At a regional level, we would also urge early dialogue through NECA to secure commitment to the extension of Metro services from both South Hylton and Pelaw to Belmont, and to add the former Belmont-Newton Hall railway alignment to the safeguarding which already exists for the Leamside line.