

Cheshire East Council Budget Consultation 2009-10
People and Places Event – 14th January 2009

Minutes of Discussion Group 3 – Roads and Transport

Facilitator:	Andrew Ross	
Co-Facilitators:	Jenny Lees, Steve Reading	
Cheshire East Member:	Councillor Jamie Macrae	
Consultees:	Lesley Gleaves	Cheshire County Council
	Mike Smith	Congleton Partnership
	Tony Gentil	Parish Councillor
	Councillor Hatfield	Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council
	Diane Smith	Macclesfield Borough Council
	Anthony Blackley	Crewe & Nantwich LSP Env Group
	Lillian Burns	Prestbury Parish Councillor
	Cedric Knipe	Macclesfield Borough Council
	Liz Lunn	Cheshire Police

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS AGREED BY THE GROUP:

- Maintaining roads and footways. More investment on local roads / town centres.
- Safety a clear priority combining education, engineering, enforcement and partnership working.
- Environment / climate change / sustainability / air quality.
- Integrated transport / smarter choices / less travel
- Supporting economic development.

ARE THERE ANY ROADS AND TRANSPORT ISSUES THAT YOU FEEL WE SHOULD HAVE GIVEN A HIGHER PRIORITY?

There was a general consensus that the condition of footways is a common problem for older people and those with mobility problems. It was acknowledged that budgets were limited but the group wanted to know what spending plans existed. The term 'Flags to Flexi' was used to describe one of the preferred solutions to this issue (i.e. the replacement of easily damaged flags with tarmac).

A number of delegates referred to the Department for Transport (DfT) reports on the benefits of Smarter Choices measures in achieving modal shift & reducing the need to travel. It was felt that this should be given a higher priority.

It was felt that air quality / climate change / carbon footprinting doesn't feature clearly enough in the Local Transport Plan or Community Strategy. Air quality overlaps with many agendas (i.e. sustainability, reducing CO₂ emissions, modal shift, health) and it was felt it should be a priority issue.

There was a general acceptance that speed was a factor in causing accidents but some delegates felt that the continual changes of speed limit on a single stretch of road can be very confusing, particularly for those unfamiliar with the route. The A530 from Northwich to Middlewich was an example. It was suggested that a corridor approach to speed limits would be easier in some areas. Concern was also raised at the perceived high cost of speed awareness / high collision route warning signs (i.e. Red Routes) and there was uncertainty over the effectiveness.

There was also felt to be over complexity in the way roads are currently prioritised in terms of safety. The number of deaths on a stretch of road has led to its prioritisation for remedial investment. This did not seem completely fair as other factors may influence the number of deaths (e.g. number of people in a vehicle, volume of traffic), which did not necessarily relate to the road.

Cllr Macrae acknowledged all the comments made and would factor these into the budget development work where possible. He stated that departmental budgets had now been determined, but there remained scope for negotiation over the allocation between different services. He advised the group that one aim of the new Council was to bring together transport, planning and highway policy into one area and to focus efforts of the Cabinet. Strategic housing, highways and economic development would also be joined up.

Cllr Macrae was concerned that damage to pavements was often caused by vehicles parking on them. Any costs of reinstatement fell to the local authority and this needed to be reviewed to ensure the person / company responsible paid. He noted the police could not act unless they saw the vehicle being parked. The considerate contractor scheme was noted and although it is voluntary could be built into policies.

IN OUR EFFORTS TO MAKE TRAVEL SAFER, SHOULD WE PLACE A HIGHER PRIORITY ON EITHER: I) EDUCATION, TRAINING & PUBLICITY CAMPAIGNS, II) ENFORCEMENT MEASURES, OR III) LOCAL ROAD IMPROVEMENTS – OR A COMBINATION OF TWO OR ALL THREE OF THESE?

A number of delegates questioned the benefits of educational campaigns and whether there are figures to demonstrate the success / outcomes in terms of safety. Others felt that there is a role for education, but some questioned whether it should be a central government responsibility, rather than local authorities? It was felt that targeted training and shock tactics (i.e. DVD of re-enactments) do work in influencing behaviour.

There was a general consensus that enforcement measures should be a high priority. It was noted that the use of mobile and static cameras has reduced the number killed or serious injured (KSI) in some areas and it was therefore important to protect funding for the cameras.

Cheshire Police expressed great concern at the proposal to reduce Cheshire East's contribution to the Cheshire Safer Roads Partnership (CSRP) and they asked the Council to revisit that proposal. It was pointed out that the number of KSI's for 2008 was 300 against a target of 249. Therefore, they felt this needed to be a top priority for the LAA and be adequately funded.

It was noted that KSI's in the Cheshire East area accounted for half of those in the whole area covered by Cheshire Police (inc. Halton & Warrington). There was a particular

concern over the 'Cat & Fiddle' route and it was acknowledged that the proposal to introduce speed limit enforcement (average speed cameras) would not be possible without funding. The chairman of CSRP is keen to involve Members in discussions on the CSRP and they also intend to write to the Council. It was noted that the relevant Cabinet Member had declined an invitation to attend the next CSRP meeting on 22nd January.

Cheshire Police are also looking to introduce flexible & mobile working arrangements for officers. They also expressed an interest in working with Cheshire East on asset management / possibilities for co-locations. Cllr Macrae offered to take the matter away for further discussion.

It was confirmed that the KSI number did include the M6. The group asked why the stretch of the M6 between junctions 15 and 18 seemed to have more accidents. It was thought that this stretch of motorway is heavily used and one of the earliest built – therefore it did not comply with current design standards. It was also noted that a multi-modal study had been undertaken on the West Midlands to Manchester corridor. The study noted the high number of junctions and services in close proximity, which leads to a great deal of lane changing. The study made a series of recommendations (i.e. widening or improvements to the slip roads) but they had not yet moved forward.

It was noted that the Regional Spatial Strategy will require Local Authorities to have a Route Management Strategy for main routes and guidance would be issued soon. It was felt that the recommendations of the multi-modal study should be considered.

Statistics suggested the economic cost of a serious casualty was £160k whereas a death was over £1m. The A530 had been classified as a red route – a campaign which meant using a combination of engineering measures, raising awareness and enforcement with cameras. The group generally supported the use of cameras and felt that the attitude to speed needed to change in a similar way to drink driving. However, the consensus was that such a change was a task for the Government and local partnership arrangements could help.

The group felt red tarmac had been over-used and was no longer effective and expressed a preference for mobile warning signs. They quoted an example in Spain where speeding cars were actually forced to stop by a red light. The group hoped that the new Council may be able to pilot new initiatives and reduce the costs of new, effective signs.

It was noted that people caused accidents, not roads, and although variable speed limits were not legal in England, they had been piloted in Scotland. Sections of the M42 and M25 had advisory limits. Cllr Macrae raised the links with the Police and the issue of not being able to enforce some reduced speed limits especially in rural areas.

IN IMPROVING OUR LOCAL ROADS SHOULD WE: DIRECT MORE FUNDING TOWARDS LOCAL ROADS AND FOOTWAYS WITHIN RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES AS OPPOSED TO THE STRATEGIC HIGHWAY NETWORK? SPLIT FUNDING EQUITABLY BETWEEN THE LOCAL AREA PARTNERSHIP BOUNDARIES (6-8 AREAS)?

The group asked whether Local Area Partnerships are equitable in terms of highway condition / maintenance requirements? They would welcome a professional view on the

condition of the highway network across the different areas. In terms of funding, it was felt to be important to focus on problem areas, rather than per capita.

The County Council had used national indicators to determine investment and it was acknowledged that any change to this could impact on performance indicators. It was recognised that any changes to the distribution of funding will have positive and negative impacts in different areas. For example, focusing on the local networks may impact on safety on the strategic network – important to balance the risk.

The groups asked whether there was any evidence of differentials in funding or greater need between the areas. Andrew advised the group that the figures suggested road condition varied across the area (i.e. condition of the network in Macclesfield better than Crewe & Nantwich).

Some delegates expressed concern that following investment to improve town centres (i.e. quality of paving), funding was not available to maintain them to the same level. This has resulted in the deterioration of many town centre schemes, which has a potential impact on the local economy. The group would like to see a greater focus on the maintenance of the local network.

Cllr Macrae noted that the County Council had announced some additional spend of some £1m to initially tackle the highway maintenance backlog. It was noted that in terms of the classified road network the split of the County revealed a significant difference in road condition with Cheshire West & Chester being in the top quartile and Cheshire East being in the lower quartile. This meant they would have to decide how to distribute funding and possibly invest in areas of high need at the expense of national indicators.

The group questioned whether the allocation of Government grant funding was linked to performance indicators (NI 168 and 169). Andrew advised the group that there was no link at present. He was not sure if the Government were considering such a change. Any link to such indicators needed to have clear outcomes and risks identified.

The issue of utility companies not reinstating roads to the same condition was also raised. Andrew noted the efforts by the Government to better co-ordinate highway maintenance and utility work. Planning and controlling such work was essential. Noted that contractor vehicles also damaged pavements.

IN TACKLING CONGESTION SHOULD WE PLACE A HIGHER PRIORITY ON OUR ATTEMPTS TO IMPROVE THE FLOW OF TRAFFIC AND INCREASE THE CAPACITY OF OUR NETWORKS?

It was recognised that increasing capacity of the road network is a “never ending tale”. There was felt to be a need to do more to manage congestion and improve the links between road, bus, rail and motorways in Cheshire East – better integration of transport networks.

Alternatives to car use should be promoted but it was recognised that there are the difficulties in encouraging people to change their travel habits. Congestion was felt to be a good tool to get people out of their cars, particularly for journeys under 5 miles. It was also felt that the cost of public transport was also an issue that should be considered.

It was recognised that small reductions in traffic levels make a big difference (i.e. school holidays) and flexible & mobile working arrangements could help in reducing the need to travel. It was agreed that there is no single solution to managing congestion. As the new Council's priorities include maintaining the existing road network, there was a consensus that the Council should at least give people the option of using alternative methods of transport to the car.

The benefits of flexible bus services in rural areas were recognised (i.e. Taxi Rider). The group asked about the review of public transport arrangements and opposed potential reductions to the budget. Cllr Macrae acknowledged this issue and felt there would be greater scope to review the 2009-10 revenue and capital budgets after the 1st April and see if there were further options.