

TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE - 17th NOVEMBER 2004

Report Of The Forward Plan Manager

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Bishop)

TAUNTON TRANSPORT STRATEGY REVIEW & “3rd WAY”

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the background detail to the development of the Taunton Transport Strategy Review (TTSR), including the “3rd Way”.
- 1.2 To seek the Executive’s support to the content of the TTSR, and their “in principle” support for the content of the “3rd Way” option, subject to receiving further details regarding impacts upon affected junctions.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 The TTSR has been subject to development over the course of the past 18 months. This has involved a comprehensive public consultation exercise. The response to the consultation was one of general support for the TTSR strategy, although opinion was split on whether to pursue the Inner Relief Road, or to drop the proposal in favour of delivering a cultural quarter in the vicinity of Wood Street. Work has since progressed on the “3rd Way”, a compromise solution. Members are now requested to support the content of the TTSR and provide their “in principle” support for the 3rd Way option. The County Council are requested to provide further information on the impact of the “3rd Way” on the junction with Bridge Street and associated junctions along its route.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Taunton Deane Borough Council, Somerset County Council and Regional Development Agency (RDA) have been working together over the past 18 months to develop an Urban Design Framework (UDF) for Taunton town centre. This work is being steered by appointed consultants, Terrence O Rourke (TOR). The project is important in order to develop certain key elements of the Taunton Vision proposals, including the identification of appropriate development opportunities and supporting infrastructure. An integral element of this work is the Taunton Transport Strategy Review (TTSR - prepared by Atkins on behalf of the County Council).
- 3.2 Atkins / Somerset County Council undertook consultation on the TTSR during February and March 2004. The Panel will be aware that some of the key proposals within the TTSR were: Northern Inner Distributor Road, relocation of bus station, extension to urban clearway on East Reach, reallocation of town centre parking away from commuters to shoppers, enhanced parking fees for commuters, together with options for the Inner Relief Road (continued support / withdrawal).
- 3.3 The response to the consultation was of general support for the proposed strategy, and for the majority of the major proposals. Attached at Appendix A is the Executive Summary to the TTSR Consultation Response (prepared by Atkins)*.
- 3.4 Regarding the Inner Relief Road (IRR), the Panel will be aware that public opinion was equally divided upon whether to continue support for the proposed IRR, or to drop the proposal in order to facilitate the development of extensive cultural facilities

within the vicinity of Wood Street (the UDF option, favoured by TOR). Both Councils and the RDA have since been working on the 3rd Way, a compromise solution.

- 3.5 On 5th October 2004, all Members were invited to a “3rd Way” presentation at County Hall. Within the 3rd Way option, the IRR has been realigned in order to reduce environmental impacts and to maximise development opportunities including the provision of a new theatre complex off Wood Street. It would be designed as an urban street rather than freeway.
- 3.6 To inform the debate, the 3rd Way option has been appraised against both the IIR option and the UDF option (i.e. no IRR). All Members have been circulated with a CD copy of the County Council’s 3rd Way presentation*. This sets out the results of the appraisal process.
- 3.7 The County Council’s Environment & Transport Review Panel considered the TTSR / 3rd Way on 25th October 2004, and provided support for its content. The County Council’s Executive Board are due to consider the TTSR / 3rd Way on 10th November 2004.
- 3.8 TDBC SPTED Review Panel considered the content of the TTSR / 3rd Way on 27th October 2004. The Panel resolved as follows:

SPTED supports the content of the Taunton Transport Strategy Review and the proposals for the Third Way be supported in principle subject to further information being provided and consideration being given to the impact of the Third Way on the junction with Bridge Street and associated junctions along its route and that they be referred to Executive for further consideration and final approval.

* Any Member wanting to have a CD copy of the full version of the report into the consultation response, or who has not received a CD copy of the 3rd Way presentation, should contact Mark Leeman in the Forward Plan Unit (contact details are given below).

4.0 **PRESENTATION TO EXECUTIVE**

- 4.1 Jeremy Callard (Transport Studies Manager / Somerset County Council) will provide Members with a detailed presentation on the content of the TTSR / 3rd Way. Members will be given the opportunity to raise any questions and concerns.

5.0 **CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

- 5.1 The TTSR is central to the delivery of the Borough Council’s corporate priority relating to improved *Transport and Access*. The TTSR proposes improvements for all modes, including buses (new bus station, park and ride and bus priority), walking and cycling (new routes) and vehicles (e.g. NIDR and 3rd Way). Various elements of the TTSR, such as the NIDR, are crucial to realising the full potential of key town centre regeneration sites, thereby improving the local *Economy*. In addition, the TTSR is important for the delivery of *Environmental* improvements. The various components of the TTSR have been designed so as to reduce severance, congestion, pollution and noise impacts.

6.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

- 6.1 Members are requested to resolve as follows:

That the Executive supports the content of the TTSR, and the proposals for the “3rd Way” be supported in principle subject to further information being provided and

consideration being given to the impact of the “3rd Way” on the junction with Bridge Street and associated junctions along its route.

Background Papers

Taunton Transport Strategy Review: Report On Consultation. (Atkins - 2004)

Third Way Scheme: Presentation To Members (Somerset County Council – 5th October 2004)

SPTED Review Panel, 27th October 2004: Taunton Transport Strategy / The Third Way

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Appendix A. Taunton Transport Strategy Review: Report On Consultation – Executive Summary. Atkins (2004)

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APPENDIX A

Taunton Transport Strategy Review – Report On Consultation (Atkins / Somerset County Council) August 2004

Executive Summary

The Taunton Transport Strategy Review (TTSR) is a study to review Taunton's current and future transportation needs. The study has reviewed existing transport policies, investment plans and transport improvement schemes, in order to propose a strategy which will enable Taunton's transport system to meet the future needs of the town.

In 2001, Taunton was identified as a Principal Urban Area (PUA)¹. This status will require a period of significant growth of the urban area in terms of resident population, housing development and employment. An appropriate transport system must therefore be planned and delivered in order to properly manage the associated increase in travel demand.

Somerset County Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council and the South West Regional Development Agency have commissioned studies to provide insight into how such growth could be accommodated in Taunton. The Urban Development Framework (UDF) has considered the future role of the town centre and the re-development of under-used land, so as much growth as possible will be accommodated within the existing urban area. However, new development is required beyond the existing built-up area, and a further study (the UES) has considered a range of options for an urban extension to the town.

The land use proposals emerging from both the UDF and the UES will result in major changes to the layout of Taunton, with significant increases in travel demand. The TTSR study has considered both the immediate needs of the town, as well as Taunton's longer-term transportation requirements.

The views and opinions of residents, businesses and users of the transport system have been of great importance in developing this transport strategy. Every effort has been made to engage and consult with the public. This Report details the findings from the consultation programme.

Methodology

The consultation process has involved a number of different mechanisms, including leaflets and questionnaires distributed to the general public and to a representative sample of the Somerset Influence Group, a series of public exhibitions, meetings and workshops with stakeholders representing a variety of organisations, and the development of an informative website².

¹ *Regional Planning Guidance for the South West Region (RPG10)*, September 2001, Government Office for the South West.

² 2,758 visits were made to the website.

Six workshop events were undertaken with local authority officers, Somerset County and Taunton Deane Borough Councillors, members of the Local Strategic Partnership, parish councillors, professional and voluntary interest groups in February 2004.

Leaflets and questionnaires were distributed in February/March. The survey of the Influence Group yielded 876 responses (a response rate of 58%) while an additional 747 responses were submitted by members of the general public. Additionally, 21 responses were submitted on the website, giving a total of 1,644 responses.

Public exhibitions were held in March. These were well-attended by members of the public.

The Strategy

Overall, the transport strategy, its objectives and its deliverability are supported.

Public Transport Strategy

Consultation has highlighted an overwhelming dissatisfaction with Taunton's public transport system, particularly bus services.

Proposals to introduce Park and Ride schemes are generally supported. The proposals which include new bus links and new services to development areas are also considered to be worthwhile. Consultees are also supportive of the proposal to relocate the town's bus station. However, views on bus priority are mixed, with no clear consensus.

Highway Strategy

Proposals for a Northern Inner Distributor Road (NIDR) are generally supported. Other elements of the strategy, such as adjustments to Priory Roundabout on the A38 are also considered to be worthwhile. Consultees are more sceptical about the plans to extend the hours of operation of the clearway on East Reach and views on this proposal were wide-ranging.

Walking and Cycling Strategy

The proposals to improve pedestrian facilities on routes into Taunton are welcomed. Similarly, plans to complete the cycle route network are supported. Stakeholders recognise the importance of improving facilities to maintain and improve on the currently high levels of walking and cycling. The importance of educating the public and school children to raise awareness of walking and cycling is also recognised.

Town Centre Strategy

The presentation of the options for the town centre has yielded a range of contrasting opinions. Overall, support for the Vision for Taunton is greater than that for the Inner Relief Road (IRR), but no clear consensus has emerged. However, the possibility of a 'compromise' scheme has also emerged.

Parking Strategy

Proposals for improved signage to the town's car parks are generally supported by stakeholders and the public. Similarly, plans to create new car parks on the edge of the town centre are supported by the public, though stakeholders have some reservations.

However, although proposals to reallocate town centre parking from long-stay (for commuters) to short-stay (for shoppers) are well-received, an associated increase in charges for long-stay parking is opposed. Some stakeholders do recognise that the success of Park and Ride is linked to the cost of town centre parking.

Travel Plan Strategy

Consultation demonstrates support for proposals to change travel behaviour through the development of travel plans with schools and employers. The promotion of alternative modes of transport was welcomed.

Half of all survey respondents would be willing to try travelling into Taunton by alternative modes of transport to the private car.

Recommendations

We recommend that further analysis is undertaken (using GIS software) to examine the geographical distribution of survey responses and to identify whether there are any particular clusters of support or opposition to some of the proposals. This additional analysis will help inform subsequent consultation work as the proposals and schemes are developed in more detail. The areas requiring further analysis are:

- ◆ NIDR;
- ◆ East Reach Urban Clearway;
- ◆ Inner Relief Road/Vision for Taunton;
- ◆ Pedestrian Priority in the Town Centre;
- ◆ Bus Priority; and
- ◆ Reallocation of Parking.

In addition, given that the consultation has identified no strong preference for one option over the other, and in light of consultees' requests for consideration of a scheme which combines both the IRR and Vision proposals, we believe that Somerset County Council and the RDA's decision to commission further work to assess the 'Third Way' is strongly validated by the outcome of the consultation.

As the surveys of the general public and the Somerset Influence Group yielded good levels of response, we do not feel that additional questionnaire surveys are necessary to consult with the public at this stage. There will of course be a need for consultation on specific proposals as they are developed in more detail, e.g. proposals related to the parking strategy.

The stakeholder workshops had a good attendance and discussions focused on a range of topics. However, we feel there will be merit in further exploring the views of organisations representing people with disabilities and particular needs as proposals are developed.

Given the general dissatisfaction with bus services in Taunton and the surrounding area we feel that further discussions with both bus users and non-users would be worthy of consideration. Detailed discussions with bus operators should also take place, to fully understand the dynamics of the local bus market and the challenges faced. This should be undertaken as part of the review of the Passenger Transport Strategy.