

Stevenage Transport Strategy

Local Plan Hearing – 19th January 2017

Opening Statement on Behalf of Stevenage Borough Council (SBC)

1. Since the Publication Draft of the SB Local Plan in January 2016, SBC has refined and updated its transport strategy, culminating to date in the Transport Strategy expressed in the Vectos Technical Paper, December 2016 [ED127].
2. Even during the course of this week, traffic modelling run scenarios have been undertaken to reflect and refine this Transport Strategy. I will explain this in detail in a moment, but the upshot is that the results firmly reinforce that strategy.
3. We have met with Herts CC, and whilst it can of course speak for itself, we understand that it is supportive of the approach in the strategy subject to an assurance that the Local Plan commits to its delivery. The Strategy is entirely consistent with the current draft of the Hertfordshire Transport Vision 2050.
4. It is our intention to reference and rely upon the Transport Strategy in the Local Plan, and to make available, and plan for, investments accordingly. Our proposal is that it forms an Appendix to the Local Plan.
5. As a result we propose modifications to Policies IT4 and IT7 and supporting text. Our draft proposal is set out in a separate document, which we will discuss today.
6. We propose an update to the IDP, setting aside £3.5m for cycleway improvements, behaviour management, and a monitor and manage fund, taken from the amount set aside in the previous IDP for highway junction changes, so that there is no net increase in the overall IDP figure. I will elaborate on that in a moment.
7. Our strategy is predicated on Mobility. That is, access to day to day facilities for a wide sector of society. We are focussed most on growing a healthy, active and pleasant community throughout Stevenage, and in using the Local Plan, and the associated development growth, as the catalyst for achieving that.
8. So, Mobility comes in many ways. It includes Virtual Mobility (for instance working from home, or shopping online), walking and cycling, shared transport, including buses and car share, and single occupancy cars.
9. We will be designing for, and encouraging, more use of the higher capacity and more environmentally and socially sustainable transport networks. This is where we will prioritise

effort and investment. The highest capacity networks (that is people per unit area), aside from virtual mobility, are active travel (walking and cycling) followed by shared transport, including buses and car share.

10. For the purpose of our assessment we have assumed that there will have been a gradual reduction to 15% less car drivers in 2031 than would have been the case if the current characteristics were maintained. That would mean an increase in the proportion of people doing other things, even if it is only once or twice a week, including:
 - Working from home
 - Scooting, walking or cycling to school
 - Sharing a car
 - Cycling or walking
 - Taking a bus
 - Taking a train
 - Changing the time at which they travel
 - Travelling a shorter distance
11. To put this in context, for people that live in Stevenage it would mean a car driver proportion of about 50% for travel to work in 2031, compared with in 2011:
 - Brighton, 37%
 - Bristol, 50%
 - Nottingham and Norwich, 46%
 - Cambridge, 32%
 - Leicester, 52%
 - York, 49%
12. For further context, the traffic models have assumed that 25% to 30% of cars on the Stevenage network in the commuter peak are for trips of 2.0km or less.
13. We say that this is an entirely reasonable assumption to make, particularly in light of what is expected by national policy [NPPF para 29 onwards], what is observed elsewhere [above], the focus of the investment [below] and the pure common sense that people act to minimise their inconvenience.
14. The extent of shift will be influenced by the degree of convenience on the highway network. The lesser the inconvenience, the lesser the shift. To a large extent this is what we have seen to date, with a relatively uncongested network in Stevenage, unusually for most towns and cities.

15. We will not be prioritising investment in highway capacity improvements, designed for the convenience of the car commuter, above investments in more sustainable and socially inclusive mobility. It is of course not the purpose of planning policy to prioritise protection of the convenience of the car commuter.
16. As a result, for the purpose of assessment, we have left the highway network as it is, except for some minor modelling adjustments, and the Lytton Road closure which enables relocation of the bus station next to the railway station and an expansion of the town centre towards this new transport interchange. Ie, no major highway capacity changes other than Lytton Way.
17. In the scenario that we have tested, there is a general increase in journey times across the network of up to one and a half minutes during the commuter peak periods. This will be less if there is a greater shift, and more if there is less.
18. This order of magnitude is not significant in the context of NPPF, the need for social and economic growth, and in particular given the potentially exemplar alternative mobility options.
19. Technology and social interventions and trends are playing major roles in increasingly flexible attitudes towards mobility. Travelling as a passenger on either public transport or in a car makes it easier to use technology on the move, either to check facebook, to shop, to work or to text chat with friends, and this is what is happening.
20. The recent social phenomena has created a rise in the intergenerational divide. For instance, the total car driver distance travelled by young males (17 to 34) has dropped constantly and significantly, more than a third, since the mid 90s [ITC p12]. Many young people are treating cars as appliances, not aspirations. Equally, the number of young males (17 – 34) with a driving licence has dropped over the same period by about a third [ITC p17].
21. All of this is consistent with the aims of national policy [NPPF para 29 for instance], and demonstrates flexible attitudes, ie, that change is possible, it can be influenced, and that it does happen. We will draw on that attitudinal opportunity to deliver growth based on the wealth of Mobility that Stevenage can offer, including, but not relying upon, traffic capacity.
22. Private travel includes walking, cycling or driving a car. Shared private travel is car sharing, or say walking buses to school, and public travel is of course buses and trains.
23. Some people will choose private travel. Stevenage has some of the very best high capacity private travel networks in the UK. Its Dutch cycle network, although currently tired, can be nothing short of excellent. It can deliver sustainable mobility at a pedestrian, and hence community interaction, scale
24. Our proposal is for an investment of £3.0m in this network over the Plan period, in accord with the cycle strategy, still in development, but which will be submitted to this Examination, as an appendix to the Local Plan, before it closes, and which will include:
 - Completion of missing links

- Maintenance, including upgrading lighting, way markings and decoration of underpasses
 - A comprehensive wayfinding strategy, including signing and maps
 - Cycle service stations and cycle parking
 - Pleasant rest areas
 - Continuous cycle routes with priority over side roads
25. The figure of £3.0m is an extrapolation of costs estimated for a good quality upgrade of a part of the cycle network.
26. Influencing behaviour will help to accelerate flexible attitudes. New and existing development will need to, or will, provide travel planning and management of travel. However, SBC is best placed to influence, monitor and manage mobility on a town wide basis.
27. We propose that the Local Plan establishes a Steering Group for mobility, made up of SBC, Hertfordshire County Council and other invited members, that may for instance include local groups, large employers, and charities such as Sustrans. This steering group will provide advice to SBC.
28. In some circumstances, it may be prudent for SBC to provide further mobility education, and in the expectation of such interventions, the IDP makes an allowance of £0.5m for a monitor and manage sustainability fund.
29. It is worth saying a few words about traffic modelling, its limitations, and how we have used it.
30. The traffic models used here are very crude mathematical representations. They are single modal car based models. They are deterministic. That is that they are based on fixed demands and are unable to:
- Flex the mode of travel
 - Flex the time of travel
 - Flex whether travel occurs at all
 - React on a time, mode or need to travel basis to increasing car driver inconvenience
 - React to the increased relative attractiveness, whether it for health, community or other reasons, of other forms of mobility
31. For these reasons, and more, the models rely completely on a human brain to feed them information, and to interpret the results in the light of the inputs. They are far from the source of ultimate truth.
32. In addition, the assumptions in the work up to and including the models in December 2016 included assumptions that had not been refined to local circumstances. For instance, these included:

- Trip rates for town centre development that are about three times higher than actual rates for town centre developments, as generic trip rates for residential uses were used, that have no regard for location, and even in that respect were higher than rates for non town centre development derived from TRICS
 - Background traffic growth based on uplift only mathematical factors, with no allowance for downward factors such as current mobility trends, the consequences of modern masterplanning, sustainability measures in mitigation of growth, flexible attitudes and policies that reduce congestion by supporting development which facilitates the use of sustainable modes of travel [NPPF para 30]
 - Traffic growth between model zones that have no committed or Local Plan development
 - All trips have been assumed to be travel to work trips [which actually only make up about 37% of car trips in the morning peak], and have therefore been distributed around the network on that basis. These trips will tend to be longer than, for instance, education trips, and therefore overestimate cars on the network
33. The consequence of this was that the model for Stevenage forecast gridlock in Stevenage by 2021, without even the inclusion of any Local Plan growth.
34. This is patently wrong, and a result such as this is meaningless. It is wrong because gridlock does not occur on a regular basis. It is no coincidence that most towns and cities operate road networks at capacity for at least some of the commuter period, but that gridlock does not occur. Before that occurs, people act to minimise their inconvenience, by making small changes if possible, and big changes if necessary.
35. In more heavily congested cities, where networks operate at capacity for longer periods, it is congestion that remains a constant. I.e., as roadspace reduces, traffic reduces, and as roadspace increases, traffic grows, maintaining a constant level of congestion (measured by journey speeds). [Note EU CREATE research]
36. It is also wrong from a common sense perspective, because Stevenage at the moment is relatively uncongested, with a high capacity road network. To jump from this to notional gridlock in four years does not satisfy a sense check, although it is easy to see how a deterministic model with the assumptions that have been included, would mathematically get there.
37. We have refined the model accordingly. It is still necessarily crude, and does not represent reality. However, in making the refinements it is a more useful tool from which judgements can be made.
38. We have started with a definition that in practice gridlock will never occur on a regular basis. We have run this model iteratively, changing assumptions in light of earlier results, to meet that definition.

39. We have run the model based on the existing road network, with no changes in capacity, except for a notional change at one junction which we included for modelling reasons.
40. As the model was not flexible enough to do this, we have left in what we believe is an overestimate for background traffic growth, taking in committed development in North Herts and Welwyn Hatfield, and a general uplift for potential development in the region up to 2031. This unfortunately still includes the unrealistic upward only growth factors, and none of the downward factors.
41. We have taken out a notional 15% of 2031 car driver trips as a proxy for the delivery of the Transport Strategy.
42. We have run the model over a three hour peak period for each commuter peak. Where we have then reached capacity in the model for the middle peak hour we have decanted trips to the shoulder peak hours. For this exercise we moved 2.0% of traffic from the middle peak hour into the remainder of the morning three hour period, and 3.5% in the evening peak. This does not reduce the peak period demand, it simply reflects the effect of retiming.
43. The result is that the average journey time for trips on the Stevenage network is about 1 minute 30s more in the morning peak three hour period and about 1 minute 20s more in the evening peak three hour period compared with a run with the committed development and highways schemes including the A1(M) Smart motorway scheme.
44. The Plan meets the instructions in NPPF in terms of facilitating sustainable development [29], encouraging solutions which support reductions in emissions and which facilitate the use of sustainable modes of transport [30], perpetuating and creating a high quality built environment with accessible local services that supports the community's health, social and cultural well being [7], and managing growth to make the fullest possible use of active travel and shared travel [17, bullet 11].
45. In light of the mitigations, the residual cumulative transport impacts will not be severe and so are not material in the context of NPPF para 32 and therefore in the planning context.
46. Therefore, we say that the Plan, with our proposed modifications, is sound in transport, traffic and mobility terms.