

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET – 21 January 2021

Question 1

Ms J Gallagher, Hereford

To: cabinet member, environment, economy and skills

Could the council examine statistics around how many people use local buses in Hereford city and whether including electric buses in the Towns Fund bid is appropriate? Would a better solution be to edit this section of the Towns Fund bid to create a park and ride scheme instead and build upon the cycle initiative already started by Herefordshire council?

I don't feel electric buses have longevity, will be popular with local residents, be used or be best use of public money.

Response

The Hereford Town Investment Plan (TIP) submission is the responsibility of the Hereford Towns Fund board. This is a requirement of the government process for the Towns Fund. The Hereford Towns Fund board have undertaken a comprehensive process to draft the Town Investment Plan. This has included public consultation on local priorities where a request for better buses emerged very strongly, and an extensive process to select projects for inclusion in the investment plan for submission to government. The electric buses project proposal was submitted by Hereford City Council and Rail and Bus for Herefordshire, and has been selected for inclusion in the submission to government.

Where the TIP is of the required standard and contains viable projects, government will offer Heads of Terms to Hereford. Following the agreement of Heads of Terms the council, working with the Towns Fund board and project sponsors, will have up to one year to develop agreed projects in detail and complete and assure comprehensive business cases which will include demonstrating the project viability, expected demand, and value for money.

Should the electric busses project be supported to proceed by government, detailed work will be undertaken to design the service based on the best available evidence so that it responds to public demand, and builds on learning from similar schemes elsewhere.

Herefordshire Council is strongly committed to a sustainable transport vision and will be properly investigating the potential for park and ride as part of our commitment to that

It should be noted that the council are utilising funding from an early award of Towns Fund money to extend the Beryl Bikes initiative and offer grants for businesses to purchase electric bikes and cargo bikes. In addition, a council project selected for inclusion within the TIP will contain an element of support towards cycling and walking infrastructure within the city.

Question 2

Mr M Franklin, Bromyard

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

Re: Item 6 - Hereford Transport Strategy. We are told that stopping the Western Bypass and SLR will require a write-off of £11.833 million, which cost may eventually fall to Herefordshire residents but this is not the total cost. What is the forecast opportunity cost of these decisions, i.e. the amounts by which forecast increases in the revenue base through growth of businesses

and housing development will be reduced if these significant infrastructure improvements do not go ahead?

Response

The Hereford Transport Strategy Review has considered how different packages would contribute to growth proposals for the core strategy in terms of contributions to accessing the sustainable urban extensions and supporting a thriving economy (outcome indicators O6 and O7 in the assessment framework). Each package option was seen to provide large beneficial support for the sustainable urban extensions (O6) and beneficial or large beneficial support for thriving local economy (O7).

Assessments carried out for the Review provided forecasts to 2026 which informed the cabinet's selection of its preferred strategy. The forecasts demonstrated that all of the package options could maintain traffic conditions similar to those observed in the 2016 base year and therefore support delivery of the core strategy growth.

The executive has also received legal advice from counsel that indicates that stopping the western bypass scheme does not mean that strategic housing sites cannot progress but will mean that developers will need to demonstrate appropriate mitigation in submitting their planning applications for the consideration of the local planning authority.

On this basis it is not envisaged that the selection of the preferred transport strategy and stopping the western bypass and southern link road schemes will have a significant impact on future council tax and business rates revenues.

Supplementary question

The legal advice is that stopping the western bypass scheme does not mean that the strategic housing sites cannot progress, although you say developers will need to demonstrate appropriate mitigation and no costs are indicated with that so it may be a deterrent but my question is while all things may be possible not all things are equally likely. Looking at the best, worst and most likely outcomes and taking account of the additional housing and commercial development which might be expected are you looking not just at the scheme itself but the whole economic impact of the scheme? What are the long-term revenue benefits or costs of the six proposals selected for consideration from the Hereford transport strategy review?

Response

It is fairly common knowledge that when the Core Strategy was approved in 2015 the inspector made it clear that she did not approve the allocations of land in the west of Hereford city on the basis of a road being included because in her opinion there was considerable risk associated with that being delivered. So those housing allocations were as far as I understand it allowed through by inspection on the basis that there would be, as in any other city, decent transport plans being provided at the same time as applications came forward. We took legal opinion on that and that was confirmed so as far as we think we are not slowing anything down or reducing our revenue. We can continue as we are but I will ask officers to provide a detailed written response.

Written response

The high level capital and revenue costs associated with the 6 strategic transport package options assessed in the review are set out at page 93 of the review. The review did not attempt to predict long term revenue benefits of options or packages and did not undertake benefit cost ratio assessments. It did consider support for the economy and growth in terms of qualitative assessment of the impact on accessibility for development locations provided by the various packages as referenced in the response to the original question.

In terms of any future assessment, it is likely that the council will need to determine the transport capacity which the preferred package will provide to support the growth of the city for the longer term and this will inform housing and employment land proposals in an updated local plan. Noting that it is likely that the council will be required to allocate sufficient housing to meet nationally set targets it is considered that the choice of the preferred transport strategy for Hereford will not have a detrimental impact on future revenues generated from council tax and business rates countywide but the distribution of those allocations may change and be influenced by the transport strategy.

Question 3

Ms K Sharp, Hereford

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

There have been leaflets and adverts claiming that the transport review concluded that the best way to address congestion was to build a "Western bypass". I understood this would only be achieved if any new road scheme was accompanied by demand management schemes, such as Congestion Charging schemes and 'work place parking levies' to limit the increased vehicle use arising from new roads? Where in the Transport Review - that was presented to Herefordshire Council – did it claim that congestion across Hereford could be reduced by a Western Bypass?

Response

Herefordshire Council has not published the leaflets or adverts referred to in the question but I am aware of them.

The Hereford Transport Strategy Review report set out the impacts on congestion of the individual transport options in the Option Assessment Framework results set out in chapter 6. Page 63 of the report includes the output for indicator 5.1 'What impact does the option have on delay and congestion across the city as a whole?' and this sets out the impacts from large adverse to large beneficial. The western bypass (option 14) is shown as having a beneficial impact on this indicator alongside 7 other options out of the original 18 which were assessed. The Western Bypass package (Option A+C+D) which projected significant reduction in congestion is made up of walking and cycling elements, demand management elements and the road itself. The projected congestion reduction for this package is based on all selected options working together and indeed, congestion charging schemes and 'work place parking levies' are integral to that. It is confusing to me that some opposition members champion this package, the most expensive and environmentally damaging proposal – which will take a decade or more to deliver – as their obvious choice but also publicly state they oppose congestion charging, raising car park charges and 'work place parking levies'. I cannot offer an explanation for that apparent contradiction.

It is important to note that the Eastern Link package also includes elements of demand management and also is projected to deliver significant reduction in congestion (23% compared to 29% for Western Bypass package). This Eastern Link option package is forecast to cost less than half of the cost of the Western Bypass package, which is forecast to cost £261 million.

Supplementary question

Your answer spells out a key point about the western bypass (option 14) in the review - that walking and cycling elements together with measures to restrict car use such as congestion charging and work place parking levies would be integral to significant reductions in congestion (i.e. reductions not achieved by the road itself).

So that all parties can be clear on this, what level of fees are required on congestion charging and work place parking levies to prevent the induced demand that would negate the benefit of spending over £100million on any road scheme, and how would these be applied across Hereford?

Response

I can ask the consultants to come up with an estimation of those fees but it is to me and always has to be to me an apparent contradiction that you build a road and then to try and negate the effect of induced congestion. Essentially the bigger the roads you build the more cars you're going to get on them, to try and negate that you then start charging people for using their cars. It seems a flawed logic but regarding the specific question about fees I will ask officers to try and provide a response with consultants.

Written response

Introducing demand management measures including charging mechanisms would help address both induced traffic and diverting traffic which could result from the initial relief provided by a new road. As the cabinet has ruled out congestion charging when it considered the review 3 December 2020, it is likely that any charging mechanism would be restricted to car parking charges. However, demand management can also be delivered through traffic calming and speed reduction measures which prioritise active travel modes and public transport over cars in specific locations/areas and these form part of our preferred strategy. Noting that our preferred strategy includes a road scheme we will need to review the potential levels of induced/diverted traffic as we develop the detail of the scheme and this would inform the range of demand management measures and their locations on the network to help ensure that final proposals optimise the benefits of the additional route options. It is it not possible to predict what this mean for parking charges at the present time but we do feel that they will need to increase over current levels in order to encourage shorter distance journeys to transfer to walking, cycling and bus services.

Question 4

Mrs J Richards, Hereford

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

Historically capital road projects have rarely been delivered within budget, even after allowing for inflation. The City Link road is a prime example, where professional fees and land costs increased, despite the public previously being told that the funding for the Transport Hub was ring fenced and would not be affected by cost over runs on the road scheme. Can you please confirm that funding for any transport schemes will be tightly controlled and the design and development of capital transport schemes will go out for tender, rather than pursued via an extension of the Balfour Beatty Living Places contract?

Response

I can confirm that the budgets for the delivery of the transport schemes which form the transport strategy confirmed in December by cabinet will be managed using the council project management system Verto. This should ensure project spend is controlled and delivered within approved budgets. Any cost increases will be managed using a robust change control sign off process. A procurement strategy for the procurement of the professional services to develop and design these projects will be developed and approved – it is my intention to ensure an appropriate tender process is completed and projects are not delivered by default through the public realm contract.

Question 5

Mrs V Wegg-Prosser, Breinton

To: cabinet member, environment, economy and skills

Reference the New Improvement Plan for Hereford, Item 8 on the Agenda:
Advertisement Feature in Hereford Times, 14.1.21, promoted by Mr. Frank Myers, MBE.

My question concerns the decision to appoint Mr. Myers to the Hereford Town Funds Board, which will oversee the delivery of this new Plan. In his advertisement, Mr. Myers makes claims which cannot be substantiated, distorts evidence, and calls for the people of Hereford to act now to 'save the bypass'. Mr. Myers has publicised his opposition to the recommendations of the Council's democratically elected Coalition administration promoting a new sustainable vision for Hereford in a rapidly changing world. Is he fit to be a member of the Hereford Town Funds Board?

Response

The government guidance on Town Deals sets out the expected membership for Towns Fund boards. Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP's) are required to be invited to sit on Town Fund boards. The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership were invited to put forward a member from their Board to sit on the Hereford Towns Fund board. The Marches LEP nominated Frank Myers (as an existing member of the LEP Board) to represent them on the Hereford Towns Fund board and it is in this capacity that Mr Myers is acting during Towns Fund board business. The Hereford Towns Fund board benefits both from having a range of stakeholders and partners and from a diversity of views.

Question 6

Mrs E Morawiecka, Breinton

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

Many people have complained about the state of Herefordshire's roads and the lack of funds available to repair and maintain existing road infrastructure across the County. Can the Cabinet member confirm reports that both Severe Weather Reserve funds and Pot Hole Repair money has historically been used to cover the initial costs of new capital road schemes in the County?

Response

The Hereford Transport Package revenue development costs were funded from a number of council's revenue budgets, external grants (from Highways England and Midlands Connect) and reserves including the severe weather reserve. The appropriate process was followed to allocate reserve funds and the report which sets out the use of the severe weather reserve can be seen in the report on the council's website by following the link below:

<http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/documents/s50053659/Hereford%20Transport%20Package%20HTP%20Options%20Consultation%20Phase%202.pdf>

The South Wye Transport Package development costs have used both external capital grant and the council's LTP grant funding. The allocation of LTP grant funding to support delivery of the South Wye Transport Package was done by means of virement and recorded in a decision report. A number of decision reports confirm the allocation of LTP funding to the SWTP which can be seen on the council's website.

Supplementary question

Thank you for the link in answer to my question, which shows that of the £5.972million planned to be spent on working up the Western Bypass, £2.422million was funded from Revenue streams and £2.45million from prudential borrowing.

When the Hereford Times are reporting that there is a "£12million bill if the road schemes are axed", would someone be able to explain that this large sum of money has already been spent, a large proportion taken from previous revenue budgets, and which should have been used to maintain or repair existing road infrastructure over previous years?

Response

Cabinet member infrastructure and transport:

It's a very important question. I noticed the headlines this morning saying that we've got a £12 million bill to cancel these schemes as if that's extra money to pay. It's not extra money to pay, the situation is that when a council tries to develop a new scheme it has to use its own revenue budgets and officers to work that up and to pay consultants. We can then go and ask for capital funding from elsewhere. It's an accounting exercise really that we need to now rebalance that and realign that. I will ask our section 151 officer to make that clear and perhaps Councillor Harvey would like to add something.

The section 151 officer confirmed that the council would not be faced with a bill for an additional £12 million. The money had already been spent so this was not new spending but a bookkeeping adjustment to move the capitalised spend on the balance sheet in effect to council revenue reserves.

The cabinet member finance and corporate services also responded:

In addition there is a certain amount of money that has been written off already in terms of revenue spend in previous years so this 11.8 simply refers to funds that are sitting on the capital lines that the decisions before us in the report paper refer to.

Question 7

Mrs C Protherough, Clehonger

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

The Foundation for Integrated Transport's Fellow in Transport and Climate Change, John Whitelegg, has proposed that other Councils should "Do a Hereford" by taking a decision that puts this Council in the forefront of all councils taking transport decarbonisation seriously. He said that the cabinet member responsible for transport, Councillor John Harrington and his cabinet colleagues, are to be congratulated for recognising the importance of buses, active travel and demand management as well as decarbonisation for the future of transport policy and quality

of life in Hereford. Please confirm the level of carbonisation that would be incurred should major road building projects go ahead instead of cheaper, simpler sustainable active travel measures.

Response

For clarification, the cabinet does not intend to progress road building projects instead of active travel measures. Our recent decision confirmed that the preferred strategy would include greater investment in walking, cycling, mobility hubs and passenger transport. We also feel that a new road link to the east of the city and second river crossing is essential to increasing the resilience of the network and providing alternatives for people who need to move about the city.

The Hereford Transport Strategy Review has included high level assessment of carbon impacts in two ways and these are represented as outcome indicators O1 and O3 within the climate emergency objective for the package assessment framework. O1 provides an indication of operational carbon emissions (changes in traffic movements and fleet composition) and O3 provides a qualitative assessment of embodied carbon (carbon emissions resulting from construction). The package assessment results set out in chapter 7 of the review indicate that the packages with road schemes have either adverse or large adverse impacts in terms of embodied carbon (O3) and beneficial impacts in terms operational carbon (O1). Further detailed technical assessments will be required as specific elements of the preferred strategy are taken forward and this is likely to include appropriate assessment of carbon and biodiversity impacts.

Question 8

Mr T Meadows, Hereford

To: cabinet member, infrastructure and transport

It seems that despite my repeated questions and WSPs detailed percentages, there is no record as to what the average journey time savings in minutes would be as a result of a Western bypass. Can WSP confirm that all the percentages on journey time savings they have referenced for vehicles are on average less than 5 minutes, and that the majority of these journey time savings can be achieved more simply and cheaply by implementing sustainable transport measures?

Response

It is correct that the average journey time percentage changes referenced in the review are less than 5 minutes when expressed as time, although as these are averages, actual journey times that would be experienced by individual travellers in the various scenarios would be both higher and lower than this. Average journey times as assessed in the review for the 2016 base year are just under 17 minutes for the a.m. peak or 16 minutes across all periods of the day. This comprises an average of 4 routes assessed in the review which cross the city via main radial roads (such as the A49, A465 and A438) travelling in each direction on the route (for example the A49 northbound and southbound) during the period 8-9am. The greatest change in average journey time indicated by the modelling forecasts would be the A49 northbound in the am peak period and this would see a reduction of around 23% (do minimum vs package A+C+D) which would be a reduction of journey time of 4 minutes and 38 seconds from total journey time of 19 minutes 48 seconds down to 15 minutes 10 seconds.

In terms of which types of intervention make the biggest impact on reducing journey times the Hereford Transport Strategy Review Report indicates that package A+B+C (active travel, buses and demand management measures) could reduce journey times by 4% on key corridors (page 80 of the report) and this only reaches 5-7% when different road options are introduced (see pages 82, 84 and 86 in the Report).

The cabinet's preferred strategic transport package includes a blend of measures combining walking and cycling, investment in buses and school travel and a new road link to the east of the city. Whilst it is accepted that the sustainable measures represent the best value for money and can help reduce travel by car the cabinet is concerned that the reliance on a single river crossing has a significant impact on the resilience of the network resulting in regular disruption and the provision of a second bridge with reasonable links both north and south of the river is essential for the city going forward.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for confirming that even after spending over £200million on new roads, the average journey time saving is less than 5 minutes, which is the time someone can spend looking for a car parking space.

I note that this time saving is only achieved if new roads are accompanied by Demand Measures, such as work place parking levies and congestion charging. I understand some local politicians whilst supportive of new roads are opposed to such Demand Measures, despite them being required to prevent increased car traffic generated by new roads.

If new roads are constructed without implementation of demand measures would average journey times reduce or actually increase?

Response

The simple answer is in my opinion they would increase. The whole reason why they're included in the road option for the western bypass is to counter the effects of induced traffic. It's a very good point if you're going to spend £256 million on trying to reduce congestion and you're only going to achieve a five minute reduction in journey time and by going that you're going to have to charge people in the town more money to come in and use those roads which actually we support as an administration where it's appropriate but the opposition is totally against this idea. I will ask our consultants to give us an estimation of what a road on its own would bring without those other measures.

Written response

Page 63 of the Final Report indicates that a Western Bypass on its own would be 'beneficial' in terms of reducing journey times across the city as a whole (relative to doing nothing). However, the reductions in journey times would be less than if the Western Bypass was accompanied by demand management (and walking, cycle and bus schemes) as these additional elements would limit the extent of induced traffic which would otherwise occur. That is, the quoted reductions in journey times would be smaller if the Western Bypass was progressed on its own.