



# Report to Cabinet Member for Transportation

Decision to be taken on or after Wednesday 28 December 2005

Decision can be implemented 3 or more working days after decision has been signed.

Cabinet Member Report No. T07.05

**Title:** Tackling Congestion

**Date:** 16 December 2005

**Author:** Overview & Scrutiny Committee for Community and Environmental Services

**Contact Officer:** Darl Sweetland, 01296 382864

**Electoral Divisions Affected:** All

## Summary

This report sets out the context for the 'Tackling Congestion' review undertaken by the Congestion Task Group (the 'Task Group') of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for Community and Environmental Services (OSC). The review was undertaken to consider the draft five-year Local Transport Plan (LTP) approach to tackling road congestion in Buckinghamshire. In order for the review to influence the Council's approach the OSC's report had to be finalised in December 2005 so that changes to the LTP can be made before its consideration by Cabinet on 27 February 2005.

## Recommendation

**A. The Community and Environmental Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC) agrees the report of the Congestion Task Group and requests that the Cabinet Member for Transportation adopt and implement the following recommendations:**

**(i) The Local Transport Plan should include a definition of congestion that can be readily understood by the public. Information about average journey times and longest delays at problem locations should be provided to the public so that residents and business can plan to avoid peak time congestion or build this into their journey time. A road user friendly definition together with information about congestion will enable the public to monitor the effectiveness of the authority's work to tackle congestion.**

**(ii) A hierarchy of road improvements should be drawn up before 27 February 2006 to assess the potential impact of growth in general terms and the funding needs and phasing of such work. This strategy should be suggested to other south-east Councils and organisations such as the LGA in order that a complete picture of the costs of congestion resulting from growth can be presented to SEERA and Government.**

**(iii) A Lead Officer should be appointed to recommend to the Cabinet Member the level of resources needed to undertake a full investigation of the options, costs and**

**timescales for the prospective investment in Urban Traffic Control (UTC) and Urban Traffic Management Control (UTMC).**

**(iv) The Local Transport Plan and in particular the section on Congestion should explicitly set out the case as it stands for UTC &/or UTMC and provide provisional timescales for the investment decision and implementation.**

**(v) The Cabinet Member is recommended to visit Reading UTMC to see what can be achieved through targeted use of information to help the public make the choice themselves to manage congestion.**

**B. The OSC requests that Transportation officers regularly meet and update Cllr Hedley Cadd to monitor and report back progress to the OSC on implementation of the recommendations.**

#### **A. Reasons for the decision**

1. The OSC agreed the scope of the review on 28 September 2005 and amended Terms of Reference were approved by the OSC on 23 November 2005, link: [http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/cabinet\\_papers/overview\\_community\\_environment/ce\\_200\\_51123\\_item8.pdf](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/cabinet_papers/overview_community_environment/ce_200_51123_item8.pdf) The report of the Task Group as agreed by the OSC on 14 December 2005 is attached as Appendix 1. The Task Group members are Richard Pushman, Hedley Cadd, David Rowlands and Martin Tett.

2. Objective 7c of the Corporate Plan states that the Council will:

“ Support the motorist by reducing journey times and managing congestion, promoting the free and efficient movement of people and goods.”

The measures and targets to deliver this are within the remit of the Transportation Service. The Council, as highway authority, is required by the Transport Act (2000) to produce a five year Local Transport Plan (LTP) to say how the authority will manage roads and transport in the county. One of the five themes for the LTP is Tackling Congestion.

3. In deciding to review the LTP approach to congestion the OSC was mindful that in the last survey of residents satisfaction with Council's services the public said that action on traffic congestion was their third most important priority for improvement after road and pavement repairs and crime levels. Congestion - or the perception of traffic levels and journey delays - is therefore an important measure of the quality of life for Buckinghamshire residents.

4. The action taken by Transportation to manage congestion must be seen in the light of Government transport policy, the work of the Highways Agency – who manage trunk roads and motorways – and the prevailing trend for increasing car ownership and use. A specific issue for Buckinghamshire is the prospective growth of towns in the county as a result of housing development that is being planned in the South East Plan. Over the next 20 years this will increase the numbers of people living, working and travelling through the county. In undertaken their work Task Group members therefore sought to ensure that the proposed plans were future proof.

5. The LTP approach to congestion is based on four action areas that are collectively designed to enable congestion to be managed or reduced by:

- i) Optimising the use of existing infrastructure to maximise travel capacity and keep traffic moving
- ii) Achieving modal shift from private car use towards more sustainable modes
- iii) Managing demand and reducing need for travel

iv) Where appropriate, increasing or building new capacity  
The OSC's findings (Appendix 1) and recommendations focus on i) and iii) because the Task Group's next review will look at 'Alternatives to the Car' and so will deal with ii).

6. Three types of performance indicators are proposed in the LTP to assess the success of action. These are:
- a) Traffic growth in the three major urban areas (Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Chesham/Amersham) and at key locations on the strategic inter-urban road network
  - b) Journey time reliability for defined journeys over this network
  - c) Customer satisfaction about congestion and the Council's management of it

**B. Other options available, and their pros and cons**

7. The production of the LTP is a statutory requirement. If the decision was not to implement the OSCs recommendations this would mean that the authority had decided not to:
- i) Thoroughly investigate technical solutions and required sources of funding to maximise existing road capacity
  - ii) Consider how information can be provided to the public to actively encourage the use of sustainable modes of travel
  - iii) Enable the public to make an informed choice about when or whether to travel
8. By implementing the recommendations the Cabinet Member and the Council would be equipped to decide in the medium term whether to invest in traffic control and public information systems to manage traffic and increase journey time reliability, and so effectively tackle future congestion.

**C. Resource implications**

9. The advice given to the Task Group on the visit to Reading is that Council's should start small and select key locations and proven methods to tackle congestion. Task Group members considered that the £120,000 cost for seven roadside signs to inform public about delays ahead or car park availability was cost effective. Leading edge pilot authorities have substantially reduced the cost of urban traffic control schemes. Reading's £3.2million scheme would now cost an estimated £1million. The draft LTP (Part 3, page 58) suggests that a Urban Traffic Management Control (UTMC) system for Aylesbury and High Wycombe would require a bid to Government for funding of £5 to 7million. A bid in 2008 would mean that Buckinghamshire was not a fast follower of innovation but may enable the use of developer funding in Aylesbury and the linking of existing UTMC enabled infrastructure.

**D. Legal & Property implications**

10. None

**E. Other implications/issues**

11. Impact assessments have been undertaken in line with the Policy Information Bank guidance. These in summary indicate that:

s1 **Equality and Diversity.** The recommendations would widen access to information about congestion.

- S2 **Crime and Disorder.** UTMC systems can be enabled to provide the Police with the ability to control traffic to manage traffic or other incidents.
- L1 **Value for Money.** The cost of elements of UTC or a complete UTMC package would be dependent on its location and specifications. A number of authorities are installing communications networks to link not only traffic infrastructure but other Council facilities. This, particularly when utilised and part funded by other public services, can produce long term savings in information, data and voice communications.
- L2 **Sustainability.** Reducing congestion has known environmental and economic benefits ranging from reduced vehicle emissions to lower haulage costs. Giving the public real time information about congestion or public transport provides residents and industry with an informed choice about how they manage their own travel as part of the wider community.
- L3 **Risk Assessment.** The demographic risk of a larger population in the county, which is posed by potential growth and its knock on implications for increased car use, is highly likely to increase the number and duration of congestion hotspots. There are political and reputational risks for the Council if action is not taken to tackle congestion. Proven technology and standardised contractual arrangements with reduced risks can be harnessed to manage congestion. Importantly the recommendations could lead to the public being provided with information on congestion so they are actively involved in managing the risks themselves.

#### **G. Feedback from consultation and Local Member views**

- 12. The Task Group is comprised of Members from three of the four districts and member feedback on the review has been considered in public at the OSC. Officers from Transportation have been consulted on the Findings and Recommendations. The Cabinet Member has invited the Task Group Lead Member to set out the OSC's findings and recommendations to inform political consideration of congestion management options.

#### **H. Communication issues**

- 13. Through Buckinghamshire times residents were asked for their views on how the Council should tackle congestion. The most prevalent view was that the Council should both improve and promote public transport. Respondents have therefore been advised that this will in part be the subject of the Alternatives to the Car review in early 2006. In terms of engineering solutions to congestion there was support for the use of traffic lights with vehicle sensors to avoid non- peak hold ups as well as part time traffic lights. The OSC report will be placed on the Council's website and the Centre for Public Scrutiny review database.

#### **I. Progress Monitoring**

- 14. If the OSC recommendations are agreed then it is crucial that these are taken forward in the LTP or through other identifiable work. Best practice suggests that scrutiny reviews should be monitored by one Member who liases with one senior officer in the reviewed service. In this instance the Member/ Officer progress monitoring can partly use the prospective 27 February 2006 decision on the LTP to check on the policy decision. Slippage on implementation could (if required) be reported to the 25 January or 22 February OSC meetings. Bullet point progress reports on all the recommendations are to be reported to the 19 April OSC as background to the Alternatives to the Car review.

## **J. Review**

15. It is recommended that action to implement the recommendations be reviewed jointly with the Cabinet Member and Transportation PAG before the start of preparation for any bid for funding to implement UTMC or major element of it such as public real time information on car parking, traffic flows or public transport.

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### **Background Papers**

[14 December Overview and Scrutiny Committee 'Tackling Congestion' Report](#)  
[Congestion Task Group - Terms of Reference](#)  
[Draft Local Transport plan 2006- 2011](#)

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### ***Your questions and views***

*If you have any questions about the matters contained in this paper please get in touch with the Contact Officer whose telephone number is given at the head of the paper.*

*If you have any views on this paper that you would like the Cabinet Member to consider, or if you wish to object to the proposed decision, please inform the Democratic Services Team by 5.00pm on 23 December 2005. This can be done by telephone (to 01296 383602), Fax (to 01296 382538), or e-mail to [cabinet@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:cabinet@buckscc.gov.uk)*

**CABINET MEMBER REPORT NO. T07.05**

**DECISION TAKEN:**

I have taken into account any representations received concerning the contents of this report.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**DECISION NOT TAKEN:**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_  
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**For Reference**

Professional advice supporting the decision was provided by the following Officers

Name	Signed	Date
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