

# Town Planning Committee

Wednesday, 25th November, 2009

## SPECIAL MEETING OF TOWN PLANNING COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Campbell (Chairman);  
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Lavery); and  
Councillors Brownlee, Cunningham, Hendron,  
Jones, McCarthy, McCausland, O'Neill,  
Patterson and Rodway.

In attendance: Mr. R. Boyd, Members' Support Officer; and  
Mr. J. Heaney, Committee Administrator.

### **Traffic Management in the City Centre**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 18th June, it had requested a presentation from representatives of the Roads Service and from the Department for Social Development in respect of plans for traffic management in the City centre. Accordingly, the Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### **"Relevant Background Information"**

A report was considered by Committee on 18th June 2009 outlining the Department for Regional Development (DRD) Road Service proposals for enabling measures to facilitate the DSD Streets Ahead proposals in Donegal Place and for removal of northbound traffic from Donegall Place. The proposals will have implications on general traffic movements in the city centre and will involve re-routing of some bus services and alterations to existing traffic movements in surrounding streets. Roads Service consider that a number of Traffic Regulations Orders (TRO's) will be required for Castle Street, Queen Street and Upper Queen Street to facilitate the alterations to traffic movements. This will involve changes to the movement of scheduled bus routes with services that utilised northbound travel along Donegall Place being directed to Queen Street/Castle Street before rejoining Royal Avenue.

The Committee deferred consideration of the proposals and requested a presentation by Department for Regional Development and the Department of Social Development on the full proposals traffic management proposals for the city centre including Rapid Transit and the impacts of Streets Ahead on city centre traffic.

### Key Issues

A ministerial review of the emerging strategies for DSD Streets Ahead proposals, DRD City Centre Traffic Management proposals, City Centre Ring South Section proposal and Rapid Transit proposals was carried out earlier this year and was recently approved by the DRD Minister.

Roads Service Eastern division are currently developing traffic management proposals for Belfast City Centre on the basis of the principles in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) while accommodating the DSD Streets Ahead and Rapid Transit proposals.

The proposals have been divided into 3 areas:

- (i) Streets Ahead Enabling Measures - To facilitate the ongoing DSD Streets Ahead proposals to make Donegall Place one way to traffic requires transfer of public transport facilities to Upper Queens Street, Queens Street and Castle Street by 2010. A number of Traffic Regulation Orders are currently being prepared and include:

#### **Castle Street**

- Access only street
- One way traffic from Queen Street to King Street (westbound)
- A section of bus only street between Fountain Street and Donegall Place
- Removal of on street parking
- Introduction of formal loading bays and loading restrictions
- On-road contraflow cycle lane from King Street to Queen Street

#### **Queen Street**

- Introduction of one-way traffic northbound
- Access only street
- Provision of new bus shelters on the west side of the street (to accommodate diverted bus services)
- Changes to on street parking provision
- Introduction of designated disabled parking bays
- Introduction of formal loading bays and loading restrictions

### Upper Queen Street

- Bus lane, new bus stops and shelters on the west side of the street
  - Changes to on street parking, including the introduction of dedicated disabled bays and loading facilities
- (ii) **Rapid Transit Enabling Measures** - To facilitate the provision of a rapid transit service in Belfast by 2011/12 will require dedicated public transport lanes on all the main streets around the city centre. This will require a reduction in general traffic in the core city centre streets; and
- (iii) **BMTP Traffic Management Enabling Works including DSD Phase 2 Streets Ahead Proposals** - Delivery of the full BMTP proposals, to reduce traffic volumes in the city centre and create a better environment for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport services will require an alternative provision for existing users. The DSD Phase 2 Streets Ahead proposals (post 2012) will fully pedestrianise Donegall Place and Donegall Square North effectively closing the front of the City Hall to through traffic except for Rapid Transit vehicles and cyclists. The consequence of this is the re-routeing of public transport services to the rear of the City Hall which will require the restriction of general traffic from Donegall Square South.

Road Service state that the development of the proposals, which require Traffic Regulation Orders, will require extensive consultation with affected groups and this will be carried out in accordance with the legislative process.

### **Resource Implications**

There is no resource implication for the Council.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee is requested to consider the proposals for City Centre Traffic Management proposals as outlined by DRD and DSD

### **Decision Tracking**

No decision tracking

### Documents Attached

### Key to Abbreviations

- DRD** – Department for Regional Development
- DSD** – Department of Social Development
- TRO** – Traffic Regulation Order
- BMTP** – Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan”

It was reported that Messrs. T. McCourt, Divisional Roads Manager, Mr. K. Monaghan, Deputy Divisional Roads Manager, Mr. S. Pollock, Roads Service, Mr. C. De Burca, Department for Regional Development Rapid Transit Division and Mr. J. Johnston, Department for Social Development, Streets Ahead Project, together with Mr. D. Clark representing Translink, were in attendance and were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman.

Mr. Pollock proceeded to outline the purpose of the presentation which would seek to provide a context for the proposed Traffic Regulation Orders, an outline of the longer-term emerging proposals, clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various statutory bodies and explain the linkages between the various projects and initiatives. He then provided a background to the City centre improvements and Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan and outlined the responsibilities that each of the various Statutory Bodies would have.

In respect of the Streets Ahead Project, he indicated that the first phase of the project included three areas within the City centre at Queen’s Street, Donegall Place and Arthur Square. The aim of the project was to improve the shopping environment, attract more tourists and investment, enlarge and enhance the pedestrian zone, improve access to all areas, develop linkages between all areas of the City and to promote civic pride and reduce crime. He outlined the various work that was being carried out to date in the Queen Street, Donegall Place and Arthur Square areas. Mr. Pollock pointed out that the total cost of the proposed Phase II development, which would encompass the City Hall was estimated at £44 million and the ultimate aim of that phase of the project was removal of traffic from Donegall Square North, in front of the City Hall.

Mr. De Burca outlined the proposals for a Rapid Transport Project within the City which he suggested would be a high quality, customer-orientated bus transit system that delivered fast, comfortable and low cost urban mobility. He highlighted the savings that could be achieved by adopting a bus transit system as opposed to a light rail or metro system and he outlined the proposed routes which such a system would take to bring the buses into and out of the City centre. The initial phase of the transit system would seek to link the East and the West of the City. However, the exact routes had not been agreed upon and consultation was still ongoing.

The final element of the Plan was the Traffic Management Enabling Works which would assist with the integration of the transit system and would co-ordinate with the Streets Ahead Project. Mr. Pollock outlined the various traffic management enabling works required, including those for Queen Street, Castle Street and the front and back of the City Hall. He displayed for the information of the Members several slides depicting the proposed traffic flows within the City centre. He pointed out that current surveys had indicated that 60% of the traffic within the City centre did not stop or had no destination within the City centre area. Therefore, it was one aim of the Traffic Management Enabling Works to remove all unnecessary traffic from the City centre.

In conclusion he highlighted for the Committee's information the role of the Joint Departmental Review on emerging traffic management proposals for Belfast City centre, which had been set up following a fatal accident which had occurred on 11th November, 2008. The Review had involved the Department of the Environment, the Department for Social Development and the Department for Regional Development and had looked at the emerging traffic management proposal for the City centre and had drawn a number of conclusions. The Joint Departmental Review had assessed the emerging proposals and had identified a need to make alternative provisions for existing users and had recognised that significant changes would be required to achieve Phase II of the Streets Ahead and Rapid Transport Scheme. The Review had recommended the continuation of close working relations between project teams for both Streets Ahead and Rapid Transport. It had recognised the need for further investigation and research into traffic management and the effects of the proposals. It had highlighted also the need for the infrastructural improvements, together with safety improvements and the need for economic and environmental impact studies. In conclusion the Joint Review Team had recognised the Streets Ahead Project would facilitate the reduction in traffic, encourage greater use of the City centre by pedestrian cyclists and public transport and lead to greater public safety.

Mr. Pollock then outlined the next steps which would be to advertise the Traffic Regulation Orders which would allow for consultation, consideration and resolution of any objections, completion of the construction of Phase I of the Streets Ahead Project and the development of plans for the introduction of a Rapid Transit Enabling Measures.

The Members of the deputation then answered a number of questions from the Members in regard to the cost of the various phases of the Streets Ahead Project and the projected costs for the introduction of a Bus Rapid Transit System. In response to various questions, Mr. McCourt, the Divisional Roads Manager, indicated that economic appraisals would be carried out in relation to the various proposals which would have to be submitted to the Northern Ireland Executive for inclusion within the current and further spending reviews.

In response to question with regard to the development of a transit system within the North and South of the City, Mr. De Burca indicated that he had consulted widely with representatives from all areas of the City and it had been agreed that the East West link would be an appropriate starting point. He assured the Members that it was the Department's wish to have a Bus Transit system in operation in all areas of the City. However, this was dependent on available funding from further spending reviews.

The Members of the deputation answered various questions with regard to specific areas of the City, they thanked the Committee for receiving them and retired from the meeting.

After further discussion, the Committee agreed to support in principle the introduction of the Traffic Regulation Orders, noting that the publication of such Orders would involve a consultation exercise, which would permit the Council to comment on the specific details contained within each individual Order.

Chairman