



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Rapid Transit Study Response / Resident Parking Update / Concessionary Travel Consultation / Newtownards Road Planning Framework
Date:	14 May 2008
Reporting Officer:	Marie-Thérèse McGivern, Director of Development, ext. 3470
Contact Officer:	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext. 3459 Keith Sutherland, Planning & Transport Manager ext. 3578

Relevant Background Information

Rapid Transit Study

The Department for Regional Development (DRD) published details of the Belfast Rapid Transit study and presented a summary of the study to the Development Committee in April 2008. The study carried out further analysis of possible route options and the most appropriate type of technology for the development of the system. There is currently a six week consultation period to respond to the study.

Resident Parking consultation

The Department for Regional Development previously published a Draft Policy Residents Parking Schemes Consultation document to which the Council responded in February 2007. The Council response whilst welcoming the introduction of this scheme, where it secured the support for a majority of the residents, raised serious concerns over the charging for residential parking schemes in Northern Ireland.

Free Travel for People Aged 60-64

The policy consultation sets out proposals to extend the concessionary fares scheme to include people aged 60–64. Currently free travel is available to people aged 65 and over, those registered as being blind and those in receipt of war disablement pension. Half fares are also available to a number of groups.

Newtownards Road Planning Framework

The Newtownards Road 2012 group as part of the action plan developed to support the regeneration of the area from Bridge End to Hollywood Arches are seeking to develop a structure that will help harness the potential developments within the area and address the ongoing blight arising from the BMAP/ BMTP and infrastructure proposals.

Key Issues

The Rapid Transit Study

The DRD presentation to the previous Committee was based on a recent consultant study findings (**Appendix 1**), published on the same day, into the rapid transit option for the city. Consideration of the detail contained in the Rapid Transit study and the DRD presentation identified a number of issues Committee may wish to consider as part of a the draft response (**Appendix 2**):

General

- The final form of technology (guided bus or light rail), capacity and the longer term potential in relation to the continued development of the city. The significant difference in Capital Cost Estimates, between Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Light Rail Transit (LRT), set out in the Study is an important element of the Consultant's recommendation of a bus based system. However, the basis for these cost comparisons are not clear in terms of whether the comparison is like for like and whether or not the system, as suggested can be upgraded at a later stage to tram or light rail. An important difference in the comparative costs for the systems relate to the degree of segregation from other traffic along the route with other variations for infrastructure or vehicle costs. It is not clear from the report whether or not the bus based system will utilise a greater proportion of shared roads space with other traffic.
- The quality offered by bus based rapid transit can vary considerably depending on both the specification of the vehicles and the associated infrastructure (stops, interchanges, ticketing and real time information systems). The level of specification for the quality service is not clear from the study. The benchmark should be set to ensure the system selected for Belfast provides a viable attractive alternative to the car both in terms of service quality and journey time. The quality of provision must be clearly articulated and ensure that the provision includes high quality infrastructure incorporating real time information and full integration with re-aligned public transport provision in the form of an integrated system.
- The proposals do not consider provision for the north and south of the city or address the potential relationships to existing provision within the corridors associated with the study options. The provision should be set within the longer term context of city wide transport and the objectives of securing a modal shift towards public transport. The Council as part of the BMAP processes advocated the development of clear transport corridor plans that provided the context for longer term planning on the basis of an integrated approach (**Appendix 3**).
- The BMTP and RTS outlined timetables for the progression of the different transport options and their implementation. The BMTP stated that commencement of a bus rapid transit network with the implementation of the Eway scheme in the Newtownards Corridor within the 2015 plan. Detailed planning of rapid transit schemes in three other corridors not served by rail infrastructure and/or to support major development was also outlined. As the progression of the EWAY, CITI Route and part of WWAY is now proposed how does this impact on the implementation of other transport initiatives?
- The proposed routes suggest that the Rapid transit scheme will not be segregated from other traffic in major sections of the route particularly close to the city centre. It is not clear how the system will perform or deliver a modal shift in these circumstances. In the absence of route segregation and priority over other city centre traffic it is not clear what frequency or speed can be achieved.
- Significant development proposals such as those for Titanic Quarter offer the opportunity for both private sector contributions and the integration of provision

into the design. Previous rapid transit schemes have indicated the potential for attracting private sector investment is stronger in relation to light rail schemes rather than bus based – it is not clear to what extent the report has considered the potential for private sector contributions or investment.

- In relation to affordability and integration of the schemes it is not clear whether the calculations are based on existing transport fare structures or whether the proposed routes will be integrated within the existing public transport network.

Specific

- There are a number of route options presented in the report Executive Summary that Committee may wish to consider in detail including the potential alignments for the WWAY Rapid Transit scheme beyond the Royal Victoria Hospital; the proposal to divert EWAY and combine the access with Titanic Quarter and the potential to link George Best City Airport by a modern, fast, efficient and frequent public transport service.
- The potential conflict between the EWAY proposal and the Comber Greenway. Whilst the walkway and cycleway were introduced as temporary resources along the protected alignment they have become well utilised. The possibility to examine alternative routes such as the Newtownard Road has also been raised by Sustrans. (**Appendix 4**). The EWAY rapid transit link will provide an important element of what could be a modern effective public transport system for the city.
- The continued retention of the Bankmore link as part of the city centre transport solutions by DRD could affect the existing proposals and their future enhancement. The Council has highlighted serious concerns over the impact of the proposed of four lane road link from Cromac St to Sandy Row in relation to community severance, air quality and the adverse implications on the potential for the rapid transit connectivity to the South of the City and the university area.
- The report fails to identify detailed options in relation to the potential routes through the city centre and the level of priority that can be afforded to public transport initiatives. The connection through the city and the ability of the system to provide integrated through routes are critical both in relation to the existing proposal and any potential for a future upgrading of the system. The relationship with the city bus re-routing study and the potential to remove lay-over facilities from the City Hall/ Donegal Square area is a critical element of the study that is not clarified.

Residents Parking

DRD announced the five areas to carry out preliminary consultations on proposed resident's parking schemes in Belfast as: Barrack Street, Donegall Pass, Sandy Row, The Markets (west of Cromac Street) and Brown's Square. See **Appendix 5** for maps of the areas.

As part of the process DRD intend to conduct parking surveys, initial scheme design, carry out informal consultation with residents, finalisation of scheme designs and commencement of the necessary legislative process. This process is expected to take up to 12 months to complete.

DRD propose the introduction of Controlled Parking Zones (CPZ), an area where all on-street parking is controlled. This means that parking is only permitted in designated parking areas or bays and that the remainder of the kerbside space is subject to yellow line restrictions. Two measures are proposed:

Permit Only Parking Areas

These are normally shared surface areas where there are no footways. Only vehicles displaying a valid permit can park in these areas.

Mixed Use Areas

These are normally traditional streets with footways. Only vehicles displaying a valid permit or a valid pay and display ticket can park in these areas.

It is proposed that the scheme will operate between 8.00am and 6.00pm Monday to Saturday. The proposed permit charge remains at £80 per year but is reduced to £40 in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas. All the areas proposed are designated as a Neighbourhood Renewal Areas and the Council welcomes this introduction of reduced costs within these areas.

The Council previously raised concerns in relation to the charges on inner city communities which already suffered from the negative effects and disruption associated with commuter traffic. This potential additional charge, although reduced, for the introduction of a system to address external factors beyond their control remains inequitable.

Free travel for people Aged 60-64

A review of the Accessible Transport Strategy 2015 was carried out in December 2007 which stated that a review of the concessionary fare scheme would take place. The Council response welcomed initiatives to make public transport more accessible to the elderly.

The recent consultation document (**Appendix 6**) outlined a range of options for the extension of the concessionary fare scheme. The extension of the scheme is currently limited by the availability of resources and the recommendation focuses on the 60-64 age group as an expansion of the existing provision.

This change would increase the mobility options for a significant proportion of the city population utilising the existing public transport. It is therefore recommended that the proposal for the extension of the concessionary fares scheme to include people aged 60 to 64 should be supported by the Council.

Newtownards Road Planning Framework

The Newtownards Road 2012 group developed a multi-faceted action plan to support the regeneration of the Inner East area from Bridge End to Holywood Arches. The plan outlines a range of actions and proposals from direct intervention in the public realm through to major public and private regeneration proposals.

The part of the city to be covered by the proposal includes the sections of the identified arterial routes of Albertbridge Road and Newtownards Road and is likely to come under pressure for significant change as a result of major development proposals in or adjacent to the area of study – Titanic Quarter, Sirocco, Connsbank. The action plan developed by the group highlighted the need for a framework to provide a context for the public and private sector proposals for the area.

The 2012 group are seeking to develop a structure that will help harness the potential developments and address the ongoing blight arising from the BMAP/ BMTP and

infrastructure proposals through the development of a planning framework. The framework, which will also draw together the findings from the previous work in relation to the neighbourhood renewal, arterial routes and BMAP processes, has been estimated to cost £15,000.

A request has been made for a contribution of £5,000 from the Council towards the cost of the Framework development. The support is being sought on the basis that the balance of the funding will be secured from a combination of public and private sector funding.

The production of the framework offers the unique opportunity for the group to add to the specific thematic work already carried out in the area and address the opportunity to harness the potential for positive change. It is therefore suggested that Committee accede to the request from the Newtownards Road 2012 group for the provision of a £5,000 contribution towards the production of the Planning Framework.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Committee:

- Considers the draft response in **Appendix 2** as the basis for a response to DRD Rapid Transit Study;
- Notes the contents of the report in relation to Resident Parking proposal;
- Supports the DRD proposal for the introduction of the concessionary fare scheme for the 60-64 age group; and
- Endorses the recommendation for the provision of a £5,000 contribution towards the production of a Planning Framework for the Newtownards Road area by the 2012 group.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Executive Summary of DRD Rapid Transit Study
Appendix 2 – Draft Response to Rapid Transit Study
Appendix 3 – BMAP response on corridor plans
Appendix 4 – Correspondences from Sustrans
Appendix 5 – Concessionary Travel consultation document.

Key to Abbreviations

DRD – Department for Regional Development
CPZ - Controlled Parking Zones
WWAY – West of city proposed rapid transit route
EWAY – East of city proposed rapid transit route
BMAP – Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

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