



Report to: Development Committee

Subject: Belfast City Access Strategy

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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Complications caused by the first stage of 'Belfast On The Move' and the new bus lanes highlighted the sensitivity of Belfast's retail and leisure industries to transport disruptions. In the current economic climate it is particularly important that we reduce the risk of future negative impacts if the positive work in the Investment Programme is not to be undermined.
1.2	Therefore, to support the retail and leisure offerings in the city, we would like to commission a study and the subsequent development of a sustainable City Access Strategy and plan. This would be in partnership with key stakeholders and would enable the Council to fully understand the current and future needs of the city. It would also develop indicators that would enable us to monitor the situation and identify future actions to address the city's needs, in respect of accessibility, City Centre transport, parking and broader mobility.
1.3	The Belfast Metropolitan Area has a population of approximately 645,000 while almost 1.3 million people live within a 50 mile radius. Belfast City is the main centre of employment, administration and commerce for Northern Ireland providing almost 30% of total employment (this figure rises to 50% for the Belfast Metropolitan Area).
1.4	Research carried out in 1999 as part of the preparation of the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan estimated the daily number of cars travelling into and out of Greater Belfast at 297,000 cars while the number of cars travelling into and out of Belfast's central core on a daily basis, was estimated at 149,007.

1.5	A survey carried out in November 2005 to establish the mode of transport used by people travelling into Belfast's inner cordon during the morning peak hour showed that 68 per cent of all cars were driver-only occupancy.
1.6	To facilitate the transport of these people each day, the city has a 703 mile classified roads network, 10 train stations (including two major hubs near the centre), two principal bus services Metro (BMA Commuter) and Ulsterbus (Inter Urban and Rural Services), and numerous taxi operators.
1.7	Following recent changes to the traffic network within the city centre there has been a perception that congestion has increased. The main aim of the Belfast On The Move project is to reorganise traffic management within Belfast City Centre to facilitate a reduction in general traffic levels and encourage greater walking, cycling and public transport use. The project should free up street space for public transport, walking and cycling and for those people who need to drive into the city centre for services, shopping, employment or leisure.
1.8	The Council Transport Policy advocates the provision of alternatives to private vehicle use that could be increasingly sustainable, efficient and comfortable. The Policy also acts as a means of promoting awareness of the need for more efficient use of private vehicles highlighting that good management of the demand for private transportation is essential.
1.9	It should also be noted that several studies/projects have already been completed (as referenced above) on the current situation and various metrics are available. Suitable reference should be made to these. Where practicable, this information will be made available to the successful consultant. Engagement with key stakeholders is also critical throughout this study.

2	Key Issues
2.1	To both minimise any negative impacts and identify any positive opportunities for Belfast's retail and leisure industries, as a result of better transport management, a sustainable City Access Strategy and plan should be developed. This should address the following objectives:
2.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ensure the accessibility offered by the transport system is available to all; – Improve safety and security; – Reduce air and noise pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption; – Improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the transportation of persons and goods; and – Contribute to enhancing the attractiveness and quality of the urban environment and urban design
2.3	In terms of content, a City Access Strategy should consider the factors in the following diagram. Getting the right balance between these factors will improve the quality of life of people living in the city whilst also contributing to the economic viability of the city.

2.4



2.5 To develop a City Access Strategy and plan will require two main stages.

2.6 Stage 1

A baseline study to map the current situation and information sources. This will include identification of key stakeholders, existing transport & accessibility strategies and a review of current provision alongside any recent or planned interventions within the city. It is likely to include:

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- Identification of relevant existing information sources and their ownership/accessibility
- Analysis of the current and future trends for transport demand and provision together with the physical characteristics of the city infrastructure. This will be captured using appropriate mapping representation. Aspects to consider include:
 - Identification of the city's key connection hubs and strategic centres, and the major transport corridors.
 - The current capacity of the existing transport network and infrastructure (road, parking, bus and rail, etc). A review and analysis of the current investment and service provision in these areas.
 - Parking availability, usage and location and the impact of subsidised or free public sector parking.
 - Mobility options and identification of the means of getting around the city, especially the city centre area.
 - Identifying gaps in relation to the current investment, service provision, legislative controls, policy positions and other arrangements in place.
 - Identification of appropriate benchmarking assessment of the city performance in terms of accessibility and mobility.

2.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Engaging with key stakeholders and clearly identifying their concerns/issues and suggestions for solutions. In particular it should consider concerns over: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – accessibility and mobility; – congestions (both in terms of typical congestion levels and travel time variability); – the availability of parking (short and long term) including issues of pricing – and any potential implications for the different economic sectors within the city; and – exploration of the potential environmental and social impacts.
2.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Analysis of the nature and extent of the current challenges and including the identification of any underlying causes. – Review and analysis of best practice and case studies (both within Europe and internationally).
2.10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Initial identification of potential actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – that are within the remit of the Council to pursue. – that key partners can implement utilising existing legislative and statutory frameworks. – that can only be addressed in the longer term with changes to these statutory frameworks, or with significant investment, or via policy shifts such as opportunities to further integrate land use and transit through a shared plan or strategy.
2.11	<p><u>Stage 2</u> On the basis of the information derived at stage 1, this stage should explore the potential options for improvements and develop a City Access plan for the city. It is likely to include:</p>
2.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Exploration of the more realistic opportunities to determine the implications for implementing them, taking account of the strategic, legislative and financial context. Opportunities may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Improving traffic operation, or better demand management (peak travel periods) to deliver predictable travel times, and reduce congestion on main roads. – Public transport fare prices. – Parking management and parking supply, allocation and pricing. Re-designating areas for parking. – Congestion charges. – Improving public transport. – Introducing Access Management (restrict vehicle access to certain zones), linked to a set of complementary measures such as those above. – Mobility Management and alternative transport arrangements such as Active Travel. – Modify the existing infrastructure. – Introducing new infrastructure.
2.13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identification of the key policy levers to aid the introduction of ideas such as those listed above.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Development of key performance indicators to be able to monitor and manage the issues and problems identified in Stage 1. – Further engagement of key stakeholders to discuss and refine potential solutions.
2.14	<u>Optional follow on Stage</u> or additional commission: On the basis of the information derived at stages 1 and 2, Committee may consider a third stage to determine the most appropriate options to inform a longer term, comprehensive strategy.
2.15	<p>This stage would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Carrying out a full options appraisal including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – an assessment of the positive and negative impacts; – monetary and non-monetary costs (initial investment and any ongoing costs); – benefits and risks for the various options; and – how they address the issues and problems highlighted in Stage 1. – Recommending the elements which could be introduced in the shorter term and those which should be incorporated within a long term strategy. – Proposals on how any associated costs could be funded.
2.16	The work in all stages would need to be developed with input from key stakeholders such as the Department for Regional Development (DRD); Translink (Metro, NI Railways, and Ulsterbus); private operators and parking providers; port and airport operators; tourism providers; local businesses; enforcement agencies and the public. It should also be supported by reference to existing good practice and take account of existing mechanisms for the collection of data and monitoring of associated local impacts.
2.17	It is essential that the recommendations made are developed within the strategic context of city-wide regeneration and development plans. This includes the Belfast MasterPlan, the various travel plans, the Tourism Framework, the Investment Programme, etc.
2.18	In common with many other cities, Belfast has a range of transportation challenges. Any strategy to address them needs to achieve the right balance between the many competing demands for road space and public realm in the city centre. Accessibility is a key factor in maintaining effective growth of the city. Accommodating everyone’s requirements and the competing demands requires an objective approach informed by a robust set of key indicators or data.
2.19	It is likely that some of the recommendations made may only be driven forward at the level of the NI Assembly. However, this should not constrain the recommendations being proposed especially if they will encourage people into the city and support our local businesses.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	We estimate that the work outlined in the two stages could be delivered for approximately £30,000 from existing budgets. It is possible that there will be cost implications associated with implementing the subsequent strategy. Any recommendations in the strategy will be subject to a full cost/benefit analysis for committee consideration.

3.2	There are some staff resource commitments in terms of managing the successful sub-contractor. These are estimated at approximately 15-20 staff days.
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4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	There are no equality and good relations issues with regard to commissioning the work. However any recommendation for an access strategy will need to be screened and, if necessary, impact assessed particular with regard to disabled access into the city.

5	Recommendations
5.1	Committee are asked to approve a budget allocation of £30,000 from existing budgets to commission the work outlined in stages 1 & 2.

6	Decision Tracking
It is hoped that the recommendations will be brought to committee for consideration six months after approval to proceed.	