

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 28th November, 2018

SPECIAL MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Graham (Deputy Chairperson) (in the Chair); Aldermen Haire, Kingston and McGimpsey; and Councillors Beattie, Corr, Dudgeon, Hussey, Johnston, and O'Hara.

Also attended: Alderman Convery and Councillor Boyle.

In attendance: Mr. A. Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy; Mrs. C. Reynolds, City Regeneration and Development Lead Officer; Ms. A. Doherty, Planning and Transport Officer; and Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of the Chairperson (Councillor Lyons), the High Sheriff (Councillor Howard) and Councillors Baker, Dorrian, Mullan, O'Donnell and O'Neill.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Transportation Issues in the City Centre

The Committee was reminded that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 14th November, had agreed that a special meeting be held, to which representatives of the Department for Infrastructure, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and Translink would be invited, to discuss transportation issues in the City centre, following the recent fire in Bank Buildings.

The City Regeneration and Development Lead Officer reviewed the background to those issues, following which the Chairperson welcomed the following representatives:

Department for Infrastructure

- Mr. K. Monaghan, Divisional Roads Manager, Eastern Division;
- Mr. C De Burca, Director of Dfi Roads Transport Projects and Business Services;

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- Mr. G. Doherty, Section Engineer, Belfast South; and
- Mr. G. Miskimmin, Deputy Section Engineer, Belfast North

Police Service of Northern Ireland

- Inspector David Gibson

Translink

- Mr. C. Conway, Chief Executive; and
- Mr. D. Bannon, Belfast Area Manager.

Mr. Bannon informed the Committee that, as a consequence of the Bank Buildings fire, Translink had been required to re-route a large number of its services in and around the City centre, which had coincided with the launch of its Glider service. He reported that there were now an additional sixty vehicles per hour operating via Chichester Street, High Street and North Street and that, whilst that diversionary route was working well, in terms of delivering passengers close to, for example, Castle Court, Translink now needed to plan for service provision in the medium to long term, given that Royal Avenue was unlikely to open to traffic until April at the earliest. He then referred to the funding which had been secured from the Department for Infrastructure to deliver a high impact festive travel campaign and confirmed that, since its launch, there had been a welcome increase in passenger numbers travelling into the City centre.

Mr. Conway reported that, whilst passengers were now becoming accustomed to the new routes and temporary stops, there were still some issues to be addressed, such as adjustments to timetables. He reiterated the point which had been made by Mr. Bannon around the need for Royal Avenue to be re-opened to traffic as a matter of urgency and confirmed that in the longer term, Translink would, if Castle Street were to be closed for an extended period, be required to identify other routes in which to leave the City.

Mr. Monaghan confirmed that the Department for Infrastructure had, in the immediate aftermath of the Bank Buildings fire, worked with other agencies and businesses to develop an access and loading plan for the City centre. He reported that, whilst the plan was working well in the main, there were some issues, particularly around Bank Square and Castle Street, which officers from a number of agencies were working to address. He confirmed that the imminent opening of the Primark store in Commonwealth House and increased conservation-led activity around the Bank Buildings would place additional demands on the plan and that the Department for Infrastructure would be working to meet the various needs of all stakeholders. He concluded by outlining the arrangements which had been put in place to facilitate tour bus operators and by pointing out that Primark had now assumed, by way of consents, responsibility for the control of the area located within the security cordon.

Inspector Gibson reminded the Committee that a significant amount of work had been undertaken by the various agencies to assist the Police Service of Northern Ireland

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in and around the City centre, such as the re-painting of road markings, and he thanked them for their contribution. He highlighted the fact that the Police Service had been using social media to raise awareness of the new transport routes and road safety enforcement and stated that there had not, as far as he was aware, been any major issues since the new routes had been introduced.

The Translink representatives then addressed a number of issues which had been raised by Members, particularly around congestion and air quality concerns in Chichester Street, late night services, reliability on certain routes and the need for greater communication generally.

Mr. Conway explained that additional services would be provided in the lead up to Christmas and that Metro, Goldline and rail services would be operating at weekends until midnight. He confirmed that recent delays on some routes had been a knock-on effect of collisions in other parts of the City and that every effort was made to ensure that customers were provided with up-to-date information in such circumstances and generally.

Mr. Bannon pointed out that the number of buses using Chichester Street had doubled since the Bank Buildings fire and that he had, as a precaution, requested the Council to undertake air quality monitoring in that area. He added that the new Glider buses utilised the cleanest available propulsion technology, which should improve air quality across the City in the longer term.

The representatives were thanked by the Chairperson, following which Messrs. Conway and Bannon and Inspector Gibson left the meeting.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

DfI Roads Service Autumn Report

Mr. Monaghan submitted for the Committee's consideration the Department for Infrastructure Roads Service's Autumn Report, which outlined the work undertaken by the Roads Service's Eastern Division within the Council area during 2018/2019.

In relation to major works, he reported that the York Street Interchange scheme remained a high priority, given that it would address a major bottleneck on the strategic road network. New bus lanes were being constructed currently on the M1 and M2 motorways, which would provide an additional 4.6 kilometres and 2.2 kilometres, respectively. He then provided an update on the two minor works schemes, at Barnett's Road, which was progressing, and at the Blacks Road/M1 Junction 3, which was programmed, and on the maintenance of various structures across the City. The Committee's attention was then drawn to the Division's work around collision remedial schemes, traffic schemes, pedestrian measures, traffic signs, carriageway markings/resurfacing and street lighting. He then highlighted the wide programme of cycle improvement measures which had been implemented, such as the widening of the Comber Greenway, and the various schemes which were being planned. He added that the sole traffic calming scheme which had been programmed for the period, at Tennent Street, had been withdrawn, due to objections from the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

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A Member then drew to Mr. Monaghan's attention to the need to undertake resurfacing in Sydney Street West and Abbeydale Crescent, Drive and Parade, and in the Lower Shankill area, including Shankill Parade, and suggested that traffic management measures should be introduced at the Lanark Way/Springfield Road junction. Other Members highlighted the need for traffic calming measures in Glasvey Drive, for gullies to be emptied on a Sunday due to the presence of parked vehicles at other times and difficulties with the Albertbridge Road/Templemore Avenue junction leaving the City.

Mr. Monaghan confirmed that issues with the material to be used to resurface Sydney Street West and Abbeydale Crescent/Drive had now been resolved and that consideration would be given to including Abbeydale Parade in that scheme. He undertook to examine the Lanark Way/Springfield Road junction and to advise the Member of the outcome. He pointed out that only up to four traffic calming schemes were delivered each year and that, since Glasvey Drive was located at number forty-three on the current list of around 500 streets, it was unlikely to be actioned for the foreseeable future. In relation to gully cleaning, Mr. Monaghan stated that additional funding had become available for routine work, some of which could potentially be utilised for gully emptying, and he invited the Member to identify gullies in his area. It was pointed out that, despite the Roads Service on occasions issuing flyers informing residents of their intention to cleanse gullies on a Sunday in streets where accessibility was an issue, teams had still encountered issues with parked vehicles. Finally, he confirmed that the Albertbridge Road/Templemore Avenue junction had been configured in such a way as to allow Glider buses priority access.

Mr. De Burca informed the Committee that the Belfast Rapid Transport Glider service had been launched on 3rd September and that, since then, there had been an increase of 33,000 passenger journeys per week on the Glider routes. Reliability and punctuality had since risen to 99% and 94%, respectively which, he pointed out, was due to a high level of enforcement activity around clearways and bus lanes. The Glider fleet was demonstrating a 10% to 40% improvement in fuel efficiency, when compared to other Metro buses, and air quality emissions had also improved by 90% on Glider routes.

He reported that all thirty of the Glider vehicles had now been delivered and that an additional two vehicles would be acquired early in 2019. All 102 halts, complete with ticket machines, validators and real time passenger information screens, were now operational and the road infrastructure was now complete. He outlined the issues which had delayed the opening of the Colin Transport Hub and confirmed that it was anticipated that it would be operational by the end of January. Mr. De Burca concluded by referring to the proposed extension of the rapid transit scheme to the north and south of the City and confirmed that the routes which were being recommended would be subject to a full business case and transport modelling.

The representatives were thanked by the Chairperson and, with the exception of Mr. Monaghan, who remained for the subsequent item on the Belfast Bicycle Network Plan, they left the meeting.

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The Committee noted the information contained within the Department for Infrastructure Roads Service's Autumn Report, a copy of which is available [here](#).

Belfast Bicycle Network Plan

The Planning and Transport Officer submitted for the Committee's consideration the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To provide background and outline some of the issues to consider in the context of the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) presentation on the implementation of the Belfast Bicycle Network Plan.

2.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that the Committee notes the background and consider the issues in respect of the implementation of the Bicycle Network Plan including opportunities for joint action with the DfI Cycling Unit.

3.0 Main Report

Belfast Bicycle Network Plan

3.1 The Council responded to the public consultation on the Draft Belfast Bicycle Network Plan in March 2017, highlighting the following issues:

- the need for investment and clarification on the resources available to implement the plan within the proposed timeframes;**
- the omission from the draft Plan of a number of the main arterial routes which could service high density residential areas from the primary network in particular in west Belfast, south Belfast and north Belfast; and**
- identification of opportunities to improve connections to the existing greenways supporting the development of a network in the East of the city.**

3.2 It is recognised that DfI has made some progress on developing the cycling network in the City centre, however, there remains a lack of significant progress on establishing a coherent bicycle network city-wide. There is a need for convenient and safe cycling infrastructure linking the city centre to the north, west and south of the city. Further

investment is also required to maximise opportunities around the development of greenways such as the Comber and Connswater Greenway and develop new greenways.

- 3.3 The implementation of the Belfast Bicycle Network Plan would indicate a contribution to delivering a number of the outcomes of the Belfast Agenda in particular ‘Belfast is a vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally sustainable city’. An indicator of this outcome is to increase ‘the percentage of all journeys which are made by walking, cycling or public transport’. It is also in line with the emerging policy in the Local Development Plan, draft Plan Strategy to promote active travel and the Green and Blue Infrastructure plan. It is suggested that the following issues and initial priority areas (in Bold) are raised with Dfl for consideration.

A Community Greenway Route to Service the West of the City.

- 3.4 There is a lack of cycling infrastructure for west Belfast, the main option remains that of using the bus lanes to connect with the city centre and other networks. The alignment of a proposed greenway route could link the Transport Hub and Belfast City Centre along the busway to the Westlink and Bog Meadows. This connection could be extended alongside the M1 Motorway corridor to connect with the Lagan Towpath and Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park to the south. The proposed route and connections has the potential to link high density residential areas in the west of the city to the Lagan Towpath and the city centre. It is considered that it would provide a safer environment in which to encourage greater uptake of cycling
- 3.5 It is worth noting the council’s PEACE IV Connecting open spaces project, which seeks to create a pathway and cycleway network (approx. 10km) to connect communities across west Belfast, is currently in progress (Development stage). At a project level Property and Projects Department has initiated engagement with Dfl.

South/Southeast Belfast linking to proposed Gasworks Bridge and Towpath.

- 3.6 Cyclists currently share the bus lane on the Ormeau Road which is operational between 7.30 a.m. to 9.30 a.m. and 3.30 pm to 6.00 p.m. Monday to Friday. The bus lane runs in both directions but is not continuous and heavily used. There is a shared path section from Park Road to the Ormeau Bridge and an advisory cycle lane on the Ravenhill Road (which experiences a high level of parking outside the urban clearway

restricted times). A high quality dedicated route along the Ormeau Road or Ravenhill Road would link to the towpath and National cycle route and potentially a Gasworks bridge. The ability to link the city centre to the Ormeau Park area through a new Gasworks Bridge would establish a high quality active travel route for pedestrians and cyclists who live and work in the city centre.

South West Belfast

- 3.7 The draft Belfast Bicycle Network plan includes a Southwest Route 5 which links Castle Junction to Finaghy Road North utilising the Boucher Road industrial estate. However, the potential to improve cycle infrastructure along the Lisburn and Malone Roads which service high density residential areas has been omitted and should also be considered as part of a wider network.

North Belfast

- 3.8 The draft Belfast Bicycle Network Plan identifies the North Route 8 which links the City Hall to Gray's Lane and to Whiteabbey. Similar to other areas in Belfast cyclists currently use the bus lanes (Antrim and Shore Road). The development of Route 8 could greatly improve opportunities for cycling in north Belfast. Linkages though to the new York Street bridge as part of the York Street Interchange project should also be included linking into the city centre and Ulster University Belfast campus in both directions.

East Belfast - The Sydenham Greenway

- 3.9 There is an opportunity to connect the existing Comber Greenway and Connswater Community Greenway with the North Down Coastal Path at Holywood. This could provide a link to the City Airport, Harbour Estate, D5 and the proposed park and ride facility at Tillysburn. This proposal would deliver elements of the Green and Blue infrastructure plan (as part of the ongoing Local Development Plan work) to consider routes and links along green corridors and rivers which can be used to promote cycling and walking.
- 3.10 For information a copy of the draft Belfast Network Plan and consultation report can be assessed by using this web link to the DfI site: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/consultations/draft-belfast-bicycle-network-2017-consultation>

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.11 There would be resource implications associated with the implementation of the bicycle network proposals if carried out in partnership with DfI which would need to be assessed at project development stage and brought back for committee consideration.**

Equality or Good Relations Implications

- 3.12 No specific equality or good relations implications.”**

The Planning and Transport Officer provided an overview of the report and stated that Mr. A. Grieve, Safe and Sustainable Travel Division, Department for Infrastructure, and Mr. J. Hobbs, NI Greenways, were in attendance in order to comment on the Plan.

Mr. Grieve explained that the Department for Infrastructure’s public consultation on the Belfast Bicycle Network Plan had taken place over a three-month period, commencing in early 2017. He reported that over two hundred written responses had been submitted, including one from the Council, with the majority of those confirming support for the proposed bicycle network, wishing to see it implemented as the earliest opportunity and expressing concern at the lack of cycle paths along many of the arterial routes. It was evident also that the North and West of the City faced particular challenges in relation to developing cycling infrastructure and that there were areas where cycle use was particularly low. That had been emphasised further by work which had been undertaken by the Department for Infrastructure and Urban Villages in the Collin area, which had led to walking and cycling studies being commissioned for the North and West of the City. Those studies would, he indicated, inform the overall development of the cycling network.

He confirmed that the comments which had been made by the Council and other stakeholders, specifically around the need to adapt more arterial routes in the South and East of the City for cycling, to identify more traffic-free ‘greenway’ routes and to improve connections to existing routes, would be used in the development of the final bicycle network. In terms of funding, which had been raised by the Council, Mr. Grieve stated that it was hoped that some additional resources would be made available to progress the development of the plan.

Mr. Grieve and Mr. Monaghan then clarified a number of points which had been raised by the Committee.

Mr. Hobbs informed the Members that he had been involved with Greenways NI for the past seven years and was the editor of the Bikefast website, which focused upon everyday cycling issues in Belfast. He reported that, in the previous year, he had written a series of articles in support of objections to the Belfast Bicycle Network Plan and that those had been referenced in approximately 41% of the two hundred odd responses to the Department for Infrastructure’s public consultation. He highlighted a number of key issues which needed to be given greater consideration in the context of the proposed

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network plan around, for example, traffic congestion and childhood obesity, and stated that, unless the current under investment in infrastructure was significantly addressed and safe and attractive cycling routes were provided, the proposed plan would have limited success. He drew the Members' attention to cycling initiatives being delivered in cities such as London and Manchester and stressed that the Council had a significant role to play by providing cycling infrastructures within its open spaces, such as the Giant's Park, and by lobbying for the Gasworks bridge to be prioritised.

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy explained that the Department for Infrastructure was engaged in discussions with the Council around the Local Development Plan and how the Council would meet its infrastructure requirements, given that the number of people, jobs and housing would be expanding over the coming years. He added that the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy, which was being implementing currently, permitted the Council to increase cycling provision within the City.

Mr. Hobbs then addressed a number of points which had been raised by the Members and, together with Mr. Grieve and Mr. Monaghan, was thanked by the Chairperson.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and that it would receive further updates as the Belfast Bicycle Network Plan was developed.

Chairperson