

MEETING OF THE BERKSHIRE LOCAL TRANSPORT BODY (BLTB) – THURSDAY 14 JULY 2022

CONTACT OFFICER: Alison Webster, Chief Executive, Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Item 8: One Year Evaluation Reports

Purpose of Report

1. At your meeting in March 2017, you approved guidance for the preparation of one- and five-year-on impact reports for BLTB funded local transport schemes. It has been decided to trial a less intensive approach towards the impact reports being considered at this meeting to reflect the reduction in reporting requirements from government whilst still demonstrating the value of investment in infrastructure.
2. This report introduces the one-year impact report for the following schemes
 - Scheme 2.04 – Arborfield Cross Relief Road
 - Scheme 2.26 – Wokingham: Winnersh Relief Road Ph2
 - Scheme 2.43 – Wokingham: Barkham Bridge
 - Scheme 2.44 – Reading Buses: Completing the Connection

Recommendation

3. You are recommended to note the revised evaluation process and the reports from the scheme promoter and the LEP conclusions.

Supporting Information

4. The LEP has a well-established and agreed process for the monitoring and evaluation of BLTB funded local transport schemes, which requires scheme promoters to produce one- and five-year-on post completion monitoring reports for each of their schemes. To date the process has also required these reports to be reviewed by the independent assessor and reported to the BLTB.
5. Since the LEP is unlikely to be overseeing significant capital funding going forward it was considered an appropriate time to review the monitoring and evaluation process to ensure that it remains proportionate and fit for purpose.
6. Historically, we have used these reports to feed into our regular reporting to central Government but with the conclusion of the LGF Programme the level of detail required has reduced. The LEP is still required to report back on outputs but traditionally the timing of the evaluations has not supported this process, which is monitored through regular reviews with transport officer. Nevertheless, these evaluations remain valuable to help us demonstrate the value of our investment and to inform future priorities.
7. For this round of 1-year evaluations we have therefore trialled a less prescriptive approach for the format and detail of the reports and enabled the scheme promoter to tailor the reports to their own needs and make them directly relevant to supporting investment decisions going forwards.
8. At the same time the contract with the consultants who have undertaken the independent review has reached an end. Rather than renew it at this stage, we have brought the process in-house with LEP officers summarising the key outputs of the review and taking forward the lessons learned. Roughly £41,000 has been allocated from the Business Rates Retention Pilot funding to pay for the

independent assessment of the 1 and 5 year evaluations. It is proposed that this funding be retained until the November BLTB meeting when the future role will be agreed.

9. The reports submitted by each of the scheme promoters continue to summarise the outcomes of the monitoring and evaluation undertaken following the completion of the schemes. The analysis gives an initial indication whether a scheme has been successful in achieving the related aims and objectives set and agreed at the start of the scheme development. It also seeks to demonstrate that the funding obtained has provided value for money and that any lessons learnt are captured as evidence to inform future decision making. In particular the assessments focus on:
 - Scheme build;
 - Delivered scheme;
 - Costs;
 - Scheme objectives; and
 - Impacts on the economy

Arborfield Cross Relief Road (ACRR)

10. Wokingham Borough Council received £24m in DfT grant towards the cost of this £28.3m scheme. The ACRR was a new road built to seek to mitigate the impact on the A327 from a range of developments in the area, by providing additional capacity on the road network. Due to the value of funding applied to this project its management was retained by DfT, with the LEP and BLTB carrying out an oversight role only.
11. The key strategic objectives were to unlock planned development of 2700 dwellings, minimise adverse impact and improve health outcomes. It sought to achieve this by reducing the growth in traffic flows and transport related emissions and noise at key locations and encouraging the use of active modes.
12. In assessing the delivery and effectiveness of the scheme, a number of metrics were identified through which the delivery and performance of the scheme could be assessed. The assessment has confirmed that in terms of scheme delivery all of the key features of the scheme have been delivered, other than certain public realm improvements that are due to be completed in 2022. The scheme was delivered to budget with a minor overspend of £63,473 (0.22% of the estimated total cost) and hence not considered a substantial change given the scale of the scheme.
13. At a high-level, most of the key milestones were met with the detailed design being completed ahead of schedule. The road opened in November 2020, which was approximately 6 months behind schedule, which was due primarily to drainage issues identified whilst on site.
14. In terms of the economic impact of the scheme this has been assessed by monitoring the delivery of employment and residential property in the local area. Furthermore, the green bridge element of this project won the innovation category of this year's Construction Industry Research and Information Association BIG Biodiversity Challenge Awards, which celebrates projects with at least one element that benefits wildlife and habitats
15. In terms of housing building rates, data was available for 2020/2021. This showed that the total number of houses constructed was 107 with a further 212 under construction. This fell 29 short of the total permitted house building rates (348), but still represented 92%. It was likely that housing building rates were not as prevalent during 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, additionally, Brexit created uncertainty in the economy and led to issues with the labour market.

16. The one-year on impact report of the Arborfield Cross Relief Road project is attached at Appendix 1.

Winnersh Relief Road Phase 2 (WRR)

17. Wokingham Borough Council received £6.3m LEP funding through the Business Rates Retention Pilot Fund towards the cost of this £8.04m scheme. The WRR was a new road built to improve traffic capacity and alleviate existing congestion through Winnersh by means of the provision of an alternate route for non-local traffic travelling through the area. Phase 2 of the Relief Road was opened for traffic in May 2021, whilst final scheme completion date was September 2021. Phase 1 was completed previously and funded by the developer.
18. The key strategic objectives of the scheme were to reduce existing and future peak hour congestion and journey times, facilitate the Hatch Farm Dairies housing development, cater for traffic generated by other new housing developments and encourage active transport through provision of cycle lanes and footpaths.
19. In assessing the delivery and effectiveness of the scheme, a number of metrics were identified through which the delivery and performance of the scheme could be assessed. The assessment has confirmed that in terms of scheme delivery all of the key features of the scheme have been delivered.
20. In terms of the cost of Phase 2 of the scheme, the outturn costs are not currently available because the Phase 2 construction works were combined with the West of Forest Road scheme. As a result, individual costs for each scheme will not be available until the cost of the two schemes have been disaggregated, so this information will be re-evaluated in the 5-year post scheme report.
21. At a high-level, whilst many key milestones were met the full opening of the scheme to traffic was a year behind the original programme. The key reasons and lessons learnt from this were that working within close proximity to and interface with National Highways required close management and regular communication to ensure both parties could deliver their contracted work on time. In addition, there were a number of issues related to drainage and utility diversion, that were not foreseen at the start of the scheme, that led to delays in delivery. Finally keeping the road open for public use, whilst desirable to minimise disruption, resulted in tight phasing of works and further delays.
22. The impact of scheme upon travel demand and journey time reliability in and around Winnersh has been analysed using several datasets, including traffic counts, pedestrian and cycle counts and journey time reliability surveys. Initial conclusions are that the Relief Road has reduced congestion on arterial routes around Winnersh such as the A329. With total traffic at one monitoring site reducing from 14% to 10% since the completion of the scheme. However, it should be noted that this scheme was constructed during the Covid-19 pandemic and as a result, the pre- and post-scheme traffic volumes recorded may not be directly comparable. This will be reassessed in the 5-year evaluation report.
23. With respect to cycling there were only a limited number of sites where comparable cycling data could be collected. Whilst there remains a high level of cycling, this limited data suggests there have been some reductions in cycle volumes, however this can be explained in part as off-road cyclists were excluded from the after survey and again cycle volumes may have been impacted by

the changes in travel patterns caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. This will also be revisited in the 5-year evaluation.

24. Journey time unreliability due to congestion was identified within the Business Case as a key contributing factor towards the development of the WRR. Some data has been collected and further data will be included in the 5-year report. However, at this stage due to IT issues, there is no direct comparison available, but this will be submitted to the LEP as soon as possible.
25. In terms of the economic impact of the scheme this has been assessed by monitoring the delivery of residential property in the local area. The scheme has helped to facilitate the Hatch Farm Dairies housing development. By the end of 2021/22, 409 of the 433 total permitted dwellings have been built. The final 24 dwellings are due to be completed during 2022/23. This data highlights the continued provision of housing in the local area and contributes towards the successful delivery of this scheme objective.
26. The one-year on impact report of the Winnersh Relief Road Phase 2 project is attached at Appendix 2.

Barkham Bridge

27. Wokingham Borough Council received £4.2m LEP funding from the Local Growth Fund towards the cost of this £7.7m scheme. The B3349 Barkham Bridge scheme involved the construction of a new road bridge over the Barkham Brook, with the original single-lane bridge retained as a pedestrian and cyclist route. This removed the existing bottleneck by facilitating continuous two-way traffic over the Barkham Brook minimising further delays, providing safer facilities for cyclists and pedestrians as well as reducing the impact of increased traffic from major developments around the area.
28. The key strategic objectives of the scheme were to reduce peak hour journey times, support housing delivery, increase throughput of traffic across the bridge and increase the number of cyclist and pedestrians. In assessing the delivery and effectiveness of the scheme, a number of metrics were identified through which the delivery and performance of the scheme could be assessed.
29. Construction of the bridge began on programme in Autumn 2019 and was completed in March 2021, just a month behind programme, despite issues caused by Virgin Media. Overall contractor performance was considered to be good, with the build quality and management of a high standard.
30. In terms of the cost of the scheme, the predicted outturn figure is currently £8.2m, which is £443,000 above budget, representing a 5.7% increase. The forecast project cost increase was caused by several factors, the main one was a compensation event as a result of the Virgin Media delay causing contractor delay; it is hoped that this funding can be recovered.
31. Overall, initial indications are that the scheme has offered actual and potential benefits to network users, commuters, and residents, especially through the provision of significantly reduced journey times. The new bridge layout accommodates two-way traffic and initial survey results show significant journey time reductions on all routes that use Barkham Bridge. These range between 5% and 44% exceeded the target of achieving up to a 10% reduction in one or both peak hour journey times set out in the business case.

32. Initial analysis also shows the scheme has supported local housing delivery. In 2020/2021 period the total number of houses constructed (107) and under construction (241) matched the planned house build rate (348). Therefore, the scheme has achieved its target output of supporting a housing build rate within 10% of planned build rates within the first year of the scheme opening. As the scheme is aimed at supporting the 2026 local plan housing delivery the full benefits will only be realised at the end of this period. The house build out rate will continue to be monitored and reviewed again during the 5-year post scheme evaluation.
33. Looking at travel demand there has been a 15% increase in eastbound flows and 33% increase in westbound flows in the AM peak hour, but in contrast a 7% and 22% decrease during the evening peak. This means the scheme has exceeded its target to increase throughput up to 25 to 30% in the AM peak hour one year after scheme opening, but not met the target in the PM peak. This will be continued to be reviewed in the 5-year evaluation.
34. There was no pre-scheme data for cyclist and pedestrian flows, but post scheme data has been collected and this will be continually monitored from now on, to help demonstrate increased uptake of sustainable modes on the corridor.
35. The one-year on impact report of the Barkham Bridge project is attached at Appendix 3.

Reading Buses: Completing the Connection

36. Reading Buses received £1.5m LEP funding from the Local Growth Fund towards the cost of this scheme. This represented the total capital cost with Reading Buses' contribution being £1.045m towards running costs associated with the substantially enhanced RTI system and ticketing facility, covering five financial years. The project consisted of the following elements:
 - A core, multi-operator Real Time Information (RTI) system.
 - Three bus departure screens at rail stations – two at Reading and one at Newbury.
 - Audio-visual customer information installations on 51 buses
 - An online travel shop - enabling smart travel via app or smartcard.
37. The strategic objectives for the scheme were to support and drive further economic growth in the local area; enable and encourage use of local buses instead of private vehicles; enable and encourage easy interchange between public transport modes, and other sustainable modes; Make live information available to passengers and allow personalised purchase of mobile or smartcard-based tickets.
38. It was anticipated that this investment by the LEP would lead to higher passenger satisfaction with bus travel in the region; more useful management information on bus service performance to help refine timetables to reflect real life traffic conditions; more use of buses by passengers who currently struggle with audio or visual impairments; less use of cash transactions and more use of 'smart' ticketing to speed up bus boarding times and a modal shift from the private car to the bus.
39. The various RTI elements of the project were delivered on time and to budget between October 2020 and April 2021. The launch of the customer-facing system was delayed due to government Covid travel advice and when restrictions started to relax in September 2021, new features of the shop were used to issue a free day ticket voucher to all customers. The launch of the smartcard element of the shop was postponed until restrictions had eased so that a full communications campaign could be undertaken without causing disruption to travel patterns. In the meantime, the

opportunity was taken by Reading Buses to add further enhancements to the scope of the project (at their own cost) for a launch during 2022. This approach was sensible and ensured maximum impact and take up of the new products

40. In terms of achieving the objectives, it had been intended to use Transport Focus surveys to measure passenger satisfaction surveys. However, due to the pandemic and a significant drop in the numbers of people using public transport, the bus passenger survey was paused. Nevertheless, feedback from users of the new App has been very positive and there was strong take-up of the free travel promotion with 20,000 tickets claimed.
41. Data collected through the RTI system has proved invaluable in replanning the combined networks in response to the significant changes to travel patterns and traffic conditions during the pandemic. This has helped contribute to improved start point punctuality from 89.4% in 2018-19 to 93.4% in 2021-22, and mid-points from 78.2% to 85.2%.
42. It was expected to be able to measure modal shift as part of the project, but with Covid having a major impact on travel patterns and initial advice not to travel, it has not possible to identify a change in patronage that could be linked to the deployment of the improved systems funded by this project, although the aim to help improve confidence in using public transport across the Thames Valley region directly aligns with the post-pandemic need to rebuild.
43. One of the expected outcomes from allowing personalised purchase of mobile or smartcard-based tickets was to reduce the amount of on-bus cash transactions to speed up journey times and to reduce the risk of Covid19 transmission. Initial analysis shows that the percentage of cash transactions has reduced by 32% from an overall percentage of 22% to 15%.
44. Overall, the LEP would agree with the conclusion of the analysis that despite the challenges of Covid-19, this was a successful project, delivered on-budget and largely on-time. Such projects are highly deliverable and give real benefits to passengers, and over time (post-Covid) will encouraging a modal shift back to public transport.
45. The one-year on impact report of the Reading Buses: Completing the Connection project is attached at Appendix 4.