

HCC LTP4 TRANSPORT CONSULTATION: KEY POINTS BY HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

However thoughtful LTP4 undoubtedly is, more sustainable solutions can be devised. We make practical suggestions on three issues of county-wide importance: east-west rapid transport; the Hertford bypass proposal; and the imminent closure of part of the Hertford Loop railway.

A414 EAST-WEST RAPID TRANSPORT

2. Recognising the “relatively poor east-west connections” across the county, HCC proposes a ‘bus rapid transport’ scheme. However, any new scheme needs to appeal strongly to the public, to tempt people out of their cars. Piecemeal bus improvements are unlikely to do that. A tramway would be more expensive but could be more cost-effective. Lord Salisbury’s Gascoyne Cecil Estates recently called for a tramway from St Albans to Hertford, via Hatfield and Welwyn (*Transport for Hatfield and Beyond in Central Herts*, 2016). As it notes, “Trams make towns and cities more pleasant places by reducing road traffic by up to 14%: the six tram systems that exist in England alone cut 22 million car journeys each year across Sheffield, Nottingham, Manchester, West Midlands, Croydon and Blackpool.” Reg Harman has suggested a longer option, between Broxbourne and Watford, using existing railway branch lines at either end; its main/central section is for Hertford to St Albans, and it could be linked both to Harlow and Hemel Hempstead. (‘Transit through the Metropolitan Green Belt’, in *Tramways and Urban Transit*, September 2016.) This latter option would cost around £1 billion (at £20 million per kilometre).

3. That high cost needs to be put in context. The ‘official’ options proposed in LTP4, for enhancing the A414, would cost a similar amount. The latest estimate for the Hertford bypass, as discussed within HCC, is around £200 million, while two motorway junctions cost some £250 million each. These figures total £700 million, to which would need to be added other contemplated improvements: conceivably a further £300 million. In effect, HCC is looking to spend around £1 billion on upgrading the A414, which would simply facilitate more long-distance car and lorry traffic, besides causing further congestion and pollution elsewhere, away from the key junctions/improvements. Yet a tramway would enhance access to Hertford and other town centres while reducing car traffic and pollution from vehicles.

HERTFORD BYPASS

4. The fact that the LTP4 proposal for a Hertford bypass would cost some £200 million means that it involves “further growth of Hertford beyond that currently included in the emerging East Herts Local Plan.” LTP4 seems simply to assume that enabling Hertford to grow would be a good thing. But this is not self-evident. An alternative strategy would be to retain Hertford as a pleasant market town of character, and accommodate the additional

housing and business needs of the region in other parts of the County or beyond. Hertford at its present size has a distinctive character which would be lost if it were drastically extended outwards.

5. There is an alternative option. LTP4 notes that a key lesson from research is that reductions in single occupancy car use were more achievable when accompanied by reductions in parking spaces combined with sustainable transport promotion. Indeed, LTP4 even cites a Hertfordshire case study, at Warner Brothers Studios, near Watford, where this crucial combination led to the proportion of visitors arriving by car reducing from 80% to 50% between 2012 and 2015, while the proportion of staff arrivals by single occupancy car fell from 88% to 61%.

6. Currently, HCC has done little to develop these options for its own staff, by way of travel plan. County Hall has by far the largest car park in Hertford, with well over a thousand spaces: more than in all the public car parks in central Hertford put together. It is quite happy to issue car passes on demand even to staff living as close by as West Street – despite the fact that its own monitoring has revealed that a significant proportion of rush-hour traffic on the A414 in Hertford involves cars going to/from County Hall or Wallfields.

7. If the County has not so far led ‘by example’ (which if done well could inspire major employers in other Hertfordshire towns), it might soon feel more exposed on this issue, as its physically close neighbour East Herts Council has recently started thinking positively about this. A recommendation of EHC’s Sustainable Transport Task and Finish Group in 2017 was: “Consider a charge for use of the car park at East Herts Council Offices [which has over 200 spaces], alongside an incentive scheme for those who car share or use lower emissions vehicles.” We believe that this kind of approach can be beneficial to staff: delivering cheaper, more enjoyable journeys to work, together with improvements in their morale, if car sharing is properly introduced (carefully, gradually, and with support and monitoring).

RAPID REINSTATEMENT OF THE HERTFORD LOOP LINE

8. We have all known for over a year that the northern part of the Hertford Loop Line is due to be curtailed later in 2018, with buses put in place instead. This is because a new platform is needed at Stevenage, while Network Rail has financial problems. The closure could last at least three years, and quite possibly seven or more. Recently the *Mercury* (11 January 2018) has had a front-page story about some people’s fears over falls in the value of their houses because of this.

9. For many of those living in Stevenage (or in other towns on the route to Cambridge) and working in Hertford, or those commuting in the other direction, it would now be more likely that they would drive rather than have to catch a bus. In short, this is a disaster. Yet strangely LTP4 makes no mention of it.

10. Derrick Ashley, Cabinet Member for Environment, Planning and Transport at HCC, laments “the utter lack of joined-up thinking between those running the railways, the

Government and those doing the infrastructure” (*Mercury*, 4/1/18) Fine words, yet HCC could in principle act to ensure that closure only lasts for a finite time – and as short a period as possible. It should dip into its ample reserves, or draw on other sources of public-sector financing, to offer Network Rail a loan to bring this scheme forward with a fixed time schedule. Nor would HCC be acting outside its remit, or recklessly. It would however require determined and joined-up action by HCC.

CONCLUSION

12. These suggestions would do much to kickstart widescale sustainable transport in Hertfordshire.

Hertford Civic Society

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