

HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

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Chairman
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Dear Derrick

TRAVEL TO WORK AND TRAFFIC CONGESTION IN HERTFORD: THINKING CONSTRUCTIVELY, WITH IMPROVED INFORMATION

We have already had some useful discussion about these issues (and one of you raised questions about the extremely concentrated arrival/departure travel patterns at County Hall). Now that Simon has found and forwarded the AECOM report with its detailed mapping of rush-hour traffic flows on the A414, it is possible to offer further thoughts, following consultation with Reg.

The AECOM report uses ANPR or car number plate data to show definitively what the rush-hour traffic flows are for the Hertford section of the A414. The report is highly technical, but does have a succinct set of key findings (p. 20). They are all reproduced in full below (these quotations are differentiated by being shown in italics), while our brief comments are added after each one, without italics, though placed in brackets.

- *A significant number of vehicles using the A414 travel all the way through the Hertford Corridor (40% West Bound in the morning).* (These are vehicles that might in theory benefit from a Hertford bypass.)
- *In the morning peak, 31% of vehicles using the A414 East Bound within Hertford are turning right at Hale Road causing a potential conflict with westbound movements.* (These EB vehicles are heading for County Hall in particular – there are ways in which they could be reduced in number, summarised later.)
- *A significant proportion of trips entering Hertford from the East are using the A414 to access Hale Road in the morning peak (31% - 1574).* (Likewise these vehicles are going to County Hall in particular – and there is the same scope for reducing such flows.)
- *B1000 and Ware Road have also been identified as possible alternative East/West strategic routes.* (However, even since the AECOM report was produced in 2014, new developments along or near the Ware Road have increased congestion there, and this is a situation that could well worsen with more housing planned for the hinterland of Hertford East under the District's newly adopted Plan.)
- *'Rat-Runs' have been identified on Lower Hatfield Road, Byde Street and Hagsdell Road/Queen's Road to avoid congestion on the A414.* (Perhaps these Rat-Runs could be

diminished if the A414 flows more easily, though they do not offer the same quality of through travel for longer-distance journeys and may perhaps be assumed to consist largely of relatively local vehicles. In addition, there may also be suppressed demand on the part of those currently avoiding car travel locally during the rush hour, and this could complicate matters, unless it too is factored in.)

There is one other brief passage worth quoting (p. 11): uniquely, it highlights the County Hall factor, though not by name.

- *It was also noted that [on the part of EB vehicles using A414 Gascoyne Way in the morning rush hour] 31% travel to site 8 [i.e. up towards County Hall and Wallfields]. To make this journey, vehicles would take a right turn at the Hale Road roundabout. Given the large number of vehicles this represents, it suggests a conflict in traffic at this junction with vehicles heading westbound along the A414 – this conflict mirrors observations which informed microsimulation modelling of the corridor. The area south of site 8 is a large employment area in Hertford, which supports the number of vehicles travelling towards this area.*

That conflict is worse for vehicles travelling to County Hall from the West than for those travelling from the East, as the latter may be able to use the Hagsdell Road Rat Run in the morning. It is worth noting that, if anything, the AECOM report underplays this conflict, as it follows a broad, three-hour definition of the rush hour in the morning (and likewise the afternoon), when the most active phase is arguably no more than two hours.

POSSIBLE OPTIONS

In the face of these findings, what are the options?

First, there is a high-cost option of a Hertford bypass, as proposed in LTP4. This raises two issues. First, financial ones. Even if the money (£200M) is made available, it would represent funding taken away from more sustainable options. Secondly, as LTP4 says, there would be knock-on development effects: road construction would be followed by a huge amount of extra housing, which would enormously change the character of the 'attractive smallish town' that Hertford can still claim to be – and probably, as at Bishops Stortford, traffic congestion would only temporarily be reduced. Perhaps, as it has done for many years, this option will continue to lie on the table?

Secondly, there is a set of much cheaper options, which for the most part could also be implemented far more rapidly, perhaps obviating the need for a bypass. Some combining of these options, initial elements of which are already partly in place, would be possible.

- Staff could be expected to work from home one or even two days a week (Ministry of Justice requires its HQ staff to do this twice a week, to save money on provision of London office space).
- Staff could be encouraged much more strongly not to travel as if they need to be at their posts from around nine to five. (A 'core day' for which staff attendance is required

and in which all meetings would be held could be defined as starting at 10.00 or 10.30 and ending at 3.00 or 3.30.)

- A serious car sharing scheme could be implemented, making use of appropriately large (dis)incentives. Properly supported/rewarded, such schemes can even boost staff morale.

To complement any such efforts to lessen car commuting to/from County Hall, it is also important to begin to upgrade public transport provision. This is particularly true for the East-West A414 corridor. The suggested East-West tramway (Herts Orbital Transit or HOT) should ultimately play a big part in this. However, in the shorter term, a substantial amount can be achieved by upgrading existing bus services and developing new ones. Some of this could be done by developing priorities for buses on the road system but, where appropriate, new off-road provision could be considered: possibly in part on alignments planned for the East-West tramway, prior to its full development.

In principle, funding for such developments should come from the County's transport spending, as it would not solely be for the benefit of HCC staff. Equally, however, there is an argument that as these bus developments in the Hertford area would need to be particularly geared to those accessing County Hall, the County's own reserves might be drawn upon, or else some part of its massive site could be rented out or sold for housing. It is worth bearing in mind that constructing, maintaining and managing the existing County Hall car parks must involve considerable costs, even if these costs are hidden from public view. It is sometimes estimated that that 'free' car parks actually cost their owners up to £1,000 annually for each space. And at time of writing there is even a temporary overflow car park for HCC staff at the Hertford football ground: a first case of park and walk, for County Hall?

CONCLUSION

We would not expect you to respond in detail to these points/suggestions, which we have made as concisely as possible, though we would be very happy to discuss them with you, or even to make another presentation.

Finally, we believe that the ideas advanced here are in line with the County's suggestions to major employers in LTP4; and also that, if you have not already had recent contact with East Herts Council on the issue of staff travel to work, you might find them considering similar issues and options.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm

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