

Comments on NWLTF's Alternative Transport Strategy Discussion Document in Relation to the Headingley Neighbourhood Plan Transport Options Note

CONTEXT

- 1.1 Having previously provided advice on traffic and transport issues to Headingley Network's Transport Group and to the Ash Road Area Residents Association (ARARA)¹ I was asked for an opinion on the draft Headingley Transport Options (HTO) note being prepared for the Headingley Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.2 Having reviewed that document it appeared that some of the ideas in the North West Leeds Transport Forum (NWLTF) Alternative Transport Strategy Discussion Document were proving very influential. To my mind these created a disconnect between the very locally-specific neighbourhood proposals and the more strategic proposals focused on the A660 corridor. I have been asked by Bill McKinnon of the A660 Joint Council to set out my observations in the form of this short note.
- 1.3 *I should make it clear that I am not commenting on whether the NWLTF proposals are better or worse than the Trolleybus scheme that they have been developed as an alternative to, but on whether these proposals are appropriate for the Headingley Neighbourhood Plan.*

HEADINGLEY TRANSPORT OPTIONS (HTO) EMERGING IDEAS NOTE

- 1.4 It is worth beginning with a quick observation about the objectives, goals and general approach set out in the HTO note, repeated here

General Objective: *To promote access, economic vitality and environmental standards in the Headingley neighbourhood and so enhance the quality of life of its residents and users*

Goals: *To reduce accident risk, noise, pollution and other unwanted effects of traffic and to make it easier to travel to, from, within **and through** Headingley.*

General Approach: *To encourage, wherever possible, the use of public transport and active modes (walking and cycling) rather than cars*
- 1.5 These are all very sensible. Having said that, I have highlighted the 'and through Headingley' statement in the goals as I would suggest it is worth considering whether that is an essential part of a Neighbourhood Plan, particularly where the general objective is to enhance the quality of life for residents of the neighbourhood. It is however consistent with the ideas that emerge from the NWLTF which as I will show below are focused on improving the position for traffic passing *through* Headingley, but with some consequential adverse impacts on the neighbourhood.
- 1.6 I was initially a little confused when I looked at the Headingley Transport Options note for the HNP. There are many good ideas contained within it that would seem to be exactly the sorts of things a Neighbourhood Plan should be looking at. It is simply a shopping list of ideas but this is quite appropriate for the moment, the document is exactly what it says it is – 'emerging ideas and options' that would require further work in order to develop a strategy.
- 1.7 But amongst these good ideas there is an underlying theme that I found quite surprising. On further investigation I realised that this came from the work by the NWLTF.

¹ I am a director of one of the UK's largest independent transport planning consultancies and have been resident in Headingley for over 35 years.

NWLTF PROPOSALS

- 1.8 The NWLTF Alternative Transport Strategy Discussion Document is a preliminary draft which has been offered up by the NWLTF as a discussion document about alternatives to the A660 Trolley Bus scheme (Part A of the document) and as part of a broader discussion on the transport strategy for Leeds City Region (Part B).
- 1.9 I am only commenting on Part A, the A660 proposals, and only in so far as they have been drawn into the Headingley Transport Options note.
- 1.10 There is a general implied intent within the NWLTF report to develop measures that support buses, by amongst other things reducing delays to them on the A660. While this may be the intent it doesn't reflect the fact that the majority of measures proposed are essentially a series of traffic management options designed to reduce delays at junctions, particularly at traffic light controlled junctions. Most of these aim to reduce 'conflicting' movements. Conflicting movements are usually where cars are turning right across the general flow of traffic. Reducing these conflicts generally means that you can increase the straight-ahead flow through a junction.
- 1.11 In removing these conflicting movements you may reduce delays to buses at these junctions but what you primarily achieve is a reduction in delays to cars going straight ahead through the junction.
- 1.12 As cars will make up 90%+ of the vehicles on the A660 it would be disingenuous to claim that such schemes are designed to benefit buses. What they really do is make it easier and faster for cars to get through the junctions. Helping cars go faster doesn't help public transport – on the contrary it will just encourage more traffic to use the A660, (until the point at which the extra traffic wipes out the time 'benefits' that the scheme initially brings).
- 1.13 Furthermore to get rid of these conflicting movements there are several proposals in Part A of the NWLTF report which in the context of a Neighbourhood Plan are highly inappropriate.
- 1.14 The proposal (Option 3 in their report) to reduce the conflicting movements at the North Lane/A660 junction is a good example of this as the scheme requires changes to Bennett Road and St Michaels Road in order to make it work (essentially to provide an alternative route for the traffic that would be banned from turning at the North Lane/A660 junction).
- 1.15 The suggestion that the traffic barrier at Bennett Road (which was closed as a rat run by Leeds City Council in the late 1980) be removed will 'import' passing traffic onto a road which is currently local access only. This idea would seriously worsen conditions for pedestrians on the Otley Road (by Boots) and on North Lane (by the Community Centre) as well as for people using HEART and of course the residents of Bennett Road.
- 1.16 The North Lane/A660 junction scheme also proposes making it easier for eastbound traffic from Kirkstall Lane/North Lane to route via St Michael's Road and past the War Memorial. It is hard to think of a less appropriate road in Headingley to be encouraging more traffic to use it. In fact the proposal to make the western end of St Michael's Road one way eastbound not only encourages more traffic to use this narrow residential street but will also speed up the traffic on the one way section.
- 1.17 Elsewhere the Shaw Lane/A660 junction proposals (Option 12) would add more traffic to Headingley Mount. This road has already borne the brunt of additional traffic as the unavoidable consequence of the Ash Road area-wide traffic calming - to add more traffic onto it in order to improve the flow of traffic down the A660 is arguably adding insult to injury.
- 1.18 This is where it gets difficult to support many of the ideas in the context of a Neighbourhood Plan since, as I've shown above, most of these schemes will result in traffic being diverted onto neighbourhood streets.

- 1.19 There are some good ideas within the NWLTF Alternative Transport Strategy in the context of the debate that it is seeking to influence (which is movement along the A660 corridor) but it is dominated by traffic management solutions that are all about maximising the flow of *vehicles* and not *people*.
- 1.20 If you want an example of this then have a look at the suggestion in Option 6 that the bus stop on Cardigan Road near North Lane should be moved out of the main carriageway and into a new bus lay-by to reduce the queues that sometimes back-up behind it. What does this achieve? Firstly it makes the car journey a little quicker. Secondly it makes the bus journey a little slower as the bus then has to look for a break in the traffic to pull out into the road after people have boarded or alighted.
- 1.21 The changes may only be modest but the net result is that public transport has become slightly less attractive, both in absolute terms, and more so in relative terms. Or looked at another way – the 50 to 80 people that will typically be on a bus in the morning rush hour are disadvantaged to allow maybe 10 car drivers who get caught behind a loading bus a few seconds advantage.
- 1.22 This is the sort of scheme that does almost exactly the opposite of what it might be thought to be designed to do - to make buses more attractive. There are plenty more examples. The Hyde Park Corner ideas (Option 17) for instance could have some potentially beneficial impacts in terms of the pedestrian environment outside the Crescent shops but these are almost incidental to the main outcome which is to reduce delays to through traffic (predominantly cars) on the A660.

IN SUMMARY

- 1.23 If the aim of the Neighbourhood Plan is to enhance the environment, vitality and liveability of the area for Headingley residents and businesses then one might take the view that the focus of the transport options should be on the streetscape and the environment for pedestrians and cyclists on their local streets. On the A660 arguably the Neighbourhood Plan focus should be on mitigating its adverse impact on the environment for the shopping and leisure facilities in the centre of Headingley. The best way to do that is likely to be by not increasing highway capacity, in any shape or form, and instead supporting measures that make it easier and safer to walk and to cycle and easier and more attractive to use the bus - more attractive fares, simpler, ticketing, better information and additional bus priority where feasible (but not by simply increasing the capacity for all traffic).