Leicestershire
County Council

CABINET – 15 DECEMBER 2020

NETWORK MANAGEMENT PLAN REFRESH

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1.   The purpose of this report is to seek the Cabinet's approval of the County Council's refreshed Network Management Plan (NMP).

Recommendations

2.   It is recommended that the refreshed Network Management Plan, which consists of a Policy and Strategy document (attached as Appendix A), and a Plan (attached as Appendix B), be approved.

Reason for Recommendations

3.   Government encourages local highway authorities to regularly review and refresh NMPs, to ensure that they continue to reflect national legislation and guidance, changes to local policies and new procedures and developments.

4.   Refreshing the NMP will ensure that the Council's approach to managing its highway network remains fit for purpose both now and in the future. It will ensure that the approach takes account of current and future challenges, including growth pressures on the road network, customer expectations, decreased funding and climate change, as well as reflecting the County Council's current network management activities.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

5.   The Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a presentation at its meeting on the 5th November 2020, which provided an overview of the County Council's proposed refreshed NMP. The Committee's views are set out in Part B of the report.

6.   Subject to approval by the Cabinet, it is intended that the refreshed NMP will be published at the end of December 2020.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

7.   The Council's current NMP (2014-2026) was approved by the Cabinet in April 2014.

8. The Council's third Local Transport Plan (LTP3), which was approved by the County Council on 23 March 2011, places a strong emphasis on supporting the economy, making the best use of the existing network and maximising the benefits and value for money of investments. The refreshed NMP is a key document to help the Authority deliver its LTP3.

9. In May 2019, the County Council declared a climate emergency and committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 for its own operations, to work with others and to lobby government to make the wider 2030 target possible. On 13 September 2019 the Cabinet approved work to be undertaken in revising the Council's Environment Strategy 2018-2030, Strategic Plan and Single Outcome Framework and, to incorporate climate change and carbon commitments.

10. The Council's revised Environment Strategy 2018-2030 (agreed by the County Council on 8 July 2020) includes specific targets to reduce the environmental impacts of travel and transport. A poorly functioning, congested road network can have a negative impact on the environment. Through maintaining a holistic approach to the management of the network, the delivery of the refreshed NMP will help to address the environmental impact of transport, including noise, air quality and carbon reduction.

11. The Council's revised Strategic Plan (agreed by the County Council on 8 July 2020), supported by the Council's Enabling Growth Plan, outlines the Council's five key outcomes for 2018 to 2022. It is recognised that the Plan will need to be revisited at an appropriate point in the future, once the longer-term transport impact of the Coronavirus pandemic becomes known. By effectively managing the road network through a continued holistic approach, the Authority aims to: provide more consistent, predictable and reliable journeys for the movement of people and goods, thereby supporting the delivery of new homes and jobs; improve safety and accessibility for all road users, helping to promote healthier and less polluting (including carbon) modes of travel. The refreshed NMP supports the delivery of all five of the Strategic Plan's strategic outcomes.

Resource Implications

12. The review of the Council's NMP will support the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) by ensuring that the Council can maximise opportunities to deliver efficiencies and be flexible in adapting to changes in future budgets.

13. Preparation of the refreshed NMP has been funded from within Environment and Transport Department budgets and delivery of the actions and activities set out in the refreshed NMP, will continue to be funded from within its existing budgets.

14. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on the financial implications of this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None

Officers to Contact

Ann Carruthers – Director
Environment and Transport
Tel: (0116) 305 7966
Email: ann.carruthers@leics.gov.uk

Janna Walker – Head of Service, Highways and Transport Commissioning
Environment and Transport
Tel: (0116) 305 0785
Email: janna.walker@leics.gov.uk

PART B

Introduction

15.   Managing the road network is vital to the future prosperity of Leicestershire. The transport system has a key role to play in helping local economic prosperity and growth. Given the impact of congestion on the environment and economy, a strategic approach is required, one which considers the causes of congestion, the impacts, the challenges and the possible solutions.

16.   The Authority has a legal obligation (the 'network management duty') to manage its road network. The transport network is under strain and the Council continues to face numerous challenges. These challenges can negatively affect the smooth operation and performance of the highway network.

17.   The Environment and Transport Department's Business Plan includes an outcome for the Council's transport system and assets to be effectively managed and well maintained. The rationale is to enable the efficient management of the network, whilst delivering financial savings. One of the actions identified to deliver this is to continue to implement the NMP.

18.   The Network Management Policy and Strategy sets out the Council's high-level principles, objectives and approach. The Network Management Plan describes how the Authority will continue to manage its network in practice. Together both documents provide a steer for the delivery of day-to-day network management activities. Whilst the documents refresh the existing NMP, they do not change the Council's approach to network management.

19.   The refreshed NMP will help to ensure that the Council has a transport system that is fit-for-purpose both now and in the future, helping to deliver both national and local objectives around the environment, economy and health.

Background

National Policies

20.   In 2004, a Government White Paper 'The Future of Transport' was published which emphasised the importance of the active and co-ordinated management of the road network. Government has since introduced, and continues to introduce, a variety of policies to achieve this, seeking to make road transport more efficient and effective, keeping it safe and reducing greenhouse gas and other emissions.

21.   It is likely that government's legal commitments on climate change and its plans to decarbonise transport may result in changes to the 'network management duty' and associated legislation. There is likely to be a lot of change in these areas over the coming years and the Council's network management policies will need to be sufficiently agile to account for this, particularly those that relate to the environment and climate change.

Legislation

22.   The Traffic Management Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) was introduced to reduce congestion and disruption on the road network. It places a duty on local highway authorities (LHA's) to secure the expeditious movement of traffic, ensuring the smooth movement of traffic on their road network, and the networks of surrounding councils. Authorities are required to make appropriate arrangements for planning and carrying out these duties.

23.   The network management duty is part of the 2004 Act. The duty recognises:

- the importance of managing and operating the road network
- the importance of optimising benefits for all road users
- the needs of those who maintain the infrastructure (both of the network itself and of the services within it).

24.   Although a NMP is optional, government encourages LHA's to prepare one.

25.   As well as the 2004 Act and network management duty, LHAs have other legal responsibilities on the highway, which are of equal importance. There are a range of duties and powers under which LHA's maintain, improve and manage the highway network. These include:

- the Highways Act 1980, which principally covers the structure of the network
- the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 (NRSWA), which covers utility street works
- the Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984, which regulates the activities of road users.

Impact of Covid-19

26.   Much of the refreshed NMP was prepared prior to the outbreak of the pandemic and the profound societal, health and economic impacts it has had. It is too early to say at this time what the pandemic's long-term impacts might be on our society and for our economy.

27.   In May 2020, the Government issued its Safer Travel guidance, regarding managing travel by walking, cycling, and public transport as England moved out of the first lockdown. This guidance makes clear that the requirement for LHA's to meet the network management duty is not affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

28.   The County Council has developed a separate Covid-19 Transport Recovery document, which sets out how in the short term it is seeking to respond to the pandemic's impacts and to aid recovery in line with our statutory obligations, including the network management duty. It will be updated regularly to reflect the ongoing transportation needs as the pandemic situation develops.

Network Management Plan refresh and restructure

29.   The current Network Management Plan was published in April 2014.

30.   Although national legislation remains largely unchanged, resulting in no radical change proposed to the Authority's 'in principle' approach to network management, a range of new and emerging challenges mean that it is now appropriate to refresh

the current NMP. These challenges include:

- growth pressures on the transport network
- reduced funding
- climate change, environment, carbon challenges and flooding
- impact of external strategic projects on the road network, e.g. HS2
- utilising new technology
- network resilience
- co-ordination of works, road space booking, permit scheme and parity of approach
- customer expectations.

31.   Furthermore, it is important to reflect the latest work the County Council and its partners are undertaking in support of network management, i.e. around managing road works (through the Council's Highway Permit Scheme), events, parking, encouraging sustainable travel and dealing with unplanned incidents.

32.   As part of the refresh the NMP will be restructured to align with the approach taken with similar policy documents in other areas of responsibility covered by the Environment and Transport department, i.e. the Highway Asset Management Plan and the Passenger Transport Policy and Strategy.

33.   The result is a network management framework that consists of a Network Management Policy and Strategy, and a separate Network Management Plan, attached as Appendix A and B to this report.

Network Management Policy & Strategy (NMPS)

- Provides high level policies
- Sets out the wider legal and policy framework and context.
- Sets out the strategic approach that will be adopted when managing the road network.

Network Management Plan (NMP)

- Explains how we deliver our network management policies and strategy in practice
- Describes the activities that we undertake to manage the operation, performance and development of the road network.
- Sets out a number of supporting principles, providing policy guidance for the day to day operational delivery of network management.

Day to day operational delivery of network management procedures, practices and annual programmes of work
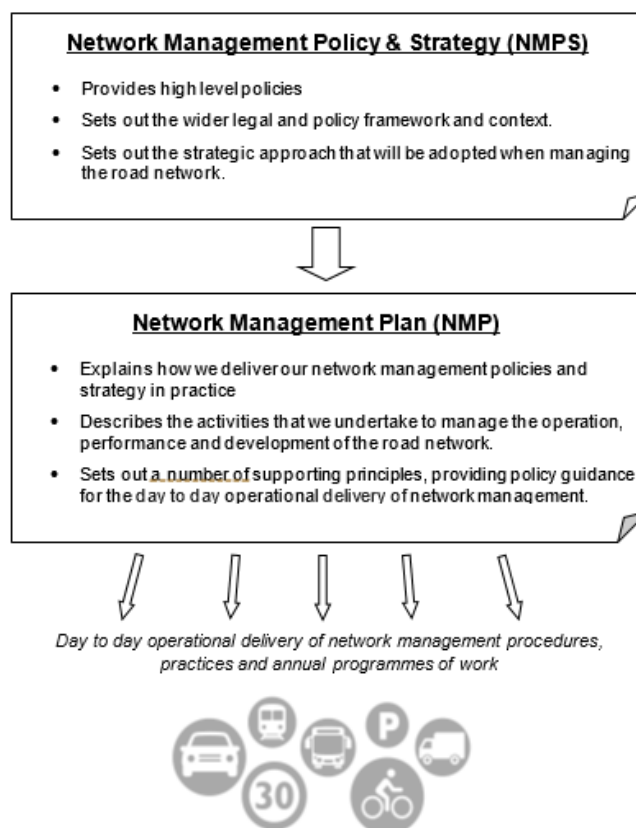
Figure 1.1. Network management document framework

34. The framework will play an important role in the delivery of Leicestershire's Local Transport Plan (LTP), which sets out the Council's long-term vision and strategic goals for transport. It will not only contribute to the delivery of LTP goals but will enable the Authority to continue to meet its network management duty and contribute to delivering national objectives. It's role in helping to manage Leicestershire's road network is vital to the future prosperity of Leicestershire. Given the impact of congestion on the economy the framework provides a strategic approach, one that considers the causes of congestion, the impacts, the challenges and the possible solutions.

35. It will enable the Authority to continue to take a holistic approach to network management in Leicestershire. This will help to deliver positive outcomes for the environment, Leicestershire's local economy and quality of life for the people who live, work and travel through the County.

36. The framework is closely aligned to other developing policy and strategy documents across services. It will require regular review while these documents are in development and may need to be amended accordingly which will be undertaken by the Director of Environment and Transport using their existing delegated authority.

37. The framework will have no defined end date, however, it will be considered for review within five years, or earlier if there are significant changes in legislation, local circumstances, national policy or guidance that affects network management.

Network Management Policy and Strategy

38. The high-level policy and strategy document provide the policy, legal and strategic framework for a revised NMP. Firstly, it sets out:

- the challenges the Authority faces
- the legal context
- the wider local, regional and national policy/ context.

39. Secondly, it describes the Council's strategic approach to network management, focusing on four main components:

- Understanding the network and its usage
- Planning and development
- Highway management
- Traffic demand management

These components remain unchanged in principle from those of the current NMP.

40. Finally, it contains five overarching network management policies, as shown in the table below. These set out the broad objectives and principles that will continue to be adopted to manage the operation, performance and development of the Council's network:

I. **Develop and operate a holistic network management approach.**

This will ensure the optimal use of the Council's resources, strategically managing the operation, performance and development of the county's road network for the benefit of all current and future users.

II. **Manage the operation, performance and development of the network based on a balanced risk-based approach, which incorporates all available evidence.**

This will ensure the Council's decision making continues to take account of the safety of stakeholders, customer expectations, network hierarchy, levels of use, travel demand, network resilience, environmental and climate change impacts, network condition and maintenance, and available resources.

III. **In planning for the housing and economic needs of Leicester and Leicestershire's population, the County Council will employ a flexible approach to reviewing, amending and developing the network.**

This will ensure that the network reflects changing travel demand and traffic patterns, including any changes in the makeup of road users and introduction of new travel modes and technologies.

IV. **Engage and consult with all partners and stakeholders, where appropriate, and lead by example, applying the same standards and approaches to our own network activities as to those of others.**

*This will ensure parity and balance between the interests of the various parties and ensure effective collaborative working relationships are maintained***.**

V. **Have regard to our other wider obligations, policies and objectives set out in our Environment Strategy and associated Carbon Reduction Roadmap**

This will ensure the Authority continues to seek to minimise the environmental impacts of travel and transport (and provide benefits in support of our climate resilience and net zero carbon targets), so far as is reasonably practicable;

41. The Network Management Policy and Strategy has been developed to help the Council take account of the challenges set out above. It will ensure that the Authority continues to adopt and develop a risk-based strategic approach to network management that is agile and can adapt to change and future challenges and opportunities.

The refreshed Network Management Plan (NMP)

42. The refreshed NMP describes at a more detailed level how the Council intends to continue to adopt its strategic approach and fulfil its network management duty in practice.

43. It sets out the range of activities the Council undertakes with partners on a day-to-day basis to manage the operation, performance and development of the road network, under the four main components set out in the Policy and Strategy document:

Understanding the Network and its Usage

How data is collected and used and how the Council will continue to improve its understanding of who uses the network, what for, where, how, when and the impact it has. This includes:

- Reviewing of the road network hierarchies and classifications, to improve understanding of the network and help us make better informed decision making, i.e. when planning road works or considering priorities for investment.
- Developing a proactive approach to engagement, working alongside members and parish and local communities, seeking new and improved methods of communication.
- Utilising the Confirm Highway Management System to help gather local intelligence and feedback from customers about the road network.
- Utilising new technology to gather and deliver traffic data and intelligence, in smarter and more cost-effective ways.
- Utilising a suite of transport models;

Planning and Development

How the development of the network and the impact of growth is managed. This includes:

- Clarification on the County Council's role as a Local Highway Authority and as a statutory consultee in the planning process, and with regards to air quality matters.
- Working with districts to support Local Plan development, within the framework of the Strategic Growth Plan.
- Encouraging and facilitating early engagement with developers at the earliest opportunity to minimise the construction impacts of their works- this includes the consideration of suitable construction routes.
- Ensuring third party improvements are delivered in accordance with our Highway Asset Management Policy and Strategy and do not place unnecessary financial burdens on the public purse with regards to future asset maintenance.

Highway Management

How planned events are managed, such as road works and maintenance as well as unplanned events, such as road traffic collisions and severe weather events. This includes:

- Operating the Highway Permit Scheme to better plan, manage and coordinate road and street works.
- Regular road and street works coordination meetings with works promoters such as utility companies.
- Promoting use of national One. Network website as a single point of information for road works.
- Consideration of a Lane Rental Scheme to reduce occupation on most traffic sensitive parts of the county road network
- Work with neighbouring highway authorities (including Highways England) and

the Police to agree suitable Emergency Diversion Routes.
- Clarification on County Council's role as a Lead Local Flood Authority.
- Work closely with partners in the Leicestershire and Rutland Local Resilience Forum (LRF) to plan for and manage major incidents.
- Continue to provide a dedicated HS2 team to work proactively with HS2 Ltd to maximise the opportunity to reduce construction impacts on county road network.

Traffic Demand Management

How the Council manages demand and the use of the network and encourages sustainable travel. This includes:

- Delivering behavioural change measures, promoted under the ChooseHowYouMove website.
- Continuing to secure government and developer funding to implement walking and cycling infrastructure.
- Implementing Traffic Regulation Orders to control traffic movement and parking, including HGV weight restrictions to control lorry movements across county.
- Working with the police to manage abnormal load movements across the county.
- Working with district partners on parking enforcement, including use of a camera car.
- Carrying out county town parking reviews.
- Working with partners to take a multi-faceted approach to school parking.
- Exploring possibility of increasing size of road network- building new junctions or roads.
- Utilising new traffic signal technology to better manage the network, e.g. more intelligent temporary signals to assist all road users, including pedestrians and cyclists during works.

44. The refreshed NMP also includes several supporting operational principles, which will provide:

- guidance for officers involved in day-to-day decision making on managing the operation, performance and development of the road network

- a set of clear supporting principles under which members, residents, partners and stakeholders can expect us to operate (Appendix C).

Delivery in practice

45. The current NMP contains an action plan to underpin its delivery. There is no stand-alone action plan included within the refreshed NMP. instead, actions and activities set out within the refreshed NMP will be captured and set out within the usual Environment and Transport business planning process, along with other services that the Department delivers. Progress on actions will be reported on, in line with the County Council's wider business plan reporting process and corporate planning framework.

Consultations

46. An authority-wide approach has been taken to the development of the refreshed NMP. Those service areas within the Council's Environment and Transport department, whose day-to-day business impacts on the operation, performance and development of the road network have assisted with its development.

47. In October 2020, external parties (including district councils, the police, bus operators and utility companies) were provided with an overview of the County Council's proposed refreshed NMP. Feedback was sought to ensure that the content is refined to reflect the views of key partners and stakeholders.

48. The Environment and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a presentation at its meeting on 5th November which provided an overview of the County Council's proposed refreshed NMP. The following points were highlighted by the Committee:-

    i. Traffic was one of biggest contributors to air quality within Leicestershire. Members welcomed that Environment and Transport colleagues were working with the districts and Public Health to look at joint working and consider what measures could be planned to mitigate air quality issues in the future.

    ii. It was acknowledged operating a transport network with heavy goods vehicle's posed a challenge of enforcing weight restrictions, which only the police could do. The County Council had seen previous success from community lorry watch schemes. Unfortunately, the Council was constrained by the network and had to determine on appropriate diversions. Where possible these would be kept to main roads, however it was acknowledged that was not always possible.

    iii. Where Members saw temporary traffic lights where no works were ongoing, or examples of poor patch works then it should be reported to the County Council as quickly as possible. The Council's permit and fine system allowed more inspectors on the network, however they could not be everywhere, the more information the Council received the quicker it could react, including making utilities re-do any poor patch works.

    iv. Members were further pleased to note that the County Council will be considering a lane rental scheme, which would mean utility companies who wished to undertake roadworks had to book and pay for the road lane. This could generate income that could be invested back into the highways network whilst also making utilities plan their maintenance and reduce the time taken to complete works. Further details of the scheme would be brought to Members for consideration.

Relevant Impact Assessments

Equality and Human Rights Implications

49. The County Council has made a range of commitments to promote equality and diversity, and to reduce disadvantages and inequalities of opportunity. The aim of the refreshed NMP is to set out the Authority's approach to how the network in Leicestershire is managed, maintained and improved.

50.   The refreshed NMP supports various LTP goals including, an accessible and integrated transport system that helps promote equality of opportunity for all Leicestershire's residents, a transport system that improves the safety, health and security of residents and a transport system that helps to improve the quality of life for residents and makes Leicestershire a more attractive place to live, work and visit.

51.   A poorly functioning, congested and/or unsafe network could have a negative impact on the environment, economy, health and quality of life. This could affect health, earning ability, reduce access to life opportunities (such as healthcare, education and training) and could lead to social isolation.

52.   The refreshed NMP focusses on those areas that are most in need and will provide the greatest benefits. Transport solutions that could help to address issues will help all users of the network, including the protected characteristics.

53.   These proposals are aimed at managing the highway network in the best way, taking account of stakeholder expectations and the available budget.

54.   An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment screening has been carried out. It was found that the refreshed NMP would have a neutral/positive impact and therefore a full assessment was not required.

Environmental Impact

55.   The review of the NMP provides an opportunity to consider the impact of how we manage the network, the climate emergency, carbon emissions, active travel and congestion etc.

56.   The review of the NMP provides an opportunity to describe the positive work the Authority carries out that supports network management and the wider environmental agenda. As far as possible, our approach to network management will focus on making the best use of our existing road network and reducing demand on it where possible, through reducing the need to travel and promoting walking, cycling and passenger transport alternatives.

57.   Where relevant an appropriate environmental impact assessment will be completed as specific proposals are developed.

Partnership Working and Associated Issues

58.   Working with key partners, such as neighbouring authorities, Highways England and local planning authorities, will be increasingly important in seeking to provide a better managed road network in Leicestershire.

Background Papers

Cabinet - 1 April 2014 – Network Management Plan 2014-2026
http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MID=3989#AI37760

Cabinet – 18 September 2020 – MTFS latest position

http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=5997&Ver=4

Cabinet – 24 March 2020 – E&T 2021 Highways Capital Programme
http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=5993&Ver=4

Leicestershire County Council current NMP (2014 - 2026)
http://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2017/1/5/network_management_pan.pdf

<u>Appendices</u>

Appendix A -   Draft Network Management Policy and Strategy
Appendix B -   Draft Network Management Plan (NMP)
Appendix C -   Network Management Plan Supporting Principles

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