



ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

COMMITTEE: 4 MARCH 2021

DEVELOPMENT OF A MELTON MOWBRAY TRANSPORT STRATEGY

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT

Purpose of Report

1. To provide an overview of the work that the County Council is undertaking to develop an interim Melton Mowbray Transport Strategy (MMTS) and to seek the Committee's views.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Supporting the economy of market towns and rural Leicestershire is a priority of the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership's (LLEP) Strategic Economic Plan, which was considered by the Cabinet in March 2014.
3. The Enabling Growth Action Plan, approved by the Cabinet in March 2015, identifies supporting the development of market towns for employment land as a priority activity for the County Council. It includes a specific action to work with Melton Borough Council (MBC) to plan for the future growth of Melton Mowbray.
4. The third Leicestershire Local Transport Plan (LTP3), approved by the County Council in March 2011, contains six strategic transport goals. Goal 1 is to have a transport system that supports a prosperous economy and provides successfully for population growth. The LTP3 sets out the County Council's approach to achieving this, namely, to improve the management of the road network and continuing to address congestion issues.
5. The LTP3 Implementation Plan (2015/16), approved by the Cabinet in March 2015, contains an action to take forward work to identify and cost a preferred scheme to address Melton Mowbray's transport problems.
6. In September 2015 the Cabinet considered the development of a MMTS. The report explained why it was necessary to develop a Strategy, advised the Cabinet of the outcomes of transport studies and set out proposals for taking forward the development and eventual delivery of a MMTS. Cabinet:
 - supported in principle the strategic growth of the town; and
 - it also accepted a proportionate and reasonable deterioration in traffic conditions in Melton Mowbray as a result of developments being permitted prior to full completion of the (Melton Mowbray Distributor

Road (MMDR), on the condition that such developments were contributing to the delivery of the MMDR and wider Strategy.

7. In May 2016 the Cabinet considered a report concerning proposals for the development and eventual delivery of the MMTS, which included plans for the MMDR. It agreed inter alia continuation of the development of the MMTS and authorised the Director of Environment and Transport to undertake the necessary consultations and negotiations as required to enable the definition of a preferred route for the Northern and Eastern sections of the Melton Mowbray Distributor Road (NE MMDR).
8. In March 2017 the Cabinet considered a report on the MMTS and the MMDR. The purpose of the report was to advise the Cabinet of the revised timetable for the development of a business case for the NE MMDR, to seek approval to undertake further collection of evidence and, subject to Cabinet's approval, to note the next steps in the process for the development of the business case for the NE MMDR. The timetable was required to enable the County Council to meet a revised Government timetable for the preparation of a business case for the NE MMDR. Failure to accelerate the timescales would have been likely to significantly lessen the chances of securing future public funding for the construction of the NE MMDR.

Background

9. Despite previous investments in highway improvements, Melton Mowbray continues to experience some significant traffic congestion problems. Evidence highlights that further significant housing and economic growth in the town is likely to exacerbate these problems. As a result, a significant and coordinated investment in new transportation measures is required to enable the town's future growth.
10. In September 2015, the County Council committed to the development of the MMTS, to provide a basis for future transport investment to support Melton Borough Council's (then-emerging) Local Plan to 2036. The Plan is now adopted and provides for significant housing (over 3,500 new homes by 2036) and employment growth (at least 80ha) in and around the town. The Plan also embeds the delivery of that growth with the development and delivery of an MMTS (including the MMDR). Additionally, there are plans for four Manufacturing Zones, which taken together with the Local Plan allocation would provide for around 160ha of employment.

The continued importance of having an MMTS

11. The development, adoption and delivery of a MMTS remains important for a number of reasons. These include that:
 - the MMDR alone is not sufficient to support Melton Mowbray's planned growth – evidence shows that it needs to form part of a wider package of complementary measures if the town is to grow successfully and wider objectives are to be achieved, including environmental;
 - it will provide a clear framework for development and delivery of other measures – without such either there is a significant risk that those measures will not be delivered, or they will be delivered in a reactive,

inefficient and uncoordinated way that fails to maximise the value of currently planned and future investments; and

- it will provide an evidenced-based platform that strengthens the authority's position in continuing to secure developer contributions towards the delivery of the MMDR and wider measures and on which to take-up future government bidding opportunities (where it is affordable for the authority to do so).
12. Without an MMTS identifying a wider package of interventions, there is a risk that it will not be possible to keep short-term deterioration in traffic conditions within the town to proportionate and reasonable levels (as agreed by the Cabinet in 2015). If this were to occur, economic growth and recovery could be undermined; the delivery of wider goals and objectives, including environmental, could likewise be undermined.
 13. Notwithstanding the reasons set out above, there is a requirement by government that a Strategy is submitted alongside the Full Business Case for the NE MMDR. Any failure to do so might undermine that Case, in turn potentially putting at risk the near £50m Large Local Majors funding previously earmarked by government towards the delivery of that project.
 14. As highlighted in paragraph 1, this report seeks the Committee's views on an *interim* MMTS. The reasons why the Strategy is only an interim version at this stage are set out in the section below.

Development of an Interim Strategy

15. There are two key reasons why only an interim Strategy has been drafted at this time.
16. *Impacts of Covid-19:* It is too early to have sufficient evidence to understand what the potential longer-term societal and economic impacts of the pandemic might be. Whilst it would be inappropriate to abandon or radically alter *strategic* policies and strategies at such a time, conversely for lower order policies and strategies, such as ones relating to particular areas or places, it might be more appropriate to allow for a degree of flexibility.
17. Such is the case with the MMTS; putting in place an interim document will provide an appropriate framework that reflects and fulfils the reasons for needing a Strategy, as set out in the section above, whilst providing a framework that gives a degree of flexibility to tune the balance of measures to be provided in the light of, inter alia, further emerging evidence of the pandemic's impacts. (It is important to emphasise that Covid-19 does not alter the fundamental case for the MMDR; its provision is essential to opening up areas of land for housing and employment growth and it will provide for people to travel by a number of modes and for the movement of goods and delivery of services.)
18. *Town centre regeneration:* Melton Borough Council (MBC) has ambitions to improve the attractiveness and quality of the town centre environment. Preliminary work to inform the development of an MMTS included traffic modelling of various conceptual options for changes to the capacity of town centre roads (including Norman Way and Wilton Road). This modelling has

shown that traffic conditions in the town centre are sensitive to significant changes (2036 scenario), with queues and significant delays forecast to result from even (relatively) minor capacity reductions.

19. Any future plans for regenerating the town centre (including the development of any possible masterplans proposing changes to the layout of the town centre) could well have a fundamental impact on how traffic behaves in Melton Mowbray. It will also determine the scope for potential enhancements to walking, cycling and passenger transport facilities across the town centre. It is therefore critical that the development of the MMTS is informed by any such plans.
20. Additionally, proposals for the Manufacturing Zones in and around the town have yet to be drawn-up in any detail and work is ongoing on masterplans for the northern and southern Sustainable Neighbourhoods; the outcomes of this work too will influence the content of the MMTS.
21. Putting in place an interim MMTS will allow further time to understand ambitions for the town centre and to finalise proposals/masterplans for key development sites in and around the town.

Overview of draft interim strategy

22. The interim document is more limited in scope than a full MMTS and is not a long-term replacement for the full Strategy. Nonetheless, once approved the interim document should be treated as the MMTS, until a final version is put in place. It is intended that the interim MMTS will be submitted to government with the NE MMDR Full Business Case (Autumn 2021).
23. Once MBC's plans for regenerating the town centre are shared, further work, including modelling and development of options for changes to the configuration and capacity of town centre roads, will be undertaken.
24. Notwithstanding paragraph 22, the draft interim MMTS is an evidence-based document that draws together a wide range of information about the town and about traffic and transport conditions. It provides the basis for future transport investment in Melton Mowbray, supporting Melton's Local Plan and maximising opportunities to enable Melton Mowbray's economic growth and to deliver on wider objectives, including environmental. The interim MMTS provides a road map for completing the full MMTS.
25. Attached at Appendix A is the engagement draft document; in brief summary, it sets out:
 - the purpose of the strategy, explaining why it is being developed and some of the benefits in doing so;
 - details of traffic and transport, including a general summary of traffic conditions in the town;
 - description of issues and challenges, including five key themes:
 - i. Growth
 - ii. Environment
 - iii. Access to opportunities
 - iv. Health and wellbeing

v. Funding.

26. It also provides:

- a framework for the approach to be taken to addressing issues, including:
 - ideas for the comprehensive reclassification and resigning of roads in the town to complement the MMDR, with the general intention of reducing the classification (status) of roads through the town and encouraging as much traffic as is possible to use the MMDR;
 - proposals for rerouting lorry movements post opening of MMDR, with the general intention of rationalising the number of routes that lorries are permitted to use and maximising their use of the MMDR.
 - conceptual proposals for improving the walking and cycling network across the town;
 - suggestions for improving the attractiveness of passenger transport provision in the town, including the possibility for a 'bus hub' (mini-bus station); and
 - conceptual ideas for making changes to the way that traffic flows on the central ring road, Regent Street and Brook Street

27. Additionally, it also sets out draft policies that are intended to strengthen the authority's position in:

- seeking to safeguarding the delivery of and future functioning of the MMDR; and
- securing further developer contributions towards the delivery of the MMDR and wider Strategy measures.

28. The document at Appendix A is being used for public engagement, as set out below. Ultimately, the final version of the interim Strategy will consist of an executive summary supported by a more comprehensive document that includes more of the supporting evidence and background.

Engagement

29. Public engagement on the draft interim MMTS commenced on 20 January and will close on 7 March 2021 (just over six weeks). As well as residents and visitors to the town, there will be targeted engagement with key stakeholders e.g. businesses, passenger transport providers, landowners, developers, local action groups, Public Health England and the emergency services.

30. The overall purpose of the engagement is to inform the development of the interim MMTS. The specific aims of the engagement are to:

- establish the level of public support for the Strategy;
- gain a further understanding of travel behaviour and transport issues in the town;
- inform the overall approach that we are proposing to take in the Strategy to addressing the traffic and transport issues and also in seeking to influence peoples' travel habits;
- inform the further development of proposals for re-routeing of traffic in the town post MMDR opening, including lorry movements; and

- inform the further development of the proposed policies.
31. Although part of the overall Strategy, consultations on the MMDR have, and will continue to be undertaken separately and are out of scope of this engagement.
 32. To ensure that the engagement reaches as wide an audience as possible it consists of an online survey, which is available via a link from the Council's website, along with an online forum called Confers (which amongst other features contains maps on which people can leave 'sticky notes' to identify issues or make suggestions for improvements). It has been advertised widely through media channels and stakeholder networks. To ensure the engagement is Covid-19 compliant and as safe as possible, no public exhibition has been held. Although hard copies of engagement material are available on request, its use has been minimised, due to health and logistical issues during the pandemic.
 33. The Committee's comments are being sought as part of the engagement and will help to develop the interim Strategy.
 34. Comments received through the engagement exercise will be analysed and reviewed by officers and as appropriate will inform changes to the draft Strategy; in some cases, comments received may also be helpful in shaping future scheme ideas or programmes. A further report detailing the outcome of the engagement and presenting a final version of the interim MMTS will be presented to the Cabinet in Summer 2021.

Resource Implications

35. In line with the Medium-Term Financial Strategy approved by Full Council on 17 February 2021, development of the MMTS continues to be funded from the Highways and Transport Capital Programme. Greater details about that Programme's content will be presented to the Cabinet for approval in March and is the subject of a separate item on the agenda for this Committee meeting.
36. Separate reports to the Committee and Cabinet have set out the implications associated with the development and delivery of the MMDR and further updates on that project will be brought to the Committee and Cabinet, as necessary.
37. Aside from the costs of the MMDR, it is probable that to fully implement a MMTS (i.e. to deliver all the proposed measures that it will likely embrace) will run to several tens of millions of pounds. Around £14million of developer contributions have so far been secured towards the delivery of the MMDR and other transport measures in the town.
38. However, given the wider financial pressures on the Council, beyond that, delivery of the MMTS will be dependent on continuing to seek to secure funding from other sources, including from third parties (e.g. developers through the planning system – not just from the Sustainable Neighborhoods, but from other developments as they come forward, e.g. the Manufacturing Zones) and public funds (e.g. government funding (bidding) opportunities). There is very little funding available in the most recently approved Highways and Transport Capital Programme to materially contribute towards MMTS delivery, i.e. beyond funding for its development and costs associated with delivery of the MMDR.

39. A robust supporting evidence base is essential to these processes and having an MMTS in place should help to unlock these funding opportunities.
40. To mitigate against the significant risk of forward funding infrastructure in line with district councils' local plans, the County Council is currently developing an infrastructure policy. During March consultation and engagement is happening with interested parties on the draft policy. The policy will take into account issues raised as part of this consultation exercise and be brought to Cabinet for approval in the spring. This will be important in setting out the parameters under which further funding is sought, including in relation to the MMTS.
41. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on the content of this report.

Timetable for Decisions

42. Engagement with stakeholders, Members, and the public to help shape the Strategy is taking place between 20 January and 7 March 2021.
43. A further report on the outcome of the engagement, presenting the final draft Strategy, will be considered by the Committee in Summer 2021, ahead of presenting it to Cabinet for approval.

Background Papers

Cabinet - 11 September 2015 – development of a Melton Mowbray Transport Strategy

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=4230&Ver=4>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

This report has been circulated to Members representing the electoral divisions in the Melton area: Mr. J. T. Orson JP CC, Mr. J. B. Rhodes CC, Mrs. P. Posnett MBE CC and Mr. A. E. Pearson CC.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

44. The Equality Act 2010 requires the Authority to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity between different protected groups.
45. Melton Borough Council's Local Plan (2011-2036) states that the Borough's population is ageing, to such an extent that if trends continue unchecked, there will be an increase in deaths over births in the Borough by 2036.
46. One of the aims of the MMTS is to improve accessibility for all ages, including older people. We will continue to take an evidence-based approach to ensure that funds are focussed where they can provide the most benefit and continue to monitor the effectiveness of this approach.

47. The MMTS will facilitate the provision of transport improvements that will assist the local economy and facilitate sustainable, safe and healthy communities. It will do this by tackling congestion on our roads and encouraging walking, cycling and the use of passenger transport. Beneficiaries of the MMTS include all network users e.g. pedestrians, cyclists, drivers and passenger transport users.
48. An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) screening exercise is currently in development and will be informed by the outcome of the engagement. If appropriate, a full EHRIA, will be presented to the Cabinet alongside the engagement outcomes, to assist the Cabinet with its decision on the exercise of its Public-Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010.
49. If appropriate, separate Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments will be completed as specific schemes are developed.

Environmental Impact

50. Transport is linked to several wider policy areas, including air quality, the environment and climate change, as well as economic growth, housing and health inequalities. These considerations have been included within the development of the draft interim MMTS and will continue to play a fundamental role in influencing the future development of transport interventions in Melton Mowbray.
51. If appropriate, an Environmental Impact Assessment will be completed as specific schemes are developed.

Appendix

Appendix A - Engagement draft document

Officers to Contact

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