

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES

REDUCTION IN LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN GRANT 2010/11

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 On 10 June 2010, an announcement was made by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) that provided details of the local government share of the Coalition Government savings proposals for 2010/11.
- 1.2 On 24 June 2010, Cabinet received a report from the Director of Finance that included the implications of these savings for Wirral Council (Minute 52 refers).
- 1.3 This report sets out a re-cast Local Transport Plan (LTP) Capital Programme for Wirral based on the announced savings to the Integrated Transport Block and the funding for bridge strengthening on the Primary Route Network.
- 1.4 The effect of these savings on the programme has been mitigated through the value engineering of schemes and the competitive rates via the Highway and Engineering Services contract with Colas.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Members will be familiar with the Local Transport Plan (LTP) for Merseyside, which sets out the transport strategy for the sub-region. The second LTP (LTP2) covers the period between 2006/07 and 2010/11 and contains a five year programme and a comprehensive set of performance indicators and targets.
- 2.2 On 14 January 2010, Cabinet approved the 2010/11 LTP programme which was based on the original settlement of £7,684,000 (Minute 268 refers).
- 2.3 On 10 June 2010, the new Coalition Government announced cuts to local government, and Cabinet considered a report from the Director of Finance on 24 June 2010 which set out the implications of the overall reduction in funding for 2010/11 for Wirral Council (Minute 52 refers). Of the total £3.91million reduction in capital grants to the Council, £1.01 million was cut from the LTP transport capital programme.
- 2.4 The LTP funding cut comprises of £790,000 from the Integrated Transport Block and £220,000 from a ring-fenced grant that the Council had successfully bid for in order to carry out strengthening works to the Town Link Viaduct in Birkenhead.

3.0 TRANSPORT CAPITAL SETTLEMENT 2010/11

- 3.1 The LTP settlement is made up of two main blocks, the Integrated Transport Block and the Highway/Bridge Maintenance & Strengthening Block, plus additional funding for specific projects. In 2010/11 Wirral was also successful in being awarded an additional ring-fenced allocation for bridge strengthening on the Primary Route Network (PRN), i.e. the Town Link Viaduct in Birkenhead.

Summary of Wirral's Original LTP Settlement 2010/11:

- Integrated Transport Block 3,155,000
- Highway / Bridge Maintenance 3,441,000

- Bridge Strengthening on PRN 1,088,000
- **TOTAL** 7,684,000

3.2 After applying the announced reductions, the revised LTP programme should be:

- Integrated Transport Block 2,365,000
- Highway / Bridge Maintenance 3,441,000
- Bridge Strengthening on PRN 868,000
- **TOTAL** 6,674,000

However, as the ring-fenced grant had originally been awarded to carry out specific strengthening work to a key structure on the PRN, it is not possible to make the announced 20% cut to this scheme, which appears to have been applied arbitrarily. Therefore, alternative adjustments to the road maintenance programme have been necessary to ensure that the Town Link Viaduct scheme can continue fully funded.

3.3 A new, re-cast programme is attached at **Appendix A**. The table includes both the previously approved budgets as well as the reduced budgets under each of the LTP headings. In line with the current transport policy framework, the approach taken has been to apply a 25% cut across each of the Integrated Transport Block headings (Congestion, Road Safety, Air Quality/Environment and Transportation), so that the impact of the reduced funding is carried equally by each of the policy areas.

3.4 The following sections of this report describe the main changes that have been necessary in each block to meet the re-cast budgets.

3.5 MAINTENANCE

3.5.1 Original budget = £4,529,000; Reduced budget = £4,309,000

3.5.2 There was no specific cut on 10 June 2010 to the LTP allocation for highway maintenance, probably in recognition of the ongoing need to improve the condition of the road network. However, this block has been affected by the need to fill the gap in funding for the bridge strengthening works on the PRN. As the contract for the strengthening of the Town Link Viaduct is already committed at the original budget cost (£1,088,000), it is not possible to now reduce the amount allocated to this project. As a consequence, the £220,000 saving has been made from the Maintenance Roads & Footways programme to enable this key bridge project to continue fully funded. A revised structural highway maintenance programme is attached at **Appendix B**, which supersedes that approved by Cabinet on 4 February 2010 (Minute 317 refers).

3.5.3 However, should any of the schemes listed in **Appendix B** not be deliverable due to unforeseen circumstances, such as unexpected statutory undertakers works, it is proposed to select other projects from the previously approved programme.

3.5.4 Following on from works undertaken during 2009/10 to refurbish the Dell Underpass Bridge, Members may be aware that I have recently written to the Department for Transport (DfT) to seek an additional £260,000 to fund variations to the works contract which were due to unexpected levels of deterioration in the substructure supports. However, in the current climate of funding cuts, it has been considered prudent to assume that this additional funding will not be available, therefore, this scheme and amount has been included within the 2010/11 bridges programme (Refer to **Appendix C**).

3.6 CONGESTION

3.6.1 Original budget = £605,000; Reduced budget = £454,000.

3.6.2 Two named projects for which funding has been retained in the Congestion block are the Speed Network Management Review and the Noctorum Avenue/Upton Road junction improvement. The former is a continuation of the project started during 2009/10 for which Members had given previous approval (Cabinet 23 July 2009; Minute 70 refers); and since Cabinet on 14 January 2010, more detailed work has revised the estimate of the Noctorum Avenue/Upton Road scheme from £300,000 to £249,000. In order to meet the reduced total for the Congestion block, the funding for Bus Priorities has been deleted and the balance (£50,000) of the block total allocated to UTC/Telematics/CCTV.

3.6.3 Whilst undesirable not to be able to carry out further bus priorities work this year, no particular project had been agreed with Merseytravel to date. Work continues however with bus operators and Merseytravel with a view to developing a Statutory Quality Partnership Scheme for consultation in the near future. In addition, Wirral Council has submitted a bid to the LTP Partnership, to which additional funding has been awarded from the Department for Transport's Congestion Fund, to carry out various measures on the A552 Congestion Corridor, including a review of the traffic regulation orders and improve traffic signal equipment at seven junctions to reduced delays, which should benefit buses as well as other traffic.

3.7 ROAD SAFETY

3.7.1 Original budget = £980,000; Reduced budget = £735,000.

3.7.2 Whilst road safety continues to be one of the Council's key priorities, a reduction to the road safety programme has been necessary as part of the cost saving exercise. As in the Congestion block, there is a named scheme that the Council is already committed to delivering, i.e. M53 Junction 3, for which the previously agreed budget cannot be cut, therefore, it is proposed that the £310,000 budget is retained for this project.

3.7.3 Consequently, the remaining £425,000 has been allocated between the Community Speed Reduction Initiative (Accidents to Zero), which has proven to be successful in residential areas (£15,000), Local Safety Schemes (LSS) (£350,000) and Safer Routes to School (SRTS) (£60,000).

3.7.4 The reduced LSS programme has been recast based on the programme approved by Cabinet on 4 February 2010 (Minute 315 refers). One proposal, Parkside Road, Bebington, has been dropped following further accident investigation work as it has been concluded that the anticipated casualty savings will not be met. The other proposals have been 're-engineered' in order to reduce the cost whilst maintaining the aim of casualty reduction. For Members' information, a revised draft programme of Local Safety Schemes is attached to this report at **Appendix D**.

3.7.5 The proposed SRTS programme, to the total of £60,000, is also included in **Appendix D**. Prioritisation has been given to projects that have been awarded, or are expected to attract, partner or matched funding from external bodies, such as Sustrans. This will ensure that alternative funding opportunities are maximised. Where additional funding is not expected, the projects that have already been discussed with schools and where the biggest benefits are anticipated to be gained have been prioritised. For additional information, a reserve list of schemes is provided at **Appendix E**.

3.7.6 It is proposed, in the event that it should prove impractical to proceed with an approved scheme or if unallocated finance becomes available within the Road Safety block, that available funding is used to expand delivery of the SRTS programme.

3.8 AIR QUALITY / ENVIRONMENT

3.8.1 Original budget = £950,000; Reduced budget = £712,000.

3.8.2 This block of funding is directed towards delivery of the Walking and Cycling Strategies. Reductions to this block result in the loss of £238,000 in total, with £133,000 being lost from Walking and £105,000 being lost from Cycling.

3.8.3 The following Walking projects have been identified for funding in the first instance:

- Puffin Crossing in Whetstone Lane, Birkenhead (£66,000)
- £200,000 for Area Forum local improvements; and
- £111,000 for Allport Road / Allport Lane and £115,000 for Borough Road / Mount Road pedestrian improvements, in line with more detailed cost appraisals.

3.8.4 The remaining £100,000 has been allocated to Public Rights of Way in order to secure matched European funding for the Wirral Circular Trail. The reduced budget will however mean that improvements to the wider PRow network will not be possible in 2010/11.

3.8.5 Due to the commitments described above, there is no funding available in the Walking block to continue the ongoing programme of pedestrian dropped kerbs this year. Members will recall that this programme has been implemented over a number of years in consultation with WIRED (Wirral Information Resource for Equality and Diversity). However, as the Area Forums' budget has been protected from the financial cuts, individual Area Forums may wish to consider allocating some of the LTP funding to carrying out such improvements.

3.8.6 The proposed £105,000 reduction to the Cycling programme will mean that the rolling programme of improvements, to develop the Wallasey Network, will be affected accordingly. However, the Council has been successful in being awarded £105,000 capital grant by Sustrans, therefore the overall impact of the cuts to the 2010/11 funding will be cancelled out. Whilst fortunate, in reality, the benefits of the additional grant will not be seen by the delivery of extra measures.

3.8.7 **Appendix F** sets out the revised draft programmes in the Air Quality / Environment block.

3.9 ACCESSIBILITY

3.9.1 Original budget = £150,000; Reduced budget = £112,000.

3.9.2 Accessibility is one of the 4 "shared priorities" that was agreed by Government to be delivered as part of the second Local Transport Plan (LTP2). The Accessibility block of the LTP Capital Allocation has been used in recent years to help break down barriers to people using public transport, and deliver schemes and initiatives to improve access to jobs, healthcare, education and life opportunities.

3.9.3 Key elements of the Accessibility programme are the Scooter Commuter and Travel Training schemes. The Scooter Commuter Scheme provides eligible clients with a 6-month loan of a 50cc scooter, along with all personal protective equipment, insurance and training, in order for them to access key opportunities. This scheme aims to reduce worklessness by providing transport for people where there is no other means of getting to their desired destination, i.e. a location not served by public transport. The Merseyside WorkWise scheme was the basis of the Beacon Award for Improving Accessibility and, therefore, has been recognised nationally as an innovative transport solution.

- 3.9.4 The travel training scheme was originally set up in Wirral in November 2007. This scheme supports individuals aged 16+, by providing one to one training to help those who need extra support to make journeys on their own using public transport. Travel training can help those who are not familiar with using public transport, those having to make new or unfamiliar journeys or people who are experienced difficulties after a recent disability or illness. Once completed, travel training reduces reliance on car journeys, saves money by reducing reliance on taxis and most importantly improves the clients independence, enabling them to travel independently with confidence.
- 3.9.5 The Accessibility block also contributes to the ongoing Merseyside TravelWise initiative, as well as assisting provision of facilities that support the Council's Travel Plan. Both initiatives are instrumental in promoting 'Smarter Choices' and helping to encourage sustainable travel to reduce the impacts of travel congestion and carbon emissions.
- 3.9.6 The impact of reduced funding across this block will mean that there will be less support for people to access key opportunities and fewer Travel Plan measures possible during 2010/11. The annual contribution to Merseyside TravelWise (£30,000) is anticipated to be maintained.

3.10 TRANSPORTATION

3.10.1 Original budget = £470,000; Reduced budget = £352,000.

3.10.2 The Transportation budget is split into two parts – (i) Advanced Design, Land & Forward Planning, and (ii) Research & Monitoring. Particular projects include highway scheme development, associated land acquisition, LTP partnership working, studies, traffic modelling and monitoring systems.

3.10.3 Key projects that this block of funding has supported include the development of the City Region Transport Model, which will enable the LTP Partners to test the impacts of various transport infrastructure measures and interventions for inclusion in the forthcoming [third] LTP. Other projects include purchase and installation of cycle counters to monitor cycle use on key routes, installation of permanent automatic traffic count loops to measure traffic flows across the Borough, and surveys such as the use of the A41 by Heavy Goods Vehicles to access the Twelve Quays Freight Terminal.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Reductions in the LTP capital grant will inevitably impact on the Council's ability to deliver the measures aimed at fulfilling the objectives and targets of the Merseyside Local Transport Plan. Cuts to the 2010/11, and future, transport capital grant allocations will therefore require proposed schemes and interventions to be prioritised in accordance to their ability to assist delivery of the LTP strategy.

5.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Staff from my Department will continue to provide Wirral's input to the LTP and its strategic development. Whilst reduced, delivery of the Transport Capital Programme is likely to continue to have an impact on staffing requirements, particularly in the areas of work that require detailed accident analyses and public consultation prior to the scheme identification and implementation. It may still be necessary, therefore, to

appoint consultants to undertake certain categories of work so that I have the necessary capacity to deliver the proposed programme of works.

6.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no specific ethnic minority, elderly persons or equal opportunities implications arising directly from this report. The transport strategy, which underpins the LTP, includes measures to assist the transport needs of all sections of the community.
- 6.2 In addition, the Accessibility Plan within LTP2 identifies current transport barriers to key destination across Wirral. This work will inform the identification of potential transport proposals to improve opportunities for all people.
- 6.3 Wirral's highway and transport proposals consider the needs of people with disabilities and impaired mobility, as set out in the Merseyside Code of Practice on Access and Mobility, which takes full account of the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The impacts of the cuts to the LTP capital grant will result in fewer and/or reduced projects being delivered than had originally been planned. However, those that will be delivered will continue to have positive Community Safety implications, either through improvements in road safety (e.g. introducing physical changes to the highway) or improvements in personal safety (for example, better street lighting).
- 7.2 LTP2 directly addresses the Government's Road Safety shared priority, which links closely with the Council's Local Area Agreement and Corporate Plan objectives to reduce traffic accidents, and also complements most of the Council's corporate objectives. The Accessibility work supports strategic aims to reduce worklessness, promote greater independence and choice, improve support for those with mental health problems, reduce numbers not in employment, education or training, and increase numbers going to university, especially from disadvantaged communities. Projects to increase the use of sustainable modes of transport support the aims to reduce our carbon footprint, encourage healthy lifestyles and participation in fulfilling activities, and reduce childhood obesity.

8.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 1 Sustainability and LA21 issues are common threads running through all the transport policies. Reducing the LTP programme, again, will mean fewer measures or improvements to support the environmental and carbon reduction aims.
- 8.2 Specific elements of LTP2 include:
- Sustainable Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the strategy;
 - Joint working with health authorities and the promotion of walking and cycling;
 - Reduction of transport related emissions;
 - Encouraging greater use of public transport and non-motorised modes of transport;
 - Development of Travel Plans with schools and businesses; and

- Merseyside ‘TravelWise’ – the initiative that is specifically helping to make an important contribution to people’s behaviour change and the promotion of alternative modes of travel to the private car.

9.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no specific planning implications in regards to the reduction in capital grant for transport.
- 9.2 However, in accordance with DfT guidelines, the LTP is closely aligned with the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and other strategic and local policies, including the Regional Transport Strategy, Wirral’s Tourism Strategy and local environmental, social and economic regeneration strategies.
- 9.3 The Merseyside Authorities are committed to approving a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), which will improve linkages between land use and transport within the planning approvals’ process. Members may recall that the SPD was particularly noted by the Government in the settlement letter as “indicative of forward thinking on the links between transport and planning”.
- 9.4 This SPD will form an integral part of the Core Local Development Framework (LDF). It is intended that the full SPD be approved and implemented in the near future and will be reported to Members separately in due course.

10.0 ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no specific anti-poverty implications in regards to the reduction in capital grant for transport.
- 10.2 However, it is recognised by the LTP partners that the cost of travel by public transport, which has risen out of proportion to the cost of travel by car, can be a barrier to unemployed people or those on low incomes. Wirral officers are currently working with bus operators, Merseytravel and Cheshire West and Chester Council with a view to developing a Statutory Quality Partnership Scheme for future implementation. The cost of fares has been identified as a potential element for consideration in this project; however, this will require further detailed work and sharing of commercially sensitive data between partners. I anticipate bringing a future report to inform Members of this project.

11.0 SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Social inclusion is a thread running through the LTP, which aims to provide a fully integrated transport system that is accessible to everyone. Therefore reduced funding will impact on the delivery of the measures and interventions that could help improve social inclusion.

12.0 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 There are no implications under this heading.

13.0 ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT

- 13.1 The Communities and Local Government announcement on local authority savings, dated 10 June 2010, and the document titled “Local government’s contribution to £6.2 billion efficiencies in 2010-11”, which is accessible on the web site

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/localgovernmentfinance/>, have been used in the preparation of this report.

14.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

14.1 The LTP contains a Wirral-wide transport strategy and implementation plan, and changes to the 2010/11 programme will be of interest to Members in all wards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

15.1 Cabinet is requested to

- (i) approve the revised LTP Capital Programme;
- (ii) Authorise the Director of Technical Services to select suitable alternative schemes within each of the LTP blocks from the relevant reserve list of schemes, in consultation with the Cabinet Member and Overview and Scrutiny Committee Spokespersons, if in the event that it should prove impractical to proceed with an approved scheme or unallocated finance becomes available.

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