

## **London Inn Square - Post Scheme Monitoring**

Report of the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment

***Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.***

**Recommendation: It is recommended that:**

- (a) Members note the findings of the monitoring of traffic impacts is noted;**
- (b) the specific proposals described in section 4 of the report are investigated further and progressed for delivery in 2013/14 through the Exeter Local Transport Plan programme.**

### **1. Summary**

This report follows a series of working group meetings with city and county councillors to reflect upon and monitor the impacts of the London Inn Square city centre scheme. This report summarises the findings of the traffic data monitoring before and after the New North Road closure. It also makes some recommendations for some additional works to be carried out in 2013/14, based on feedback and experiences from local members, traders and local residents.

### **2. Background**

The London Inn Square scheme was delivered in time for the John Lewis store opening on 12 October 2012; however, the restriction of access from New North Road into Sidwell Street came into effect in May 2012. As part of the February 2012 HATOC recommendations, it was requested that the local Member Task Group monitor the impact of the scheme and that a report be presented to the Committee 3-6 months after implementation.

As part of the scheme monitoring commitment, Devon County Council installed automatic traffic counters on New North Road and York Road in order to understand the change in traffic levels before and after the scheme was completed. By recording data on a daily basis, it meant that other influences on travel behaviour, such as utilities works, school holidays and peak periods, e.g. Christmas, could be explained.

Two Transport Working Group meetings were held in August and November 2012 which consisted of city and county councillors for Newtown and Polsloe and St David's and St James wards, as well as officers from the city and county council. The group considered the traffic data and flagged up issues that had arisen during the John Lewis store construction phase.

### **3. Technical Monitoring Data**

Traffic surveys were carried out before and after the closure of New North Road and automatic traffic counters were installed on New North Road and York Road to record traffic flows hourly, every day. This allowed more detailed analysis to enable officers to explain traffic behaviour and how routing may have changed over time. It was also possible to

explain changes to traffic flow resulting from utilities works taking place on North Street and effects of school holidays and King William Street car park reopening.

Early problems reported in June/July by local residents and fed back by councillors at the transport working groups was the level of queuing on York Road and vehicle routing issues on Longbrook Street. Officers explained that not all of the mitigation works had been completed and that it would take time for drivers to get used to the new layout and seek alternative routes. In agreement with councillors, signal timings were changed at the York Road/Summerland Street junction to help get more traffic on York Road through the signals. This helped ease some of the problems. Furthermore, contractors were instructed to remove and reinstall signage to direct traffic correctly from the north of the city.

As predicted, the total traffic levels on New North Road heading east past the prison has decreased since the road closure in May, which suggests a proportion of the drivers previously travelling through Sidwell Street are choosing alternative cross city routes at an earlier part of their journey. There have been weeks with higher than average flows such as when the utility works were being carried out on North Street. There was also an increase in the lead up to Christmas. Most recent counts show approximately 5,200 vehicles travelling eastbound over a 12-Hour period, compared to 6,050 before the closure.

In the case of York Road, there was a higher percentage transfer to York Road initially, which resulted in long queues at peak times. Furthermore, a higher proportion of drivers than predicted were using Longbrook Street rather than Blackall Road, which caused lengthy delays extending back from the Longbrook Street/York Road junction. This was particularly pronounced during the utilities works, which closed North Street, one of the alternative local cross city routes. Traffic volumes reduced following the reopening of North Street.

It was originally predicted that about 45% of the traffic travelling from New North Road onto Sidwell Street would transfer onto York Road after the closure, with the remainder dispersing onto alternative routes. Data collected to date shows that in reality the slightly higher figure of 55% of this traffic has transferred onto York Road. However, overall the total traffic volumes on York Road are similar to the levels which were predicted and modelled.

One of the greatest negative impacts in the early stages of the road closure was traffic choosing not to use the shorter distance, Blackall Road route to travel towards York Road. Instead, a high number of drivers were using Longbrook Street, which caused queuing problems at peak times, extending back from the right turn into York Road. At the time, officers and members debated whether to install additional signage to direct traffic down Blackall Road; however, it was agreed to monitor the situation further as it was early after the traffic management changes.

A recent comparison of counts on Longbrook Street found that there were approximately 300 less vehicles using Longbrook Street in February 2013 over a 12 hour period compared with the count carried out in October 2012. Surveys of Blackall Road found that there had not been an increase on Blackall Road, which is further evidence that over time drivers were choosing alternative routes at an earlier part of their journey. There are further measures described in section 4 to address problems with bus manoeuvres at the Longbrook Street/New North Road junction.

There were concerns that there would be further delays on York Road and Longbrook Street once King William Street car park had reopened and John Lewis had begun trading; however, the 5 month period of road closure before John Lewis opened saw a trend of traffic levels reducing on York Road and drivers choosing alternative routes. There was a minimal impact following the opening of the car park. In advance of the opening weekend, press

releases were issued encouraging use of the Park and Ride. Surveys found that Park and Ride bus patronage was up and traffic levels were lower on York Road.

The past couple of months' worth of data represents typical traffic levels, i.e. post store opening/Christmas traffic peak volumes and shows that 12 hour flows on York Road has levelled off at about 6,300 vehicles southbound. This is comparable to the levels of traffic officers predicted, which formed the technical justification for the scheme. Since the John Lewis store opened, there have been few issues raised in respect of queuing and delays on York Road/Longbrook Street.

Traffic levels on these roads will continue to be monitored in the future. The London Inn Square scheme was intended to improve the public realm and address an accident collision cluster on Sidwell Street and at the Paris Street/High Street junction. There will be a review of the accidents on Sidwell Street as part of the stage 4 road safety audit.

#### **4. Further Measures**

The traffic data monitoring shows that traffic levels are largely in line with the traffic volumes predicted by officers prior to the scheme being implemented; however, there are a number of relatively minor issues that need resolving. This section outlines what works/further investigations are proposed in 2013/14 Local Transport Plan programme.

##### **Longbrook Street/New North Road junction**

Some buses turning left into Longbrook Street are unable to make the turn easily and complaints have been raised by Stagecoach and bus users. Discussions with local members has suggested removing or reducing the cycle lane on the Longbrook Street approach to New North Road to allow the centre line to be moved across, which would make the manoeuvre easier.

##### **Bus Stops**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> outbound bus shelter on Sidwell Street is due to be installed in early April. A bus stop flag is proposed on Bampfyld Street to allow citybound users of the B bus to alight for access to the post office on the corner of York Road. Currently, the nearest stop is near Peacocks on Sidwell Street. The principle has been agreed; however, the proposal is subject to the outcomes of a minor scheme safety audit. The bus stop outside Iceland also has drainage issues, which are being investigated and will be resolved.

##### **Taxi Shelter**

Some people are confusing the taxi shelter for a bus shelter. The taxi shelter is to have appropriate signage on the flag pole and in the information panels to make this clearer for people.

##### **Loading Arrangements/Taxi Rank**

The stall traders want the county council to consider the possibility of an extension of the loading bay (by a few metres), which would be restricted to lorries loading during loading hours but would operate as a taxi rank during peak times, i.e. evenings. The principle has been discussed on site with local members responsible for Newton and St James area and officers are investigating what additional signage and lining/traffic orders would be needed in order to permit this and whether it would be acceptable to the authority.

##### **Contraflow Cycle Lane**

Cyclists have raised some concerns about the safety of the contraflow cycle lane. In response, it is proposed that a cycle road marking is painted at each end of the cycle lane. This would make it clear to cyclists where to access the cycle lane on approaches from New

North Road and Bailey Street. It would also highlight to pedestrians crossing between John Lewis and Waterstones that there may be cyclists approaching from the right.

### **Paris Street right turn movements**

There are still some drivers turning right into Sidwell Street despite the banned movement. A sign has been ordered to be installed on the right hand side of the carriageway to make the restrictions explicitly clear.

## **5. Financial Considerations**

£50,000 was programmed into the 2013/14 Local Transport Plan programme to address any outstanding or unforeseen issues, following completion of the London Inn Square works. Resolving the list of items described above is not anticipated to exceed this amount.

## **6. Sustainability Considerations**

The improvement schemes have been subjected to a design and safety audit process and Cabinet has previously approved the scheme, which was designed to create a more attractive environment, which encourages more walking, cycling and use of public transport. Positive comments have been fed back at community events about the pedestrian improvements in the York Road area and the easier access particularly across Acland Road and Oxford Road.

## **7. Carbon/Air Quality Impact Considerations**

The Cabinet report noted that the highway changes would result in a net reduction in all of the pollutants (NO<sub>2</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub> and CO<sub>2</sub>) as a result of the anticipated changes in vehicle flows and speeds. The impacts will not be fully known until Exeter City Council carries out its next round of air quality monitoring. The impacts will nevertheless be monitored as and when data is collected.

## **8. Equality Considerations**

As the Cabinet approved report noted, the scheme was designed involving representatives from the Mosque on York Road, St Sidwell's Primary School governors and Living Options Devon, who represent people with visual, hearing and mobility impairment. Following completion of the scheme, there has been positive feedback about the lack of clutter, which aids navigation for people with limited sight. Other positive feedback includes the use of tactile paving extending to the building facades and use of contrasting colours to distinguish kerb edges and low level seating, which can be difficult to pick up. The use of drains to aid orientation has also been recognised as a positive part of the scheme.

## **9. Legal Considerations**

Any proposed works relating to signage or amendments to the loading bay/taxi rank will be subject to the resolution of any objections received regarding the Traffic Regulation Orders. The works would need to be advertised in accordance with the Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.

## **10. Risk Management Considerations**

No risks have been identified.

## 11. Public Health Impact

The purpose of the scheme is to create a safe, attractive, accessible city centre, which encourages people to spend time walking around the city. Some of the proposed measures described in section 4 are expected to further enhance safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

## 12. Options/Alternatives

Other suggestions were put forward to adjust the signal timings to give improved priority to cyclists using the contraflow cycle lane; however, as the final scheme design was subject to a formal road safety audit and included discussions about the signal timings for cyclists, the current arrangement was considered to be the safest option. A further road safety review will nevertheless be carried out 12 months post completion of the scheme, i.e. in October 2013.

## 13. Reason for Conclusion

The traffic data monitoring indicates that although the initial impact on the Longbrook Street/York Road area was significant, a number of the supporting traffic management measures had not been implemented and insufficient time had been allowed for drivers to seek alternative routes. It is clear that 6 months post scheme completion, the traffic predictions are broadly accurate and that traffic has redistributed with limited impacts on other parts of the network. The measures outlined in section 4 are relatively low cost and will address outstanding concerns relating to safety and accessibility.

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### Electoral Divisions: St David's & St James and Newtown & Polsloe

#### Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper	Date	File Reference
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Nil

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