

## Totnes Experimental Traffic Order

Report of the Head of Highways, Capital Development and Waste

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

**Recommendation: It is recommended that the Committee:**

- (a) Notes the latest observations on the Totnes Experimental Traffic Order;**
- (b) Agrees to make the Experimental Traffic Order Permanent subject to a further review in 2016 at which data from 3 years before and 3 years post introduction can be analysed;**
- (c) Agrees that a Shared Space enhancement scheme be developed and implemented in The Narrows to a value of £30,000.**

### 1. Summary

At its meeting on 24 September 2013 this Committee resolved:

- (a) that the Experimental Traffic Order be extended by a further period of 6 months from the date of this meeting, and reviewed by the Committee after the extended period has expired;*
- (b) that the scheme for minor lane changes to improve traffic flow on the Coronation Road approach to the Station Road junction shown in Appendix IV to Report HCW/13/40 be implemented as soon as practicable, subject to prior consultation with the Fire Brigade, Ambulance Service and Hospital who all require access at this location. (Minute\*13 refers)*

Following the HATOC and appropriate consultation the lane changes referred to were implemented in December 2013. Monitoring of the effect on traffic flows is being undertaken through Department for Transport Congestion Statistics which are released annually. The next release of these figures covering the period September 2013 to August 2014 is expected in November 2014.

This report updates previous reports and summarises results of further consultation, representations received and investigation undertaken since the September 2013 HATOC.

Given the available data, the experiment continues to achieve its objectives in relation to reducing personal injury accidents in the area originally identified on Fore Street and the lower section of High Street. However, there have been two further personal injury collisions reported by the Police in The Narrows on High Street and these are discussed further later in the report.

At the time of writing, a report has been received of a slight injury collision which occurred on the lower section of Fore Street on Wednesday 2 April. Further details of this may be available from the Police at the HATOC meeting.

Based on both on and off street parking data the Experimental Traffic Order (ETO) has not had a marked effect on the overall level of parking in Totnes.

## **2. Background/Introduction**

As detailed in the minutes of the HATOC of 24 September 2013 the experiment was introduced following public consultation primarily to address a pattern of injuries to pedestrians in collision with motorised vehicles which occurred on Fore Street and High Street.

The scheme was introduced as a method of reducing the amount of traffic using the town centre illegally as a short cut and thereby reducing the likelihood of injury collisions to pedestrians in conflict with motorised vehicles which was a problem at that time.

The Experimental Traffic Order (ETO) scheme was introduced officially on 22 March 2013 to coincide with the re-opening of the road upon completion of gas main renewal works by Wales and West Utilities.

The purpose of the ETO is to reduce the risk of pedestrian and vehicle conflicts by preventing the use of Fore Street and High Street as a short cut for through traffic. Reversal of flow on Station Road and lower Fore Street achieves this objective without restricting access to the town centre to the extent of full or partial pedestrianisation. A plan showing the Experiment can be seen in Appendix I.

The Police supported the ETO scheme when it was considered in November 2012.

## **3. Observations relating to the ETO to March 2014**

### Casualty Data

Part of the initial justification for introducing the experiment was the casualty record on Fore Street and the lower section of High Street. Of the seven injury collisions reported by the Police in the three years prior to the start of the consultation process, four involved drivers leaving the scene of the collision without exchanging details.

Since the HATOC on 24 September 2013, two further collisions have been reported. Both occurred in The Narrows section of High Street outside of the original target area. Both collision reports are consistent with pedestrians feeling safe in a shared space environment in collision with vehicles travelling at low speed.

Details of the Casualty Data can be seen in Appendix II.

These types of collision are of great concern as they have potentially occurred because pedestrians now feel safer in the environment created by the experiment. It is therefore intended, building on work undertaken with the community in 2013 and subject to HATOC approval, to develop and implement a Shared Space scheme in The Narrows to further encourage driver perception that they are travelling through a pedestrian friendly zone.

A budget of up to £30,000 for the scheme has been made available from the Local Transport Plan, Market and Coastal Towns Programme. A plan showing the design concept being developed can be seen in Appendix III.

As mentioned in 1 above a slight injury collision is reported to have occurred on 2 April 2014 on Fore Street. When compared with the original Casualty data along Fore Street this would bring the post scheme casualty rate to 1 in 1 year compared with 7 in 3 years prior to implementation of the scheme.

## Car Parking Data

The data analysis below is for June to December 2012 and 2013. It is felt that this will remove any distortion due to the closure of High Street for the Gas Main renewal from January to March 2013 and any residual effect which may have been felt in April and May.

Analysis of on street ticket sales for the entire town between June and December 2013 show an overall fall in ticket sales of 11.5% over that period equating to a reduction of 45.5 tickets per day. There are currently 3 fewer parking spaces available on Fore Street and High Street than in 2012 which might account for some of the reduction.

South Hams District Council has provided data which shows that off street car parks in Totnes have increased ticket sales by 4% between June and December 2013 equating to an increase of 45 tickets per day. Combined figures for the period June to December 2013 compared with the previous year show a drop of 0.04%.

Total car park ticket sales within the town over the period June to December 2013 were 321,486 compared with 321,600 for the same period in 2012.

Based on these figures there has been an overall reduction in parking within the town of 0.5 vehicles per day over the June to December period.

## Footfall and Modal Shift

No footfall or cycle use surveys were undertaken before the beginning of the experiment. It is therefore not possible to estimate change in footfall or any shift from Motorised transport to either foot or cycle. However, parking levels within the town are to some extent a proxy for footfall data and these indicate a shift from On Street to Off Street Parking with no significant fall in numbers.

## Economic Data

### (a) Local Data Company

The County Council subscribes to a service provided by The Local Data Company (LDC) which provides information on business activity across the UK and enables comparisons to be made locally. LDC undertook a survey of businesses in the Totnes Retail Core in March 2013 which showed that there were 227 businesses trading in the retail core of the town. A similar survey undertaken in March 2014 showed that 241 businesses were trading with 14 vacant premises.

The vacancy rate in the town which includes leisure premises was reported as being 5.9%.

The regional average vacancy rate is currently 11.8%.

### (b) Totnes Traders Action Group

The organisation has actively campaigned for removal of the Experimental Traffic Order and has part funded a study into its perceived effects on the economy of the town. Devon County Council has offered to contribute toward the costs of the study which has been independently produced by Professor Chris Balch of Plymouth University. (Appendix IV)

The study was received shortly before the deadline for this report and is based on responses received from businesses within the town to a questionnaire sent to 160 businesses in February 2014. The resultant report is based on a 40% response rate. An additional survey of 186 shoppers provides supporting qualitative data.

The executive summary points to a drop in footfall based on information received from traders and to a drop in pop and shop trade. The fall in pop and shop trade is consistent with available parking data as detailed above. However, the corresponding rise in off street parking would appear to have offset this in terms of parking tickets issued within the town and overall parking levels have remained virtually unchanged. The lack of a survey prior to the experiment does mean that there is no baseline against which to measure a reported drop in footfall.

The study also mentions particularly poor performance in the retail sector in seven months of 2013 compared with 5 months in 2005 and 4 months in 2011. Whilst it is acknowledged in the report that the High Street was completely closed for gas main renewal works in January, February and March it is also reasonable to expect that some of the post closure recovery period would have taken performance below trend for an additional period. It is suggested that a more representative picture might emerge if the period of the closure and an allowance for a recovery period were removed from the trend analysis.

The report also draws attention to a year on year fall in revenue generated over the Christmas period. The report mentions the ongoing trend in Internet sales which may also have been a factor but fails to put the Totnes experience into a national context.

Prof Balch acknowledges the limitations of his research and the relatively limited resources used to produce his report but feels that it does draw some useful conclusions about the effects of the Experiment. A commentary by the County Council's Economy and Enterprise Team on Professor Balch's report can be seen in Appendix IV A, this questions the validity of the report's findings in drawing firm conclusions on economic performance.

Traffic Data

Traffic Surveys have indicated that traffic entering the Town Centre via Station Road in May 2013 had roughly halved when compared with the volumes entering Fore Street from The Plains in December 2011. Much of this traffic would appear to have displaced to St Katherine's Way, The Lamb and Cistern Street.

A further survey undertaken in February 2014 showed that the traffic volumes entering the town centre had increased to 55% of the 2011 levels. The majority of the increase in traffic, roughly 250 vehicles in a 12 hour period, has been identified as turning right into Upper Fore Street from Station Road. Traffic volumes turning left into lower Fore Street have increased slightly to approximately 750 vehicles in a 12 hour period.

Analysis of the speed data collected on Lower Fore Street is shown in the table below.

	15-20mph		20-25 mph		25-30mph	
	0700-1900	24 Hr	0700-1900	24 Hr	0700-1900	24 Hr
Dec 2011	409	555	40	67	2	6
Feb 2014	107	151	11	16	-	-

The data indicates that traffic exceeding 15mph has dropped from 451 vehicles in a 12 hour period in Dec 2011 to 118 vehicles in February 2014 and that no vehicles are now exceeding 25mph.

Traffic Movements

Analysis of vehicle flows has indicated that general traffic levels on the A385 either side of Totnes have increased by between 3.6 and 4% in 2013 compared with 2012.

Analysis of congestion monitoring data provided by the Department for Transport has shown that journey times have generally increased within the town with the biggest increases seen on the A385 corridor Westbound between Bridgetown and Redworth and northbound on Coronation Road towards Station Road. As mentioned in 1 above, these figures are published every Autumn giving figures for the previous September to August. The effects of changes made on Coronation Road since August 2013 are not represented in the figures.

Results of the surveys are shown in Appendix V and show that whilst journey times on some roads increased sharply during the first few months of the experiment, as traffic volumes rose to their summer peak, in August the delays in many cases reduced from the levels previously seen.

#### **4. Responses to Consultation and other representations received**

##### Responses to Consultation

In the period since the last HATOC, responses and comments continued to be received but in fewer numbers than previously. Comments reflect those previously submitted from both residents and traders as well as from visitors to the town. As before many wish for the experiment to be discontinued and many wish for it to be made permanent. A summary of the responses can be seen in Appendix VI.

Responses received from various stakeholders are summarised below.

##### Community Transport

'Bob the Bus' is a community transport provider based in the town and operates as a charity with volunteer drivers. "Bob" has continued to see a year on year fall in patronage due to the re-routing of its services although, as expected, timetable reliability has improved as traffic volumes have decreased from the summer peak.

Currently, "Bob" is deferring any further changes to its timetable and routes pending the outcome of this HATOC's consideration of the ETO and the results of further changes on Coronation Road designed to improve access to the Station Road junction and the Town Centre.

Devon County Council has continued discussions with representatives of 'Bob the Bus' to discuss potential re-routing options and potential funding for additional shelters and stops along its routes.

##### Totnes Town Council

It is believed that Totnes Town Council intends to hold a meeting on 15 April 2014 to discuss its response to the experiment.

Whilst the response will not be available until after this report has been published, the Town Council has recently adopted a Transport policy and Strategy which includes the following elements:

Vision – A resilient town wide transport strategy that will deliver sustainable travel for all users, ensuring safe, healthy street and a pleasant, prosperous and vibrant town centre.

The strategy continues to:

- acknowledge the need for continued access for emergency services and delivery vehicles and community transport on High Street/Fore Street; the need for easy

access for pedestrian, particularly disabled access, the need for adequate parking overall in the town to support trade, and a desire to improve the pedestrian experience in the town.

- Recognises the need to encourage and support traffic management measures to reduce car usage, congestion, air pollution and noise that enhance the environment, improve safety and promote sustainable modes of travel.
- Support improvements to the pedestrian experience in High Street/Fore Street.

## **6. Financial Considerations**

It is estimated that up to £10,000 might be required to remove the existing experiment and restore the road to its pre-experiment state.

The cost of implementing the shared space road surface treatment option in The Narrows plus associated drainage works is estimated at £30,000. If, as discussed in a previous report, community funding could be made available, this approach could be extended to other areas of the town centre.

## **7. Sustainability Considerations**

The goals of the scheme are to reduce both the level of traffic, risk to vulnerable road users and enhance the economic and cultural life of the town.

## **8. Carbon Impact Considerations**

The scheme has been designed bearing in mind the effect on carbon emissions and overall should not have a negative impact.

## **9. Equality Considerations**

There are no equality considerations implicit in the proposals. However, the County Council is confident that measures currently being considered on Coronation Road have the potential to further address congestion issues within the town. This, in turn may enable the community transport operator to adjust its routes and timetables to improve its service.

## **10. Legal Considerations**

The Experimental Traffic Order complies with the provisions set out in the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and its related regulations.

## **11. Risk Management Considerations**

A Minor Scheme Safety Assessment and Road Safety Audit have been carried out as part of the design of the ETO. No major issues were identified but recommendations made will be considered should the scheme be made permanent.

Should the existing experimental scheme be removed it is likely that personal injury collisions in Fore Street and High Street will return to former levels.

## **12. Public Health Impact**

Based on the available data the retention of the experiment continues to help make Devon a place to be Safe and Naturally Active in a sustainable and low carbon environment.

### **13. Options/Alternatives**

No acceptable alternatives to the ETO are thought possible within available budgets. Should the existing experimental scheme be removed it is likely that personal injury collisions in Fore Street and High Street will return to former levels.

### **14. Reason for Recommendation/Conclusion**

To date the County Council has undertaken monitoring of this scheme which indicates that the experimental one way Order is achieving the objective of reducing personal injury accidents in the original target area.

Supporting information on traffic volumes and vehicle speeds indicates both a fall in vehicle numbers and speeds.

Since the scheme was introduced in March 2013 there has been one injury accident reported. No official data regarding the collision was available at the time of writing the report. However, newspaper reports have referred to the collision as slight. This would put the collision figures at 1 in 1 year which still demonstrates a fall in collisions from 7 in 3 years within the original target area.

Parking data within the town indicates that overall car generated visitor numbers to the town have remained static.

Economic data is not conclusive. Whilst the Plymouth University study draws negative conclusions from a 40% sample of businesses polled, other sources show that more businesses are operating in the retail core now than before the start of the experiment and that vacancy rates are considerably lower than the regional average.

It is usual to monitor the effects of collision reduction measures over a three year period. As a decision on whether to make the experiment permanent or to remove it is required before 22 September 2014 it is recommended that the experiment is made permanent and monitored in the usual way.

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### **Electoral Divisions: Totnes Rural**

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper	Date	File Reference
Nil		
mj110414shh totnes experimental traffic order		
hk 03 140414		