

Introduction

The City of Southampton lies at the western end of the South Hampshire sub-region. The wider urban South Hampshire area, consisting of Southampton, Eastleigh, Fareham, Gosport, Portsmouth and Havant, together with parts of the New Forest, Test Valley, Winchester and East Hampshire has a combined population of 971,250 (2004 figure) and is the largest urban area in the South East region outside London.

As a consequence, the area is also one of the South East's major economic centres and whilst other successful areas in the region depend upon linkages to London, South Hampshire operates in a distinct and largely separate manner, relying instead on connections with other regions and with Europe as a result of the presence of two major ports (Southampton and Portsmouth) and a regional airport (Southampton International).

The existence of an efficient and effective transport network in the City (and in the wider South Hampshire area) is therefore vital to its continued development and success.

Background to the Development of the LTP

Transport is, however, not an end in itself – it exists to support the achievement of other, wider, objectives. This second Local Transport Plan for the City (LTP2), covering the period 2006 – 2011, looks at these wider objectives and considers their implications for travel and transport. It then examines the challenges and opportunities that the City is already facing, or is expected to face over the next few years. Taking all of these factors into account, the LTP derives a series of objectives from which a Local Transport Strategy is then established.

The Local Transport Strategy lies at the core of the LTP and, being essentially a long-term vision, it is set in a much longer time frame, taking a 20-year view of how the transport network of the City is expected to develop. The five-year programme of the LTP should thus be seen as the first implementation stage of this Strategy.

Development of the LTP is not an unconstrained exercise. Governing the whole process, the Department for Transport (DfT) provides extensive guidance on what the LTP should contain and how it should be formulated. For this second round of LTP's, the DfT also provided advance notice to authorities of how much funding they could expect to receive over the five-year period and made clear that the implementation programmes contained within the plans should reflect those allocations and should not contain unrealistic and unfundable ambitions. For the City, this has meant that the programmes have been developed to take account of a likely average annual allocation of around £4.2M, made up of £3M for Integrated Transport measures and £1.2M for Maintenance.

The LTP also needs to take account of the Shared Priorities for Transport agreed between central and local government. This means that it has to set out how the City intends to improve accessibility, reduce congestion, improve road safety and enhance air quality.

The LTP needs to reflect the priorities and varying demands of a large number of stakeholders, ranging from major economic and employment centres, such as the Port and the City Centre, to individual residents and interest groups concerned about their local situation. Crucially, the LTP must also provide a clear public statement of the travel and transport policies of the City Council and must therefore accurately represent the political views of the Council Members.

To ensure that the LTP fulfils these diverse (and often conflicting) requirements, it has been the subject of an extensive consultation exercise. This has involved contact with a wide range of individuals and organisations using a variety of means. The development of LTP 2 has been a two-stage process, with a Provisional Plan being submitted to DfT in July 2005. This in itself was the subject of consultation prior to its submission, and it has subsequently formed the basis on which a more focussed second round of consultation has been undertaken.

Amongst the consultees have been Associated British Ports (ABP), the Chamber of Commerce, public transport operators, the Southampton Partnership, the Primary Care Trust, the NHS Trust, Sport England and groups representing young people and older people. Discussions have also been held with Members from all political parties of the Council and with neighbouring authorities.

One important feature of this LTP is the presence of a sub-regional transport strategy, the Solent Transport Strategy, which has been developed jointly with Hampshire County Council and Portsmouth City Council (and in association with the Isle of Wight Council).

The Solent Transport Partnership was established in 2003 and is a voluntary grouping of the local transport authorities, government agencies, regional bodies and transport operators in urban South Hampshire. The Solent Transport Strategy has been endorsed by the Executive of the Solent Transport Partnership and also by PUSH, the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire.

Challenges and Opportunities

The LTP identifies a range of challenges and opportunities that the City is already facing, or is expected to face over the coming years. Principal amongst these is the pressure likely to arise on the transport network from the implementation of the South East Plan which is likely to see the development of up to 80,000 new residential units in South Hampshire by the year 2026, underpinned by an economic growth rate of between 3 - 3.5%. This will involve development not only within the City but also in the surrounding area.

One of the important areas of understanding that has been clarified during the evolution of the LTP is that the form of this new development is such that it will reinforce the roles of the two cities, Southampton and Portsmouth, as centres of gravity at either end of the sub-region, as opposed to leading to the creation of a more linear 'Solent City'. This in turn, leads to the understanding that the major focus must be to enhance the existing networks centred on the two cities, rather than to create new ones across South Hampshire.

There are however, other major challenges to be faced. A declining birth rate, coupled

with a rapid increase in average life expectancy means that the City is having to cope with an increasingly aging population. This brings a distinct set of challenges for the transport network, as older people are less likely to have direct access to a car and hence to rely more on public transport, and some experience difficulty in accessing any form of transport.

The provision of good quality public transport is also vital for the City's Priority Neighbourhoods where deprivation indicators are highest and where car ownership levels tend to be lower than elsewhere in the City.

Public transport itself represents another challenge. It is vital for the future of the City and the sub-region that an efficient, affordable, reliable, high quality public transport network exists. At present, for a variety of reasons, this is not the case. The City has an extensive bus network and eight railway stations, but there is a lack of focus for bus operations in the City Centre, there is poor interchange at the Central Station and at the ferry terminals, and most of the stations are under-utilised.

Service reliability is also an issue, but improvement will require a joint approach between Council and operators, as both parties are able to effect parts of the solution.

The Port is a major driver of the local economy and with the refusal of planning consent for the development of Dibden Bay, ABP will be concentrating their efforts on maximising the capacity of the existing port. The evidence points to there continuing to be significant increases in the levels of both freight and passenger traffic through the port over the coming years. The transport network needs to be able to accommodate this without adversely impacting on the lives of residents.

The City Centre needs to be supported in its role as a regional retail destination, and the viability of the various district centres across the City needs to be ensured to enable them to continue to provide facilities at a local level.

Road safety is a major concern and the City has, for many years, been successful in reducing the number of injury accident casualties through a combination of education, engineering measures and enforcement. However, in recent years, achieving the required level of reduction has become more challenging as most of the accident hotspots have been treated and City-wide interventions have been completed. There remains an unacceptable level of incident, but the reasons for this appear to be complex, and multi-strategy approaches seem likely to be the way forward.

The quality of the street scene has become a major issue in recent years as has been the standard of highway maintenance. These two topics are clearly related, but until recently, the level of investment was far less than that required to meet all of the aspirations. The substantial backlog of work and the expected levels of funding in future years make it imperative that a more structured approach to maintenance investment is established that takes into account a wider range of user needs and considerations than has been the case until now.

Maintaining and enhancing the quality of the environment has also risen up the agenda in the last few years, and of particular concern to the City is the declaration during 2005 of six Air Quality Management Areas, all of them on the basis of excessive levels of nitrogen dioxide resulting from traffic emissions. This is a challenging situation as all of the areas are located at key points on the City's road network where obtaining immediate relief is unlikely to be achievable. It is also important to ensure that there is no further deterioration in environmental quality as

a result of the implementation of the policies contained in this LTP, and to satisfy that requirement, a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has been carried out.

Perhaps the biggest challenge of all is that of funding and of securing sufficient money to enable all of these other challenges to be addressed. It is clear that the long-term requirements for the City (and the sub-region) cannot be accommodated within the funding that is currently identified and major new sources of finance will need to be found if successful outcomes are to be achieved.

Many of these challenges also represent significant opportunities and the LTP explains how it is planned to approach them. There are, however, some new initiatives that offer particular opportunities. These include the introduction of the 2004 Traffic Management Act (which provides authorities with new powers to control roadworks, enforce a wider range of traffic offences and require a review of the network to ensure that road space is being managed in the optimum manner) and the proposed Transport Innovation Fund (which is likely to provide significant levels of funding for schemes that include some element of road user charging, or for schemes which benefit national productivity)

The Strategic Approach

The key strategic approach of the LTP that has been developed to address this range of challenges is called '**Reduce – Manage – Invest**'. This is an incremental three-stage approach that can be applied both to the existing network and to considerations of new developments as they come forward.

- **Reduce** – measures will be put in place to reduce journey lengths and the overall demand for travel, eg through land use planning policies, the introduction of travel plans, changes to working practices, etc.
- **Manage** – better management of the existing network and of works that take place on it, and more efficient use of available road space, eg through the use of powers in the 2004 Traffic Management Act, wider use of intelligent traffic systems, support for public transport, more bus priority and cycle lanes, etc.
- **Invest** – new infrastructure will only be provided where there is still a residual demand after the first two stages have been fully exploited. New infrastructure will not be about providing new capacity, but will form part of balanced package of measures intended to lock-in the benefits obtained from the other stages.

A range of interventions is then set out, grouped to reflect this over-arching strategic approach. 'Reduction' interventions cover the so-called 'softer' demand management measures, such as better linkage between land-use and transport planning, the use of travel plans, support for public transport operations (e.g. more bus priority) provision for and promotion of sustainable travel modes (particularly through the implementation of a new Active Travel Plan), and changes to working practices. Reference is also made to the need to consider, for the medium to longer term, whether some form of charging mechanism would be appropriate.

'Management' interventions cover approaches to reducing congestion through better and more extensive use of intelligent transport systems, by the use of urban traffic control and by utilising the new powers offered by the 2004 Traffic Management Act.

A more effective public transport system clearly has a major part to play in the more efficient use of the City's network and there is extensive consideration of the contribution that the various modes can make. In particular, the strategy sets out the need for better bus interchange facilities in the City Centre, the need to re-model Central Station to provide better interchange facilities, the role that Park and Ride can

play, particularly as part of the sub-regional approach to managing the pressures arising from the South East Plan, and the increasing importance of taxis, especially to support the night-time economy. It also highlights the need to improve accessibility to the local rail stations and hence to increase their use.

This part of the strategy also covers the role of powered two-wheelers, explains the contributions that are likely to arise from the increased use of sustainable freight distribution and from the Council's own Best Value Review of the Use of Transport, and describes how highways maintenance policies can be expected to contribute towards the achievement of street scene and safety objectives.

The continuing improvement of road safety is a key element of the policy approach of the LTP and a detailed Road Safety Strategy is set out, intended to deliver the road safety targets that have been established. As outlined earlier, this is one of the Shared Priorities between central and local government and is an area where the City has struggled to achieve targets in recent years, largely due to major success in injury accident reduction during the 1990's. The future strategy involves even more partnership and inter-agency working than in the past, recognising that solutions to the problem will require the input of a number of organisations.

This part of the LTP strategy also sets out how the Council proposes to address the environmental issues and in particular, the Air Quality Management Areas. It contains a framework Air Quality Action Plan within which it is proposed to develop individual action plans for each of the designated areas. The LTP also contains a summary of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) that has been carried out on the policies of the LTP and how the outcome of that SEA has shaped the final Plan.

The 'Invest' part of the strategy describes in more detail those major investment proposals that are seen as essential over the period to 2026. These include access improvements to the Port in the vicinity of Dock Gate 4, the introduction of a Park and Ride network for the City, a new Central Station interchange, enhancement of the rail gauge between Southampton and the West Midlands, and new bus interchanges in the City Centre. It also outlines the concept of a possible 'Bus and Toll Lane' on the eastern approach to the City, linked to the development of the eastern Park and Ride site, although it notes that this is purely a concept at this stage and that much more work is needed to determine the feasibility.

Continuing investment is also proposed in measures to assist public transport, and those that promote active travel (walking and cycling).

The final part of the overall strategy is that of improving accessibility. Accessibility is not seen simply as a transport-related issue: it is considered as a much wider topic that involves service providers as much as transport providers. It considers how accessibility can be improved in its widest sense, involving access to education, employment, healthcare and retail services. It seeks to ensure that service providers deliver their services in a way that maximises their accessibility, rather than simply rely on transport solutions to address the problems.

The Five-year Programme 2006 - 2011

Arising from the overall strategy, the proposed five-year programme for the period 2006-2011 is then set out. This is framed within the funding constraints that are known to exist and is constructed to ensure that it directly addresses the LTP objectives. It is also intended to ensure that the LTP targets are met.

The levels of funding that are likely to be available mean that the programme does not contain any major schemes during the period. The one large scheme it is proposed to progress is the first stage of the Dock Gate 4 access improvement around Marsh Lane and Terminus Terrace. Subject to funding, it is also hoped that the first Park and Ride site may be close to completion by the end of the period. The City will also take a lead role in promoting the Southampton – West Midlands rail gauge enhancement scheme.

Re-modelling of Central Station is unlikely to start within the period but it is intended that work will be progressed on developing the scheme.

As part of the continuing policy of extending pedestrian and bus priority in the City Centre, it is proposed to introduce new bus interchange facilities on both the east and west sides of the City Centre. This will need to be linked to a major review of bus routing and provision of bus priority measures.

Improvements are proposed at Woolston District Centre, linked to the redevelopment of Woolston Riverside, and work will be concluded at Portswood District Centre.

There will be a continued roll-out of the real-time bus information system and the programme of major highway maintenance schemes will be continued, based on the condition ratings.

Finally, there will be continuing programmes of schemes that promote active travel (cycling and walking), improve road safety, support the introduction of travel plans, and help to improve air quality.

Tables set out the sources of funding that are anticipated during the period of the LTP and how that funding will be allocated. The total funding allocated to highways and transport over the period 2006 - 2011 is likely to exceed £80M.

Indicators and Targets

Ultimately, it will be necessary to demonstrate what this level of investment has achieved, and to enable this to be done, a series of indicators and targets have been established. These have to be monitored and reported on through the Annual Progress Report (APR) process. Some of the indicators are mandatory, set by the DfT and others can be locally determined. The range of indicators selected is, however, intended to give a complete overview of the range of objectives of the LTP.

Conclusion

The policy direction of this LTP is intended to achieve a step-change over time in both the quality and effectiveness of the City's transport network. It recognises that, increasingly, the improvements that are needed will only be deliverable in partnership with other bodies, and that the improvements will result from a wide range of interventions, rather than from a single policy measure.

The nature of transport means that the majority of timescales are medium – long term, although a range of shorter-term interventions are proposed which will contribute towards the achievement of the targets that have been established. Conclusive proof of the effectiveness of these policies may not be clear for a number of years, but it is fully believed that the policy direction set out in this document meets the needs of the City as they are understood today.

