West of England Joint Transport Study Consultation

Submission from Transition Larkhall, Bath

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Introduction

In conjunction with the University of Bath, the South West Foundation and Transition Larkhall (TL) has been investigating patterns of car use into and through our locality - which stands at the NE of Bath in a triangle bordered on the east and south by the A46 and the A4 trunk roads respectively. The area suffers from severe traffic congestion and related air pollution associated with the A4 London Road and local traffic which is often an overspill or circumvention of that road.

We submit that the traffic and transportation problems experienced in this sector of Bath are a microcosm of the wider Bath situation. Our research indicates the locality's traffic issues have two key facets which are unrecognised in local authority assessments and in the solutions proposed for alleviating the broader A4 London Rd problem.

Specifically, we submit that there is considerable commuting traffic which uses the suburban roads between the A46 and central Bath which is not being counted as part of the broader pattern of east-west traffic using the A4 London Road. We further show that a major proportion of these local volumes at peak periods represent private vehicles transporting children from Bath's eastern periphery to both private and state schools in the centre and west of the city.

This submission details the extent of this problem and relates it to the proposed Park and Ride (P&R) and A36-A46 link and the quality and volume of bus services serving the east of Bath. The report concludes with some recommendations for transport options to remedy the local problem and contribute to the wider issue of traffic congestion in the A4 east of Bath corridor.

Traffic Volumes and Consequences on the A4 London Road

It is widely acknowledged, by local and national authorities that traffic volumes on the A4 London Road between the A46 junction and the Cleveland Place junction are grossly excessive and contribute to persistent excesses in the levels of atmospheric pollution on this corridor. Although volumes in the mid-2000s fell from a peak of 29,000 in year 2001, they were still 24,000 by 2015. This represents a 24-hour average of 812 vehicles per hour. During daytime hours of course, this average is much higher. A sample count of westbound traffic at Lambridge, London Rd., from 23rd March 2016 at the 7.15 to 8.15 am peak recorded 1033 vehicles. London Road is also part of the high emissions corridor that runs through the centre of Bath and into its western zones.

Various remedies have been and continue to be proposed to curb these volumes. Solutions include a proposal to de-trunk the A4 within the city boundaries and a new bypass road to link the A46 with

the A36 across the Avon valley to the east of the city. There have also been several attempts to plan a Park and Ride facility in that vicinity; the latest of which is a current proposal for a 2000-space P&R at Bathampton meadows. These plans inevitably encounter local opposition because of their scenic and environmental impacts and plausible claims that they will have a very small impact on London Rd volumes and maybe even instigate additional vehicle trips: because suppressed demand would be activated by any road space created. More recently, ideas for 'soft' measures have been proposed, such as CycleBath's scheme for restricting city centre access to designated types of vehicles<http://transitionbath.org/radical-city-bath-living-heart-transport-plan-aims-make-centre-bath-pedestrian-friendly-reduce-vehicle-congestion/>. The current report follows this line of analysis.

In particular we focus on the volumes and problems of commuting traffic which do not appear in the A4 traffic counts because it uses alternative 'rat-run' routes, particularly a journey from the A46 through the Larkhall suburb and on to the centre via Camden to the north of the river. As local residents and campaigners it seems clear to us that a considerable portion of the A4 London Rd traffic has in recent years diverted to this latter route.

Traffic Volumes into Larkhall from the East of Bath

In October and November 2016, Transition Larkhall members began a study of driver behaviour and journeys into and through Larkhall, as part of a project sponsored by the University of Bath and South West Foundation. As this project is still continuing completed data sets are not available. However some preliminary statistics already show some highly significant facts.

Commuting traffic travelling from the east of Bath towards the centre would arrive at London Road West either from the Batheaston bypass or, from the north, by the A46 dual carriageway. It should then proceed westwards along London Rd towards Cleveland Place and the city centre.

However numerous bottle necks along the London Road and at Cleveland Place make peak journey times unacceptable to drivers aiming to arrive at workplaces, schools and HE campuses for prescribed times. Instead the pattern observed by TL is for drivers to leave the A46 dual carriageway at Swainswick and then proceed southwards down the former A46, Gloucester Rd to Deadmill Lane. Some of this traffic may even originate from the Batheaston bypass and travel north on the A46 before exiting at Swainswick on the old Gloucester Rd. to travel south and west.

Traffic counts were recorded on four mornings at the junction of Deadmill Lane and Gloucester Road: 17th October, 24th October, 31st October and 7th November. Volumes of traffic continuing past Deadmill Lane and onto the London Road at Lambridge were negligible. By contrast several hundred vehicles turned off Gloucester Rd into Deadmill Lane during the morning peak period. The precise counts are as follows (see page 3).

17th October 2016 7.0 – 10.0 am **All** schools at school	24th October 2016 7.0 – 10.0 am ***All*** *schools half-term vacation*	31st October 2016 7.0 – 10.0 am *Private schools, Beechen Cliff and Hayesfield half – term vacation*	7th November 2016 7.0 – 10.0 am **All** schools at school
1,130 vehicles	*340* vehicles	*642* vehicles	978 vehicles

The bulk of these trips consisted of **car** journeys made between 7.15 am and 9.0 am
Viz:

17th October 2016 7.0 – 9.0 am **All** schools at School	24th October 2016 7.0 – 9.0 am **All** schools half-term	31st October 2016 7.0 – 9.0 am *Private schools, Beechen Cliff and Hayesfield half – term vacation*	7th November 2016 7.0 – 9.0 am **All** schools at School
871 vehicles	275 vehicles	636 vehicles	803 vehicles

The higher proportion of vehicles in the 7.15 – 9.0 period suggests these are mainly commuting trips to workplaces, schools etc. The considerable difference between volumes in this time period as between 17th October and 7th November on the one hand and 24th October on the other can be explained by the half-term school holidays which occurred in w/c 24th October .It can therefore reasonably be inferred that between 400 and 500 trips in morning peak times consist of parents or carers transporting children to schools – the majority of which are located in the south and west of Bath.

We currently lack comparable contemporary comparisons of hourly flows on London Road which distinguish between school holiday and term-time periods. However older data indicated falls of around 20% on London Road volumes during school holidays. It should also be noted that the sample morning peak data for London Rd cited in the previous section counted 1033 vehicles of all kinds. For the equivalent times on 17th October at Gloucester Rd and Deadmill Lane 445 cars alone were counted. In other words as much as 41% of London Rd totals is not using the London Rd but is diverting through Larkhall; and the bulk of this is private and state 'school-run' traffic.

Implications and Consequences of Larkhall Through-Traffic

The previous section showed that the Larkhall diversion being taken by traffic to avoid London Rd involves almost half (41%) the London Rd volumes in the morning peak period. Yet the physical and social contours of the two routes are quite different. London Rd has relatively generous dimensions comprising three lanes in places. By contrast the Larkhall 'rat-run' for commuters and the numerous school-bound drivers consists of narrow roads which were never designed for commuting traffic. Deadmill Lane and some other roads are single track. There should also be concern about the *safety and health of children at the two junior schools and nurseries in the heart of Larkhall through which this traffic passes and emits exhaust pollutants.*

The West of England Joint Planning Consultation document's main recommendations are unlikely to alleviate this situation. It envisages both a P&R for the east of Bath and a new road linking the A36 and A46 in. Presumably the link road is merely an aspiration as it would require both central government support and authorisation, as well favourable economic and political conditions. These factors plus a lack of logistic and detailed traffic forecasts in the document therefore make the link

road a very remote prospect. Serious consideration of the link road proposal at this stage is thus premature and irrelevant.

The proposals for a P&R at Bathampton on the other hand, are more current, detailed and have been subjected to assessment and criticism from various parties. In our judgement as a community environment group, the cost-benefit balance would not seem to justify investment of scarce funds in a single facility at that location. Best case scenario reduction of 2,000 trips from the daily 20,000 current average for London Rd amounts to a 10% reduction.

But previous P&R evidence suggests a sizable proportion of the 2000 places would be reduced by new trips taking advantage of the P&R and by the release of suppressed demand traffic to take any freed-up road space. Our Gloucester Rd counts suggest up to 1,000 drivers from this 'rat-run' alone, could be tempted to use a more freely flowing London Rd route. The historic highs of 29,000 from 2001 on London Road also indicate the hidden existence of suppressed demand of up to another 5,000 trips that could return if a P&R were constructed.

More generally, we believe that the grand designs for mass transit systems on this and adjacent sections of the A4 overlook the limited scope for transport modes other than buses*. In our judgement it is the limited contribution which bus transport makes to the transport needs of travellers from the east of Bath that needs addressing.* A topic which we take up in the next section.
We would recommend that the focus for transport planning should be more localised and tackle the excessive traffic, currently rat-running through areas such as Larkhall, which the previous section has identified as stemming from very specific driving patterns. In this case the inordinate numbers of trips involved in the 'school run' from the east to the centre of Bath.

Bus Services for the East of Bath

There is a considerable disparity between the volume of bus services covering the west of the city and those for Larkhall and the east. Comparing two analogous points on both sides of the city – both of which are equidistant between their two respective service routes – provides the following contrast. Between the western suburbs (Locksbrook/Lower Weston/East Twerton) and the city centre there are, on average 27 inbound buses per hour potentially available each weekday.

By contrast, for the Camden/Larkhall/Lambridge area only 10 buses in each hour are potentially available. The routes concerned are the 6/7 via Camden to Fairfield Park and Larkhall and services 3, 271, 272 and X31 along London Road. These are optimal timings, of course. With adverse traffic conditions, frequent delays and, after 6.0pm, actual service availability is much less. The optimal figure also assumes that potential passengers have the time and mobility capability to walk between the routes in order to take advantage of a more convenient bus time on the other route.

Simply reducing this disparity in services between the two sides of Bath would do much to tempt drivers to switch from car usage. However, this might not make a great difference to the parents and carers transporting children from all points to the east of the city to the private and state schools in its southern and western zones.

There is therefore also an urgent and compelling case for relevant local authorities and service providers to liaise with schools to organise comprehensive services to link outlying areas such as Batheaston, Bathampton and smaller local villages to the main schools which children from these areas attend.

Such a service need not require generous, or possibly any subsidy. It could be self-funding depending on levels of demand and the flexibility of the services which providers are willing and able to offer. However, as the above figures show it could relieve Larkhall roads of up to 1000 car trips per day; with possibly equal or higher reductions on London Road,

CONCLUSION

Recommendations for West of England Joint Planning Consultation

More focussed and local studies, such as the TL one for the Larkhall parallel route to the A4 London Rd., should be undertaken to uncover the precise nature and causes of existing congestion. Such investigation could open up the kind of 'soft solutions' to excess traffic volumes, congestion and air pollution illustrated above. In particular, by identifying the interaction between trip rationales, driver decisions and the (in)adequacy of other transport modes – specifically bus services - more economic solutions could be evaluated and pursued. For the particular problems associated with the interaction between the A4 London Rd and Larkhall, we urge that the following low-cost improvements and additions to bus services be investigated.

1) A system of *school transport* between areas in and to the east of Bath and the private and state schools located in the south and west of the city. A system which would need to be initiated by local authority and supported by relevant bus companies and schools – after an assessment of their pupils' needs.
2) Investigation of ways in which the disparity in bus services frequencies between those serving the west of Bath and those for the east could be reduced. So that drivers all along the A4 corridor and adjacent points would be attracted to switch to more frequent services on the east. If necessary a bus service from the east direct to the University at Claverton Down could help to expand frequencies; as happens with the student bus services between the city centre and the western periphery; which benefit students and residents alike.

The advantages of giving priority to such soft measures over 'hard' capital projects such as the projected Bathampton Park and Ride and the more aspirational A36-A46 link road, would be: substantial cost savings, shorter time horizons to relieve the problems and also the capacity for iterative and rapid adjustments to improve any remaining deficiencies.

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