

Transport: comments on Joint Local Plan Issues consultation

- The plan appears as a series of initiatives, rather than a co-ordinated, integrated transport policy.
- What little focus is given to the subject is largely in the context of the conurbation rather than across the whole Joint Local Plan area. Limited attention is paid to the rural community, except perhaps where it feeds the conurbation.

New transport technologies

- Although the plan covers the period 2013-2033 it is very disappointing in terms of its vision for the future of transport in the area. The assumption throughout the document is that tomorrow will be a straightforward extrapolation of today's services, technologies, infrastructure and means of commuting, with little or no account being taken of the huge strides that are being made in the field of transport systems and infrastructure. Whether driven out of, or embraced in the Local Plan, these will inevitably have a bearing on the assumptions which underpin the Plan.
- The document mentions plans to widen certain major roads towards the end of the plan period, however there is no recognition that road traffic may in fact decrease over time due to the adoption of new technologies and that the money may be better spent elsewhere.
- There is no mention of electric cars and the need to provide charging points both in rural and urban areas.
- The document mentions plans to widen certain major roads towards the end of the plan period, however there is no recognition that road traffic may in fact decrease over time due to the adoption of new technologies and that the money may be better spent elsewhere.
- Towards the end of the plan period we can expect autonomous vehicles to be common on our roads but there is no recognition of this or how this could be turned to the advantage of the plan area.

Congestion and pollution

- There is recognition of the high levels of congestion within the conurbation area and there is reference in the Housing issues paper to the high numbers of people commuting from rural areas within Staffordshire. However, there is no attempt to address the fact that the situation will be further exacerbated if rural housing development is allowed to continue unabated and unless something is done to develop the rural economies through the provision of sustainable and appropriate rural employment opportunities.

- The document refers to “the good transport systems to the other parts of the country via the M6, A50, A500 and A34”. However there is no mention of the A53, which is a major feed route into the conurbation and a major link to the M6 for commuters, businesses and industry in parts of adjoining Cheshire and Shropshire. This road is already congested and dangerous and will inevitably be impacted further by the housing and employment growth projections in the Plan.
- The reasons for not including HS2 in the Issues paper is understood but attention should be given to the opportunity and need to incorporate parts of the existing West Coast line into the local transport infrastructure when HS2 is operating. This could include re-opening long closed stations and rural tracks as a means of providing additional infrastructure and capacity into the conurbations, thus helping to relieve load and pollution.
- There is no mention of embracing alternative, environmentally friendly transport initiatives and systems, or the important part that they play in addressing and relieving congestion and pollution.
- Zero Emission Vehicles could help with air quality and noise issues. Adopting Low Emission Zone standards for trucks and buses in the urban area should be considered as a way of improving both air quality and noise.

Public transport and rural issues

- Issues concerning public transport are recognised in the issues document but largely in the context of the feed into and within the conurbation. This includes reference to rural public transport services. However, there is no mention of the limitations of or need for public transport services within the rural communities. If this was addressed it would provide a vital lifeline between the communities, especially for the young and elderly and also help to boost the rural economy as people would be able to access local shops and services, instead of commuting into the urban areas. It would also help to reduce the load on the infrastructure within the urban areas and improve
- Much is made of the under-utilisation of buses but there is no recognition that empty buses are a major source of emissions, noise and congestion. Operators must be encouraged to use vehicle sizes which are more appropriate and also to look at ways in which re-planning of routes and timetables and flexible or on-demand routing could improve utilisation.
- On-demand public transport needs to be considered particularly for the rural area, where fixed routing is difficult to maintain economically, and which tends to leave many communities isolated. Current thinking seems to be to provide subsidies to under-utilised fixed routes which do nothing to resolve the situation.

- There should be more integration of the bus and rail networks, for example by providing a free-of-charge link service between train stations and key destinations at interchange points.

Walking and cycling infrastructure

- There is reference to providing walking and cycling infrastructure to support transport and leisure but this is mainly in the context of the urban areas. The situation also needs to be addressed in the rural communities for the same reason and as a means of encouraging tourism in the rural area.
- In the rural areas need a focus on restoring the neglected and fragmented network of footpaths and off-road routes which would make the area attractive to walkers and cyclists that. Access to many footpaths in the rural area has now become difficult if not impossible due to the network becoming fragmented by busy roads – ways need to be found to re-connect these routes into a coherent network.
- Leisure-oriented routes need to be complemented with businesses which leisure users will need, e.g. cafes, pubs, craft shops, which also need to have adequate car parking and secure bike storage.
- A key enabler for increasing cycling is the provision of secure cycle parking points. There is no mention of this.

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