

Cllr. Don Mackenzie  
Executive Member for Access  
County Hall  
NORTHALLERTON  
North Yorkshire  
DL7 8AH

Date: 8 July 2019

Dear Don,

**Harrogate Congestion Study**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Harrogate Congestion Study.

Rather than reply through the online questionnaire we have chosen to provide a more detailed response, which sets out the Borough Council's views and position. We have endeavoured to cover the topics that are included in the questionnaire in order to provide clarity about our views on the specific questions you have asked. Much of our reasoning is set out in an appended supporting note, however, our key points are;

- We acknowledge that there is congestion in the Harrogate and Knaresborough area, varying by location, time of day, whether events are on etc.
- We strongly support investment into sustainable transport measures, particularly those focussing on dedicated cycling infrastructure and public transport improvements;
- Some form of demand management is likely to be required in addition to sustainable transport investment. We favour a parking supply and pricing based approach over any potential congestion charge as mentioned in the consultation;
- We believe that there are still opportunities to improve junctions to unlock additional highway capacity;
- Based on the evidence available we do not support a relief road at this point in time;
- Should significant investment in sustainable transport options not result in a sufficiently high enough shift from car trips to walking, cycling and public transport then it is acknowledged that additional highway infrastructure will need to be considered, in time.

Whilst Harrogate Borough Council (HBC) is not the highway authority, we recognise that transport and traffic are key issues which influence and affect our district; as an economy and as a place where people live, work, visit and do business. For this reason, strategic and sustainable transport is a very much a corporate priority for this Council. Furthermore, our Council has a strong focus on climate change and carbon reduction. As such, we have committed financial and officer resources to these important work areas; to ensure that we can adopt a clear, consistent and evidence based

position on transport matters which impact on our district. This helps ensure that we are well informed and strategically placed to work in partnership with relevant transport bodies as well as to lobby and influence on relevant transport issues. This is evidenced through the recently commissioned Strategic Transport Study which helps inform the HBC response to this consultation.

We recognise that North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) is still in the early stages of establishing a preferred way forward on strategic transport policy for Harrogate and Knaresborough, and we are extremely keen to work with you on this.

Having reviewed the evidence base available we have identified a number of key issues and opportunities and would be pleased to discuss these in more detail with you. As highlighted above, fundamentally we do not feel that a relief road solution can be justified at this time and keen to see a focus on quality sustainable transport measures. However we do believe that there are opportunities to bring forward a proactive action plan for tackling congestion in the area. This could be built around public sector progression of a strong programme of sustainable transport focussed interventions, working alongside the private sector to deliver improvements beyond what could ordinarily be secured to mitigate development. We feel that this type of collaborative approach would bring the biggest benefits to the future sustainable development of the area at this time.

To help assist with moving this work forwards in a positive way, we have attached our thoughts on what an indicative congestion action plan might look like. We have set this out as a series of short term, medium term and long term measures for how we believe that congestion could be proactively tackled across Harrogate and Knaresborough.

I hope the views in this letter and supporting note are of interest and value to you and your team. We look forward to working closely with NYCC as this important work progresses to the next stage.

Yours Sincerely

Councillor Phil Ireland  
Cabinet Member for Sustainable Transport

## **Indicative action plan and suggested measures for tackling congestion across Harrogate and Knaresborough**

### **Overarching Strategic/Area-wide interventions**

- Promotion and hopefully, implementation, of the scheme that will enable two trains per hour to operate between Knaresborough and York. The work to develop a scheme with Network Rail that has currently been undertaken is appreciated and HBC strongly supports the aspiration to double the frequency on the Knaresborough-York section of line.
- Promotion and development of a scheme to improve access for Harrogate line trains onto the East Coast Mainline at Skelton Junction (North of York).
- Close working with West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) to achieve the best possible access for Harrogate line train into and out of Leeds Rail Station.
- Continuing support for the Leeds Bradford Airport Parkway Rail Station proposal in order both to significantly improve public transport connections to flights and also to provide an opportunity for those living in North Leeds to be able to park and use the rail line to access Harrogate and Knaresborough.
- Continuing promotion of electrification of the Leeds-Harrogate-York rail line – ‘The Harrogate Line’. This may be superseded longer term if technology can offer similar benefits through a different solution.
- Increased investment into shared mobility solutions.
- Greater monitoring and accountability of travel plans to ensure that developer mode split targets are being achieved.

### **Preparatory work for future interventions**

- Park and Ride feasibility work, with a particular focus on the Leeds Road corridor using the existing ten minute frequency of the 36.
- Development of schemes in advance of funding opportunities that seek to enhance developer mitigation at locations identified as being likely to be under pressure in future.
- Traffic signal optimisation studies on key corridors – to identify areas where the network is not currently optimally functioning with a view to implementing signal improvements.
- Assessment work of key pinch points on the network and future solutions, such as Starbeck level crossing.

## The Short Term (to 2025)

West & South West Harrogate (Otley Road, Leeds Road and the areas between).

This area will be the focus of much of the development in the district to 2025 and therefore where the greatest opportunity for unlocking third party funding exists;

- Completion of the NPIF West Harrogate work;
- Delivering local plan mitigation but utilise developer funding towards transport infrastructure to develop highway improvement, rather than just mitigation, in the following locations;
  - Pot Bank Roundabout
  - Pannal Station Road/A61 junction
  - Leeds Road M&S junction
  - Crag Lane/Otley Road junction
- Improved traffic signal technology and optimisation;
- Extend existing bus services to serve new development and Cardale Park;
- Bus priority work to enable direct connections with services to the north of Harrogate;
- Implementation of Park & Ride on the Leeds Road corridor with complementary Cardale Park peak shuttles should the feasibility work suggest such an intervention to be worthwhile;
- Expand cycling provision to connect with the Otley Road cycleway;
- Improve sustainable transport connections to Hornbeam Park from West Harrogate;
- Smarter choice measures linked to enforced developer travel plans;

Wetherby Road/Skipton Road. The most congested route(s) in the Harrogate and Knaresborough area which is reinforced through the traffic count data within the WSP work. Tackling congestion on these routes is a priority in economic development terms given they connect to the A1(M), York and beyond.

- Traffic signal improvements. There appears to be a particularly sharp reduction in congestion between Bilton Lane and the A61/A59 'Little Wonder' roundabout which suggests that improvements to signal coordination may be achievable on Skipton Road and the wider corridor;
- Rationalisation of some of the junctions onto the corridor. Whilst this option was not progressed within the WSP reports, we are of the view that the numerous entrance and exit points across Skipton and Wetherby Roads create inefficient operation of the roads as distributors. The practice of a right turning vehicle moving across a lane of traffic in order to nudge into the opposite lane causes delays in both directions and whilst not wishing to see a draconian roll out of this intervention, there are locations where this could be undertaken. The Regent Terrace area is one

such location. It may well not be popular with local residents but, unfortunately, the wider movement of vehicles on this corridor should take precedence. Any closed roads could become cycle routes and a home-zone approach adopted.

- Park and Ride. This corridor could significantly benefit from Park and Ride but the deliverability would need to be identified through the feasibility work.
- Improvements to the quality of the cycle routes between Bilton and Harrogate Rail Station and between Bilton and Starbeck. These off road cycle routes have potential to remove significant numbers of car trips if improved and the junctions connecting them to workplaces are made far more cycle friendly.

#### Knarborough Road

- Bus priority. This route, as you are aware, is exceptionally well served by public transport with both rail and bus providing a high level of provision. Some initial indications from our emerging transport priority work suggest that time savings of several minutes per journey can be achieved through bus priority between Knarborough and Harrogate.
- Signal optimisation. Similarly to the Skipton Road/Wetherby Road corridor if signals can be improved as a result of the suggested study work this could be undertaken fairly cheaply.
- Harrogate to Knarborough Cycle Route. We are continuing to promote the Harrogate to Knarborough cycle route as a key piece of infrastructure to connect Knarborough, Starbeck and Harrogate Rail Stations, Harrogate Hospital, workplaces, Starbeck High Street and Harrogate Town Centre with residential areas along the corridor. The ambition is for this route to connect to the forthcoming Otley Road cycle route which then opens up cross town journeys and connections to education and Cardale Park.

#### Medium Term (2025-2035)

- Further work to improve Woodlands junction, potentially through a more radical intervention;
- Improvements to junctions between Harrogate and the A1(M) and within Knarborough as identified through local plan work. On the lines of the similar short term actions these could then be enhanced further with additional funding;
- Further improvements to rail services through the next franchise renewal (lobbying work for this to be undertaken in the short term to be in line with the renewal period);
- Significantly improved connections to rail stations to support access to High Speed 2 and potentially Northern Powerhouse Rail services including Harrogate Line journey time improvements;
- Achieve direct pan-northern rail services, particularly connecting to Manchester.

- Completion of a Harrogate and Knaresborough wide high quality cycle infrastructure network;
- Schemes adapting to changing trends in travel;
- Potential for small electric vehicle Park and Ride. Encourage visitors or commuters to swap their car for a small electric vehicle and drive into town that way. Routes such as to the rear of the showground could be investigated to give journey time savings and verges could become designated lanes for these vehicles;
- Potential significant parking policy changes to deter private vehicle use;
- Consideration of automated vehicle impact and measures to ensure any benefits from these, should they become commonplace, are captured locally.
- Implementation of potential schemes to improve major congestion hotspots such as Starbeck Level Crossing.

### **Long Term (post 2035)**

- Measures to accommodate growth within the next local plan period (2035 onwards)
- Radical interventions to prioritise sustainable transport to further bolster the short and medium term actions;
- Potential implementation of new highway infrastructure if the short and medium term actions have not achieved the required reduction in congestion levels.
- Adaption for future travel needs depending on how trends develop.

## Harrogate Borough Council – Response to NYCC Congestion Study

### Background Note: Evidence and Rationale for HBC Response

#### Evidence base

The work undertaken by WSP on behalf of North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) provides useful background information to underpin our response. We would summarise the key statistics as;

1. Average trip length within the study area of not more than 2.6km at either am or pm peak;
2. 37% of traffic travelling wholly within the Harrogate and Knaresborough area;
3. Percentage of through traffic is 7% across am and pm peaks;
4. Households with one or more car 84%;
5. Limited impact associated with school day traffic compared to non-school days;

These statistics enable us to draw a number of conclusions;

- A short local average trip length and low levels of through traffic suggest that there are a significant number of trips that could, either in their entirety or through the 'first/last mile' component of those journeys with an origin/destination in the study area, be converted to a more sustainable mode of travel (walking cycling, public transport and to a lesser ideal, shared vehicular travel).
- A high level of access to cars represents a challenge to public transport given that many residents are already incurring the expenditure of running a vehicle. It also begins to lean policy thinking towards some level of restriction through the supply or pricing of parking to make it more difficult to undertake short trips by car. This however requires quality alternatives to be in place so that residents or those visiting the area still retain a good level of convenient mobility.
- The fifth point represents an interesting statistic and is reinforced by views of many of those working at HBC that, perceptually, school holidays see a significant easing of congestion. If the traffic levels are only marginally lower on a non-school day than a school day then this begins to indicate that a fairly modest reduction in car use is required to allow some of the more saturated junctions to function much more satisfactorily.

You will be aware that this council has undertaken a significant amount of work around highway congestion, in consultation with North Yorkshire County Council colleagues, in order to understand if and how the volume of trips associated with potential future development to 2035 can be mitigated. This work has shown that some parts of Harrogate are indeed congested at peak times therefore there is little doubt in our organisation that

congestion does exist in the study area. We welcome this study work by NYCC and recognise at this early stage that it is about understanding the broad preference of measures that the community wishes to see investigated further. We also welcome interventions that NYCC have undertaken/are planning to undertake to address existing levels of congestion measures such as the redesign of the Bond End junction(s) that, in these fairly early days after implementation, appears to have reduced queuing. A similarly beneficial situation for motorists is foreseen at the Harlow Moor Road/Otley Road junction through the NPIF West Harrogate project. Further opportunities exist to significantly improve more junctions across Harrogate and Knaresborough, which we would also be keen to see NYCC progress.

It is appreciated that NYCC officers already understand the HBC position in relation to the impact of development on highway conditions. However, it is important to restate our position again here for the purposes of this response, in terms of how we are able to state that there is congestion, but also propose new development through our emerging local plan site allocations. In this regard the key point to stress is that a developer is only required to mitigate the traffic impact of their development and is not obliged to generate an improvement to existing highway conditions. Therefore where local plan evidence has identified a junction that is already congested but that this congestion becomes worse through development, the developer (and local plan) requirement is to ensure that the junction functions to its original level rather than to a standard that removes all congestion. On this basis our evidence suggests that all affected junctions within the district can be mitigated in this way through engineering solutions to accommodate development to 2035. However we do feel that there is more opportunity to ensure that resources from developer mitigation could also be used to help generate improvement. As we have already stated through our consultation response on the use of parking surplus monies, we strongly believe that significant sums of third party funding could be levered into Harrogate District to help improve junctions – by allocating parking surplus monies to develop expanded or packaged junction improvement schemes in Harrogate District which build upon identified local plan mitigation work.

### Rationale

Acknowledging then that there is congestion within the study area, there are a huge range of potential interventions that can be considered. If we strip back the packages and the information provided by WSP the fundamental question appears to revolve around whether new highway infrastructure should be constructed or whether demand management is preferable. Our view is that in order to justify the requirement for a measure with such an impact as a relief road would have then other alternatives have to have been fully explored and implemented. There is also significant uncertainty over whether funding would be allocated to a relief road and there is precedent for this locally; the situation we have been in since the early 1990's where a northern bypass has been protected but not taken forward



for funding has rather hung over transport policy for the area. Therefore our view is that this work needs to yield a detailed strategy for how to deal specifically with congestion in Harrogate and Knaresborough with definite, achievable actions across the short, medium and long term. These actions need to consider potential funding sources, target all parts of the study area and address the requirements of range of different types of road user.

Based on this ethos we have drafted a potential way forward for the consideration of the county council which takes a corridor based approach, is linked to future development and targets the worst radial routes for congestion. This approach is founded on the basis of ensuring quality sustainable transport alternatives for the aforementioned short local and 'first/last' mile trips initially. A form of regulation could then be applied should the encouragement not realise sufficient modal shift. Should these two tiers of intervention not be successful then, in the long term, additional highway infrastructure may require detailed investigation.

Our reasoning to support this proposal is;

- The cycle network across the study area is currently extremely fragmented. We do acknowledge and appreciate NYCC efforts to address this and that plans are being finalised for a coherent, connected series of cycle routes across the study area. However, at the moment, we feel it is fair to say that there are numerous pinch points and very few, if any, direct, unbroken and segregated routes linking homes with workplaces or rail/bus services that connect outside the area. There is minimal cycling infrastructure in Knaresborough. As a result significantly higher modal split for cycle journeys to work and school is achievable with investment. This is evidenced within the WSP stage one report which shows the significant difference between cycle journey mode split across Harrogate and Knaresborough versus the level in York. Improving the cycling commute mode share is an issue HBC is keen to continue working with NYCC and local cycling groups on.
- The bus network can be further supported and enhanced. It is our understanding that there is currently no bus priority in place on traffic lights across Harrogate. Given many bus services operate on the key radial routes into Knaresborough and Harrogate Town Centres there is little conflict between services in relation to deciding which service was allocated priority. Traffic light priority for buses is relatively cheap and can enable buses to gain time savings with minimal impact compared to bus lane implementation. Bus priority may also improve reliability to the point where routes to the north of Harrogate could be directly connected to those to the south/west which would make public transport significantly more competitive in terms of journey times. With these issues in mind and given the quality of vehicles operating on many of the routes across Harrogate and Knaresborough the bus mode split, in our view, is lower than it could be.

- There is significant opportunity to improve access to rail services, both within and outside Harrogate District to target commuters in particular. These access improvements can enable the recent and forthcoming frequency improvements to local and London services to be supported in order to maximise use of rail. A key strength of the Harrogate and Knaresborough area is the good number of local rail stations enabling short intra-urban journeys and connections to Leeds, York and beyond. Improving access will ensure that the rail mode share rises.
- HBC funds and publicises the harrogatecarshare.com lift sharing platform and is in the final process of appointing a car club operator. Interventions around shared mobility are already being led by HBC and can be further supported and developed quickly and easily. Future mobility solutions are extremely important given the likely outcomes of this study and the length of time some of the measures considered will take to implement. As a result HBC is of the view that further study work into future travel and how both our authorities can prepare for this would be worthwhile. Effectively, we need to be designing and planning for five or ten years into the future rather than now in terms of the major strategic interventions with supporting actions focussed on short term congestion hotspots or maximising developer contributions. Whilst at present the vast majority, 84%<sup>1</sup>, of households across Harrogate District have access to a car, with almost 41% of these having two or more cars, longer term measures to begin to enable people to go car free or have fewer vehicles within their household will significantly contribute towards reducing the number of trips on Harrogate and Knaresborough roads over time.

### Demand Management

Should the short term interventions outlined in the action plan above not be sufficiently successful in alleviating congestion then more stringent parking measures would be required to provide the stick to the carrot that is the infrastructure outlined above. Parking measures potentially required would include restricting of supply across both on and off street and increased pricing. There are risks to this approach, primarily around making sure that people have good access by alternative modes of transport if they are restricted from using their vehicles. If supply is restricted without adequate alternate ways of travelling then visitors, people working in Harrogate and Knaresborough and local residents are all likely to be put off using the town centre(s). This is a particularly important risk with respect to the workforce coming into the area which we know tends to include a high proportion of those staffing the lower paid service industries and hospitality trades. Reduced parking supply or higher charges would likely adversely impact lower paid workers if the alternatives are not in place.

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<sup>1</sup> Table QS416EW, 2011 Census. Car or Van Availability.

Whilst we need to be extremely mindful of the impact on key workers to the local economy there is still significant potential for demand management to work in conjunction with sustainable travel provision. It would be desirable to think that the implementation of quality cycling infrastructure, bus priority and similar measures could in isolation deliver modal shift but given the high level of access to cars it is likely that some sort of disincentive will be necessary. HBC views Park and Ride very much as a parking management tool and it will be absolutely integral to delivering reduced supply or higher parking charges in the town centre(s). Consideration of appropriate Park and Ride sites would give a parking alternative for those coming to work in the area.

We understand why a charge to drive in to central Harrogate has been encapsulated within the question on parking charges but we feel that the two measures represent very different interventions. An evidence based parking demand management strategy combined with alternative parking provision on the edge of town would give people the choice where to park and how to travel. A charge on accessing Harrogate Town Centre effectively applies a penalty that local residents undertaking short trips will find an alternative route whereas those coming into town to do business or visit would seemingly be penalised. As the short local trips offer the greatest chance of conversion to sustainable modes a parking demand based approach would be favourable.