

Berkshire Local Transport Body – Meeting held on Thursday, 9th November, 2023.

Present:-

Councillor Brock (Chair)	Reading Borough Council
Laura Fitzgerald (Vice-Chair)	Berkshire LEP
Councillor Bedi	Slough Borough Council
Councillor Fishwick	Wokingham Borough Council
Councillor Gaines	West Berkshire Council
Councillor Gillbe	Bracknell Forest Council
Stuart Atkinson	Berkshire LEP
Nigel Nawacki	Berkshire LEP

Also present:- Andrew Vallance (RBWM, LEP accountable body representative)

Apologies for Absence:- None received.

PART 1

10. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Brock declared that he was the councillor representing Reading Borough Council which was the project sponsor for scheme 2.52: Reading Civic Centre Decarbonisation and was seeking a capital swap under Berkshire LEP Capital Programme Update (Minute 12 refers). Councillor Brock did not have a disclosure pecuniary, other pecuniary or personal interest in the decision and in accordance with BLTB practice was able to remain and participate in the meeting.

11. Minutes of the Meeting held on 13th July 2023

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 13th July 2023 be approved as a correct record.

12. Thames Valley Berkshire Capital Programme Update

Russell Broad, Berkshire LEP Programme Manager, summarised a report that set out the progress of transport projects funded through the various LEP capital infrastructure programmes.

The overall capital programme continued to be delivered according to plan and the updates as set out in the appendix to the report were noted. Particular consideration was given to the position on two projects – Scheme 2.24 Newbury Station and Scheme 2.52 Reading Civic Centre Decarbonisation.

Newbury Station had originally been allocated £6.7m by BLTB in 2018 and the package of improvements had been fully delivered by Great Western Railway (GWR). Other external funding had been sourced during the lifetime

of the project and it was estimated that £700,000 of the allocated LEP funds would be unspent on 31 March 2024 when the current funding agreement terminated. There was an opportunity to use this funding to further enhance elements of the station which would lead to a range of benefits including safety and security, reliability of station systems and customer experience. It was estimated that these additional enhancements would take circa 12 months to deliver, so it was intended that the funding agreement be extended until March 2025 which would allow for any programme slippage. This was noted and Members supported the principle of enhancing a good project rather than seeking to reallocate the funds elsewhere in these circumstances.

The Reading Civic Centre Decarbonisation scheme was a grant to Reading Borough Council (RBC) of £825,000 from the Business Rates Retention Pilot (BRRP) funding to install air source heat pumps on the civic offices. There had been a delay to the works due to the appointed consultants being unable to deliver the project in full. The Council had identified a solution which was to include the works within the wider Levelling Up Fund (LUF) Civic Library project. This would simplify the procurement process, but would result in a revised delivery programme with practical completion by May 2025. The initial estimated cost for the installation of the heat pumps was £1.342m. With the £825,000 grant, the balance of £517,000 would come from the Council's sustainability budget. With the works not starting until May 2024, the Council was not able to defray the BRRP grant against the decarbonisation works in the Civic Office before 31 March 2024.

To ensure the BRRP funds were spent by March 2024, the Council was proposing to spend them as part of the wider council capital programme. By carrying out a capital swap, to retain the BRRP funds, RBC would ensure that the funds are reapplied to the decarbonisation project in Q1 2024/25.

Members asked a number of questions including the reasons why appointed consultants had not been able to deliver the project as originally intended.

Officers responded to the points raised and after due consideration the BLTB approved the capital swap.

Resolved –

- (a) That the progress made on schemes previously given programme entry status as set out in the report and appendix be noted.
- (b) That a capital swap be agreed between Scheme 2.52 Reading Civic Centre Decarbonisation and the wider Reading Capital Programme, so that the BRRP funding was spent in full this financial year, with Reading Borough Council committing to deliver the BRRP in Quarter 1 2024/25.

13. One Year Evaluation Report

A report was considered on the one-year impact assessment for Scheme 2.42 – South Wokingham Distributor Road – Eastern Gateway.

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The scheme had received £5m in Business Rates Retention Pilot funding towards a total scheme cost of £20m. The Eastern Gateway scheme comprised a single carriageway road connecting Montague Park to the north with Waterloo Road to the south via a new roundabout. The scheme had opened in February 2022, approximately one year later than originally planned due to Covid related delays. The final costs were awaited, but initial estimates were that it had been delivered well within budget.

(Councillor Bedi joined the meeting)

The scheme objectives included supporting housing delivery and relieving traffic on existing residential roads. Members noted that whilst there was some variation on specific routes, overall traffic flow on existing roads had reduced although it was difficult to determine the extent to which this was due to the scheme or other factors such as increased remote working post-Covid. There had also been an overall reduction in journey times. The link had provided improved access to new housing locations and opportunities were coming forward for development. The impacts would continue to be monitored and reported in the five-year on assessment.

Members welcomed the benefits the scheme had delivered and noted the report.

Resolved – That the one-year impact report for Scheme 2.42 – South Wokingham Distributor Road – Eastern Gateway be noted.

14. Approach to developing aspirations for prioritised strategic transport infrastructure schemes across Berkshire

BLTB considered a report on the process for developing a prioritised pipeline of strategic transport infrastructure schemes to demonstrate the ongoing need for transport investments in Berkshire and help to maximise the levels of funding secured by local authorities and their strategic partners.

The LEP Chief Executive, Alison Webster, set out the context of the funding position for major transport infrastructure projects since the establishment of the LEP in 2011/12. Since 2022 funding for new capital projects was held nationally by Government departments and local authorities were invited to put forward bids to seek to secure funding through competitive programmes such as the Levelling Up Fund or alternatively through use of their UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocation. Beyond 2024/25 and the current Spending Review period the level of capital funding for transport schemes and the method of allocation was unclear. With a General Election due before January 2025 and a Spending Review in 2024 to inform Government spending priorities from April 2025 to March 2028, it was considered vital to have a fully evidenced and agreed list of prioritised strategic transport infrastructure schemes for Berkshire.

The development of such a list would inform key campaigning activity and by working together pan-Berkshire it was likely to enhance the prospects of

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securing major investment. The development of Berkshire's future strategic transport priorities would involve working with partners such as National Highways, Network Rail and bodies including Transport for the South East (TfSE).

BLTB considered the appendices to the report which were the TfSE Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) and the spreadsheet of local pipeline of transport schemes, which was in effect the current list of future Berkshire transport infrastructure needs. It was proposed that these two documents be reviewed to make sure they remained up to date and to seek to prioritise the schemes. Members were asked for their views on the process with the aim of bringing back recommendations to the BLTB meeting in March 2024.

Members welcomed the proposal to continue a cross-boundary approach to transport infrastructure and expressed support for the proposed process that would include a series of workshops. It was highlighted that setting these priorities should include a high level of engagement from elected members, as well as officers and partners. It was proposed and agreed that detailed consideration of the process to agree the prioritised list take place at the Berkshire Strategic Transport (Members) Forum that would meet on the rising of BLTB and that the meeting of BLTB in March 2024 be held in person.

Resolved – That the proposed approach to develop a list of prioritised strategic transport schemes across Berkshire through a series of workshops leading towards recommendations to BLTB in March 2024 be agreed.

15. Date of the Next Meeting - 7th March 2024

The date of the next meeting of BLTB was confirmed as 7th March 2024.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 4.02 pm and closed at 4.26 pm)