



BANBRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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22/6/06

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE

19 June 2006

22/6/06

22 JUN 2006

Dr A McC Murray
Head of Transportation
Transportation Unit
3rd Floor, Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
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Dear Dr Murray

Re: DRAFT SUB REGIONAL TRANSPORT PLAN (SRTP) 2015

The Council, at its meeting on 12th June 2006, discussed the Draft Sub-Regional Transport Plan 2015 and the following points were made by the Councillors.

They have requested that these points be taken on board prior to the finalisation of the Plan.

Bus Station:

Firstly, Banbridge town is only one of the two main towns in Northern Ireland without a bus station despite the fact it is one of the largest commuter towns in the Province. While the document identifies this town for a refurbished bus station, this issue is critical and needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency with a confirmed site and budget for delivery.

Rail Station:

The only access to the rail network in Banbridge is at Scarva. However, the station offers a very limited service and has poor car parking facilities. The Council are keen to support public transport especially in a district which has a high commuter population. For this reason they would advocate that the access and service provision at Scarva station be included in the Transport Strategy and developed over the period of the Plan with an increased level of stops, better car parking and facilities for passengers.

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Car Parking:

Secondly, the parking statistics show that 76% of public and private spaces are occupied on a typical weekday. This does not account for illegal parking. Since the study, approximately 20-50 car parking spaces will be lost or are lost at Church Street and Rathfriland Street with new urban clearways and parking restrictions. The loss of the Doctors Surgery means a loss of 17 private car parking spaces in the town. This is not accounted for and will reduce parking spaces and turnover within the town.

The study identifies Church Square car park as parking spaces for the town centre but it is remote from the town centre principle shopping area. The topography of the town makes the car parks at the bottom of Bridge Street, Church Square and Rathfriland Street inaccessible for disabled and young families with prams. The occupancy levels at the Commercial Road, Kenlis Street car parks is at peak times 104% (as specified in the Parking Study) by Dorans for the Council in 2004. This requires examination from an Equality perspective.

The Plan does not account for the anticipated increase in visitors due to the opening of the Outlet in 2007. The Outlet will bring many thousand new visitors to Banbridge town over the next few years. This has not been factored into the future car parking needs.

Road Links:

Thirdly, in respect of new junction improvements and highways. The Council welcomes the links identified in the attached map. However, the exclusion of the Lurgan Road/Downshire Road connection is a major concern to the Council. This has been debated at length with Roads Services as part of the Area Plan process with Roads Service providing three options for consultation to the Council. It was stated by Planning Service that any proposals for the Area Plan would be delivered within that period (i.e.) 2015. However, the Transport Plan has not referred to this link and therefore it seems to have been removed. This has been in the planning for over 20 years and needs to be delivered within this area plan to help alleviate this constant congestion problem at Church Square.

In connection with the above link, the proposed closure of the Water Service Depot in the town offer Roads Service the lands on the south side of the river to enable this Lurgan Road link. Roads Service should therefore be maximising this opportunity to acquire these lands to supplement this relief road.

Taxi Rank:

The final issue in relation to the proposals is the lack of proposal for a taxi rank. While the report states that each town should have at least one on-street taxi rank no firm proposals are suggested in the report. Roads Service will be well aware of the issue of land availability in the town centre. However, Banbridge town has a large night time economy and the issues of availability of taxis is a constant problem identified by young people and the PSNI in terms of getting crowds out of the town at night time. A dedicated taxi rank would go some way to help alleviate this issue.

Walking and Cycling:

The 'Plan' is really a very poor, sketchy document short on detail either on the existing transport situation in Banbridge or on suggestions for how these should be managed or alleviated. For example in the section on 'Current Principle Problems' it refers to "Inappropriate pedestrian links leading from town car parks to main retail core..." but gives no clarification on what is meant by this nor any suggestions for improvement. It refers to localised traffic congestion at junctions, in particular at Church Square but cites no other junctions nor gives any additional information.

The 'Transport Blueprints' for walking, cycling and highways contained in the document appear simply to be lines marked on maps along main routes to which little detailed effort or thought has been given. The primary and secondary walking routes are just the existing pavements along roads with no off-road links shown or proposed links through new developments. The only proposed cycle routes are along the Newry Road and from the Lurgan Road through Church Square to Solitude Park and onto the Rathfriland Road.

It is suggested that Roads Services should take on the responsibility for the development and maintenance of urban off-road pedestrian ways and cycle tracks where they are of local importance giving safe routes to shops, schools, town centre, etc. Roads Service should be given the legal powers to vest land to ensure the provision of such links.

The Council can assert public rights of way which can give a limited provision in urban areas but Councils are not 'highways authorities' and do not have the resources to bring these up to and maintain to the standard required by the public in urban areas.

To encourage more people to walk, cycle or to allow their children to cycle safe, clean, well lit routes have to be provided. Off-road routes should be provided where possible.

It is important that Planning Service and Roads Service work with developers to ensure that new housing developments in the town provide walking cycling routes. Once brought up to standard these links should be adopted by Roads Service and maintained by it.

Schools are a locus of congestion at arrival and pick-up times.

Banbridge High School carried out a 'Travel to School' survey in 2004. They surveyed how pupils from Edenderry and Abercorn Primary Schools in Banbridge travelled to school finding that 70% and 74% of pupils respectively travelled by car. They pointed out that there are 5 schools within ½ mile of each other located between Scarva Road, Edenderry Road/Ballygowan Road and Newry Road. They pointed out the congestion caused in Primrose Gardens by parents leaving off pupils attending Banbridge High School. They suggest that this could be alleviated if a drop-off area was provided at the new community village site near the school.

The STRP shows a cycle lane through Solitude Park but does not include Banbridge Riverside Walk which runs from the Leisure Centre to Huntly. From Huntly a route continues via Kiln Loaning to the Lurgan Road (which is shown as a 'Proposed Secondary Walking Route.')

This is a popular walking circuit in the town. The upgrading of the riverside walk with appropriate lighting and the modifying of Dunbar Bridge for cyclists should be considered.

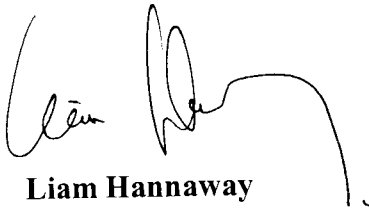
The provision of a pedestrian/cycle bridge across the River Bann linking Downshire Road (in the vicinity of the leisure centre) and the Lurgan Road or Church Place (there is a lane alongside the Masonic Hall which links to Church Place) should be considered. This would allow cyclists (and pedestrians) to avoid the congested bottle neck of the Water Bridge and give them a safe route to and from the town centre.

Conclusions:

In general terms the Plan is aspirational with no firm commitment timetable. The Council have been working on various levels to improve the infrastructure within Banbridge town and district. The Council with all the agencies prepared a Community Plan which they have shared with all statutory bodies including the Area Plan team. However, in the preparation of this Transport Plan there has been little consultation with Council Officers on the various elements contained within the Plan. The Council would ask for an in-dept discussion and consultation on the various elements within the Plan to ensure that proposals meet the aspirations of the Council. For the Plan to be useful it is important that clear timescales and targets are set out for each of the elements over the next 9 years.

I hope these issues can be resolved.

Yours sincerely



Liam Hannaway
Director of Development