

The Background and Rationale for the Huddersfield Town Centre Accessibility Project (including Bus Gates)

It is widely recognised and documented in national and international technical documents, that reducing car dominance and providing improved public transport and walking and cycling facilities within towns and cities generates benefits in terms of health and economic investment potential.¹

Reducing the dominance of the car and providing higher quality spaces for people to enjoy and walk around can have an effect on the amount of time people spend there. A report published by CABA (2004) shows that a high-quality public environment can have a significant impact on the economic life of urban centres big or small, and is therefore an essential part of any successful regeneration strategy.

For general health benefits the Government has also become increasingly focussed on encouraging the population to become more active and carbon efficient, particularly by encouraging walking and cycling, but also by becoming less reliant on the car.

The Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change and the Eddington Transport Study were published in 2006 (DfT, 2006a; HM Treasury, 2006), followed by the Department for Transport's response, Delivering a Sustainable Transport System (DfT, 2008c) as well as its Low Carbon Transport Strategy (DfT, 2009c). Government-wide, a multitude of reports set out recommendations to tackle the health and environmental crises, including through increased levels of cycling. These were consolidated in the White Paper of 2011: "Creating Growth, Cutting Carbon"²

To facilitate the increased level of walking and cycling, the Government produced in 2010, a Local Sustainable Transport Fund³ which allowed local authorities outside London to bid for funding to support packages of transport interventions that support economic growth and reduce carbon emissions in their communities as well as delivering cleaner environments and improved air quality, enhanced safety and reduced congestion.

¹ Transport, Physical Activity and Health: Present knowledge and the way ahead, by Roger L. Mackett and Belinda Brown. 2011. Available from: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/pdf/transportactivityhealth.pdf>.

<http://thegreatbritishhighstreet.co.uk/pdf/Successful-Town-Centres.pdf?2>

See list in appendix 1 for a more comprehensive reference list

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creating-growth-cutting-carbon-making-sustainable-local-transport-happen>

As demonstrated in the timeline below, the provision of a town centre environment that people can easily access and enjoy and one that can be safely navigated around has long been at heart of Kirklees council thinking for Huddersfield.

The Council has also always been aware that a balanced approach is required to satisfy the multiple requirements of users of the town centre, by maintaining not only access to the town for all modes of transport, but also levels of parking both on and off street.

The following timeline shows how the Councils thinking and implementation has developed in recent times:

2004 In 2004 Kirklees Council commissioned an “Urban Renaissance Strategic Development Framework: A public Real Strategy for Huddersfield”.

Working closely and engaging with local political, business and community interests, a set of objectives and principles was established:

- Creation and maintenance of high quality buildings and public spaces is a key to the renaissance of the town centre;
- Everyone must be able to move conveniently and comfortably around the town on foot;
- The town centre must be a unified whole; and
- Movement, activity and appearance provide the essential ingredients around which a public realm strategy can be composed.

It was proposed that overall these objectives and principles should all complement each other and connect up a town centre that works for everyone.

2009 The first project to emerge from the Strategic Development Framework was a scheme for St George’s square to create public space in front of the Railway Station. This scheme, implemented in 2009 sought to lessen the dominance of vehicles travelling through the Square by introducing a restriction for through traffic, but allowing **loading, access and taxis**.

This complemented the **existing** bus only restrictions on Westgate between Railway Street and John William Street in one direction, **which had been in place since 1983**⁴ and on Kirkgate between John William Street and Lord Street/Venn Street in both directions, which had also been in place since 1983. **These and the 2009 restrictions are shown on the accompanying plans.**

2010 As part of the preparation for a Local Development Framework, Kirklees Council commenced development of a Huddersfield Area Action Plan in 2010. The purpose of the AAP was to provide a framework to identify, coordinate and prioritise further opportunities (leisure, retail and culture developments, public realm and highway schemes) within the town centre.

⁴ KMC Traffic Regulation (no.11) Order 1983, Statement of Reasons)

During the development of the Area Action Plan, there were two stages of public consultation:

1. November/December 2009- Issues and Options covering reasonable alternatives
2. Autumn 2010- Consultation on one preferred option, based on responses to stage 1

The **aims and objectives of the consultation on the Huddersfield Town Centre Area Action Plan** were to:

- Find out people's current likes and dislikes about Huddersfield town centre in terms of access, shopping, services, built environment, transport, culture and recreational activities
- Find out what people think is important in making the town centre a good place to live, work and visit in the future
- Assess the views of people on the issues and options presented to them
- Ask people to suggest alternative options to those proposed.

The consultation considered 6 broad themes:

- The Area Action Plan boundary and character areas
- Shopping and Services
- Working
- Living
- Movement
- Environment.

For the movement theme, the following elements were consistently raised:

- **Increased frequency, quality, cost and reliability of public transport**
- **An easier centre to walk and cycle around** by making pavements easier to walk on by improving surfaces, reducing clutter, providing cycling routes across the town centre and providing links across major roads to outlying areas such as the University.
- **More pedestrianised streets in the centre** by wholly pedestrianising the town centre inside the ring road, pedestrianising specific streets and considering the roofing of streets.
- **Making alterations to existing roads** either to accommodate more vehicles, i.e. two lanes instead of one or to accommodate walking and cycling. Modifying the ring road to lessen its impact on the town centre was also considered.
- **Improved parking options for the town centre** including an increased number of car parking spaces, reduced prices or more flexible pricing and the introduction of park and ride schemes.

Informing the development of the emerging Area Action Plan and as a response to tissues raised in the consultation a number of supplementary technical documents were prepared:

- Huddersfield Conservation Area Appraisal
- Huddersfield Urban Design Study
- Huddersfield Town Centre Public Transport Accessibility Study

The Huddersfield Town Centre Public Transport Accessibility Study was developed to:

- inform the council of options to increase the reliability of public transport;
- to lessen the dominance of private vehicles in the town and to use the outcomes to:
 - improve the urban realm and to link disparate sections of the town together, which hitherto had been split by busy, vehicular traffic-dominated roads.

Observations undertaken during the study showed quite clearly that buses experienced significant delay accessing and getting through Huddersfield Town Centre, particularly from Southgate along Kirkgate and Westgate.

To facilitate the option of reducing vehicle dominance; the study looked at enforcing the **existing** traffic management measures on Westgate, Kirkgate and Railway Street. These were not being enforced by the police and the Council did not have the legal powers to enforce, except by using cameras.

In addition it was proposed to introduce **one** new bus only section of road on High Street/Ramsden Street between Market Street and Cooperation Street. This new section was proposed as a result of delay suffered by buses around Peel Street and as a way of better linking pedestrian access to the two sides of New Street.

These traffic restriction proposals, (the ones actually implemented in 2015 and enforced by bus gates) are shown on the accompanying plan. It should be noted that when comparing the 1983, 2009 and 2015 restrictions around Westgate and Kirkgate, there has been very little change to the access arrangements since 1983.

Enforcing existing bus priority traffic management restrictions would, it was felt, result in both improved bus reliability and a better pedestrian environment.

However to ensure a balanced approach to the needs of all users of the town centre, the scheme was designed such that:

- only one extra bus gate would be provided, ensuing that levels of access to the town centre would legally, by and large be similar to what they were before the enforcement commenced. (See accompanying plan).
- A critical issue was the numbers of on-street car parking spaces provided across the town centre. In the final 2015 scheme , pay on street car parking

was reduced by 11 spaces, but to offset this loss, the scheme provided 7 additional blue badge bays and 18 new spaces in loading bays.

2012 In 2012 specific funding became available from Central Government's Department for Transport Highways grant. This is monies paid to Local Highway Authorities and is provided for small transport improvement projects such as road safety schemes, bus priority schemes, walking and cycling schemes and transport information schemes.

There are three main reasons therefore why the Council chose to consider enforcing a series of bus only traffic management restrictions within the town centre:

1. It has been a desire to seek to reduce pedestrian/vehicle conflict and to improve the environment for pedestrians in the town centre that started in 1983 and had been confirmed by recent development work;
2. A funding opportunity for transport improvement schemes was available in 2012 and a decision was taken to bring forward and implement a highway scheme that would further facilitate the development of Huddersfield in line with the emerging Area Action Plan; and
3. The issue of poor air quality was starting to develop as a major national health concern, with town centres and other residential areas, where mixing of slow moving traffic with people being seen as areas of particular concern.

2014 In June Cabinet was asked to consider proposals for pedestrian connectivity, public transport accessibility and traffic restrictions in Huddersfield town centre in line with the above development work.

The report highlighted --- **“that high quality, safe, easy access and connectivity are amongst the most important building blocks of a sustainable and thriving economy”**

and that the proposals

“ were concerned with improving public transport reliability and the pedestrian experience of the town.”

The report was approved.

Plans to be referred to are :-

- Ref – 1C (1983)
- Ref – 1D (2004)
- Ref – 1E (2007)
- Ref – 1F (2014)

Appendix 1

Other Health References

- Briefing Note: Obesity and life expectancy, by National Obesity Observatory. 2010. Available from: http://www.noo.org.uk/uploads/doc/vid_7199_Obesity_and_life_expectancy.pdf.
- Obesity and overweight, by World Health Organization. Available from: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/>.
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Other Improved Economic Investment Potential References

- Pedestrian Propulsion, by Steve Mouzon. 2009. Original Green. Available from: <http://www.originalgreen.org/blog/pedestrian-propulsion.html>
- The pedestrian pound. The business case for better streets and places, by Living Streets. 2014. Available from: http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/1391/pedestrianpound_fullreport_web.pdf.
- Shoppers and how they travel, by Sustrans. 2006. Available from: <http://www.tut.fi/verne/wp-content/uploads/Shoppers-and-how-they-travel.pdf>.
- Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure: a national study of employment impacts, by Heidi Garrett-Peltier. 2011. PERI. Available from: http://www.peri.umass.edu/fileadmin/pdf/published_study/PERI_ABikes_June2011.pdf.
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