

Contact Officer: Jenny Bryce-Chan

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

GROWTH AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 15th January 2024

Present: Councillor Shabir Pandor (Chair)
Councillor Zarina Amin
Councillor Susan Lee-Richards
Councillor Harry McCarthy
Councillor John Taylor
Councillor Manisha Roma Kaushik

Co-optees Jonathan Milner
Chris Friend

In attendance: Cllr Turner, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Regeneration
Cllr Crook, Portfolio Holder for, Housing, Transport and Highways
David Shepherd, Strategic Director for Growth and Regeneration
Rashid Mahmood, Head of Major Projects (Interim)
Edward Highfield, Service Director for Skills and Regeneration

1 Membership of the Committee

All Panel members were in attendance.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

That the minutes of the Panel meeting held on the 10th October 2023 and the 20th November 2023 were approved as a correct record.

3 Interests

Cllr Lee Richards, declared an 'other' interest.

4 Admission of the Public

All agenda items were considered in public session.

5 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

6 Public Question Time

In accordance with Council Procedure rule 11, Mr Chas Ball, Secretary from Kirklees Cycling Campaign attended the meeting and asked a number of questions.

Responses to the questions were provided by the Service Director for Skills and Regeneration.

7 Transport Strategy

Cllr Moses Crook, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Transport and Highways, introduced the Transport Strategy, advising the Panel that the report being presented will provide an update on the development of the Kirklees Transport Strategy including priorities, work undertaken to date and areas still being developed.

In line with the request from Scrutiny, it is important to note that since this strategy is still in development, there is an opportunity for Panel members to offer suggestions and input which will influence the ongoing development process. The Kirklees Transport Strategy will compliment and align with both the West Yorkshire Combined Authority and National Strategies, to ensure that common themes will be implemented to best promote Kirklees priorities and interests.

It will be an inclusive strategy with public transport and Active Travel as central themes alongside a renewed commitment to the 2038 net zero ambition, which is essential as transport is the largest contributor to UK emissions. The strategy will promote choice and appropriate modes of choice for appropriate journeys. While it is pro-sustainable transport, this does not translate to be an anti-car strategy. By increasing accessibility to lower carbon transport modes along with education and incentives it is possible to make sustainable transport an obvious and easy choice, promoting adoption without being prohibitive to car travel.

The strategy and its content ahead of full adoption, will inform current and future projects, improve and enhance inclusion and contribute to both economic growth and meet the 2038 commitment.

Rashid Mahmood, Head of Major Projects (interim) informed the Panel that the report sets out the position and the vision of the Kirklees Transport Strategy. In addition, the report outlines the importance of the alignment between the Council's emerging Local Development Plan and the emerging West Yorkshire local Transport Plan.

The Panel was advised that the Strategy is currently in development and the aim is to serve some of the following purposes:

- To assist with delivery of the core Council priorities including achieving our ambitious net zero objectives by 2038
- To provide the adopted Council position on transport policy and the development of local transport schemes and initiatives
- Support the Council with the implementation of transport schemes and measures through clear policy and direction
- Provide both evidence and clear policy objectives and actions to assist with the Kirklees Local Development Plan Review and support future land use planning allocations with Kirklees
- To both feed into and support the emerging statutory West Yorkshire LTP4 which is anticipated to be developed in 2024/25. LTP4 is being developed and will be drafted this year (2024) and published in 2025

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The Panel was informed that the vision for the Transport Strategy includes matters such as the dominance of the private car, the alignment with fully integrated Active Travel links, and it must be fully supported by a first class reliable and affordable public transport system. It is important that there is improved connectivity, and that access is easy and accessible across the district.

In summary the vision is as follows:

- All communities across the district are connected and have equal access to opportunities
- Transport affordability for all is a priority
- Healthy and sustainable travel is an obvious and easy choice

The Panel was informed that the strategy sets out the long term approach and is linked with other emerging strategies, for example, bus reform, active travel strategy, and integrated rail strategy.

Active Travel - is an integral part of the approach to sustainable transport in Kirklees, enabling residents to walk, cycle and wheel (wheelchairs, mobility scooters etc.) for short journeys as well as integrating it with other modes particularly public transport.

Bus – It is important to recognise the strategic importance of bus services as the most heavily used form of public transport. Since the pandemic the bus network has suffered, therefore, bus reform recognises the need for change.

Rail – The West Yorkshire Rail Strategy is an important part of the integrated transport vision moving forward, facilitating a shift towards more sustainable and efficient modes of transport. The TransPennine Route is an integral part of this.

Road Network – Some new road building will be necessary to alleviate congestion hotspots. Bringing forward development sites will be critical to support growth and regeneration plans for the district. It is also important to improve safety on the roads, and address concerns for those walking, cycling and wheeling.

Decarbonisation – Recognises that road transport is one of the biggest contributors to air pollution, and the strategy and vision supports a comprehensive electric vehicle charging network within the district. Work will also be undertaken with the bus operators to move to a near zero emissions bus fleet.

West Yorkshire Local Transport Plan – is currently being worked on, and is due to be published in Summer 2025, and will replace the current West Yorkshire Transport Strategy 2040.

In response to the information presented, the Panel made comments and asked questions including some of the following:

- Whilst it is recognised that the ambition is to get to net zero, it would appear that there is a move to get people out of cars and on to public transport. This is of concern, particularly for people in certain areas, for example rural areas where

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public transport is infrequent and unreliable. This restricts peoples' movement which will have an effect on economic growth as they may struggle to get to work, or may be required to leave work earlier in order to get the limited buses that are available. There is a concern that the strategy does not appear to be forward looking and lacks innovation. The ability to use cars gives individuals flexibilities and freedoms, and whilst electric cars may seem like a solution, there are issues with their weight and their reliance on non-renewable resources. There are concerns as to whether the strategy is looking far enough into the future to be considered a long-term strategy.

- The information presented mentions active travel, however when it comes down to the reality, there are concerns, particularly in certain wards where, for example, the decision has been made by the Council to discontinue funding to repair lights. People will therefore stop using the active travel route because it is considered dangerous and dark.
- The report (Section 2.1) mentions a reduced need for reliance on the private car, how has it been determined that there is a reduced need for the private car? Where is the evidence base for this?
- The strategy does not appear to address the availability of public transport outside of the town centres. The strategy also aims to ensure that communities across the district are connected and have equal access to opportunities, however, some communities have difficulties accessing public facilities such as hospitals because of a lack of public transport. Unless an individual has their own car, they are likely to struggle to get to appointments or visit relatives.
- Whilst the strategy appears to contain a lot of information, it is not clear what the vision is. It does not emphasise Kirklees being in a central geographical position, equidistant from Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield, linking also the three Mayoral districts.
- Funding has been secured to make improvements to the Penistone Line, however, it needs further investment and needs to be at the heart of the Transport Strategy.
- The strategy does not appear to address concerns regarding the safety of road users in certain areas where cars are known to exceed the speed limit.
- Will the Council be leading on introducing electric vehicle charging points in the Town Centre?
- The report (Section 3.4) mentions air quality considerations, however there is no detail, how will this be implemented?
- It is heartening to see that Active Travel was to be embedded in the strategy and not just seen as an add-on. It is hoped that the ambitions of Kirklees are realised through successful outcomes.

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- Consideration needs to be given to providing a range of electric vehicle charging points to fulfil a range of different users, for example, some points in the town centre where charging takes two hours, as well as some high-speed charging points.
- Whilst it is recognised that the strategy is a draft and is high level, it will be good to see further detail in future.
- Often the concerns around public transport raised by residents are not in relation to the cost, but the reliability of services. Public transport in and out of Huddersfield on paper appears to be very good, however the links between villages is what causes people to rely on cars.
- Ensuring that train stations are fully accessible, should be a key priority in the strategy, as many disabled people are currently unable to travel on trains in Kirklees because of the lack of accessibility.
- Has consideration been given to how electric vehicle charging points will be set up where there is mainly terraced housing?
- As part of Active Travel, is the Council looking at routes down to the canal paths and will the strategy include any programmes of education for members of the public, with regard to road safety, for example, wearing high visibility clothing.

RESOLVED

That Rashid Mahmood and Cllr Crook be thanked for providing an update on the Transport Strategy.

8 Major Projects Transport Programme Update (General)

Cllr Moses Crook, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Transport and Highways, introduced the Major Projects Transport Programme update, advising the Panel that the report being presented is in response to a request from Scrutiny for an update on various aspects of the transport programme.

The report includes an update on the delivery of current and future programmes, details around the TransPennine Route Upgrade, and outlines how they link up with the Transport Strategy. Furthermore, it introduces and sets out the various transport schemes that are underway and in development, as well as schemes that are currently paused at various stages, due to inflation and broader economic factors.

The report details how the Transport Strategy will inform projects and the priorities within each project. It also contains detail on the work being undertaken to ensure that the TransPennine Route Upgrade scheme delivers maximum benefit for Kirklees, including providing links into communities, and supporting mode shift and inclusive economic growth.

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The Panel was informed that whilst current economic conditions and inflationary pressures have resulted in several capital programs within Kirklees being paused at various stages, the inclusion of forward-looking projects, in a pipeline of projects ready for funding, gives a head start when bidding into future funding streams. Work put into these schemes is not wasted or lost in this pipeline approach, as has recently been demonstrated by success in being allocated funding from the Levelling-Up Fund, round three, for the Penistone Line Upgrade. This success demonstrates that the transport scheme development strategy and programme is fit for purpose.

Rashid Mahmood, Head of Major Projects (interim) informed the Panel that the appended report gives a brief outline of the transport schemes, what has been done to date, key milestones, and some information on the TransPennine Route Upgrade (TRU). The report also contains two appendices, Appendix 1, covers the projects in detail, showing the programmes in accordance with the funding streams, and Appendix 2 gives visuals of the TransPennine Route Upgrade.

The Panel was informed that there are a number of funding streams that support the Transport Plan Capital Programme:

1. The West Yorkshire Transport Fund – established in 2014 with £1bn funding to focus on a number of issues relating to the strategic transport movements of traffic within the district. Key development areas include orbital routes, route corridor improvements for better public transport options, road and rail improvement between district hubs to provide capacity and better connectivity, and enhancing rail station gateways through, for example, better access.
2. City Regional Sustainable Transport Fund (CRSTS) – set up to make transformational changes in local transport networks. The programme will fund transport improvements including walking and cycling infrastructure and will enable more people to access public transport and promote walking and cycling in line with local regional and regional strategies. It was a five year programme, which started in 2022 and will run until 2027. There are discussions ongoing about CRSTS 2, to develop beyond 2027.
3. Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) – forms part of the CRSTS, with a key focus on accessibility, producing attractive and clean alternative modes of transport to car journeys, and connecting people to economic and educational centres. There is also a focus on healthier communities for the future, air quality and carbon emissions.
4. Active Travel Fund (ATF) – set up to create more space for walking and cycling schemes, while easing the pressure on public transport and relieving congestion on the current networks. The recent successful tranche four award to Kirklees is for £2.3m. This is for two schemes to upgrade towpaths along the Huddersfield Narrow Canal Phase 3 (Slaithwaite to Marsden) and the Huddersfield Broad Canal (Aspley Marina to Cooper Bridge) to support residents to walk and cycle more easily, providing health and environmental benefits.

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The Panel was advised that further details on the individual projects can be found in Appendix 1.

The Panel was informed that in October 2022, the West Yorkshire Transport Fund (WYTF) wider programme went through an inflation review process which resulted in schemes in Kirklees being paused or reduced in scope. The revised funding strategy is being developed with colleagues at the West Yorkshire Combined Authority to help manage the project funding gap. In 2024, a reprofiled programme will be agreed, within the original funding allocation.

The Panel was further informed regarding the work taking place on the TransPennine Route Upgrade, including the purpose of the scheme, costs, and timescales. Attention was drawn to paragraph 2.5.2 of the report outlining the scope of the Project, which identifies parts of the scheme which are relevant to Kirklees.

The Panel was advised that collaborative working arrangements are in place with TRU, and that seven formal working groups meet monthly to feed back any issues to ensure that the works being undertaken are done in a way that will cause little disruption to residents and communities. The working groups are:

- Highways Network Management Group
- Property Group - Planning and Environmental Group
- Heritage Group
- Waste Project Delivery Group
- Communications Group
- Biodiversity/Landscape Group

Any issues that cannot be resolved are escalated to a formal bi-monthly Programme Level meeting between Kirklees directors and senior sponsors of Network Rail.

The Panel was provided with information which outlined aspects of the ambitions and vision of Mass Transit, specifically: combatting climate change, providing a real and sustainable alternative to the car, cutting emissions, improving air quality, and supporting productivity and inclusive growth. West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) are currently preparing the Strategic Outline Case for Phase 1 of Mass Transit in conjunction with Kirklees officers to ensure that benefits are maximised for the district.

The Panel was advised that the Penistone Line has secured £48m of Levelling Up funding and officers are working with partners including WYCA, South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, Barnsley, Northern, Transport for the North, and Network Rail to come to an understanding of a governance structure that will help to deliver that project.

In response to the information presented, the Panel made comments and asked questions including some of the following:

- The report section 2.4, makes reference to schemes that have been paused, is it possible to give an explanation of what M2D2L means?

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- Whilst it is good that officers are talking with partners about moving forward with the Penistone Line, what involvement and information will be given to Councillors to enable them to influence what is going on and feedback to residents, and how will that be managed?
- It is acknowledged that the scale of investment is positive, however there does not seem to be much investment in the South of the borough, except in Holmfirth Town Centre.
- Improvements were welcomed, especially mobility hubs at several stations, however a concern was raised that while large sums of money were being spent on improvement on stations, there was little mention of the reliability of buses and trains. It was suggested that this was down to the bus and train operators, therefore, it is important for the public to know that this is not within the remit of the Council.
- Officers were congratulated on the success of the bid for the TransPennine Route Upgrade, any improvements there are appreciated. It is important to link the benefits of the TRU Upgrade with the wider projects in the area, particularly the Marsden Blueprint and the Marsden Place Standards.
- With regard to Strategic Transport priorities, it states that “All communities across the district are connected and have equal access to opportunities” - Is this realistic or aspirational and what is meant by “opportunities”?
- There was an announcement in November of £8bn to be invested in roads and transport, this was money that was released when the HS2 scheme was cancelled. £3.3 bn was to be directed to Yorkshire and the Humber. Does this programme include the schemes funded through this money or is that funding allocation being worked on?

RESOLVED

That Rashid Mahmood and Cllr Crook be thanked for providing an update on the Major Projects Transport Programme Update (General).

9 Work Programme and Forward Plan RESOLVED

That holding meetings in different venues would be further explored.