TOPIC 4: TRANSPORT

Response by Reading Borough Council to Inspectors Questions

CS20: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE READING TRANSPORT STRATEGY

CS21: MAJOR TRANSPORT PROJECTS

Wednesday 19th September 2007
11.00 am
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In response to Topic 4: Transport, of the Examination into the Core Strategy Submission Draft, the inspector has set out a series of questions. This topic paper addresses those questions and representations specifically relating to policies CS20 and CS21.

1.2 A table, which summarises details of those who responded during the consultation period January 26th-March 9th 2007, is included at Appendix B. Those respondents whose representations relate directly to the Inspector’s question/s are highlighted in the table. Respondents who submitted examination statements are listed at the beginning of each question response below.

1.3 For ease of reference the tests of soundness, as set out in PPS12, are included at Appendix A.

1.4 Please note document references used, e.g St01, are those within the Core Document List prepared by the Council.

2.0 Policy CS20: Implementation of the Reading Transport Strategy (Local Transport Plan 2006-2011)

Question 1
Does the Core Strategy allow flexibility if any of the core projects in the Reading Transport Strategy are removed? (Wednesday 19th September, 11.00am)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevant Examination Statements from Participants</th>
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<td>• Highways Agency (Ex15)</td>
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2.1 The purpose of the Core Strategy is not to implement the core projects of the Reading Transport Strategy per se, but to ensure that development contributes to the provision of a balanced transport network as outlined in the Reading Transport Strategy including the eight core infrastructure projects.

2.2 National transport policy makes it clear that transport considerations should be closely integrated with land use planning in terms of the location of development and the accessibility of new development to services and facilities. The Core Strategy identifies the spatial strategy (Section 3), which sets out four key areas for future development namely:

• Reading Central Area;
• South West Reading including Green Park 3;
• District / Local centres; and
• Redevelopment of parts of existing employment areas.
2.3 The Core Transport Projects form an integral part of the Spatial Strategy and future development depends on the implementation of a range of projects, schemes and programmes. However, the Reading Transport Strategy does not rely solely on the delivery of these core projects to deliver the required outcomes. It has been designed so as to ensure that elements of it are stand alone and do not rely exclusively on the delivery of one aspect or another.

2.4 It is the role of the LTP (Tr02), not the Core Strategy, to prioritise projects and identify programmes for delivery of schemes. The LTP does identify a specific timeline for each (Table 8.1 P183 and Page 10) and all of the core infrastructure projects, in line with PPS12 (Na13), have a realistic likelihood of delivery within the plan period to 2023. In fact, since the LTP was submitted, full approval and funding has been received for four of the eight core projects, namely M4 J11, Green Park Station, the latter comprising developer funding and funding from a successful Growth Point bid, and the Reading Station upgrade, which includes Cow Lane Improvements. All of these schemes are programmed to be completed by the end of 2012.

2.5 It is accepted that planning long-term major projects is not without some risk and depends on being able to secure the necessary funding. Projects are dependant on successful funding bids such as Transport Innovation Fund or Major Scheme Bids. The LTP takes up the national and regional transport themes and translates these into a range of strategies and plans, which are underpinned by a Quality Travel for Reading approach. There is further detail of strategies and plans identified within the Transport Background Paper (Tr01).

2.6 The spatial distribution of development within the LDF is proposed to fit strategically alongside the LTP. In turn, the Local Transport Plan was developed in conjunction with Planning, however the LTP specifically took account of existing and emerging development proposals and accessibility. In relation to the core transport infrastructure projects identified in the LTP, the collective benefits are greater with all of the schemes funded and implemented, however the nature of delivery does mean that some of these may come forward sooner whilst others may be re-programmed for later delivery. If significant delays emerge with one element, appropriate alternative schemes will be developed and implemented later in the programme.

2.7 With regard to policy CS20, one examination submission has been received from the Highways Agency (HA) (Ex15). They consider that the Core Strategy currently fails test of soundness 7 in that they consider that it is not based on a robust and credible evidence base and test 8 in terms of implementation. This is with specific reference to an evaluation of the transport impact of the DPD. Considerable modelling, using the Reading Transport Model, was undertaken in assessing the various components of the projects in the LTP in relation to future anticipated levels of development. The
Council has now commissioned PBA to undertake a specific study to assess actual proposals in the Core strategy, which has now been submitted to the HA’s consultants Parsons Brinkerhoff, who are currently reviewing it. The results of this review are imminent and the Council consider that the results suggest that this work will resolve this objection. Throughout the LDF process we have continued to work alongside the Highways Agency and their consultants in undertaking this study.

2.8 The overall spatial strategy within the Core Strategy will be achievable even if some of the Core transport projects are not delivered within the plan period. The Reading Transport Strategy includes a comprehensive range of projects and programmes as well as the core projects and there is sufficient contingency built into the LTP to support the spatial strategy of the Core Strategy.

3.0 Policy CS21: Major Transport Projects

Question 2
Are all the Major Projects sufficiently advanced to justify safeguarding land or lines?
(Wednesday 19th September, 11.00am)

Relevant Examination Statements from Participants

South Oxfordshire District Council (Ex16)

3.1 The purpose of this policy is to provide the strategic context for giving priority to the priority transport projects as identified within the Reading Borough Council’s LTP and that land needed for their implementation will be safeguarded from development to enable their provision. Indeed four of the eight core projects have already got the necessary funding to proceed, with works due to commence on J11 in Spring 2008, Reading Station and Cow Lane in 2008, and Green Park Station in 2007. These projects are clearly already sufficiently advanced to justify safeguarding land. For the other core projects, Para 7.15 of the Core Strategy makes it clear that only where projects are sufficiently advanced will safeguarded land and lines be shown on proposals maps. Such land and lines therefore will be applied in more detail by future DPDs such as the forthcoming Site Allocations DPD and will be informed by available information at that time.

3.2 This policy provides local context to a Strategic policy T3 within the adopted Berkshire Structure Plan (St01). Policy T17 of RPG9 (Re03) and T1 of the Draft South East Plan (Re04) also refer to developing and safeguarding delivery of the regional transport strategy and developing regional hubs and supporting the spatial strategy.

3.3 One Examination submission has been prepared with regard to policy CS21. This was submitted by South Oxfordshire District Council
(SODC) and refers to Policy CS21 as well as paragraph 3.9, 7.8 and figure 7.1, specifically with regard to the reference and inclusion of a Third Thames Crossing.

3.4 The Council’s intention is that Policy CS21 would be a strategic policy to safeguard land and lines of priority projects both within the existing LTP (Tr02) (timeframe to 2011) and successor LTPs, within the Core Strategy plan period. The Third Thames Crossing is identified as a priority project, not specifically referred to within this policy, but within paragraphs 3.9 and 7.8. The list of core projects is taken directly from the existing LTP. The Third Thames Crossing is included as a project where options for an additional crossing will be developed with adjoining authorities for north-south movement across the river.

3.5 The Thames Valley Multi-modal study (TVMS, Tr03) recommends that the case for a new Thames crossing be considered further as part of a package for the Reading Urban Area, a point with which the SODC statement concurs (para 3.9). The Cross Thames Group, which includes all relevant local authorities, is continuing to consider the strategic issue of cross-river travel and potential options to alleviate existing bottlenecks as recommended through the Study. An additional Thames Crossing is therefore incorporated in LTP2 core infrastructure projects and is shown to meet transport shared priority objectives.

3.6 The SODC objection is that a Third Thames Crossing is not included within any plans, policies or strategies for the district (Para 3.11 of submission) and as such the policy fails the test of soundness 4A and 6 (Refer to Appendix 1 below). However, the Council has considered the adopted Berkshire Structure Plan (St01), which is part of the adopted development plan relevant providing strategic level policies for the area, in line with soundness test 4a. In particular the council has conformed with Policy T3 which refers to safeguarding land where required for the development of the strategic transport network including (13) “additional capacity for crossing the River Thames in the Reading area”. The issue of safeguarding was specifically dealt with at the Berkshire Structure Plan Examination held in September 2003. The Panel concluded in the report (Refer to Appendix C - para 8.24, P81) that the policy “….does not prescribe a particular solution. Instead it only requires councils to safeguard land for an additional crossing. That being so we are satisfied that the proposal should remain, since we do not think that the interests of any parties are prejudiced by its inclusion in the Plan at this Stage”. The Council therefore do not consider that test 4a is failed in this case.

3.7 The Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan (2006-2011) acknowledges the findings of the TVMS and that as a result of the Secretary of State’s recommendations for the affected authorities, should further explore the issue of cross Thames travel in the Reading area. The Plan confirms that the Cross Thames Steering Group has reached
agreement “that options for public transport enhancements, potential Park & Ride sites and future rapid transit opportunities should be investigated further. These may or may not include the need for an additional bridge” (refer to Appendix D)

3.8 The Third Thames Crossing is also included in policy WT13 of the adopted Wokingham District Local Plan, and Policy CP19 of the Wokingham’s Alternatives for the Draft Core Strategy Nov 2005. As such the Plans for neighbouring authorities have been taken into account and therefore the Council consider test 6 has been met.

3.9 SODC also consider that soundness test 7 is not met as in their opinion the proposal for a third Thames crossing is not based on a robust and credible evidence base. The Core Strategy includes this and other core transport projects to reflect their inclusion within the Borough’s LTP, which are detailed further in the Transport Background Paper (Tr01). The LTP comprises a range of measures as part of a balanced transport strategy for the area and include public transport enhancements, MRT, Park and Ride and so on. The inclusion of the Third Thames Crossing is one part of an overall strategy and is included further to the findings of the TVMMS, commissioned by GOSE (refer also to Tr01). The LTP states that this study identified potential strategic benefits in providing an additional crossing particularly where this provides the scope to reallocate capacity to public transport and suggests that further studies should be carried out to fully evaluate the benefits and possible impacts. The LTP also identifies that RBC is working with neighbouring authorities (which includes SODC) and other partners to investigate the possible need for an additional Thames Crossing (P105). The Council therefore accepts that there is further work to be undertaken and that the project is a long term one, but not that there is no credible evidence base to support its inclusion.

3.10 The SODC submission includes suggested changes to Policy CS21 as follows: “The development of a third Thames crossing may only proceed with the approval of the adjoining local planning and highway authorities”. Clearly the development of a Third Thames Crossing or indeed any scheme, would need to secure appropriate approval before it could proceed. The policy does not, in the Council’s view, need to be explicit about this. The accompanying text makes it clear that only where projects are advanced sufficiently, will safeguarded land or lines be identified on the proposals map. In any case, the Crossing is of sub regional if not regional importance and the Reading Core Strategy should not, indeed it is not capable of, giving another authority or authorities power of veto over a scheme that is in any case outside its area. Therefore the Council does not agree that such a wording change is required.
Appendix A: Tests of Soundness

1. The DPD has been prepared in accordance with the Local Development Scheme.

2. The DPD has been prepared in compliance with the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), or with the minimum requirements set out in the regulations where no SCI exists.

3. The plan and its policies have been subjected to Sustainability Appraisal.

4. (a) It is a spatial plan which has regard to other relevant plans, policies and
   (b) It is consistent with national planning policy.
   (c) The plan is in general conformity with Regional Spatial Strategy or, where relevant, the Spatial Development Strategy in London.

5. It has had regard to the authority’s Community Strategy.

6. The strategies/policies/allocations in the plan are coherent and consistent within and between Development Plan Documents prepared by the authority and by neighbouring authorities, where cross boundary issues are relevant.

7. The strategies/policies/allocations represent the most appropriate in all the circumstances, having considered the relevant alternatives, and they are founded on a robust and credible evidence base.

8. There are clear mechanisms for implementation and monitoring.

9. It is reasonably flexible to enable it to deal with changing circumstances.
Appendix B: Summary of those who responded to policies CS20 & CS21

Representations which are specifically relevant to the Inspector’s questions are highlighted in bold.

**CS20**

**Question 1: Does the Core Strategy allow flexibility if any of the core projects in the Reading Transport Strategy are removed?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Strategy Ref.</th>
<th>Representation No.</th>
<th>Comment / Support / Object ToS (where identified)</th>
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<td>Object 4.A, 6, 7</td>
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would require the Councils to consider the provision of infrastructure where the local highway network can no longer cope with demand. They also suggest that the word “must” be substituted for “should” in Policy T4. In our view, the additions sought to Policy T3 are already covered by reading that policy in conjunction with Policy T4 that requires appropriate measures to be taken. We have also considered the use of the word “must”, instead of “should”. The JSPU indicated that they were content with this change. However, we consider that there should be an element of discretion in this policy, which is taken away by the use of the word “must”. “Should” is still a very strong indication of the need to carry out the action required in the policy.

8.17 A number of parties expressed views about traffic and public transport in rural areas. CTC argued that the inadequacies of public transport in these areas could be addressed with an emphasis on demand responsive services. They stressed the importance of the bicycle as a means of commuting to the public transport system. Similar arguments are put forward by FoE.

8.18 GOSE refer to the advice in PPG13 on rural transport issues. We considered that the advice in PPG13 regarding the focus of development in local service centres is consistent with the overall approach in Policy DP1 of ensuring that development is normally located in settlements. However, we consider that the more detailed criteria in Policy DP8 would be strengthened by an additional criterion that ensures that new development is concentrated in local service centres. In our view, the detailed suggestions put forward by CTC, FoE and BALC are more relevant at the local plan or LTP level.

The need for a reference to additional capacity for crossing the River Thames in the Reading area

8.19 OCC’s principal concern relates to the proposal in Policy T2.13 for “Additional capacity for crossing the River Thames in the Reading area”. It is clear that this proposal is not a new one. Indeed, the JSPU describe it as a “perennial bone of contention at Structure Plan EIIPs in the area”. OCC’s opposition hinges on its opinion that additional crossing capacity will increase road traffic in South Oxfordshire.

8.20 It refers to the Joint Working Party that was set up following an earlier proposal by the former Berkshire County Council to build a new bridge and extend the A329(M) into Oxfordshire. It also refers to the Secretary of State’s response to the TVMMS, when he highlighted the hubs and spokes approach, largely in terms of an emphasis on public transport; he also endorsed that study’s recommendation for closer working between authorities to develop cross boundary transport strategies.

8.21 OCC accepts that additional crossing capacity solely for public transport use may be suitable, if it were in the context of an agreed local transport strategy. As this is not the case, and the proposal in Policy T2.13 does not form part of regional proposals, it should be deleted from the policy.

8.22 RBC also refer to the Cross Thames Travel Study, which was commissioned by the relevant district and county councils in Oxfordshire and Berkshire, that concludes that “the provision of new public transport modes and the expansion of existing services should be at the heart of the strategy”. RBC maintain that that conclusion is in line with the draft RTS and the TVMMS. Both Caversham and Reading bridges are located close to the centre of Reading in densely populated residential areas. Both routes are heavily congested with local and non-local traffic. RBC explain that the existing levels of use preclude the use of public transport priority measures, although there is a need for such a scheme. The management of these routes can only be improved if additional
crossing capacity is provided. Many of the current cross-Thames trips are generated from within South Oxfordshire and they currently impact on the residential areas and the wider rural environment.

8.23 We note that the current proposal does not prescribe a particular type of crossing or how the capacity would be utilised. In the last forty years or so, there has been a rapid increase in population in Berkshire and Oxfordshire but the main areas of employment growth have been south of the river. The capacity of the bridges between Marlow in the east and Stanton in the west is a cause of congestion. The TVMMS recommends "that the case for a bridge be considered further as part of a package for the Reading urban area which considers the scope for re-allocating existing north-south capacity across the river to support public transport and traffic management to minimise localised impacts".

8.24 We are in no position to form a judgement on the merits of a new crossing of the River Thames. We recognise that there are arguments for and against such a scheme. However, it does seem possible that a particular scheme, which concentrated on an increase in travel by public transport modes could be acceptable in certain circumstances and could meet the recommendations in the TVMMS. In these circumstances, it might be possible to overcome the very proper concerns expressed by OCC. However, we note that Policy T2.13 does not prescribe a particular solution. Instead, it only requires councils to safeguard land for an additional crossing. That being so, we are satisfied that the proposal should remain, since we do not think that the interests of any of the parties are prejudiced by its inclusion in the Plan at this stage.

The need for a policy regarding airfields, particularly White Waltham Airfield

8.25 PDP, on behalf of the West London Aero Club, object to the failure to include a policy regarding aviation, and particularly the omission of a reference to White Waltham Airfield. PDP draw attention to the White Paper on Airports' Policy, PPG13123 and RPG9124. PDP also refer to the Halcrow Report on Business Aviation in the South East, which makes specific reference to White Waltham Airfield. They maintain that the Adopted Structure Plan and this Plan are the only ones in the Home Counties that have no policies regarding aviation. The airport is well located and is long established and well used for business and training aviation; it intends to increase and improve facilities to meet these demands.

8.26 PDP suggest a new policy that recognises the value of major airports close to the county boundary and one that supports the expansion of general and business aviation on White Waltham airfield.

8.27 The JSU regard White Waltham airfield as a local issue because, while it is the only licensed aerodrome in Berkshire, it is not regionally significant. The proposed policy gives blanket support to expansion on an unidentified scale. RBWM support the JSU and regard the future of the airfield as a local issue. FoE describe it as a grass strip, handling relatively small aircraft.

8.28 We consider that the advice in PPG13 is particularly relevant. We recognise the importance of White Waltham as a small airfield serving business and training flying. However, the advice in PPG13 only requires local planning authorities to consider the role of such airfields. There is no requirement for them to include a specific policy in their structure plans. The Halcrow Report presents a measured analysis of the broad

123 CD13, Annex B, paragraph (v)
124 CD30, paragraph 11.20
Appendix D: Extract from Oxfordshire LTP 2006-2011
Gloucestershire
The routeing of the major road connections between Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire, particularly for HGVs, has been subject of discussions for the last 10 years. The A44 is currently the Primary Route between Oxford and Evesham, passing through Gloucestershire, but there are significant problems caused by traffic in settlements along this route. There are difficulties in resolving these problems due to the problems on the alternative routes, especially the A40, onto which this traffic will be diverted. The County Council will continue to work with Gloucestershire to develop short and long term strategies for reducing these problems.

The Cotswold rail line runs between Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire. Both county council's play a role in the Cotswolds and Malverns Transport Partnership, which also brings together Train Operating Companies and Network Rail.

West Oxfordshire shares a long border with Gloucestershire and has a number of accessibility issues in common. Many people in West Oxfordshire look towards the centres in Gloucestershire to provide goods and services that they need, particularly higher value goods and services rather than those in Oxfordshire, as well as healthcare and employment opportunities. Similarly many in Cotswold district in Gloucestershire look towards services in Oxfordshire. However, any movement between the two counties is solely reliant on the private car as there are only minimal public transport services operating between the two counties. This is an issue that the County Councils of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire hope to investigate jointly over the lifetime of the Plan.

Thames Valley (Reading and Wokingham)
The Thames Valley Multi-Modal Study reported in January 2003 and the Government issued its response in July 2003. Local transport recommendations accepted by the Secretary of State included the development of a 'hub and spoke' transport system, including new inter-urban bus/coach services on corridors not well served by public transport and the promotion of measures to reduce travel demand and encourage more sustainable transport choices.

As a result of the Secretary of State's recommendations for the affected authorities to further explore the issue of cross Thames travel in the Reading area a Cross Thames Steering Group was formed. This comprises Oxfordshire County Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Wokingham Council and Reading Borough Council. The Group has set out to consider the strategic issue of cross-river travel, its impact on local communities and potential options to alleviate the existing bottlenecks.

An initial study was commissioned to explore, at a broad level, the implications of a range of options on traffic flows in the area. The study also considered the implications of a variety of locations for an additional Thames crossing should that option ever form part of a wider strategy.
Agreement has been reached that options for public transport enhancements, potential Park & Ride sites and future rapid transit opportunities should be investigated further. These may or may not include the need for an additional bridge.

Reading station serves a large area of southern Oxfordshire as well as providing a connection to the wider rail network for the county’s rail services. The County Council supports proposals to increase the capacity of the station.

Swindon and Wiltshire
The growth of Swindon as a Principal Urban Area could have significant impacts on traffic and travel in Oxfordshire. A large proportion of the Vale of White Horse looks to Swindon for goods and services and therefore continued good links are essential. The A420 forms the direct link between Oxford and Swindon. While this is generally of a reasonable standard there are some sections that are approaching capacity and have road safety concerns. The precise location of the development within Swindon is likely to influence the effects that it has on Oxfordshire in general and the A420 in particular. The County Council will continue to be closely involved in the process for determining how Swindon should respond to its development demands.

There is currently no direct rail services between Oxford and Swindon, the County Council continue to press the railway industry for the re-introduction of this service.

Warwickshire & Northamptonshire
The southern areas of both of these counties look towards Banbury as their main shopping and service centre. It is therefore essential that the accessibility strategies of the three counties are co-ordinated to ensure that boundaries do not become a barrier to these important movements.

Local Context
The implementation of the Local Transport Plan can support a range of other economic, social and environmental plans produced by the County Council and the District Councils in Oxfordshire. This section outlines the main non-transport plans and strategies that the Plan, as part of the Council’s long-term local transport strategy, has been designed to support, and explains what steps the County Council has taken to ensure that the aims and objectives of these plans are supported by Plan strategies and actions wherever possible.

The County Council recognises that the links between transport planning and other local government functions only begin with the preparation of a Plan that is consistent with a range of other objectives. The County Council therefore intends to ensure that links between transport planning and other