

REPORT OF THE BATH PRESERVATION TRUST TRANSPORT WORKING GROUP 2005: TRAFFIC IN BATH

The Narrow Context

The first two objects in the Objects Clause of the Bath Preservation Trust's Memorandum and Articles read as follows:-

- (a) To promote high standards of planning and architecture and to secure the protection, preservation, development and improvement for the public benefit of the character, amenities and buildings of historical, architectural or public interest in and around the City of Bath.
- (b) To protect and preserve public rights of way and the beauty of the countryside around the City of Bath (and promote its fullest enjoyment by the public).

The Trust's Guidelines state that:

Para 32 "There is an increasing awareness of the problems of traffic congestion, including pollution. We would generally support measures to control the volume of traffic while recognising the genuine interests of all users – pedestrians, motorists, cyclists, lorries when delivering only, and tourists. Pollution control should involve both technological innovation and roadside checks" and at

Para 33 "The Trust should encourage an improved system of public transport, and any practical steps to reduce pollution. We should continue to advocate weight restriction in the centre of Bath" and at

Para 36 "The Trust will continue to support the A350 as a way of keeping traffic out of the Avon Valley."

The Wider Context

In Lord Esher's book "The Rebuilding of England 1940 –1980 – The Broken Wave" (published 1981) he talks of the disintegration of our cities as they previously existed and says "of course the main agent of their disintegration was the motor vehicle. Having cut cities about even more drastically than the railways had done, it additionally, unlike them, crept into every cranny and infested the city like maggots." But he also acknowledges that the "man in the street" is now more often than not, also the "man in the motor car". He quotes the figures used by Colin Buchanan in his "Traffic in Towns" (1963) ; "the number of vehicles on British Roads, which had passed the 1 million mark in 1922, and had reached 5 million in the days of the post war consensus, had by 1962 doubled to 10 million. It was variously projected to reach between 30 and 40 million by 2010, the year by which demand was assumed to have reached saturation point."

According to the Times on Monday 18th April 2005 the number of cars on British roads has doubled in the last thirty years and now stands at 30,600,000. Perhaps even more relevant is that the number of households with two or more cars now outnumbers those with only one and that more than a million homes have three or more cars. This may mean in effect that the above forecast of saturation point in 2010 will be inaccurate.

Anyway it can now be seen that most households now include motorists as well as pedestrians.

The huge increase in these figures has not surprisingly led to problems of congestion, air pollution and damage to ancient buildings in all our cities and towns and Bath has not been spared any of them. It is evident that none of the solutions so far tried in most cities, such as inner and outer ring roads, motorway boxes and park and rides have so far solved these problems on anything other than a very temporary basis. Oxford, which is surrounded by a ring road and parks and rides still suffers from appalling congestion; some of the worst congestion in Bristol is approaching the Park and Ride at Brislington and there is still congestion on the Upper Bristol Road and on Wells Way in spite of park and ride on both roads.

But, it is now fifty years since Abercrombie, thirty since Buchanan and over twenty years since Lord Esher wrote "The Broken Wave". Near the end of his life Buchanan himself admitted in the context of the Twyford Down Inquiry that there was a limit to the new motorways we should be building. The last Conservative Government, after the SACTRA report, abandoned the policy of "predict and provide" and took out a large number of proposed new roads, including the Swainswick to Tormarton dual carriageway extension of the new A46 and the East of Bath dual carriageway leading to a Bradford on Avon bypass.

There is now a vast new range of solutions available, which do not involve new roads, car parks or irreversible development. Congestion charging in London has proved to be a success and has been accepted by many who previously opposed it. In Edinburgh there was recently a referendum on the introduction of congestion charging; the majority vote was against it, but as Mathew Paris wrote in the Times the following week, if you ask the electorate whether they want to pay for something they have till now received free, it is obvious what the reply will be. In Paris there is now a plan to close the centre of the city to all through traffic. Bus lanes on the entrance to London and other cities have expedited public transport and recently the Times reported that the Government are proposing car-sharing lanes for the busiest motorways. In the longer term central government are looking into the introduction of road pricing in lieu of road fund licences.

The task of this working group is to make recommendations to the Trustees and propose policies for the Trust, which could lead to long term solutions to the problems outlined above and are consistent with the Trust's objects and guidelines.

Recommendations.

1. For most of the year, traffic in and around Bath is close to grid-lock, with long queues leading to delays, excessive pollution and frustration. Numerous proposals have been tried so as to reduce the problems but, in practice, most have merely diverted traffic to other parts of the city. This paper attempts to put forward a series of possible proposals and changes which should be considered as a coherent whole, and be regarded as a strategy to reduce the level of traffic congestion in the city and its surrounding area.
2. However, before attempting to analyse the various areas which might warrant change, it is essential to determine the causes of the traffic problem. The recent study by the Government Office for the South West calculated that only 13% of traffic over Cleveland Bridge was through traffic. The remaining 87% was made up of traffic going to or from Bath, or internally within the city. The implication therefore was that the problem is largely local though recent observations indicate that this

may not reflect current traffic flows in Bath. We recommend that further research is therefore required.

3. The traffic in Jan – Feb 2005 over Cleveland Bridge did not appear to reflect the recent study. Normally, for the period 09.00 to 18.30, traffic over Cleveland Bridge is virtually continuous, and only for short period of about 30 minutes in the morning and afternoon is traffic other than waiting in a queue in Bathwick Street. Yet since the beginning of 2005, traffic has been light, with queues only in the morning and afternoon peak-periods. At first, this could have been put down to a combination of a long Christmas break and school holidays. These factors no longer apply, yet the traffic is still relatively light for much of the day.
4. Thus, there is a need to analyse fully the traffic flow situation, in order to ensure that subsequent decisions are likely to provide a solution.
5. It would be helpful to have clearer indication of the cost for various options. It has been estimated for example that it costs about £75,000 a year to provide a bus service which does a 40 mile round trip every 2 hours during a standard working day. An average bypass would be somewhere in the region of £15 million, the Batheaston bypass was something in the region of £76 million. It costs about £1 million to surface 1000 car parking spaces or a bus corridor with priority measures, real time information and decent shelters. The cost of the proposed Park and Ride at Lambridge has now risen to £6 million.
6. There are a number of possible traffic strategies which could be introduced to help reduce traffic flows within Bath. These have been grouped into short and longer-term measures.

Measures which could be implemented in the period 2006 – 2010.

7. HGVs.

The recent Bristol/Bath - South Coast traffic study produced by the GOSW, indicated that over a 12 hour period 935 HGVs used the Cleveland Bridge as a through route. This is a major choke point in Bath where traffic movement is constrained as much by the space available as by the numbers of vehicles involved.

The proportion of through HGVs in the total traffic may only be about 4.5%, but if you accept that each HGV is equivalent in length to about 3 cars, this translates into the space used by HGVs over the bridge as equivalent to about 14% of the space available for traffic movement over the 12 hour period. The recent lengthy period of work on the A36 at Limpley Stoke confirmed this view, as traffic in Bathwick Street flowed much more freely while HGVs were diverted onto other routes.

There is the added problem of the impact of HGVs on the substructure of roads in Bath, particularly over the numerous vaults. Whilst modern HGVs have reduced the weight footprint of vehicles over solid-based roads, where an HGV makes use of a road such as Bathwick Street, the heavier overall weight of HGVs has a major impact on the vault walls regardless of the number of tyres.

We therefore suggest that urgent action is required to reduce the impact of HGVs on the Bath area, and suggest that two options should be considered:

- a. Banning through HGVs from using the roads in the city.

- b. Imposing a congestion charge for the remaining HGVs. Many firms which deliver within the city use HGVs even though the load to be delivered could be carried on much smaller vehicles.

Both of these options would require lobbying BaNES Council to accept the de-trunking of the major routes, and to encourage BaNES to work with other local authorities to investigate regional signage, so that HGVs are directed away from using Bath as a through route.

8. **Council Parking Policies.**

The present council has adopted a policy of reducing parking in the City centre while siting large Park and Ride areas for vehicles on the outskirts of the city. B&NES acknowledges that managing parking is its most effective tool to reduce traffic yet it continues to increase parking on the periphery in Park and Rides. The most recent proposal for the Lambridge area has resulted in considerable opposition from many residents including Bathampton, Batheaston and Bathford who question whether the irreversible environmental damage to Bathampton Meadows is balanced with sufficient traffic benefit. The provision of more parking enables more people to access Bath by car. The businesses and employers want more people to come to Bath by car to underpin the economic viability of Bath but B&NES has not looked seriously at alternative ways of enabling people to enter Bath that do not involve a ring of large car parks around Bath. For example;

- The use of existing and smaller parking areas in villages on the outskirts of Bath to join an enhanced bus service
- more extensive bus priority measures which would confer a time advantage for bus passengers
- more soft measures which could change people's travel behaviour including school travel plans, workplace travel plans and the improved marketing of public transport options.

As has been mentioned earlier, there needs to be more understanding of who is accessing Bath, at what time of day and for what purpose.

A recent survey conducted on the eastern side of Bath showed that many people use a combination of the car, bus, bicycling and walking. For example, there is evidence that some people use a bus by day and car by night. So a positive campaign for a regular and punctual bus service could be made to encourage more people to do this. This should lead on to a more regular and punctual service in the evening as well.

Many journeys in Bath are likely to be short; nationally it has been calculated that a ¼ of all journeys are under two miles so it might be possible for more people to leave their cars at home even if it was just once a week. It has also been calculated that if everyone left their car at home once a fortnight there would be a 10% reduction in traffic, similar to levels experienced during the summer holidays.

9. **Public Transport.**

Whilst Bath has an extensive public transport system, some of the present bus fleet is far from modern, and the service provided can be infrequent in many areas. How to improve the system, whether with buses or trams, and the role of the rail network in helping to reduce traffic congestion, requires careful examination. Improvements in the public transport system could make a significant impact on the present level of car traffic. The re-opening of Corsham station is one option that could have a significant impact on the traffic accessing Bath from the East. It is worth noting that conventional

public transport like the X39 from Bristol brings about 800,000 people in and out of Bath in a year while all the Park and Rides together catered for 716,659 roundtrips last year.

10. **Internal City Road Usage.**

As a result of various restrictions imposed on the use of some of the roads in the centre of the city, the level of congestion on the outer roads has greatly increased. It would be relatively easy to modify some of these so that all roads in the city were available for use during peak-periods to help reduce the flow on the outer roads. Greater flexibility in the bus-gate operating times, i.e. to 10.00 to 16.30, and allowing traffic to gain access into Queen's Square from Westgate Street, could reduce the level of local traffic forced into crossing Cleveland Bridge. There are other routes which could be considered in a similar manner. The computer model built up by BaNES should be used to explore the effects of this.

11. **Cyclists and Pedestrians.**

There is a great deal of opportunity in Bath for small schemes to make cycling and walking safer and a more attractive option. Facilities for cyclists require considerable improvement, especially on the easier east-west routes into the city. However, care should be taken in ensuring that pedestrians concerns are also recognised such as: riding on pavements by growing numbers of cyclists, and the hazard for pedestrians of allowing cyclists freedom to operate against one-way traffic systems.

Longer Term Measures for Consideration.

There is still a lack of understanding of the traffic in Bath but during peak hours it would appear there is a type of congested equilibrium. The volume of traffic itself acts as a deterrent, a 'congestion charge' of time and effort. What this means is that any cars you manage to remove from the traffic stream may be replaced by others who in the past had limited their journey at that time because they felt there was too much traffic. This has implications for the road schemes mentioned below because any new road capacity is likely to be filled not only with existing traffic but also new traffic. In other words you could exacerbate the problem by attracting more traffic to the area. The longer term measures should not be implemented until short term measures are tried and a much better understanding regarding traffic in Bath is known.

12. **New Railway Stations.**

The construction of new stations (for example Saltford) in conjunction with more frequent commuter services, could have a considerable impact on the level of car commuter traffic into Bath. Here, however, there could be conflict with plans to improve the high-speed London to Bristol rail service.

13. **Congestion Charging.**

In the long term it may be necessary to consider a congestion charging system for all traffic entering the centre of Bath. This could create a conflict with owners of businesses and shops in Bath as, unless ample parking was provided outside Bath, there would be an inevitable impact on the present attraction of Bath for visitors.

14. **A Bypass for Bath.**

If all the schemes outlined above fail to make a significant reduction on traffic levels in Bath, it may be necessary to examine the benefits of new roads.

- a. **A350.** As stated above the development of this road is advocated in the Trust's Guidelines. Its improvement and that of other north-south roads in the area, could possibly be a more cost effective way of reducing traffic through Bath, but it is far

from certain that such a scheme would have the support of the residents and Councils in the areas concerned.

- b. **Link Road.** A short link road for the A36/A46 has support in some areas. With careful design, limited to a single lane additional road, it should be possible to reduce considerably the impact on the local environment. Such a scheme would take at least 10 years to gain approval through the various regulatory hurdles, and to construct. Moreover, if the current traffic statistics are correct in concluding that it would only impact on 13% of the traffic in Bath, it would be difficult to justify the financial cost of such a scheme. And this scheme was rejected by a lengthy public inquiry in the 1990s.
- c. **Tunnel Schemes.** The Federation of Bath Residents' Associations has put forward the view that an east-west, north-south tunnel would, according to its supporters, have a minimal impact on the environment. The group are doubtful if this view would be shared by those who have lived for many years at either end of the proposed tunnel but it recommends that the Trust should invite the scheme's supporters to make a presentation to the Trustees so that they can take a view on this interesting suggestion.
- d. **Motorway Traffic Interchange.** A regular, frequent and fast bus service from Bath to exit 18 on the M4 connecting with regular, frequent and fast bus service on the M4 to London and Bristol would possibly obviate the need for a Park and Ride to the North of Bath without the need for any physical change or development. This might necessitate the creation of a Park and Ride at Tormarton or better still some enlargement of existing parking facilities at Leigh Delamere.

15. **Summary.**

No single solution to the traffic problems of Bath is likely. A co-ordinated approach to the various problems should ensure that the effect of any changes proposed is a balanced one, to avoid the present situation where action in some areas has had an adverse impact on other areas. This would require a careful analysis of the source of different traffic problems, and should result in more effective solution than a piecemeal approach to the problem.

16. **Recommendations.**

The Trust's Policy should be to campaign for all or some of the measures contained in paragraphs 7 to 11 above. These measures would involve minimum physical change and almost no irreversible damage to the city or its environs. None of the measures listed in paragraphs 12,13 and 14 should be introduced until those in 7 to 11 have been carried out and monitored.