Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	**Cabinet**	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	**16 December 2021**	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE E 3331
TITLE:	**Bristol to Bath Strategic Corridor**	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: None		

1 THE ISSUE

1.1 The BBSC (Bristol to Bath Strategic Corridor) seeks to improve travel between Bath and Bristol through better bus services, improvements to bus infrastructure, and develop facilities to enable more cycling and walking services and along the A4 route, as well as to the A4 route from neighbouring communities.

1.2 We want to provide better and more sustainable transport to help people move around more easily, reduce congestion, lower carbon emissions and improve the environment we live in.

1.3 The Strategic Outline Case (SOC) establishes the potential scope of the transport proposal. This sets out the rationale for intervention (the case for change) and confirms how the investment will further our priorities and wider government ambitions (the strategic fit) to determine the 'preferred way forward'.

2 RECOMMENDATION

Cabinet is asked to;

2.1 Note that WECA Joint Committee on 28th January 2022 will be asked to delegate authority to approve the Strategic Outline Case to Chief Executives on 17th February 2022 for progression to Outline Business Case.

2.2 Note early public engagement will be carried out Spring/Summer 2022 if the Strategic Outline Case is approved.

3 THE REPORT

3.1 The A4 Bristol to Bath corridor lies at the heart of the West of England and connects the two cities of Bristol and Bath and the communities of Keynsham and Saltford in between. There are 117,000 people living within the 'area of influence' for the corridor which includes neighbouring communities to the A4.

3.2 The overall daily travel to work demand in the region, indicate that there is a substantial amount of commuting demand between B&NES and Bristol circa 13,000 trips every day.

3.3 Traffic congestion along the A4 between Bristol and Bath results in delays to journeys by car and by bus along the corridor (with associated costs to the economy) and results in additional vehicle-kilometres on the network, which works against the targets to reduce vehicle-kilometres as part of our response to the Climate Emergency.

3.4 Long journey times for bus services and poor connections between services mean that bus as a mode is not an attractive transport choice for journeys along the corridor. As rail connectivity (along the corridor) is only provided at Keynsham, residents with the option to do so are likely to choose car for journeys from locations along and neighbouring the corridor. This is reflected in the mode share for the corridor.

3.5 Poor accessibility by public transport from communities along the corridor not served by a railway station impacts on the attractiveness of bus as an alternative to the car for journeys along the corridor.

3.6 Limited bus priority along the corridor means that congestion along the corridor has a significant impact on the reliability of bus journey times. Unreliable bus journey times make bus a less attractive mode for residents along the corridor travelling to Bristol or Bath.

3.7 Less than 20% of the A4 has formal cycle facilities supporting cycling along the corridor. The constantly high traffic levels along the A4 create substantial issues of severance for pedestrian activity along (and across) the A4. The lack of facilities, along with concerns about the poor air quality and cycle safety, is putting people off choosing to cycle along and to the corridor. A lack of quality facilities to support cycling and walking along the corridor and from communities neighbouring the corridor is limiting the opportunity for people to choose healthier, sustainable and affordable modes for travel.

3.8 There is a clear quantified link between good local bus services and levels of social deprivation. Studies have shown that areas that have 10% better bus services have 3.6% lower levels of social deprivation. Improving the affordable connectivity to reliable public transport for communities along the corridor can positively impact on the social inequality along and adjacent the corridor.

3.9 If traffic flows are not reduced and mode shift to walking, cycling and public transport achieved, the poor air quality and noise will not be improved and is likely to worsen as the population grows and congestion increases.

3.10 The residents along and neighbouring the Bristol to Bath corridor are heavily dependent on car as a primary mode of travel to work with an average of 54% mode share for car. The mode share for commuter journeys from communities along the corridor to Bristol or Bath is even higher at 77%. Along

the corridor, only 20% of commuting journeys are made by walking, 7% by cycling and 9% by bus.

3.11 There are 117,000 people living within the area of influence for the corridor which represents a significant opportunity to alter travel behaviours, with improved public transport and active transport infrastructure encouraging greater modal shift to these sustainable forms of travel.

THE IMPACT OF DOING NOTHING

3.12 The increase in population from housing growth, and the increase in the working population, will increase the travel demand along the corridor. If more attractive sustainable alternatives are not introduced this growth will result in higher congestion in the area, poorer air quality and higher carbon emissions.

3.13 There is an opportunity to "lock in" sustainable travel choices for the current and future residents along the Bristol to Bath corridor if the bus, walking and cycling infrastructure and services can be provided to serve new housing development.

3.14 Economic growth will be restricted if congestion levels cannot be eased, and improved sustainable connectivity provided. There is an opportunity to "lock in" sustainable travel choices for the key development sites identified if the bus, walking and cycling infrastructure and services can be provided to serve these sites and links between the sites and the communities along the Bristol to Bath corridor.

3.15 Without intervention, by 2036 the mode share for car is forecast to increase (based on available strategic transport modelling). The largest increase in car trips will come from journeys under 5km. Journeys of this length should generally be served by active travel and public transport modes.

3.16 JLTP4 estimates that if no action is taken the cost of congestion in the region could increase to £800m a year by 2036.

3.17 Unless the opportunity is provided for mode shift from car to sustainable modes, the number of journeys by car (and the vehicle-kilometres) will increase with the associated increase in demand on the highway network. As the highway network is already congested, increased demand will result in more congestion along the corridor, poorer air quality and higher carbon emissions.

3.18 The targets of reducing vehicle mileage by 40% by 2030 (set in the Bristol One City Climate Strategy) and of 25% by 2030 (set in the Bath Transport Delivery Action Plan Phase 1) will not be achieved if action is not taken.

3.19 There is a very clear case that action needs to be taken now in order to avoid a future situation along the Bristol to Bath corridor wherein the climate emergency is not addressed, economic growth is constrained due to congestion and where the growing population will have limited transport choices and be in poorer health due to poor air quality and increasingly inactive lifestyles.

THE PROPOSAL

3.20 The Vision for the BBSC is "to create a high quality segregated and prioritised public transport, cycling and walking corridor that will provide for

reliable services to encourage people to use sustainable transport modes for short and mid-distance journeys and contribute to tackling the climate emergency through modal shift."

3.21 The identified outputs from the scheme are:

- fast, at least five-minute frequency, reliable, high quality, zero-emission turn up & go bus service between Bristol Temple Meads and Bath bus station
- high quality bus stops
- 24-hour bus priority (where appropriate) and good interchange opportunities with other modes, services and amenities
- simple, fast and convenient off-board ticketing system for the BBSC service
- simple, coherent and efficient bus network that links local communities along and neighbouring the A4 with consistent marketing and branding
- continuous, direct, high-quality cycle route between Bristol and Bath which is
- segregated from general traffic and buses

3.22 By addressing the whole of the Bristol to Bath corridor the BBSC Programme will create a step-change in the provision of bus and cycling connectivity that will complement the existing and future bus network and encourage connected walking and cycling trips. This is in line with national ambitions for public transport, active travel, and decarbonisation and will encourage mode shift to bus and active travel modes.

3.23 A better-connected transport network brings with it improvements for the economy of Bristol, Bath and the communities along and neighbouring the Bristol to Bath Corridor. It is also a key lever in enabling development through the WECA Spatial Development Strategy and future B&NES Local Plan. It plays a critical role in any possible sustainable growth at Hicks Gate and Keynsham. The North Keynsham Strategic Development Location as set out in the now withdrawn WoE Joint Spatial Plan required that this public transport upgrade be in place prior to development; it is reasonable to assume that this will also be the case should development at Keynsham be proposed through the SDS.

3.24 The scope of proposed interventions include:

- Implementation of bus priority measures in the form of new/reallocated bus lanes, bus gates and bus priority at junctions
- Implementation of new and enhanced segregated cycle facilities in accordance with LTN 1/20 both along the route and to neighbouring communities
- Implementation of improvements (including link improvements and new/improved crossings) for pedestrians and cyclists to support access from communities and rail stations to the strategic bus corridor and strategic cycle route

- New bus stops and modal interchange hubs along the route linking to local centres, cycle routes and heavy rail opportunities
- Enhanced, accessible bus stops with improved public realm and active travel links supporting access to the stops. Select bus stops may potentially become mobility hubs
- Introduction of cycle hangers, car club spaces, electric charging points and Variable Message Signs (VMS)
- Enhanced green infrastructure along the corridor supporting biodiversity net gain
- Consistent branding and marketing to improve passenger information

THE OPTIONS

3.25 A robust business case must demonstrate that the preferred solution is not only a solution to the identified issues but is the 'right solution'. A range of solutions or options must therefore be considered, and an appropriate, documented assessment process undertaken to establish the preferred solution (or shortlist of options). This also provides an audit trail of the decisions made.

3.26 We have developed a Multi Criteria Assessment Framework provides a proportionate and staged sifting process to effectively and efficiently reduce the number of options under consideration and in doing so, identify those that are most likely to meet the requirements for the scheme.

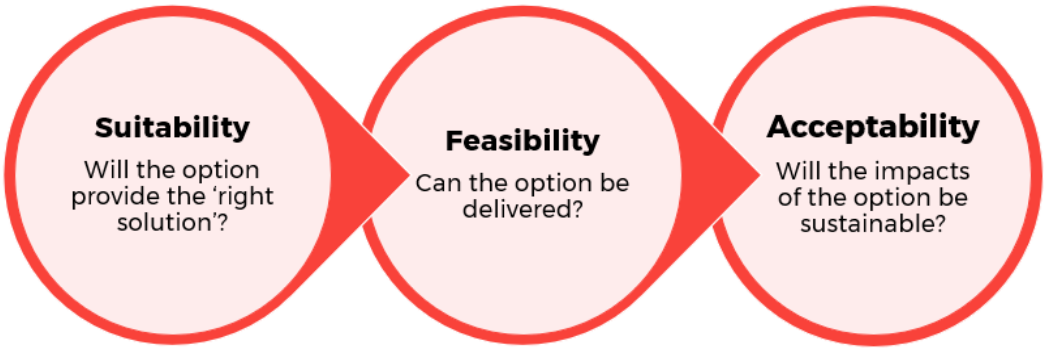

Figure 1: Assessment Themes

3.27 Sitting under the three assessment themes of Suitability, Feasibility and Acceptability (Figure 1) are 32 individual questions and scores, a few of which are set out below to demonstrate the broad and inclusive approach to sifting being taken:

- Likelihood of support
- Maximise opportunities for better health, increased physical activity, air quality
- Increase labour market catchments
- Protect and enhance natural capital

3.28 In addition, we are developing a carbon calculator tool which will further inform our sifting and thinking in the early part of the year. It is currently being developed from scratch and will be an integral part of our quantitative assessment process. For now, we are using a qualitative assessment.

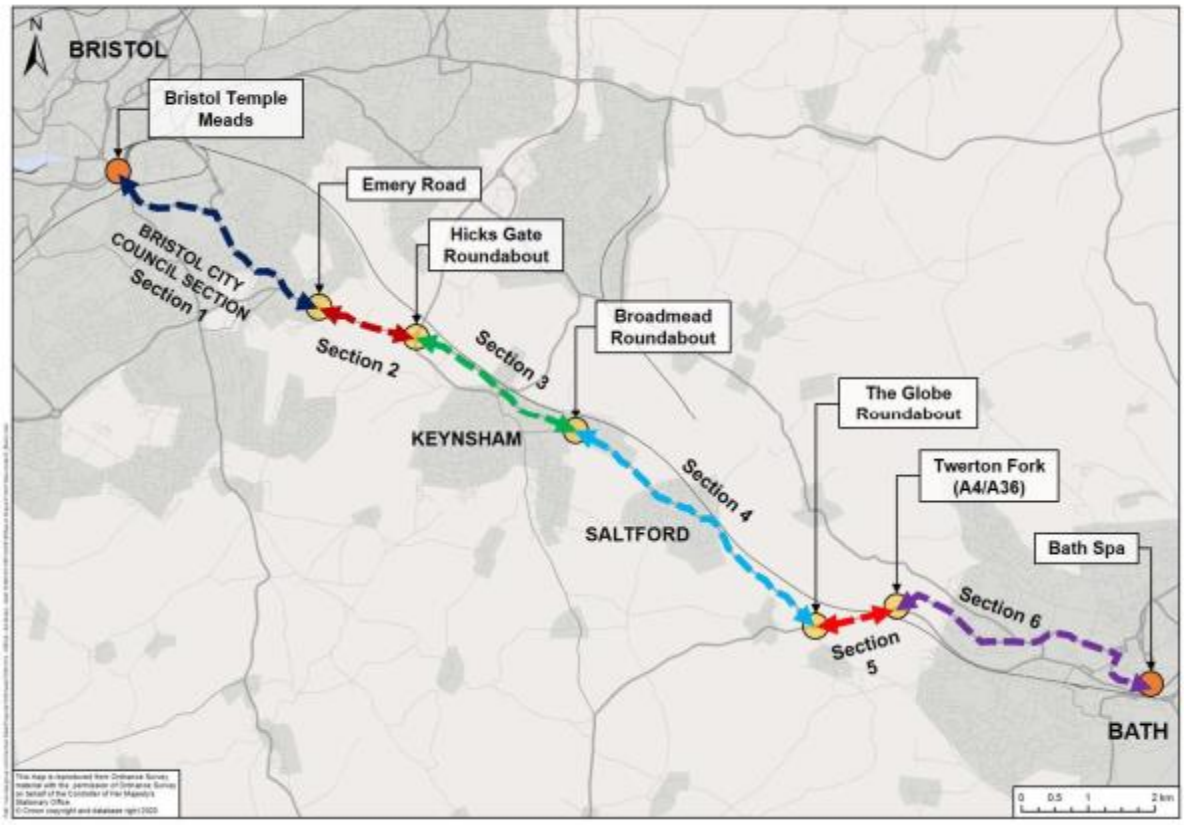

Figure 2: BBSC Corridor

3.29 The constraints and opportunities along the route vary, as such it has been broken down into six sections (Figure 2), five of which are relevant to B&NES. For each section we have explored smaller, medium and larger interventions.

3.30 The range of intervention approach allows us to develop ideas that respect existing highway ownership corridors in the smaller intervention ranging up to full segregation opportunities with the larger intervention.

3.31 Ultimately this should allow for a 'pick and mix' approach to building a corridor programme, introducing larger interventions where acceptable and choosing the smaller intervention where the constraints make it necessary to do so. It should be noted however, that the smaller intervention responds less well to the overall objectives of the programme.

3.32 The implementation of the BBSC programme may be phased and different sections of the corridor may be brought forward at different points in time. An 'early win' may be improving the community connections to the A4 route as it currently exists in preparation for the full public transport scheme.

3.33 Through a process of co-development across WECA, BCC, and various officers at B&NES, a large number of options have been developed. The options for Section 6 in Bath were co-developed with the team working on the Journey to Net Zero project as there is considerable overlap.

3.34 Workshops have been held across various disciplines such as planning policy, highways and transport including our walking and cycling specialists.

3.35 When assessed against the MCAF, those options have been reduced.

3.36 Overall, the scale of change and investment that could be achieved is summarised below:

- 15.5km of new cycling infrastructure
- 40 new crossings
- 30 new transport hubs/bus stops
- 15 public realm improvements
- £750k – 1.25M for green infrastructure
- £77.3M – 122.7M for public transport infrastructure

3.37 The 5-year funding bid for CRSTS included BBSC and ranged from £140M to 150M with match funding from enabled development sites. Work to refine the programme for BBSC continues.

NEXT STEPS

3.38 The Option Assessment Report and Strategic Outline Case will be presented in part to WECA Joint Committee on 28th January 2022. It is anticipated that due to a three-week delay, the recommendation will be to give delegated authority to Chief Executives to approve at their meeting on 17th February 2022.

3.39 If approval is given, the Bristol to Bath Strategic Corridor team will move to the Outline Business Case stage of which an early task is to have a public consultation on the options. This will then inform further development of the shortlisted options to allow for further assessment and identification of a preferred option. This would be concluded mid-2023.

3.40 A Full Business Case, which includes any development consents, planning permissions and tendering the contract could be achieved by mid-2024 with construction commencing at the beginning of 2025.

3.41 The programme will require a full review as part of the Outline Business Case including consideration of some early interventions around community connections and 'preparing' for the transformation with local projects that would assist mobility in the short term as well as form part of the more strategic intervention for delivery in 2023.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 The Statutory Considerations are contained within the body of this report.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

5.1 The funding for the Strategic Outline Business Case has been provided through the Transforming Cities Fund. Discussions with the Combined Authority are on going to determine the level of financial resource required for the Outline Business Case and the exact allocation of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement.

5.2 Discussions with the Combined Authority are ongoing to determine the level of people resource required by Bath and North East Somerset Council.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision-making risk management guidance and can be found within the Options Assessment Report.

6.2 The key risks to achieving the objectives are the following:

- Physical constraints on the network impacting on widening to support new bus lanes or bus priority measures. The physical constraints include environmental designations (in particular flood risk areas) and heritage assets (in particular in Bath)
- Costs required to overcome constraints or concerns about heritage impacts may result in a change in the scope of the Programme
- Interventions may require land take with associated impacts on landowners, property and land values
- Stakeholder opposition to land take and property impacts may delay the BBSC Programme or result in a change of scope

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 There are communities along the Bristol to Bath Corridor that face multiple challenges of deprivation. A reliable, well-connected public transport system is important to support access to employment, education and healthcare. As connectivity is not consistent along the corridor (compared to the cities) this may be one of the factors impacting on the levels of deprivation and lower life expectancies.

- The programme is key to tackling linked transport, social and environmental equality issues:
- Climate and Ecological (zero carbon movement and development, affordable connectivity, air quality, biodiversity, green infrastructure)
- Housing (affordability and market housing, disrupting the market, liveable communities, inspired placemaking)
- Economic (good and inclusive growth linked to Local Industrial Strategy)
- Health and Wellbeing (physical health, mental health, physical activity, healthy neighbourhoods, green and active travel)

- Social (inclusion, care, youth provision, community cohesion, long-term stewardship)

7.2 An Equalities Impact Assessment has not been carried out at this stage due to strategic level of the options under consideration. An EIA will be completed at Outline Business Case.

8 CLIMATE CHANGE

8.1 The B&NES Climate and Ecological Emergency Plan includes a priority for a major shift to mass transport, walking and cycling to reduce transport emissions.

8.2 If traffic flows are not reduced and mode shift to walking, cycling and public transport achieved, the poor air quality and noise along the Bristol to Bath corridor will not be improved upon and is likely to worsen as the population grows and congestion increases.

8.3 The principal aim of bus rapid transit is to Improve People's Lives through addressing the Climate, Ecological Emergency and transport poverty. Over time it will deliver significant outcomes through:

- A step change in sustainable travel;
- Zero carbon growth (housing, employment and transport); and
- Major investment in infrastructure co-ordinated with housing and employment development.

8.4 The programme also includes production of a carbon calculator that will demonstrate the carbon savings generated through the programme from a modal shift to public transport.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 None

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 The development of the BBSC Programme has drawn on the views of stakeholders on the existing problems and challenges and on ideas proposed to address the problems. Stakeholder views have been drawn from the following sources.

10.2 BBSC Programme Engagement (Summer 2021) - Public engagement was undertaken between July and September 2021 to gather the views of the public on the current challenges and issues affecting travel along the A4 corridor between Bristol and Bath.

10.3 The engagement took the form of a survey and an interactive map to which comments could be added. Views were sought on the A4 between Bristol and Bath around the themes of:

- current travel choices
- factors affecting travel choices along the corridor

- factors affecting bus travel, cycling and walking and
- suggested improvements that would encourage bus travel, cycling and walking

10.4 People responding to the survey were able to comment on improvement themes and provide further ideas for improvements along the Bristol to Bath corridor.

10.5 More than 1,300 responses were received the key highlights from the engagement are as follows:

- Factors affecting travel choices along the corridor
    - 75% of the respondents rated traffic flow along the A4 is “Poor”
    - 71% of the respondents rated air quality along the A4 is "Poor"
    - 59% of respondents indicated that a bus waiting time of 6 to 10 minutes was acceptable.
    - More than 60% of respondents indicated that they are very likely to use the bus often if the bus services are more reliable, and the bus fares are lower
    - 56% of the respondents indicated that they are very likely to use the bus often if the bus services are more frequent
    - 35% of the respondents indicated that they are very likely to use the bus often if space for bicycles is provided on buses
- Factors affecting cycling and suggested improvements that would encourage cycling:
    - Many of the respondents (51% – 80%) gave a “Poor” rating for a number of the factors identified in the survey, with the number of vehicles on the road, sharing the road with other traffic, the amount of segregated cycle lanes, feeling safe along the route and cycle priority at junctions receiving the most “Poor” ratings
    - Respondents indicated that they are very likely to cycle more often if separate cycle lanes are provided (72%), if there is less traffic on the route (66%), and if safer junctions and crossings with priority for cyclists are provided (62%). The importance of cleaner air and less pollution was highlighted by 56% of respondents
- Factors affecting walking and suggested improvements that would encourage walking:
    - 77% of respondents rated air quality along the A4 as “Poor”
    - 42% of respondents rated the quality of walking routes and public places as “Poor”

- 37% of respondents rated the number of crossing points as "Poor"

- 31% of respondents rated the quality of the pavement as "Poor"

10.6 Respondents indicated that they are very likely to walk along the A4 more often if the air is cleaner and less polluted along the route (56%), if more green spaces and/or trees are provided (47%), if there is less traffic on the route (44%) and if segregated paths are provided (43%).

10.7 Conclusions from BBSC Programme Engagement (Summer 2021) have informed the identified problems and challenges along the Bristol to Bath corridor. The improvements proposed by the public reflect the need to address air quality and congestion and to provide improved cycling and walking facilities and enhanced bus services. There is clear alignment between the proposed interventions and the public engagement response.

10.8 Previous Engagement Inputs to Policy - The stakeholder engagement inputs to the following policies and strategies are summarised below:

- Spatial Development Strategy - Future of the Region Engagement Report (March 2021)

- West of England Combined Authority Bus Strategy (June 2020)

- Draft Joint Local Transport Plan 4 (JLTP4) (January 2020)

- Joint Transport Study (October 2017)

10.9 Previous engagement responses indicate strong support by the public for improvements to the bus, cycling and walking networks, including the principle of expansion of the metrobus network. There is clear support for the BBSC Programme, and the scope of interventions included within the Programme and set out in this business case.

10.10 B&NES ward member workshop was organised at the request of B&NES Cabinet Members for Transport and Highways. WECA hosted this event on 2nd December 2021 to outline our work to date. This event was well attended and received.

10.11 If the SOC is approved and we progress to Outline Business Case the next planned engagement is a full public engagement Spring/Summer 2022. We would seek to engage the public and stakeholders on the range of options identified and seek feedback to help inform option development.

Contact person	Claire Nimmo
Background papers	None
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