

Statement to B&NES Council on behalf of Bath Chamber of Commerce and the Initiative in B&NES to the revised proposal for the Bath Transportation Package.
From Ian Bell, Executive Director.

8.7.11

Surely no one can disagree that one of the obstacles to economic growth in Bath is the state of our transport infrastructure ? Pollution and congestion are everyday experiences for business people and residents alike.

Consequently, the opportunity to bid for Government funding of improvements was really welcome. However, the Department for Transport made it clear that the priority for the investment was that it should boost economic activity. In our case, one of the ways in which that could be achieved would be to make it easier to get into and out of the City centre, whether that was people who were working, shopping or visiting.

That meant at the heart of the necessary improvements was the need to increase the capacity of Park and Ride facilities on all sides of the City and to improve the speed and reliability of buses so that people would see a good alternative to driving their motor cars in the centre.

If the original plan had been submitted and approved, it would have gone some way to delivering those objectives and solving some of our transport problems. But it would have done something which is arguably even more important.

By substantially increasing car park capacity on the outskirts, there would have been the opportunity to free up car park space in the City which could be used for new development. It would provide the much needed modern office space which is required to allow our existing businesses to prosper and grow and it would have increased the chances of attracting inward investment – both of which things would provide private sector jobs for residents at a time when the public sector is coming under serious pressure. Above all it would have sent out a strong signal that Bath had the necessary ambition and determination to compete in the modern economic world and to deliver the Vision and Economic Strategy that have previously been set out.

However, as it currently stands, this modified plan significantly compromises the City's ambitions. If it goes ahead in this form and it is approved by Government it will not solve our problems. In fact it runs the risk of being viewed by the DfT as an inadequate response to a serious problem and dare I say but it, looks quite close to simply ducking some important issues.

Much has been said about how walking, cycling and the forthcoming electrification of the rail line will have make a contribution to improving transport in Bath, and all that this is quite true. But those things will not deliver the scale of the vital economic growth that this City needs.

We are in a serious competition for jobs for our people. There is a chance to improve our infrastructure now. If we don't seize that opportunity, there will be no possibility of this kind of funding for years to come. Our economy will be in danger of stagnating and we will have lost ground on other places which it will be difficult to regain.