

## **CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT – 27 MARCH 2014**

### **THE PLAIN ROUNDABOUT CYCLING IMPROVEMENT SCHEME**

**Report by Interim Deputy Director for Environment & Economy  
(Strategy & Infrastructure Planning)**

#### **Introduction**

1. This report seeks approval to progress to detailed design and construction for the cycling improvement scheme at The Plain roundabout in Oxford. The design is based on the scheme that was submitted to Department for Transport for funding in 2013 and has been influenced by responses to consultations with stakeholders.
2. It also seeks approval for a proposed modification to the nearby A420 High Street junction with Longwall Street as a complementary improvement. Elements of the design have required amendments to Traffic Regulation Orders. Responses to these statutory consultations are included as part of this report.

#### **Background**

3. In April 2013, the county council submitted a bid to the Department for Transport for improvements to The Plain roundabout, Oxford. The bid was successful and £835,000 of Department for Transport Cycle City Ambition Grant funding was awarded to the scheme. The county council and city council have committed an additional £130,000 of locally held funds to the scheme. The Department for Transport funds need to be spent by the 31 March 2015.
4. The Plain roundabout is a very busy five-arm roundabout and main junction into the city centre from the east and the bid was submitted in part because for less confident cyclists it discourages some of them from cycling. There have been 35 accidents involving cyclists (33 slight, two serious) at or in the vicinity of The Plain in the last five years. The location and details of these accidents are included in a background paper.
5. The proposed design approach which formed part of the bid is at Annex 1 and a Service and Community Impact Assessment undertaken for this design approach at Annex 2.
6. Following approval of the bid, officers have been undertaking work to refine the design taking on board comments received through consultation with stakeholders.

#### **Proposals for The Plain**

7. The design work carried out has given consideration of how alterations to road levels, angles of approach at the entries/exits of the roundabout, width of the carriageway within the circulatory area of the roundabout, surfacing materials and

carriageway markings could improve conditions for cyclists and also for pedestrians.

8. Key features of the proposed scheme at Annex 3 are:
  - overall less road space on the roundabout and its approaches/exits, but retention of two carriageway lanes on the High Street approach with an approach central cycle lane added;
  - adjusted angles of approaches on a number of the approaches/exits to the roundabout;
  - more pavement space, particularly on the east and south west sides of the roundabout and on the central island on which the Victoria Fountain is situated;
  - gentle changes in carriageway level on the approaches and exits to the roundabout;
  - a different coloured road surface across the roundabout and introduction of enhanced footway materials; and
  - loading bays at the same level as the footways to make them more usable by pedestrians when not in use by vehicles.
9. It is anticipated that the proposed design would significantly change the appearance and operation of the roundabout helping cyclists of a wide range of experience and abilities feel safer and more comfortable. The additional footway widths would also benefit the many pedestrians in the area.
10. Given the critical role the junction plays in the wider transport network, modelling has been carried out to assess the impact of the proposals on traffic capacity and delays. Taking into account the changes at Longwall Street junction (see below), modelling suggests that overall there is a small additional delay to vehicles in the morning peak but a journey time saving in the evening peak. Given the anticipated significant wider benefits that the proposed changes to The Plain and the Longwall Street junction will bring, officers believe that on balance some additional delays to vehicles are acceptable.

### **Proposals for the A420 High Street / Longwall Street Junction**

11. Currently, the pedestrian phases across High Street and Longwall Street operate at the same time. This is required because pedal cyclists are exempted from a prohibition of vehicles turning left from High Street to Longwall Street. Removal of this exemption (which in practice benefits very few cyclists - in a recent evening peak hour survey only nine cyclists turned left into Longwall Street compared to 575 travelling eastbound to the Plain) would allow an appreciably more efficient operation of the junction.
12. This would reduce delays to all road users and also reduce the present 'bunching' at peak times of large numbers of cyclists and buses when the traffic light turns green for eastbound High Street traffic. This can create conflicts due to the restricted width of the traffic and cycle lanes on the approach to Magdalen Bridge.
13. These improvements to the traffic signal timings have also allowed officers to discuss with the Department for Transport the possibility of trialling an early release for cyclists at the traffic lights of approximately five seconds ahead of general traffic

to reduce further the frequency of cyclists and buses travelling side by side. The early release requires special Governmental authorisation and the Department for Transport has encouraged the county council to apply for this.

### **Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) Consultations**

14. The proposed design requires changes to Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) at The Plain and at Longwall Street junction. At The Plain the two laybys are proposed to be converted to loading bays. The proposal for the layby on the north side of the roundabout is for 30 minutes loading only to apply at all times of the day, replacing the current no waiting at any time restriction. This will help to ensure only legitimate loading activity takes place there – currently there is frequent use of the bay by taxis and users of the adjacent Sainsbury's store.
15. The proposal for the layby on the east side (currently with a taxi rank at night) is similarly for 30 minute loading during the day, but with a taxi rank at night being retained.
16. At Longwall Street, the removal of the exemption for cyclists to the left turn vehicle ban needs a change to the TRO. This change and those to the laybys at The Plain were consulted on between 9 January and 7 February. Consultation notices are included as a background paper. Objections and other representations made together with an officer response are set out at Annex 4. Officers recommend that the TROs as advertised be approved.
17. At Longwall Street, however, a number of objections were received in relation to stopping cyclists from being able to turn left on the road. A subsequent consultation was therefore carried out between 7 and 28 February on changing the existing left turn slip for cyclists into shared use footway – which would, in practice, allow the small number of cyclists affected by the ban to continue to turn left into Longwall Street (this design and the associated street notice is alongside the TRO street notices in the background papers). It will still be necessary to stop cyclists using the carriageway (as opposed to the proposed shared use footway) from turning left. The comments made on this second consultation including officer responses are also included at Annex 4.
18. Officers recommend that provision of shared use footway/cycleway be approved together with the proposal removal of the exemption for pedal cyclists from the prohibition of vehicles turning left from High Street to Longwall Street using the carriageway.

### **Stakeholder consultation and feedback**

19. In addition to the consultation on the TROs, stakeholders were invited to discuss progress on the project and scheme design in October last year and again in January and February this year. Some of the stakeholders submitted written comments following the discussions which are included as a background paper.
20. There was general acceptance that measures are needed to improve conditions for cyclists and that a design based on reducing road space on and approaching the roundabout together with tightening up angles of approach is the best way to do

that. However, there were some concerns expressed about the proposed design in relation to:

- impact on traffic flow
- need for the scheme to address the needs of people with severe visual impairments
- need to provide cycle facilities on the roundabout segregated from traffic
- lack of ambition of the scheme

21. The latter two were of particular concern to Cyclox, CTC (Cyclists Touring Club) and The Oxford Civic Society.
22. Annex 6 considers these main concerns in more detail. Overall, officers believe that the proposed design shown at Annex 3 adequately addresses each of them and will result in a significant positive improvement for cyclists.

### **Local Member Consultation**

23. All local county councillors were invited to discuss the proposals with officers. The two local county councillors who met officers are listed at Annex 5. One of these councillors submitted written comments following the meeting. The response was supportive of the latest design although it highlighted a concern about the impact of the design on traffic flow. This concern is addressed at Annex 6.

### **Policy & Strategy**

24. Improvements to The Plain and the High Street/ Longwall Street junctions will contribute to the delivery of the county council's strategic objectives by enabling more people to travel in and out of the city centre for all purposes including employment and education. The design encourages use of sustainable modes of transport, helping to support healthy and thriving communities and enhancing the environment.

### **Risk Register**

25. A register outlining the risks to the project and how they will be managed is included as a background paper.

### **Next Steps**

26. Subject to approval, detailed design will follow with implementation commencing in the autumn. The work is due to be completed by the end of March 2015. There will be close liaison with local businesses and other stakeholders to keep them informed of progress in the run up to and during the construction of the scheme.

### **Financial and Staff Implications**

27. The scheme design and construction is fully funded from the Department for Transport grant and locally held city and county council funds as set out in paragraph 3 of this report. Officers will manage the costs of the scheme so that it is contained within the approved budget.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

28. **The Cabinet Member for Environment is RECOMMENDED to:**
- a) approve the latest scheme design set out in Annex 3 to this report for detailed design and construction;**
  - b) approve the TROs as advertised for (i) changes to loading bays at The Plain and (ii) removing the exemption to the left turn ban for cyclists at the Longwall Street/High Street junction;**
  - c) approve the conversion of a new section of footway at the Longwall Street/High Street junction into shared use footway/cycle way as described in paragraph 17 of this report;**
  - d) authorise officers to apply to the Department for Transport for special authorisation to make the necessary amendments to the traffic signals at Longwall Street to allow a head start for cyclists.**

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Background papers:

- Plot of accidents involving cyclists and pedestrians at The Plain in the last five years
- TRO street notices and street notice for proposed shared use footway at Longwall Street/High Street junction
- Comments and objections received in response to TRO and shared use footway consultations
- Written comments on scheme design from stakeholders following discussions with officers
- Risk register

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