

TRANSPORT IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE – 20 JULY 2006

BICESTER – A4095: PROPOSED SPEED LIMITS

Report by Head of Transport

Introduction

1. This report explains the reasons for the proposed reductions in the speed limit on the A4095 Howes Lane and presents an objection by Thames Valley Police (the only outright objection received in response to statutory public consultation) with comments from County Council officers. The report recommends that the proposed reductions in the speed limit be implemented.
2. The report also explains briefly the proposal for traffic signals at the A4095 Howes Lane/Shakespeare Drive junction (within the proposed reductions in the speed limit) and recommends that the proposed traffic signals also be implemented.

Background

3. The growth of Bicester during the last 20 years is expected to continue during the next 20 years. Traffic on the eastern ring road is already close to capacity and improvement of the Howes Lane section of the western ring road is expected to be needed by 2012.
4. A feasibility study for the Howes Lane improvement scheme was carried out in 2005. That scheme was not included in the Local Transport Plan (LTP2) programme for 2006-11, primarily because its estimated cost is £9 million, of which 4.5 million will be for a new bridge under the London Marylebone - Birmingham railway line. It is hoped that the Howes Lane improvement scheme will be implemented in the early part of the LTP3 period (2011-2016).
5. Interim measures have been considered and the measures considered to be justified are traffic signals at the Howes Lane/Shakespeare Drive junction and a reduction in the speed limit on the Howes Lane approaches to this junction and at the junctions of Bucknell Road with Howes Lane and Lords Lane. Those measures are supported by the Bicester Traffic Advisory Committee (which initially requested reductions in the speed limit) and by the Bicester Integrated Transport Strategy Members' Steering Group (at its meeting on 13 December 2005). The traffic signals would operate efficiently and would greatly reduce the accident risk at the junction. A reduction in the speed limit on Howes Lane from 50mph to 40mph would contribute to road safety.

The Proposed Changes to the Speed Limit

6. The existing speed limit on Howes Lane and Lords Lane and the connecting length of Bucknell Road is 50mph. The extents of the proposed 40 and 30 mph speed limits are shown on the plan at Annex 1. More detail is shown on drawing No. BPN1066/B3310 available in the Members' Resource Centre and which will be on display at the meeting.
7. The 40mph speed limit is proposed to extend from 150 metres south of Shakespeare Drive junction, past the Shakespeare Drive junction and the accesses to Thames Valley Police Traffic Headquarters and Avonbury Business Park to a point 100 metres south of the Howes Lane/Bucknell Road junction. The 30mph speed limit is proposed to extend from that point to the Howes Lane/Bucknell Road junction continuing northwards under the existing railway bridge to the Bucknell Road/Lords Lane junction and into Lords Lane for a distance of about 80 metres.

8. Within the proposed 30mph speed limit, traffic speeds on Howes Lane (within 100 metres of its junction with Bucknell Road) are constrained below 30mph by the road layout. Higher speeds are common on Bucknell Road at the Howes Lane junction. The proposed 30mph speed limit would extend the existing 30mph speed limit on Bucknell Road, which ends about 40 metres south of the Howes Lane/Bucknell Road junction.
9. One member of the public objected to the proposed 40 mph speed limit on the grounds that he felt strongly that it should be 30 mph. However the average speed, measured in May 2005 near the middle of the 450 metre length for which the 40 mph speed limit is proposed, was 40.7 mph. Therefore it is considered that a 30 mph speed limit on that length of Howes Lane would be regarded by most drivers as unreasonable.

Proposed Traffic Signals at the Howes Lane/Shakespeare Drive junction

10. The proposed traffic signals are expected to have a life of at least 5 years, after which the Howes Lane Improvement scheme is likely to be implemented. There will be no road widening for the proposed traffic signals, because that would necessitate expensive diversions of underground Utilities' plant. Details of the proposed traffic signalled junction are shown on drawing no. BPN1066/B3250, available in the Members' Resource Centre and which will be on display at the meeting.
11. The alternative to traffic signals would be to secure an improvement to visibility to the right for drivers entering Howes Lane from Shakespeare Drive. However the land owner is unwilling to sell the land needed for the visibility improvement. Compulsory Purchase would be expensive, and take a long time. Moreover, the land would no longer be needed after the construction of the Howes Lane Improvement Scheme.
12. The proposed traffic signals were mentioned in the informal consultation for the proposed speed limit changes and in letters drawing the attention of interested parties to the statutory formal consultation for the proposed speed limit changes. Six of the responses received mentioned the proposed traffic signals; three (including Cherwell District Council) were in favour, one was in favour but would have preferred a roundabout with two against.

Objection from Thames Valley Police

13. The only outright objection received was from Thames Valley Police. Copies of their internal report of 17 February and of 16 May 2006 (which declares their response to be unchanged from that of 17 February) and of the County Council's reply of 24 February are attached at Annex 2. Thames Valley Police's main reasons for objecting are summarised below, with County Council officer comments in italics:

- (a) The proposed speed limits (and traffic signals at the Shakespeare Drive junction) do not address the accident problem. In the fatal accident at the Howes Lane/Shakespeare Drive junction on 22 January 2003 speed was not a causation factor. The solution to the accident problem at the Shakespeare Drive junction would be to improve visibility.

The proposed speed limits and traffic signals are expected to reduce the accident frequency at the Shakespeare Drive junction. The proposed speed limits are also expected to improve safety along the whole length where they will apply. Improvement of the visibility would be difficult, as explained in paragraph 11 above.

- (b) The proposed 40mph speed limit would not comply with Department for Transport advice on speed limits. Therefore it would not be respected by a high proportion of drivers and would not contribute to the general aim of making speed limits which are consistent.

The 85th percentile speed (the speed exceeded by the fastest 15% of vehicles) on Howes Lane was measured between the Shakespeare Drive junction and the Thames Valley Police access in May 2005 at 48mph. A reduction in the speed limit

from 50mph to 40mph would therefore be marginally outside the general advice of the Department for Transport in 1993. However it is likely to be respected by most drivers, and can be expected to cause a significant reduction in the 85th percentile speed.

How the project supports LTP2 objectives

14. The proposed speed limits are expected to cause a reduction in vehicle speeds along Howes Lane, improve road safety and the environment. The proposed traffic signals are expected to improve road safety.

Financial Implications (including Revenue)

15. The estimated cost of the proposed changes to the speed limits is £10,000 (£4,000 for fees and £6,000 for traffic signs). The estimated total cost of the proposed traffic signals is £77,000. Developer contributions to the Bicester Integrated Transport Strategy of £87,000 have been earmarked for the traffic signals and the changes to the speed limits.
16. Design and implementation of the proposals would be carried out by Oxfordshire Highways staff. Implementation is anticipated to take place in autumn 2006.
17. The management of the scheme can be accommodated within existing Environment & Economy staff resources. The making and sealing of the Traffic Regulation Order for the proposed speed limit changes would be undertaken by the Solicitor to the Council.

RECOMMENDATION

18. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to:**
 - (a) **instruct the Solicitor to the County Council to make a Traffic Regulation Order introducing the proposed speed limit as described in this report and Annex 1 to it and on drawing no. BPN/1066/B3310; and**
 - (b) **approve implementation of the proposed traffic signals as described in paragraphs 10, 11 and 12 of this report and as shown on drawing no. BPN/1066/B3250.**

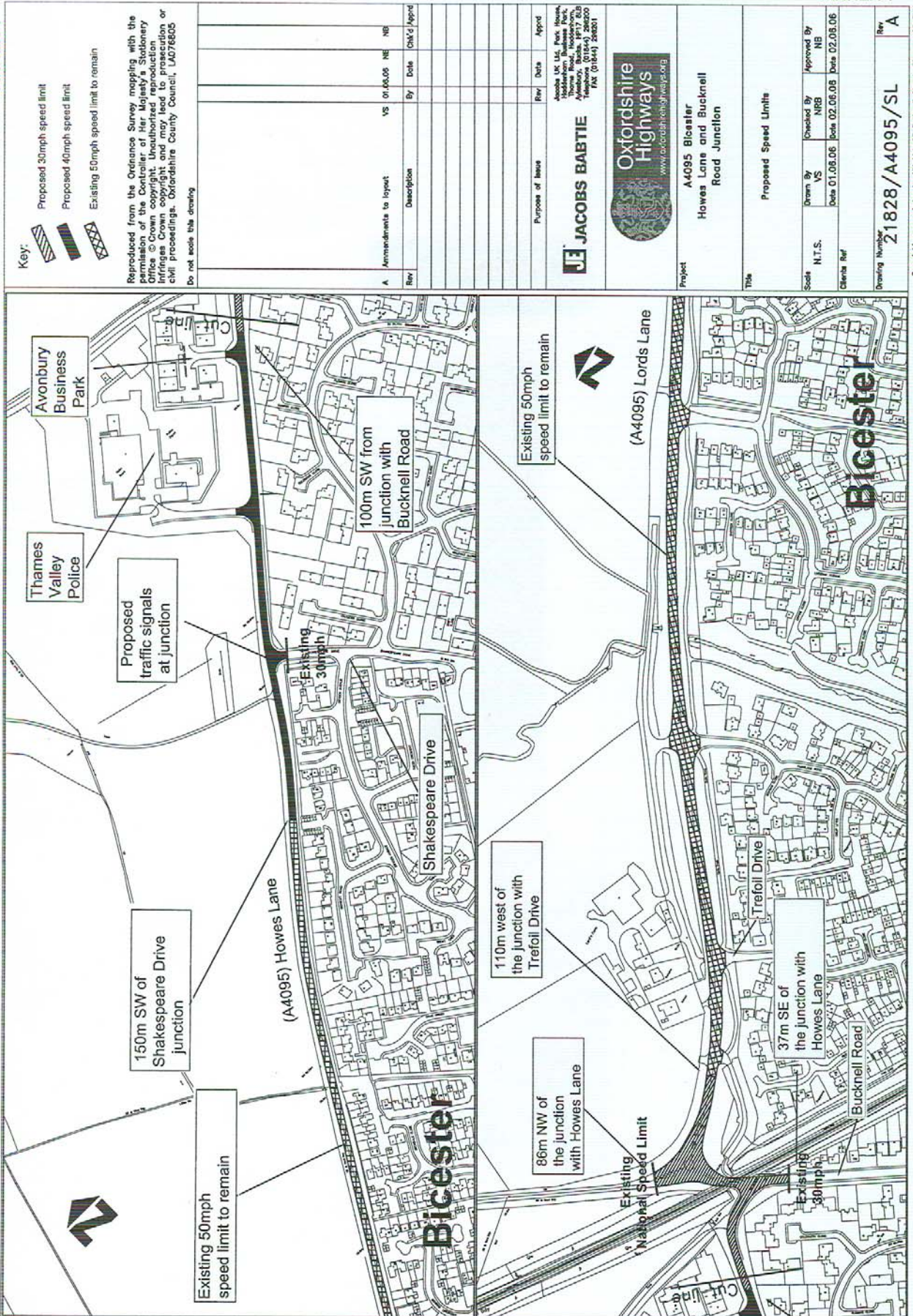
STEVE HOWELL
Head of Transport

Background papers: Statutory Notice and draft Traffic Regulation Order for the proposed speed limit changes.
Copies of letters and emails received in response to the public consultation.
Drawing No BPN1066/B3310
Drawing No BPN1066/B3250

Contact Officer: David Deriaz Tel 01865 815666

July 2006

ANNEX 1



ANNEX 2

THAMES VALLEY POLICE

ANNEX 2

Division/Station : Traffic Management, Witney

From : T N Currell

To : Superintendent Roads Policing

Ref :HQ 178/1/259

TM 091/2006

Date 17th February 2006

Tel 01869 364848

Subject :

Bicester - Howes Lane, Bucknell Road/Lords Lane junction -
Proposed 30/40mph Speed LimitHowes Lane/Shakespeare Drive junction - Proposed Traffic
Signals

This report is in response to a letter of consultation and drawing received from Jacobs Babbie, Haddenham concerning the above subject.

History

There are previous papers on file in relation to this particular subject (TM 292/05 & 642/05 refer)

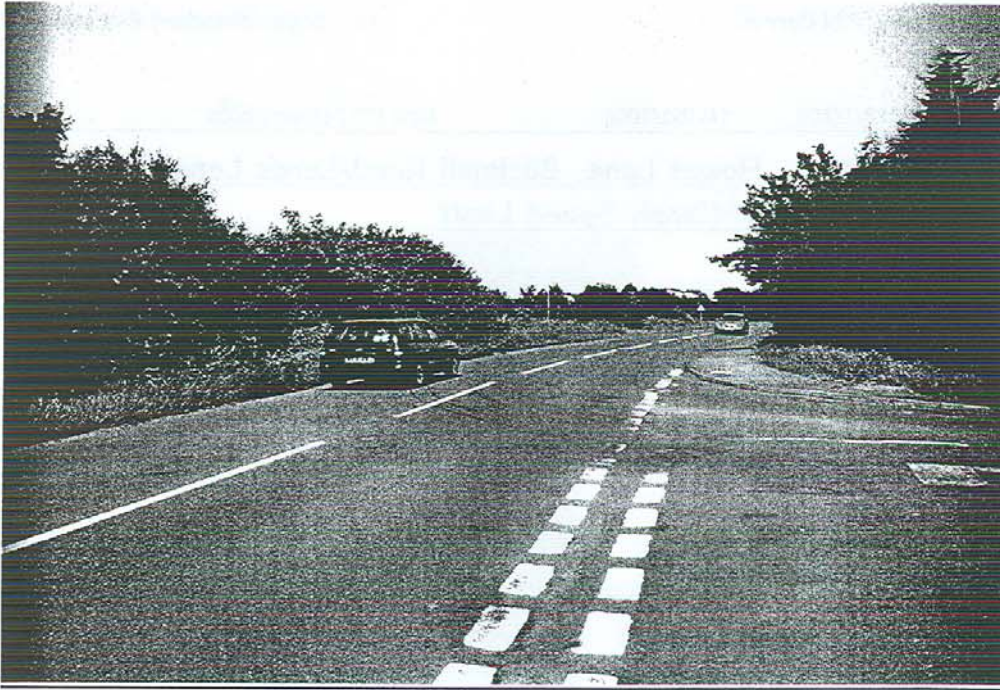
Investigation

Jacobs Babbie have been commissioned by O.C.C. to prepare a draft order for new 40mph and 30mph speed limits on Howes Lane, Bucknell Road and Lords Lane. The existing 30mph speed limit on Bucknell Road is proposed to be extended northwards under the railway bridge and a short distance into Lords Lane and Howes Lane. A 40mph speed limit is proposed on Howes Lane from the Avonbury Business Park entrance to approximately 150m. southwest of its junction with Shakespeare Drive.

For safety reasons O.C.C. intend to install traffic light signals at the Howes Lane/Shakespeare Drive junction. They will operate until 2010 when the Howes Lane improvement scheme is expected to be built.

Thames Valley police have responded to previous consultation on similar proposals for Howes Lane. The reports are attached.

The Highway Authority (O.C.C.) is responsible for setting the speed limit on all public roads. Traditionally the Dept. of Transport has issued advice and guidance to Highway Authorities on how to judge what speed limit to place on roads (circular roads 1/93). The guidelines are intended to ensure that speed limits are consistent and understandably right across the country. This aids driver compliance and helps self-enforcement. In this case O.C.C. have relaxed their criteria for setting speed limits for various reasons. The road layout is shown in the pictures below.



A4095 Howes Lane view north east



A4095 Howes Lane view southwest



Shakespeare Drive junction with A4095 Howes Lane

There is a proven link between road environment and drivers speed. Drivers must respect the need for a speed limit. If they do not accept the limit as realistic it will quickly become abused and consequently be the source of constant demands for Police action (enforcement)

The current speed of traffic is a reliable indicator of how acceptable a new speed limit would be. If the 85th percentile is 7mph or more over the proposed limit it is unlikely to be effective without other measures such as engineering or continual enforcement.

The study of the types and causes of accidents (better described as crashes) can help show if a speed limit is really the answer. Crashes may result from other factors other than speed and therefore should be addressed in other ways. If excessive speed is not the principle cause of the crashes but only a contributory factor introducing a speed limit will not remedy the situation.

Howes Lane is already subject to a 50mph speed limit, which reflects the 85th percentile speed. The road is a major link for traffic skirting Bicester town. It is single carriageway divided into two lanes, one in either direction. There are four junctions on Howes lane (Shakespeare Drive, entrance to Thames Valley Police premises, Avonbury Business Park and Thames Water). The road is unlit. There has been one fatal injury collision within the last three years (junc Shakespeare Drive)

Conclusion

The 85th percentile data suggests that the 50mph speed limit is the correct limit for Howes Lane. Thames Valley police will only support proposals for the implementation of realistic, consistent speed limits.

Speed was not a causation factor in the fatal collision.

The true problem to be addressed is the lack of intervisibility for vehicles turning from Shakespeare Drive and those travelling southwest on Howes Lane.

The Howes Lane improvement scheme should be progressed as soon as possible not in 2010. It will be very confusing for motorists having traffic light signals for four years, then the junction being improved and the signals being removed.

With regard to the 30mph speed limit proposals, the road layout and character should convey the message to the motorists to drive at an appropriate speed.

Traffic lights will cause unnecessary interruption, delay and congestion for vehicles skirting Bicester.

Recommendation

That a letter be sent to Mike Holloway, Jacobs Babbie and David Deriaz, O.C.C. along with a copy of this report for his information.



T.N.Currell C8327
Traffic Management



THAMES VALLEY POLICE

Division/Station : Traffic Management, Witney

From : T N Currell

To : Superintendent Roads Policing

Ref :HQ 178/1/259

TM 342/2006

Date 16th May 2006

Tel 01869 364848

Subject :

**Bicester – Howes Lane , Bucknell Road/Lords Lane junction – Proposed
30/40mph Speed Limit**

This report is in response to a letter of consultation and draft order received from Oxfordshire County Council concerning the above subject.

History

There are previous papers on file in relation to this particular subject (TM 292/642/2005 & 091/2006 refer)

Investigation

Thames Valley Police responded to this proposal on 17th February 2006 (TM report 091/2006 refers). The comments made in that report reflect the current view of Thames Valley Police with regard to the speed limit proposals.

Conclusion

The response from Thames Valley Police remains unchanged

Recommendation

That a letter be sent to David Deriaz, O.C.C. along with a copy of this report and previous report for his information



T.N.Currell C8327
Traffic Management



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24 February 2006

My ref: DRD/JLa/C1935
Yr ref: HQ 178/1/259
TM 091/06
Please ask for: David Deriaz

Direct line: 01865 81 5666

david.deriaz@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Dear Ms Benson

A4095 Howes Lane (and Bucknell Road and Lords Lane)
Proposed Speed Limits

Thank you for your letter of 20 February 2006 with your report dated 17 February 2006. (I see that you have also attached copies of your reports of 26 April 2005 and 20 July 2005, produced in response to earlier consultations from me, on proposals for 30mph and 40mph speed limits respectively).

I note that your report dated 17 February 2006 includes the statement: "If the 85th percentile is 7mph or more over the proposed limit it is unlikely to be effective without other measures..."

The speed measurements on Howes Lane on 25 May 2005, between the Police access and the Shakespeare Drive junction, (copied to you with my letter of 23 June 2005) show 12-hour 85th percentile speeds of 49.3mph northbound and 46.7mph southbound. If measurements had been taken north of the Police access, I expect that the speeds measured would have been lower. I expect that the presence of the proposed traffic signals at the Shakespeare Drive junction will tend to reduce the speed of northbound traffic, even if they remain on green for long periods when there is no demand from the side road.

In response to the informal public consultation letters sent out on 06 February 2006 by my consultants Jacobs Babbie, I have so far received nine letters from members of the public. Eight of them support the proposed speed limits (although one of them says the proposed traffic signals are unnecessary). The ninth does not comment on the speed limits but welcomes the proposed traffic signals.

continued/.....

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I intend to publish the formal Notice about the intended speed limits in early-May, and to report objections to the County Council's Transport Implementation Committee for consideration at its meeting of 20 July 2006. If you wish to attend that meeting and address it, you will be welcome, however you will have to give at least 3 days' written notice.

If you wish to comment further at this stage, please write to me again.

Yours sincerely

David Deriaz
Senior Engineer (Transport Projects Implementation)

cc Jacobs Babbie (Haddenham office), FAO Mike Holloway