

Reading Transport Strategy 2036: Frequently Asked Questions

Strategy, Vision and Objectives

Question 1 - Why are you against using a car in your transport strategy?

The consultation draft Reading Transport Strategy 2036 considers all modes of transport in setting an ambitious plan for improving transport options in Reading. The core objectives of the strategy relate to improving air quality, climate change, healthy lifestyles and inclusive growth. Therefore, it is clear that sustainable and active travel options will need to be prioritised for these objectives to be achieved.

The strategy does recognise that some journeys do need to be made by car. It includes policies and schemes to better manage our existing road network and provide new routes where necessary to relieve heavily congested pinch points on the network, such as the limited crossings over the River Thames and resulting congestion in Caversham and Reading town centre.

Question 2 - How is the transport strategy dealing with the air quality in Church Street in Caversham?

Improving air quality is one of the key objectives of the draft Strategy and achieving this is fundamental to the overall vision for transport in Reading. There is a strong emphasis on providing attractive sustainable alternatives to the private car within the strategy to encourage more use of public transport, walking and cycling.

In addition, there are a number of schemes included within the Strategy which will specifically improve air quality for residents in Caversham, including the Third Thames Crossing, North Reading Orbital Route and associated Park & Ride facilities.

Question 3 - What percentage of focus will be on non-commute journeys? Research by National Travel Survey shows commutes account for 16% of journeys (20% by distance).

The draft Strategy considers all types of journeys over the plan period, reflecting the fact that Reading is a regional centre for retail, leisure and cultural activities alongside a major area for employment. However, the main issues of congestion, poor air quality and carbon emissions occur during the peak periods, therefore this is a key focus of the Strategy.

Question 4 - With the likelihood of moving back to more local activities/facilities, and increases in home-working, has any consideration been given to the idea that Reading consists of a number of small interconnected villages, and that local people may want to travel from one to the other without going through the centre of town?

This is an important factor which is fully recognised within the draft Strategy. Major improvements to walking and cycling routes are included within the Strategy and accompanying Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), both within Reading Borough itself and linking to routes in neighbouring authorities.

In addition, a series of enhancements to existing and new orbital routes are included within the Strategy to provide realistic alternatives for travel directly between neighbourhoods rather than journeys needing to be made through the centre of Reading where congestion levels are higher.

Major Schemes

Question 5 - The Northern Orbital Route and Third Thames Bridge may well tend to reduce traffic within Reading's boundaries but may tend to increase traffic in Wokingham and South Oxfordshire and overall in Berkshire - so exporting emissions and congestion to other areas - is this helpful compared to more radical options? What is projected embodied carbon footprint and delivery timescale of these initiatives?

The draft Strategy has been developed to ensure that all schemes included within it form important elements of the overall plan to achieve the Strategy's objectives and vision. Initial business case work has been undertaken for the proposed Third Thames Crossing Scheme in partnership with all relevant Local Authorities. This shows the scheme predominantly reallocates existing trips onto more appropriate routes, thus reducing congestion and improving air quality for residents, rather than generating significant levels of new trips.

It is proposed that further, more detailed work will be undertaken on this and the proposed North Reading Orbital Route in partnership with all relevant Local Authorities through the Cross Thames Travel Group.

Question 6 - Considering you said that a third of the traffic on the IDR is through traffic, would you consider removing lanes to disincentivise through traffic? The IDR/Vastern Road/Forbury Road dual carriageway is an unpleasant moat around the town centre, removing lanes would make it less of a barrier.

It is stated in the draft Strategy that 'Due to a relative lack of orbital routes, a large proportion of drivers travel via the Inner Distribution Road (IDR), further adding to town centre congestion. In peak hours, up to a third of trips using the

IDR could take a more direct or appropriate route, if orbital route improvements or other transport alternatives were in place were as set out in within this strategy’.

It is therefore vital that the strategy includes proposals to address the lack of orbital routes to ensure that vehicular traffic has more suitable routes to use and does not add to the congestion and pollution in areas such as the IDR, if these journeys cannot be made by sustainable modes. The provision of these alternative routes would then enable measures such as reallocating road space to be implemented in parallel. In addition, we have an aspiration to deck over the IDR where this is feasible, for instance this is referenced in the Minster Quarter Policy Statement.

Question 7 - What are the main types of demand management scheme the Council is investigating?

Feasibility work is currently being undertaken on a range of demand management measures as set out within the draft Strategy. These include a Clean Air Zone, Workplace Parking Levy and a Congestion Charge scheme. It is important to note that any income generated from these schemes could only be able to be used to implement the transport schemes and initiatives as set out within the Strategy.

Public Transport

Question 8 - As Reading has a highly successful bus service how can the Council ensure buses are not caught up in congestion caused by commuters’ cars from housing developments outside Reading?

The draft Strategy sets out various schemes that would improve journey time reliability for buses, and result in shorter journey times, making buses a more attractive option. Such schemes include park and ride sites, orbital bus routes and high-quality bus corridors.

Question 9 - Making journey times of public transport more appealing to the masses is a key driver to choosing this option in urban areas. Would the council include a corridor by corridor review of bus stop locations and layout in their new Local Transport Strategy?

Making public transport journey times more attractive is a central part of plans for high quality bus routes included within the draft Strategy, which would use a whole corridor approach to achieve benefits for all sustainable travel choices.

Question 10 - The main victims of the new cycle routes in London are the buses, which are stuck behind the other traffic. Do the proposals for similar schemes, such as Redlands Road, also have an adverse effect on buses?

It is important to consider benefits that can be achieved for all sustainable travel modes in development of schemes and balance the provision of dedicated facilities accordingly. Shared bus lanes can be used by cyclists as well as emergency vehicles, however where feasible implementing dedicated cycle lanes alongside public transport priority would be our preference.

Question 11 - Road and stop/layover space is limited for public transport since the closure of Station Hill and the elimination of space saving and useful cross-town routes. Would the Council consider opening Garrard Street for the benefit of public transport to add to the capacity and options for the better passage of public transport across a limited Town Centre?

Access to public highway space in Reading town centre needs to be shared by many competing activities including buses, deliveries, cycles, pedestrians, taxis and disabled access. Schemes need to take account of the various users' needs and where possible accommodate these in ways that don't compromise alternative access.

Question 12 - Why does Reading not develop a Tram system like in many large cities and use this instead of diesel buses, this would reduce pollution?

Reading has the 3rd highest level of bus use per capita, outside London. This is a good frequency of bus service with wide area coverage which cannot easily be replaced by a tram. Whilst a tram tends to deliver big improvements for users on one corridor most tram systems do not offer widespread coverage of the urban area so benefits are not shared between all residents.

Most buses in Reading are already operating with the least polluting levels of emissions regime categorised as Euro 5 and Euro 6. The investment in bio CNG powered buses has also resulted in a greatly reduced carbon footprint compared to other towns and cities' buses.

We have been investing in developing a Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system in South Reading. The MRT will provide a series of bus priority measures on the A33 between Reading town centre and the Mere oak park and ride facility south of the M4 junction 11. Completion of this scheme will enable buses on this route to operate in a similar fashion to a tram service in the future.

Active Travel

Question 13 - Pedestrians sometimes need to cross roads to keep a social distance, will the council ensure that all roads having more than 2 lanes, including bus and cycle lanes, must have traffic refuges / pedestrian islands at frequent intervals?

The draft Strategy and associated Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan include proposals to implement new pedestrian crossing facilities in the Borough

where this is feasible. We are also implementing a range of temporary pedestrian schemes to assist with social distancing. When we are developing new transport schemes enhanced and new pedestrian facilities are considered and are designed to ensure that they are provided at locations that are suitable and are on key desire lines. The type of crossing facility will depend on various elements including frequency of pedestrian crossings, the speed of the road and level of traffic.

Question 14 - Can we have a long-term programme of quality improvement of our pavements, especially to accommodate an ageing population? And those in wheelchairs?/ How is accessibility for disabled people being considered in new and existing initiatives to improve walking and cycling routes?

The Council's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) sets out our ambition to encourage walking throughout Reading. The Plan includes for all routes within the proposed walking network are to have appropriate lighting and a well-maintained surface to ensure we provide safe and comfortable walking routes. Dropped kerbs, tactile paving and clear wayfinding are other measures that are considered within this long-term plan.

Question 15 - Does the council recognise that that elderly pedestrians are regularly knocked over in pedestrian areas by maverick cyclists, who do not stick to cycle lanes or obey traffic laws?

We do recognise that consideration should be given to both pedestrians and cyclists on shared facilities. Where shared paths are implemented, we provide clear signage and markings, and expect that both user groups share the space responsibly. Shared facilities are designed in line with national standards and guidance.

Question 16 - Why are you so anti-bike? The state of our cycle network is very poor. there are almost no segregated bike lanes, and the ones we have are not linked up. To date, Reading's approach has tended to be to adopt shared usage paths which break this principle. Do you see this changing now in Reading for the future?

The draft Strategy strongly promotes the use of cycling and we have also recently developed a joint Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council and West Berkshire Council. The LCWIP consists of various measures for cyclists dependent on the type of route. The cycling network consists of strategic, orbital, local, leisure and town centre routes which interconnect with residential areas and key destinations including local centre, schools, university and the Royal Berkshire Hospital. The LCWIP commits to providing high quality cycle routes, with segregated facilities where possible. Due to highway constraints, segregated facilities are not always possible, and therefore alternative measures will be sought to provide appropriate facilities for both pedestrians and cyclists.

The provision of space for cyclists needs to be considered alongside the needs of other sustainable modes of travel and will vary depending on the volume of different users and the space available. The shared use of bus lanes by cyclists is preferable to no cycle facility at all or where space for a separate cycle lane is not available.

Question 17 - Is it sensible for buses and cycles to use the same lane?

Reading has introduced a range of bus and cycle lanes throughout the town, giving space as appropriate. Where space is available, we have implemented separate cycle lanes and bus lanes, however this is not always possible due to constraints of highway land. Having space for buses and cyclists still offers a good facility to cyclists free of general traffic in line with national standards and guidance.

Question 18 - Will the bike hire scheme return?

The Council are currently researching opportunities to reintroduce a cycle hire scheme in Reading and considering the option of e-bikes to encourage longer journeys to be made by bike.

Question 19 - How will School Streets would be managed for social distancing? Most primary schools will be impossible to have physical distancing due to narrow roads unless School Streets are implemented before they go back?

The Government has issued guidance for the reopening of schools in line with social distancing guidelines. This includes the operation of one-way systems both within and outside the schools, staggered start and pick-up times and use of different entrances for different age groups.

School Streets is an initiative included with the draft Strategy and we are currently developing an information and application process for schools who would be interested in implementing this scheme in the road outside their school. Schools are expected to initiate the proposals following engagement with parents, pupils and the local community and subsequently the Council will deliver the necessary legal approvals.

Network Management

Question 20 - Please prioritise pedestrians - cyclists - transit - cars in this order. Electric cars are not a solution to improve congestion.

It is correct that electric cars are not a solution to improve congestion. They do also cause air pollution through braking and tyre wear, in addition to carbon emissions during their manufacture. The draft Strategy prioritises the use of sustainable modes of travel, including walking and cycling wherever this is possible, however it also recognises that for journeys where a private car is

required it is a better option to use an electric car (or other ultra low emission vehicle) which is less polluting than a diesel or petrol car.

Question 21 - Where are the key peak-hour overloaded congestion-causing junctions in and around Reading and what can be done about them? Have simulation runs investigated which junctions are critical?

Figures 21 and 22 in the draft Strategy (pages 55 and 56) highlight the key areas of congestion in Reading during the peak periods. This analysis has been taken from the Reading Transport Model. The draft Strategy includes a programme to upgrade signals throughout the Borough to ensure junctions can run as efficiently as possible.

Question 22 - Can we organise a car-free day?

The draft Strategy includes proposals for a comprehensive programme of events and initiatives to encourage the use of sustainable transport and active travel. Car-free days can form part of this programme, for instance the WOW (Walk on Wednesdays) initiative which is included within the accompanying Sustainable Modes of Travel to School Strategy. These initiatives form an important element of the overall Strategy to encourage sustainable travel in Reading.

Covid-19 Response

Question 23 - How can Reading try and to continue to keep the pollution down as people return to work after the lockdown?

The draft Strategy sets out an integrated programme of schemes and initiatives to promote the use of sustainable travel to reduce congestion and pollution and therefore improve health and air quality. We aim to make Reading a safe and pleasant place to walk and cycle whilst providing attractive alternatives to the private car through enhanced public transport services.

The Strategy links to the Climate Emergency Strategy which aims to achieve a carbon neutral town by 2030. Organisations and employers can help to achieve this objective through reducing the need to travel at peak times through more working from home as has happened during the current pandemic.

Question 24 - The strategy was published pre-Covid, but I have not seen any emergency cycle lanes or extra space given to pedestrians like in other cities worldwide including London. Why is this? Cars are still prevalent, and they drive fast.

The Council is developing a range of schemes to promote walking and cycling and help enable social distancing in response to the current pandemic, as set out in the Policy Committee report which can be viewed here -

<https://democracy.reading.gov.uk/documents/s12753/Reading%20Active%20Travel.pdf>.

Question 25 - Will the recent active travel schemes proposals be done without consultation? They will only push up the mileage done by car because they will not be able to travel from A to B easily.

The Council is responding to the Covid-19 emergency and the need to enable social distancing. The Government has introduced emergency guidelines to help authorities implement schemes quickly on a temporary basis without consultation which the Council has responded to. The guidance is focused on local authority areas with high levels of public transport use, such as Reading.

The schemes being implemented include a range of walking and cycling initiatives throughout the town centre and wider Borough. We will monitor the effectiveness of these schemes on an ongoing basis to ensure they meet developing travel needs and embedding the long-term shift to active travel as we move from restart to recovery. If there is a desire for schemes to be made permanent, a formal review and public consultation will be undertaken within 6 months of the scheme being implemented.

Question 26 - I understand you are making changes to support people walking and cycling because the increase in these activities during the lockdown, but this will not continue in the winter or when returning to work and cause traffic jams. What is your reasoning for this decision?

The Council is responding to the Covid-19 emergency and the need to enable social distancing as set out in the response to Question 25 above. At this stage the longer-term impacts on travel patterns of the pandemic are unknown, however all schemes that are implemented will be kept under regular review.

Question 27 - Why do we need to alter Reading or Caversham bridge when we have a cycle/foot bridge in between the two and the council already spent a lot of money on it?

The scheme to implement temporary cycle lanes on Reading Bridge is specifically responding to concerns which have been raised about the ability to conform to social distancing in Norman Place, between Christchurch Bridge and Reading Station.

Question 28 - In the most recent proposals I've seen for redeveloping the old power station site opposite the station suggest the developers now wish to put in a zig zag cycle path through the site, instead of straight. To me this is completely opposite to the idea that cycling should be for transport and not just leisure. Is there any update there?

The Council's Land Use and Transport Strategies identify this site as a key route for pedestrians and cyclist between Caversham and Reading town centre. The Council

is currently working with the proposed developer of this site to ensure proposals meet the objectives of our strategies which include a direct route from Christchurch Bridge towards Reading Station. This would resolve the issue of the narrow route currently in this location at Norman Place.

Question 29 - Would it not be better to implement a pedestrian / cycle path on the wide pavements of Reading Bridge instead of closing one lane?

This option was considered in development of the scheme, however the width of the existing pavement on Reading Bridge does not provide the space required by the guidelines for a shared path in this location.

Question 30 - Why was Sidmouth Street identified as a new cycle route? The parallel Watlington Street is an excellent and well-used route for cycling since the junction with South St was closed to rat-running vehicles. It connects to the Kennetside cycle path on the town side and the London Road toucan crossing in front of the hospital. Given that I find it hard to envisage a lot of cyclists needing to use Sidmouth Street. If this high-profile scheme is poorly-used that will be used as an argument against.

The scheme at Sidmouth Street is a temporary measure to help enable social distancing. Watlington Street has been identified in the Council's Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan as a key cycling and walking route between the town centre and Royal Berkshire Hospital and therefore a permanent scheme in this location could be implemented in the future subject to funding availability.

Question 31 - Can you please provide information on where you propose to put our bus lanes and new cycle lanes on Oxford Road?

The proposals for sustainable transport improvements to Oxford Road have previously been developed to complement the Network Rail highways works at Cow Lane They can be viewed on the Council's website here -

<https://www.reading.gov.uk/article/11825/Oxford-Road-Corridor-Study>

Question 32 - Suggestion that simple footpath laws, ensuring people always walk on the side of the road facing the traffic (so they can see the traffic heading towards them) - that would aid social distancing. Would be cheaper than closing lanes.

The Council is implementing a range of measures to help enable social distancing in Reading town centre and local centres throughout the Borough, including one-way systems for pedestrians at key pinch points.

Programme, Performance Indicators and Next Steps

Question 33 - Considering 2036 is a long way away. What's planned for the next 12 months?

Whilst the draft Strategy sets out an ambitious programme of schemes and initiatives to 2036, we are currently delivering a significant programme of major schemes through securing over £50m of external funding. This includes major projects such as the latest phases of the South Reading MRT scheme, a new railway station at Green Park, upgrading the existing station at Reading West and delivering the final elements of the new cross-Berkshire National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 422.

In addition, we are developing a comprehensive programme of walking and cycling measures throughout Reading through the recently announced Active Travel funding from Central Government.

Question 34 - Are there milestones that we can aim for before 2036, to show we are on track, for example yearly targets (like we have 671 homes per year, but for transport)?

The targets as set out in the draft Strategy will be monitored annually to ensure we are on-track to achieve the overall target by 2036. These targets are aligned with the draft Climate Emergency Strategy which has an overall objective of Reading becoming a carbon-neutral town by 2030.

Question 35 - What are the next steps for finalising and delivering the strategy?

The statutory consultation on the draft Strategy runs until 30th August 2020. This follows the considerable feedback provided through the visioning consultation undertaken in summer 2019 which informed development of the draft Strategy. All feedback provided through the statutory consultation will be reviewed and the Strategy will be updated, alongside our understanding of the implications of the current Covid-19 pandemic and longer-term implications for travel patterns.