

CHESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
SCOPING CONSULTATION ON
2ND LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN

INVITED COMMENTS FROM THE
CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND (CPRE)
CHESHIRE BRANCH TRANSPORT CAMPAIGN GROUP

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Campaign to Protect
Rural England
CHESHIRE

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INTRODUCTION

The Transport Campaign Group (TCG) of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)¹ Cheshire Branch welcomes the opportunity to input its views to the Cheshire County Council (CCC) scoping consultation on what it would like to see in the second full Local Transport Plan for Cheshire which will cover the period 2006 to 2011.

The TCG has had many inputs to the Local Transport Plan process from its inception and is particularly pleased that CCC is finally moving ahead with a Quiet Lanes scheme in the county. CPRE responded to the recent Macclesfield Forest Quiet Lanes consultation and awaits with keen interest the scheme being instigated on the ground in this lovely area adjoining the Peak District National Park. However, we are disappointed that a promise in the first LTP – to pilot a Quiet Lanes scheme in the Peckforton Hills – has not been kept and neither have there been even any initial moves to take forward any of the other potential Quiet Lanes schemes mentioned in the first LTP. We hope that this is rectified during the period of LTP 2.

We fully appreciate that, as an authority rated ‘excellent’ by the Audit Commission, Cheshire County Council is not obliged to write a full LTP. We commend the fact that it is intending to do so but are concerned that the only formal structure so far announced for taking it forward comprises delivery organisations which are not balanced with non-governmental interest groups or any voluntary or environmental organisations. We urge the authority to aim for best practice in its consultation phases, including providing feedback, and to be in a position to demonstrate it has reacted to the consultation process. We also look forward to Cheshire’s LTP undergoing not only a robust strategic environmental assessment and a sustainability appraisal, but to being rural proofed in the manner recommended by the Countryside Agency.

We would like to be informed and consulted as the LTP process progresses.

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¹ CPRE – The Campaign to Protect Rural England – exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country.

CPRE'S TRANSPORT POLICY

The Campaign to Protect Rural England believes Government and local authorities should aim to:

- Reduce the need to travel through better planning and better integration of planning and transport policies: development should be focused on brownfield land and in urban areas wherever possible and supported by public transport services
- Protect existing services such as schools in rural areas in order to improve the accessibility of these services and reduce the need to travel
- Prioritise environmentally sustainable methods of transport including walking, cycling and public transport
- Improve opportunities for people to walk and cycle safely eg. through the provision of networks of Greenways and Quiet Lanes
- Continue to improve the frequency, cost, quality and responsiveness of public transport: flexibility is particularly important in rural areas
- Ensure the costs of car travel reflect wider social and environmental costs, eg. by widening the use of parking charges
- Introduce measures to improve roads by reducing the intimidation and danger caused by speeding traffic, eg. introducing lower speed limits in all villages and on all country lanes
- Ensure the environmental impact of moving freight is minimised by increasing the use of rail, applying the latest logistics technology so that HGVs are used more effectively, redirecting lorries onto suitable roads and encouraging initiatives such as 'local foods for local markets'
- Stop building major roads in rural areas which are likely to encourage traffic growth and development, damage the landscape and reduce air quality
- Use park and ride sparingly and thoughtfully, eg. as part of multi-modal exchanges and preferably on brownfield land
- Increase the use of 'soft measures' such as car clubs, safe routes to school, home zones and green travel plans: give them more priority as cumulatively they can have a significant effect
- Reduce traffic signage to avoid clutter, particularly in rural areas, and vary signage and the design of transport infrastructure such as bus stops to suit the locality

CHESHIRE TCG's MAJOR SCHEME PRIORITIES

CPRE has consistently made the point to Cheshire County Council, and to other local authorities, that major scheme bids do not have to be for one-off big projects. They can be for a package of measures such as a rolling programmes of safe routes to school, well-designed traffic calming schemes in villages or networks of Quiet Lanes and Greenways.

CPRE is particularly enamoured with Greater Manchester's top priority major scheme in the current Annual Progress Report round. It has bid for £25 million to procure 160 yellow school buses over three years and to improve 30 school bus termini. The buses would be quieter, less polluting, fully accessible, high capacity single deck buses fitted with seat belts, CCTV, luggage racks and radio/CD/public address systems. Reducing the number of car-borne journeys to and from schools can have a significant effect on traffic everywhere and introducing young people to high quality public transport will make them more inclined to use it at other times and in later life. CPRE is also supportive of the general thrust of the work which has been carried out to date for CCC on the C-Net strategic bus services, but wants to see this initiative connecting better with rail stations and rail services than it currently does whilst not developing as a 'bustitution' option. The best strategic bus service initiative which CPRE is aware of is the award-winning "Interconnect" one in Lincolnshire where local feeder services to villages and hamlets connect with high quality buses which cross the county.

However, CPRE's Cheshire Transport Campaign Group have been asked to indicate which of the major schemes suggested to date by Cheshire County Council they favour. Of these, the TCG would like to see high quality transport interchanges delivered at both Crewe and Chester railway stations during the next five year LTP period. Crewe and Chester railway stations are important gateways to the county. The County Council has already initiated studies aimed at improving their roles as major interchanges and the Cheshire 2016 Draft Deposit Structure Plan Alteration puts forward both schemes (Policy T3 and para. 10.37). Also North West Regional Planning Guidance 13 has identified both railway stations as key regional interchanges (Appendix 3).

New transport interchanges at Crewe and Chester Railway Stations would:

- Set public transport in a wider context, raising its profile and serving not only the county and the region but inter-regional needs and cross-boundary with Wales
- Achieve significant modal shift by making seamless journeys possible whilst reducing reliance on the car and helping to reduce road traffic growth and congestion
- Support urban renaissance policies in neglected areas of Crewe and Chester and help preserve important railway heritage
- Provide much more comfortable waiting facilities, help reduce social exclusion and improve the quality of life
- Help deliver sustainable economic growth by providing attractive facilities for businesses and visitors as well as Cheshire residents

OTHER MEASURES & INITIATIVES WHICH CHESHIRE TCG WILL SUPPORT

The TCG will also support:-

- Other multi-modal schemes on brownfield land in urban areas which help reduce car use
- Other rail/bus interchange projects in market towns and rural villages such as those which have been successfully achieved at Carnforth and Clitheroe in Lancashire and rail infrastructure improvement projects such as improving access (local authorities can now fund rail projects through LTP bids) and provision for safe cycle parking at stations
- The re-opening of railway stations to encourage commuters, visitors and tourists to take the longest part of their journeys by rail: particularly Middlewich and Beeston stations
- The taking forward of public transport initiatives recommended through the multi-modal and roads-based studies, eg. introducing a parkway station on the Mid-Cheshire railway line near the M6 (proposed by MIDMAN), 15-minute 'tram-train' heavy rail services between Macclesfield and Manchester (proposed by SEMMMS) and detailed public transport studies (proposed by the Deeside Park Junctions and A5/A483 Chester-Shrewsbury Studies)
- Urban Traffic Management and Control measures in Northwich as part of a regeneration package in the town and other well-designed urban regeneration and home zone schemes
- Initiatives which in CPRE's opinion make the best use of land and existing highway capacity, encourage genuinely sustainable local communities and reduce the need to travel
- Most de-criminalised parking measures and some extra parking provision at railway stations but not more park and ride sites unconnected to rail in Green Belt
- Car clubs which it has been shown actually reduce overall car usage and other 'soft' measures such as: cross-ticketing for buses and trains, green travel plans, (not only for existing employment sites but negotiated as part of planning permissions for new ones), individual travel plan initiatives, school travel plans, safer routes to school (CPRE would be very supportive of a yellow bus scheme in Cheshire) and cycling & walking strategies
- Innovative and demand-responsive transport services (including taxi-buses and shared taxis) which meet the needs of local people both in the rural and urban areas, improve accessibility to jobs and reduce social exclusion
- A rural transport strategy which includes a commitment to develop a rural road hierarchy, a network of Quiet Lanes and Greenways (including an extension to the traffic-free greenway from Hoole to Mickle Trafford), improved rights of way, high quality village traffic calming schemes and an across-the-board speed limit of 40 mph on all country lanes, with the exception of Quiet Lanes which should have a lower speed limit (CPRE commends to CCC the Countryside Agency's LTP rural areas good practice guidance).

ROAD SCHEMES WHICH CPRE WILL NOT SUPPORT

CPRE's Cheshire Transport Campaign Group will continue to oppose:-

- Cheshire County Council, Stockport MBC and Manchester City Council in their plans to build a network of road schemes which make up the SEMMMS Relief Road. This would be unsustainable because it would provide a major strategic route between the M60 Greater Manchester Ring Road, Manchester Airport and South Manchester, encouraging more car-borne trips, bringing more development pressures on green fields, decimating areas of ancient woodland and important areas of biodiversity and reducing air quality
- The Chester Western Relief Road which would be built on greenfield land in the Green Belt in a flood plain, encourage additional commuting trips by car, contribute to traffic growth, link a congested traffic area to a congested road junction (A55/A483) and lead to a reduction in air quality
- Any new road which may be proposed as "*an improvement to the link between Winsford, Middlewich and M6 junction 18*" and any new roads which may be promoted under the banner of "*improving access to Macclesfield, Congleton and Crewe*" as similar arguments would apply as to the two specific schemes above
- The M6 Expressway or any new tolled roads

ROAD SCHEME WHICH CHESHIRE TCG HAS SUPPORTED

CPRE reluctantly gave its support to the A34 Alderley Edge Bypass because it fitted some of its exemption policies, because of special local circumstances and because CCC listened to pleas to set the road in a cutting beneath the West Coast Main Railway Line.

OTHER COMMENTS

CCC appears to be proposing to drop its commitment in its last LTP to reduce traffic growth, achieve 10% of journeys by bicycle by 2011 and 14% by public transport. CPRE endorses the North West Regional Assembly's objection to the dropping of these targets. We would like to see up-dated cycling and walking strategies which include measures to increase the numbers of people walking and cycling whilst stressing the need for walkers and cyclists themselves to behave responsibly. CCC needs to re-appoint a walking officer and should also have a dedicated rail officer with the same remit as Lancashire County Council's rail officer.

A robust policy is required to address all areas of the county suffering serious air pollution problems, notably Knutsford and Sproston, and to connect policies to the emerging regional policies on climate change. There is also a need for better cross-boundary working on transport and air pollution issues, particularly with Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Shropshire.

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