

REPORT AGENDA ITEM 11**HARBOROUGH HIGHWAYS FORUM****18TH SEPTEMBER 2006****TRAFFIC PROBLEMS IN MARKET HARBOROUGH****Purpose of report**

1. To respond to a request by Mr Callis and Dr Hill that this subject should be discussed by the forum.

Background

2. A letter sent by Mr Callis and Dr Hill to Mr Rushton is attached as Appendix A and is self-explanatory. This report explains what actions the County Council is taking, through its Local Transport Plan, to tackle traffic congestion in the town.

Local Transport Plan policies

3. The approach to tackling congestion is set out in Chapter 4 of the LTP. A number of measures can all contribute to containing the growth in congestion, including:
 - Ensuring that new land use development is planned so as to minimise the need to travel
 - Ensuring also that new land use development provides appropriate transport infrastructure to cope with the travel that is generated
 - Working to improve transport sustainability through school and company travel planning and other 'smarter choices' techniques
 - Investment to make cycling and walking more attractive alternatives to car use
 - Using traffic signal control systems, and analysis of pinch points on the road network followed by corrective action, to make the best use of the road system available
 - Use of demand management techniques through parking control and, potentially in the longer term, road user charging
 - Improving the performance of bus and rail services, including park and ride, to provide a more attractive alternative to the car
 - Ensuring that road works and other causes of hold-up are properly managed so as to minimise their impact.

4. For many years the first choice in tackling congestion would have been to provide extra road capacity, through road widening or the provision of bypasses. But changes in government policy mean such an approach is now usually last choice rather than first, with emphasis being placed instead on the more sustainable transport modes, on traffic restraint and ultimately on road user charging. There is correspondingly less money available for bypass and similar schemes.

Prioritisation

5. The package of measures outlined above is funded from LTP capital funds, from the County Council's own resources and through working with partners. Despite the substantial sums involved it is clear that available funds are not sufficient to make the impact that many would wish. In Central Leicestershire, for example, the analysis carried out for the LTP shows that, despite the best efforts of the City and County Councils, congestion on main radial routes into the city will become slightly worse over the next five years, rather than better, a finding that is typical of other conurbations.
6. Faced with this, the County Council must prioritise its spending. The alternative would be to risk making no real impact anywhere in the county. To decide priorities, analysis was undertaken of congestion problems countywide, using transport models where available but supplementing these with 'ITIS' data obtained from the government. ITIS is a new form of congestion data, obtained through satellite tracking of major commercial vehicle fleets throughout the country, giving a large sample of actual vehicle journey times throughout the day, all week, and on most roads in the county.
7. The results of this initial appraisal are shown in outline form in Figure 2.5 of the LTP, reproduced here for convenience as Appendix B. The figure shows the relative density of congestion problems in the county's different urban areas and is backed up by more detailed analysis. On the basis of this work it was decided to concentrate the main spending on reducing congestion over the next five years in Central Leicestershire and Loughborough. The reasons for this were:
 - The government requires an effective congestion strategy to be in place, with targets, for the ten biggest conurbations, of which Leicester and urban Central Leicestershire is one. Central Leicestershire therefore had to be chosen
 - Loughborough is the second most congested area in terms of its overall impact.
 - It was judged unlikely that it would be possible to have a significant impact on congestion in other areas as well as these over the next five years, because of the limitations on resources.
 - There is also evidence that some congestion-reduction measures, for example park and ride and quality bus corridors, are more

effective in larger urban areas, again lending weight to the choice of these two.

8. This approach was consulted on during the preparation of the LTP and received support.

Market Harborough

9. This does not mean that congestion in Market Harborough will be ignored. Even though the major capital investment will go elsewhere, continuing efforts will go into many of the measures listed above, including school and company travel planning, and the promotion of cycling, walking and bus use.
10. Particularly important will be work to obtain maximum capacity from the existing road network. Progress is being made at two levels:
 - Through the Area Traffic Control system, to update and adjust signal controls in a rolling programme that maximises the traffic throughput of signalised junctions
 - Through an analysis of delay points countywide, leading to a programme of improvements, many of them modest, which will unblock delays at particularly congested points on the network.
11. Market Harborough should see investment in all these areas over the next few years, as well as continued investment in road safety and other aspects of LTP policy. Techniques for measuring congestion will be improved and, when priorities are reviewed again for the third LTP, another review will be carried out of the relative priorities for investment in Central Leicestershire and the county towns.

Traffic modelling techniques

12. In the meantime, new land use development is planned for the town. It is essential to ensure that the traffic generated by this is properly dealt with through developer-funded infrastructure. The traffic impact of new development can be assessed by a range of techniques depending on its scale and complexity. These techniques range from desktop traffic assignments and simple 'gravity' models through to comprehensive traffic models.
13. The simpler analytical techniques, whether used by the County Council or by consultants acting for developers, have proved satisfactory so far in assessing the impact of generated traffic. The full range of potential development for the LDF will soon have to be assessed and it could be that, in those circumstances, a traffic model will be necessary. If so, a model will be developed. It would, however, be wrong to go to the considerable expense of doing so unless it was clear that the complexity of potential traffic movements from new development was such as to require it.

Long term planning

14. The County Council's medium term approach is as described above, a pragmatic pulling together of a range of measures, all intended to help contain the problems of congestion. The longer term may well hold more of the same, since with one possible exception there are no other solutions offering major impact on their own. Government policy would lead us to expect over the long term to continue improving opportunities for cycling, walking and using public transport, and to continue making the modest investments which will allow the best possible use to be made of existing highway infrastructure. This is likely to be linked to increasingly active demand management, up to and including, based on recent statements from government ministers, the introduction of comprehensive road user charging.
15. The possible exception noted above would be the construction of a further bypass for the town. This does not feature in the County Council's plans at the moment, perhaps mainly because:
 - Such a route (from west to north?) would be very expensive as well as controversial
 - The A6 bypass removed a substantial proportion of potentially 'bypassable' traffic and it is far from clear that a significant amount remains
 - Nor is it clear that new development in the town could contribute significantly towards its cost (in contrast to the situation in Melton Mowbray)
 - Consultation for the LTP showed no substantial evidence that local people felt this was an appropriate or necessary solution for the town's traffic problems.
16. Given the great difficulty of securing government funding for bypass schemes, it seems unlikely that any proposal for a bypass would make much headway unless the LDF process threw up the possibility of substantial developer funding. However, whatever development does take place, the County Council will continue to work to ensure that developer-funded measures properly compensate for the additional traffic generated.

Conclusions

17. In summary:
 - The County Council has a comprehensive strategy for tackling congestion set out in its Local Transport Plan
 - To maximise overall effectiveness, the main investment to manage congestion over the next five years is being placed in Central Leicestershire and Loughborough

- This decision was based upon an analysis of existing congestion problems across the county
- But there will be continuing investment of effort in Market Harborough, with benefits expected from both the general work in school and company travel planning, support for public transport and other areas, as well as targeted improvements at specific road junctions
- Over coming months, the traffic impacts of developments potentially included in the District's new LDF will have to be assessed. Appropriate techniques will be used.
- By the time of the third LTP, development in the techniques for measuring congestion will allow a re-prioritisation of investment across the county as well as more specific targets for towns like Market Harborough
- There does not appear to be a prima facie case for a further bypass for the town, but work on the LDF will provide further information on whether this could be value for money or affordable.

Background Papers

None.

Officer to Contact

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Appendix A

Market Harborough
8th August 2006

Dear Mr Ruston,

Re: Traffic problems in Market Harborough

Sarah Hill and I wish to formally invite you to attend the next Harborough Highways forum on 18th September to listen to community concerns about congestion and traffic problems in Market Harborough town centre.

The local paper, the Harborough Mail, has carried out a series of letters about this issue which highlight the concerns of the public about the difficulties encountered by road users coming through the town, as well as local traffic.

With planning permission outstanding for nearly 1,000 homes in the town the situation will not get any better. Planned works to the A14/M1 junction are likely to cause real difficulties given the problems that occur when the A14 is closed due to accidents.

We feel a review by the Highways Authority is the least that can be done and it is essential that there is an accurate assessment of the extent of the traffic problems throughout town and their causes, through traffic measurement and modelling. Only then can we see the scale of the problem and understand what steps can be taken to deal with them. Given the possibilities of further housing growth in the town under the Local Development Framework, it is vital to have this data to determine the level of highways works that are required for mitigation.

Unless these issues are addressed soon congestion will become worse in the town flying in the face of LTP objectives.

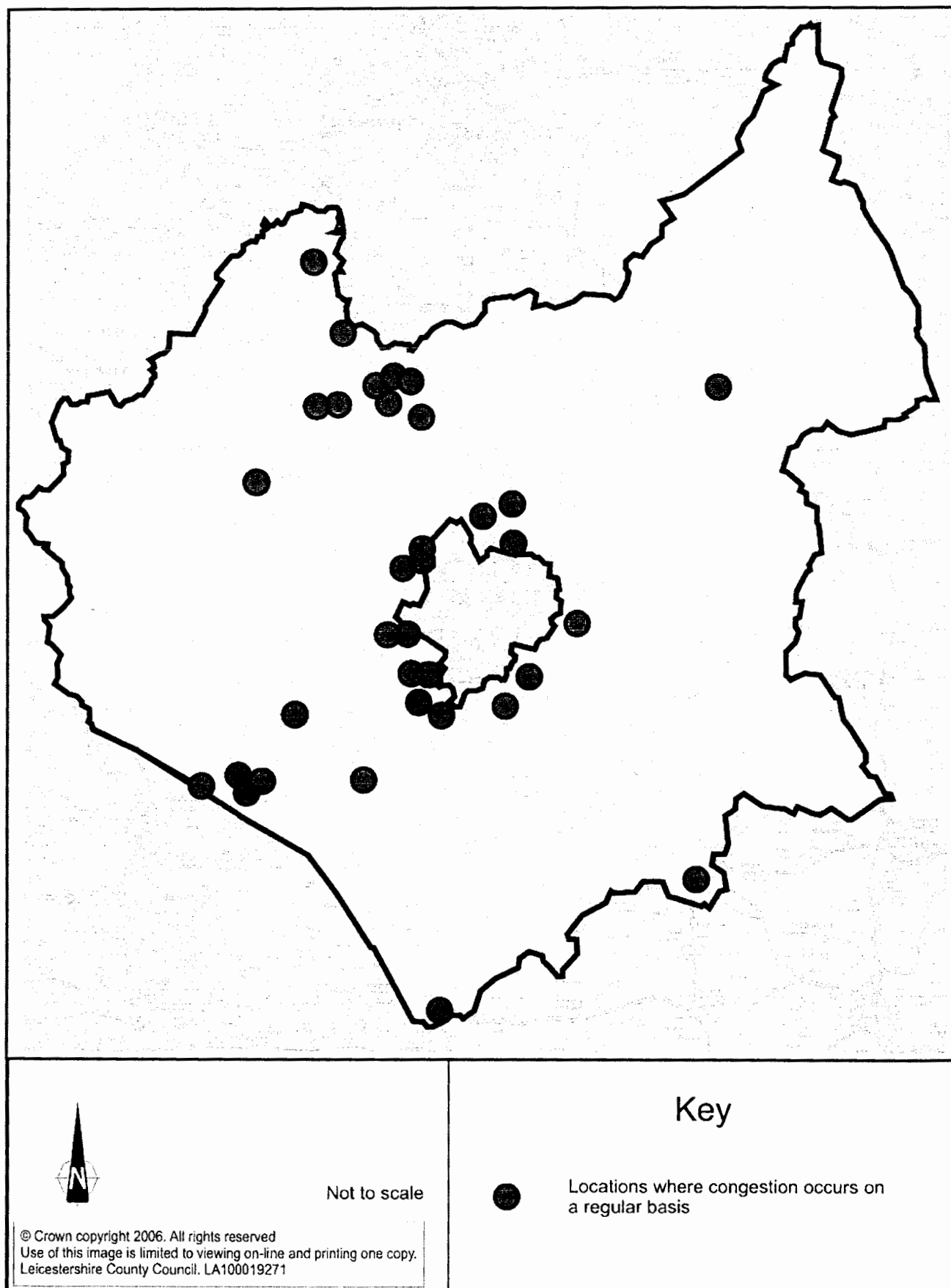
Yours sincerely,

Mr Peter Callis, CC

Dr Sarah Hill, CC

cc Mr M Lugg
cc Mr J Holden

Figure 2.5
Locations where congestion occurs on a regular basis





PR 983

19 September 2006

For Immediate Release

County Council acts to reduce traffic problems in Market Harborough

Harborough Highways Forum last night heard how the County Council will be working closely with Harborough District Council to develop a plan to tackle traffic problems in Market Harborough.

Speaking after the meeting, the County Council Deputy Leader and transport spokesman, Nicholas Rushton, said: "In developing the plan, it is important that we build on the very good work that is already taking place with the district council.

"There are a number of steps we can take to maximise the capacity of the existing road network, including reviewing the operation and timing of town centre traffic signals. As a first step, we will ensure that there is proper signing to ensure through traffic avoids Market Harborough wherever possible.

"We will also ensure developers fund measures to prevent their developments making the problem worse, as well as encouraging the district council to prevent development taking place where it would add to traffic problems.

"In advancing the plan we will investigate whether a second bypass may be justified but, as I said at the meeting, a very strong case would have to be made to stand any prospect of obtaining the necessary funding from Government. Any new bypass would be environmentally damaging and could be ineffective since so much traffic in the town is local. We also do not believe that the townspeople wish to see the attractive environment of the town centre streets ruined by putting more traffic lanes through there.

"We will clearly need to build on our work in making transport more sustainable, particularly by:

- Working with schools to develop travel plans which help to ensure more children walk or cycle to school rather than travel by car, to add to the five local schools which already have such plans

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- Similarly working with local businesses to develop travel plans for their staff, with initiatives like car sharing, home working, and commuting by bus
- Providing reliable and well-publicised local bus services, with increasing bus use helping to support gradual increases in service coverage and frequency
- Continuing to seek out opportunities to provide new links for safe cycling and walking within the town, leading to an increase in the number of those choosing to leave the car at home for local journeys.

Mr Rushton added: "In drawing up our plans, it is essential that the people of Market Harborough have every chance to make their views known, and we will be working with the district council to ensure this happens."