

## APPENDIX C

### COMMENTS OF THE MID & WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM ON WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL'S LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 2011 - 2026

The Local Access Forum (LAF) exists, as a statutory body under Section 94 of the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000, to advise Reading Borough Council, the West Berkshire Council and Wokingham Borough Council "as to the improvement of public access to land for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area".

We did not avail ourselves of the opportunity to comment on the earlier draft of the West Berkshire Council's Local Transport Plan 2011 - 2026 (LTP3), so we take this opportunity to comment in some detail on Chapters 1-5. Our comments on later chapters follow after that.

Some of our Members represent the interests of people who wish to use the entire highway network (except motorways), as is their right, by non-motorised means. With increased motorised traffic, these people have been progressively driven off the highways, until it has become normal for 'highway engineers' to see leisure use of highways on foot, by bike, on horseback or by horse-drawn carriage, as a nuisance. If we are to be truly sustainable and fair to all road users, the West Berkshire Council's LTP must consider the interests of these forms of travel **first**. If their confidence in the safety of the highway network for leisure is restored, they will also use it for utility journeys.

1.5 We trust that the Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) will take account of the increasing use of disabled buggies/scooters. These help to reduce vehicular transport and greatly assist less able, often elderly people to access the highway network. However, there is a lack of suitable safe routes for these scooters in particular, also for wheelchairs, bicycles and pedestrians, on many routes used by vulnerable groups unable for various reasons to use motor vehicles. Because routes into and through the countryside often involve sections which are unsafe for these users, there is a clear equalities' impact.

We also trust that the EIA will assess the impact of LTP policies on equestrians, that is, those engaged in the racing industry, the sport/leisure horse industry and those who drive horse carriages. These legitimate users of the road network are usually not catered for but need to use the road network for training, accessing their training areas, as well as for recreational purposes. This vulnerable group of legitimate highway users, has been recognized as vital to the local economy (see West Berkshire Council's Local Development Framework Core Strategy CS13).

3.4 We welcome, in the overall Vision, replacement of "develop" (the LTP) with "deliver", in recognition that plans need to be deliverable, based on identified resources. The LAF would expect to see elements of the linked Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) delivered through the resources assigned to the LTP, linked as shown in figure 2.1.

4.8 We welcome the emphasis on health benefits from walking and cycling and note that these methods of commuting and informal recreational use of the rights of way network (including by horse-riders and carriage drivers) can make a significant contribution to the economy of the District and to the welfare of the local population. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle by use of the highway (including

rights of way) network and exercise in urban and country parks also contributes indirectly to a lively local economy.

- 4.14 Noting the desire to shift commuting journeys from congested roads to other forms of travel, the LAF would urge that public rights of way used for this are not 'urbanised' more than necessary to achieve that laudable aim. Highest priority should be given to providing safe road crossings and sections beside busy or unlit road for cyclists and pedestrians wishing to make commuter journeys this way (see 4.35-6). These routes need to be pleasant and safe for users to obtain potential 'positive benefits for health' (see also 4.20, 4.27 & 4.48). They also need a higher priority in terms of maintenance.
- 4.15 The significant impact on non-motorised users should be spelled out here. Large vehicles, even on minor roads, are a major impediment to use of those roads by vulnerable non-motorised users (NMUs) - and to use of the rights of way network, which often cannot be used without using roads. We suggest additional wording (underlined): *'However, there are also widespread concerns regarding the problems arising from Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) using the local road network. These often relate to road safety, and the impact on the natural and built environments, the impact on use by vulnerable non-motorised users (walkers, disabled scooters, cyclists, horse riders and carriage drivers), and the impact on local communities'*
- 4.17 Add in 'which deters non-motorised travel' to read *'to certain roads, and the volume and size of lorries on many rural routes which deters non-motorised travel'*.
- 4.27 Fear of traffic on an often short journey between home and countryside means people often choose to take their car, instead of walking or riding direct from home or stable. Where possible, to reduce carbon emissions, safe routes should be created from where people live direct to countryside.
- 4.35 '*Difficulty in walking, particularly for older people*' should be added to the list. This is an important issue with the increasing number of older people.
- The issue of railway, canal and A4 forming a serious barrier to sustainable means of North-South travel are highlighted. The LAF urges greater priority to be given to creating safe and pleasant crossings of these barriers for leisure use as well as utility journeys, although often crossings suitable for non-motorised use can and should be provided alongside existing road crossings.
- 4.36 Additional issues which make cycling unattractive are:
- Difficulty in carrying shopping and more than one child
  - lack of recent cycling experience especially for older people who may well not wish to learn (balance problems)
  - the desire to arrive smartly dressed.
- 4.37 Recreational use of the countryside often unavoidably involves a vehicular journey to access the start of a walk, bike or horse ride. Adequate parking facilities need to be provided for horse-boxes as well as cars throughout the District, as often as possible at or near pubs, village halls and other places with toilet provision. Recreational routes that pass railway stations or bus stops

ought to be actively promoted, in conjunction with transport providers - for whom recreational users can provide much needed off-peak revenue to help sustain essential services to rural communities. The carriage of bikes on rural buses should be encouraged, as happens in other countries.

#### 4.40 onwards: Highway networks.

'Highways' include the rights of way network. There is no mention of highway networks for NMUs for utility & recreational purposes which would support sustainable travel, eg greenways, quiet lanes. This is odd considering the need to develop sustainable travel and the implementation of quiet lanes in Bucklebury. The LAF would like to see more sections of road that are very lightly trafficked by vehicles managed primarily for NMUs, with clearer signage and possibly a different maintenance regime, which would actively discourage use of these routes by vehicles, other than for access. An example is Lawrences Lane, Thatcham, which could become the main access route for all NMUs to the Pang Valley.

#### 4.45 onwards: Safe & Healthy travel

There is nothing in this section about fear of non-motorised users of vehicles while using roads. The perception of danger is a major factor in limiting road usage by NMUs. It needs to be included - and addressed.

4.45 A lack of awareness of the high impact on equestrian activities needs to be acknowledged, considering the importance attached to the equestrian economy in the [Planning] Core Strategy by adding '*and equestrian use of the rights of way network*' at the end of the sentence.

4.49 Enjoyment of countryside access can best be encouraged at an early age, leading to healthier lifestyles for future generations. The LAF would urge those who influence school travel plans (SMOTS) and educational programmes for schools in the District to include supervised nature walks within these, taking advantage of the extensive rights of way network and country parks. Every primary school should investigate and promote safe off-road routes to and from school into nearby countryside. Farmers, landowners and parish councils should encourage responsible access by family and school groups on permitted paths and rights of way (6.4.54).

4.50 Cross boundary issues also arise with the rights of way network. A particular issue is the Wayfarers Walk extension into Wiltshire and (via Test Way) Hampshire from Inkpen, where access from the road network by four-wheel-drive vehicles and motorbikes onto a remote byway needs coordinated management by three highway authorities.

5.3 & 5.6 The LAF is somewhat concerned that the mention of 'leisure' use in LTP2 Objectives (third bullet point) has disappeared from LTP3 Goals for 2011-2026. The rights of way network clearly has a significant and growing role in helping achieve many of the goals in Figure 5.1, as set out in preceding sections of the document. By failing to feature leisure uses among these goals explicitly, we fear that it will be regarded as an afterthought rather than a reason for travel in its own right, especially using non-vehicular means and the rights of way network. In the document overall, there is a tendency not to recognize that

much travel is for recreational/leisure purposes and that this contributes to many local businesses, either directly or indirectly.

- Fig 5.1 There are several spelling mistakes in the text on this figure.
- 6.2.22 This is an excellent summary of the potential increased role of the rights of way network in the local transport network. The LAF is pleased to see this embedded in the LTP, with the proviso that it does not reduce the amenity value for all those user groups who legitimately use the rights of way network for recreation.
- 6.3.24 The LAF is pleased to see explicit mention of the need to improve links between Thatcham and the Living Landscape but improved access to the countryside also needs to be provided for equestrians who stable their horses in this area. For example, the LTP does not appear to recognize that there is a 20+ horse livery yard close to Thatcham station, a similar business enterprise in Ashmore Green, plus many small equestrian establishments which, to thrive, would like access to a safe highway network. However, the above-mentioned railway and canal form serious barriers to achieving this. We urge the Council to give priority to this recognised need by creating multi-user, off-road (restricted byways), routes for **all**.
- 6.3.47 Horse riding and carriage driving should be included as leisure activities which require access to the countryside from this area (see comment to 6.3.24 above).
- 6.4.5 Use of the word 'perhaps' is odd here considering the emphasis on the racehorse industry in the [Planning] Core Strategy.
- 6.4.9 As this paragraph relates to sustainable tourism, horse riding should be included. The Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is highly suited to equestrian tourism which occurs now but appears to go unnoticed by the planners.
- 6.4.10 The LAF is pleased to see the LTP say the Council "will do all it can" to improve safety for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders on rural roads in the AONB. We would ask that priority is given to provision of safe 'behind-the-hedge/fence' routes, particularly for equestrians, on roads that link bridle ways, restricted byways and byways, to enable more circular leisure routes to be provided. This will support the aim of promoting 'sustainable tourism, leisure opportunities (6.4.21 & 29) and sustainable travel.
- 6.4.12 **Transport corridors.** It is vital that the ability of NMUs to cross major roads is maintained so that the rights of way network does not become fragmented. A comment to this effect should be included. Nor is there mention of the need to maintain safe, off-road, crossings of the railway line, to stop fragmentation of the rights of way network.
- 6.4.22 The Forum supports the implementation of the DfT recommendation to reduce speed limits on all minor roads.
- 6.4.28-29 Once again, there is lack of awareness of equestrian leisure/sport, even in the AONB area. Horse riding and carriage driving need to be included. See

comment above to 6.4.9. The heading of 'walking and cycling' needs to be replaced with 'non-motorised travel'.

6.4.54 Equestrians require safe routes to the countryside perhaps more than any other user group.

6.5.7 Include mention of equestrians here to support CS13. This area is home to what is probably the most prestigious equestrian teaching establishment in West Berks, Hall Place, located in Tilehurst. This business, in part, relies on private access to the countryside to ensure the safety of its customers because little, if any, recognition has been given in the past to the safety of these vulnerable users on the roads. The Forum would support speed restrictions in the vicinity of stables, in much the same way as in the vicinity of schools.

#### 6.5.10 & 6.5.30 Developing the Transport Vision for the Eastern Area

The negative impact which the major transport routes have on sustainable travel and the rights of way network (walking, cycling, equestrian travel), especially with respect to crossing the major routes (eg. A4, railway line), needs to be mentioned and addressed.

6.5.39& 6.5.46 To support LDF policy CS13, the Council should assess the needs of equestrians in these areas (if it is not known already from the District Profile) and include equestrians here.

6.6.21 Include 'equestrian routes'. Again, there is no mention of equestrian travel in the sentence. In a survey in 2005 for the ROWIP, 340 horses were counted in a 5 mile radius of Stratfield Mortimer kept in at least 25 establishments. This equates to £1million into the local economy. Equestrians desperately need safe access to the countryside because of the negative impact of vehicular traffic on the roads connecting the rights of way network. This needs to be recognized if the CS13 is to be supported by the LTP

6.6.29 Include 'vulnerable, non-motorised users'.

In Section 7 (Transport Policies and Supporting Plans), the LAF is pleased to note that the RoWIP is mentioned as a 'Key Strategy or Plan for Delivery' of 'Accessibility (Quality & Inclusion) - K4', and 'Health & Leisure - K14' (Figure 7.1). Also in 'Supporting Policies' SC1 (walking, as a travel choice) as a means of delivering the RoWIP.

Policy LTP SC1 and LTP SC2. Given the emphasis on walking & cycling, it needs to be made clear that these activities should not be to the detriment of the equestrian industry – see policy CS13 which supports opportunities for equestrians to enjoy the countryside. Thus, taking over of bridleways by cyclists should not be supported in areas where the land use supports equestrian activities.

Highway Management Policy LTP NMP1. 'all users' is mentioned several times. It would be re-assuring to know if this includes ALL non-motorised users who use or would like to use roads to link up the rights of way network, eg equestrian businesses such as livery yards, riding schools etc.

- 7.10 Highway Maintenance. It would be reassuring if 'all users, including non-motorised users' was added, if, indeed, non-motorised users are included here.
- LTP K8 Add in other road users (underlined): ii Improving safety for vulnerable road users of all ages, such as pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, horse riders, carriage drivers and those who use mobility scooters.
- 7.11.4 Equestrians are inexcusably left out of the vulnerable group. However, many have ceased using the road network, and hence the rights of way network, because of **fear of being seriously injured or killed**. They do not wait to become a KSI statistic. The document does not recognize this and yet the Council supports the equestrian industry (CS13).
- 7.16.3 Add in 'or the rights of way network' to read: *'The travel and transport aspects of development need to be planned in a way that links well with existing networks and delivers enhancements. New development should not implement measures that have an adverse impact on existing transport networks or services **or the rights of way network**'.*
- 7.17 Health and Leisure. Carriage driving is not mentioned. Routes for equestrians are not mentioned. This is discriminatory. Both should be included. There are probably more equestrians out there using the network than there are cyclists and more equestrians out there who would like to use the network. The only problem is that no counts have been done.
- 7.5.20 The LAF would like to see, under Policy LTP SC6 'Branding, Marking & Promotion', some mention of the potential for marketing West Berkshire's AONB in particular as a destination for sustainable day-trip and short break leisure tourism involving use of the rights of way, with access from railway stations in the district. The potential for attracting visitors from London, the Midlands and the rest of the southeast, as well from overseas during and after the coming Olympics, needs to be highlighted in the LTP.
- 7.7 The LAF is pleased to see the rights of way network mentioned in LTP K4, with the objective of improving Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliance of the network for disadvantaged groups of all kinds.
- 8.10 The community interest groups ought to be specified to ensure all legitimate road users are covered.

We note, under 'Monitoring of Delivery' in Figure 9.1, the proposed indicator 'ease of use of rights of way'. The LAF would like to be involved in developing that indicator in a way that truly reflects the 'ease of use' and accessibility by/for all user groups.

Adrian Lawson  
Chairman  
19 November 2010