

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT & INFRASTRUCTURE

DATE: 6 JULY 2021

LEAD OFFICER: KATIE STEWART – EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

SUBJECT: GUILDFORD QUALITY BUS CORRIDOR AND BUS LANE ENHANCEMENT - A320 WOKING ROAD



ORGANISATION Growing A Sustainable Economy So Everyone Can Benefit/Enabling a
STRATEGY Greener Future
PRIORITY AREA:

SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

To decide whether to change the operating times of the A320 Woking Road bus lane between the Stoughton Road Roundabout and Stoke Cross-roads following a statutory consultation.

This project is part of suite of transport improvements schemes being progressed throughout Guildford as part of the Quality Bus Corridor Project (QBC)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that:

1. The proposed changes to the operational times of the bus lane in Woking Road, Guildford between the Stoughton Roundabout and Stoke Cross-roads are amended to operate all day, every day.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Quality Bus Corridor Project three main objectives are:

- 1) Improved bus journey time reliability and punctuality
- 2) Increased levels of bus patronage
- 3) Reduced bus journey times

In addition, the bus lane provides a useful facility for cycles and will be available for longer periods of the day.

This will help us achieve our 2030 Community Vision objectives

- Residents live in clean, safe and green communities where people and organisations embrace their environmental responsibilities.
- Journeys across the county are easier, more predictable, and safer

DETAILS:

Background

1. In July 2019 Surrey County Council declared a climate emergency and in April 2020 Surrey's Climate Change Strategy was approved. The strategy was developed by Surrey's 12 local authorities and is the result of a shared ambition across the county council and the districts and boroughs, for Surrey's Greener Future – one where residents can live in clean, safe and green communities and embrace their environmental responsibilities.
2. To deliver on Surrey's ambitions, the county's current rate of carbon consumption would have to decrease significantly. Buses are a vital mode of transport for Guildford, used by 15,000 people per day (pre-pandemic). Surrey County Council has committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions across Surrey by 2050 as 46% of the county's carbon emissions are produced by transport. Making buses more practical and attractive for journeys has an important part to play. Additionally, with new homes proposed in Guildford Borough over the next 20 years, a reliable bus network will be vital in ensuring that an already congested road network is not overwhelmed.
3. As part of the wider 'Unlocking Guildford' package, the Guildford QBC project is specifically a set of measures designed to improve journey time reliability and provide improved on-street infrastructure and an on-board experience to encourage growth in patronage along key bus routes into and around Guildford. The focus of the Quality Bus Corridor project is along key bus corridors for the major bus routes into and out of Guildford. This specifically involves addressing congestion pinch-points for buses on the highway network, bus priority signal technologies, new electric buses and improving bus stop accessibility and Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI).
4. The proposed improvements to the local bus network bolster the overall provision of sustainable transport facilities in the area, enabling the QBC project to fully complement the other schemes within Unlocking Guildford.
5. On 25th February 2020 Cabinet approved the Bus Lane Enforcement Report which approved authorisation to the Director for Infrastructure & Operations in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport to introduce Bus Lane Enforcement and also authorised the Cabinet Member for Transport to introduce new or amend existing bus lanes and determine any formal objections through the public formal Cabinet Member decision making meeting.
6. At the Cabinet Member Meeting on 9th June 2020 authority was provided to consult about changes to the operational timing of the bus lanes in Guildford and the types of vehicle that would be permitted to use them.
7. The A320 Woking Road bus lane north of Stoke Cross-roads currently has operational times between 0700-1000 and 1600-1900, Monday to Saturday.
8. It is proposed to change the operational times for the lane to operate 24 hours per day, 7 days per week in order to:

- Improve bus journey time reliability and punctuality
 - Increase levels of bus patronage
 - Reduce bus journey times.
 - Improve cycle facilities along this stretch of the A320. Bus lanes can also be used by cyclists so the longer operating hours proposed for the lane will also provide an enhanced facility for them as well.
9. A 28 day statutory consultation about the changes was carried out between 19th November and 18th December which entailed placing a notice in the Surrey Advertiser and street notices along the length of the bus lane with information available on our web pages or by request.

New National Bus Strategy

10. It is important that we consider this report within the context of the new National Bus Strategy (Bus Back Better), which was published by the Government on 15th March 2021. The Strategy requires a local authority to consider its role in encouraging more people to travel by bus post-Covid 19 and sets out aspirations for bus services that are more frequent, more reliable, easier to understand and use, better-co-ordinated, cheaper to use and with high quality information for passengers.
11. The Council proposes to respond positively to the challenge set by Government, with Government's aspirations summarised as:
- More frequent services including extension of operation to include evenings and weekends;
 - Faster, more reliable journeys, with new powers for local authorities to enforce traffic regulations which favour buses;
 - The need to introduce bus lanes and other priority measures on any road with a frequent service;
 - More comprehensive 'socially-necessary' services (further guidance awaited on a revised definition) and a new category of 'economically-necessary' services;
 - Cheaper fares, multi-journey multi-operator schemes, daily capping and more widespread contactless payment ability;
 - Better modal integration;
 - Better information by means of journey planning websites, apps, roadside and traditional printed information, with heavy promotion and marketing to non-bus users;
 - High-specification zero or ultra-low emission buses to replace older diesel buses;
 - Buses to be regarded as a 'safe' mode of travel, with CCTV at key bus stops and more Real Time Passenger Information for predicted arrival times to reduce waiting at stops;
 - The introduction of a 'Passenger Charter' that sets out what passengers can reasonably expect from bus operators and Local Transport Authorities in terms of the way services are provided, including signposting to routes for recourse.

12. The recommendations of this report accord with the bus priority ambitions of the new National Bus Strategy. They also support our partnership working with bus operators, which has seen large and joint investment in public transport in many parts of the county, including Woking. Further improvements to passenger facilities, real time bus information, bus priority and reliability, ticketing, ultra-low and zero emission buses, alongside enhancements to bus frequencies and timings are being developed as part of the Council's formal response to the National Bus Strategy. This will be submitted to Government at the end of October, aiming to create a framework to unlock the opportunity for future bidding to secure part of the £3bn funding allocated to Bus Back Better by the Government.
13. The Council is also embarking on an exciting investment programme to accelerate the introduction of ultra-low and zero emission buses into Surrey. This supports our ambitions and strategic priorities for a greener future, our Surrey 2030 vision and our Climate Change Strategy. It is key to the Council's response to the declared climate change emergency and is part of the associated £300m Greener Futures investment programme. Providing sustainable transport options will contribute to a reduction in harmful emissions, moving us toward net zero carbon as well as helping our communities to be resilient and well connected. The Council is therefore investing £32.3m in ultra-low and zero emission buses, with a supporting investment of £9m in bus priority measures and £1.4m to expand real time passenger information. When added to a £6.3m investment in electric community transport minibuses it gives a total investment of £49m in this sector.

CONSULTATION:

14. There were 5 objections to the proposals to extend the operational hours of the bus lane and one comment in support.
15. Objections to the proposals are summarised (a to o) below:
 - a) Bus lanes only cause delays to other traffic by reducing the total capacity of a road and thereby increase pollution and frustration to motorists.
 - b) The current bus lane arrangement already causes significant traffic at rush hour from Stoke Interchange back along the Woking Road and past the Stoughton Road Roundabout. This is because the bus lane reduces this section of road to one lane meaning that those wishing to go either straight on at Stoke Interchange or left onto the A25 Parkway are blocking the road for those wishing to join the A3 northbound. I believe that for the limited number of buses using the bus lane (usually nearly empty buses) the congestion it causes is unacceptable. Rather than increasing the operating hours of the bus lane and making matters worse, I suggest the bus lane is removed completely.
 - c) few people use buses as a mode of transport. There is no evidence of increased bus usage.
 - d) There are no buses between midnight and 6am and there are few buses after 8pm so the extended hours cannot be justified.

- e) Having looked at the current bus timetables (Thursday 17th December 2020) the total amount of buses using the bus lane between 7:00am and 10:00am is less than 20, these services are 3s, 34 and 35. Compare this to the hundreds of other vehicles using the road at this time, do you think that the build-up of traffic and air pollution is justifiable? Even after the Weyside Urban Village is developed I expect the bus traffic may exceed to a total of 30 buses in these peak hours.
- f) The claim to improve Bus Journey times is unsustainable at this point as it takes 1 minute to transit these Bus Lanes, yet other road junctions cause more delays as there is no road space for speeding of bus journeys.
- g) Increasing Bus Patronage is not created by speed of Journey but of “correct destination”, “timing and comfort” - Like the Clay Lane link road – where no census of Slyfield industrial estate staff was taken prior to deciding which direction the road should go and a great deal of money wasted in the process.
- h) Claiming additional patronage on public transport, can only be achieved by asking non bus users how often and in which direction and where they want to travel to – no such exercise has been completed thus any claim to potential increase in patronage is spurious at best.
- i) Fining people between 20:00 and 06:00 is simple money raising and not road safety or maintaining bus flow. Bus priority Lanes serve no purpose if there are no buses to use them or traffic to block them – in this case the reduction of one third of road space for 24 hours when the road is acknowledged as under capacity in any respect. Thus, cannot be legally justified when the bus lane is only occupied for 11 minutes in the hour, while reducing road capacity and increasing pollution by delaying other traffic.
- j) Before Surrey CC changed the traffic flow and traffic light sequence the queues were caused by traffic coming off the A3 being a priority and yet the traffic on the Woking Road could be as far back as Slyfield and sometimes further back. When the traffic light sequence changed all traffic is held either at the lights under the A3 or on the A3 slip road, with none waiting at the Stoke Interchange lights.
- k) The majority of cars and small goods vehicles using the Woking Road in the morning either wish to turn left on to Parkway or go straight ahead onto Stoke Road, both sets of traffic will be forced to use one lane only where traffic is at its most heaviest causing more delays. The HGVs coming from Slyfield or Woking would typically go onto the A3 n/b or turn right at the lights onto Ladymead.
- l) The ongoing traffic situation will be much worse when the Weyside Urban Village is developed, where approximately 1,500 homes will have car access onto the Woking Road in three different locations, one being the roundabout which will also include all of the Bellfields traffic joining onto the Woking Road.
- m) Is this proposal based on an assumption that the 1,500+ residents of the Weyside Urban Village will not own cars? Typically, each two adult

household owns at least one car with the latest statistic for the South East is 1.4 cars per household. This means at least 2,000 additional cars will join the Woking Road traffic.

- n) Would you consider focusing on redirecting the Slyfield heavy goods traffic which wish to go onto the A3 by creating an access road at the back of Slyfield and adding a southbound slip road onto the A3 at Burpham? This would also improve the traffic flow on Ladymead.
- o) To ease the traffic heading onto Parkway or Stoke Road, could you not make the current bus lane a left turn only lane which directs traffic onto Parkway ?

Response to objections

- 16. It is not proposed to change the layout or length of the bus lane in Woking Road which runs between the Stoughton Road roundabout and the A3 off slip at Stoke Cross-roads.
- 17. At present the bus lane operates between 7-10am and 4-7pm Mon-Sat, these are typically the busiest and most congested times of the week. The lane helps buses bypass the southbound traffic queues approaching the A3 and Stoke Cross-roads.
- 18. Currently the following bus services operate along Woking Road and make use of the bus lane. The schedules shown are the current Covid timetables, but operators can increase the frequencies as and when passenger numbers increase further in the future.

Route 3s / 3 (Safeguard / Arriva): Bellfields – Guildford
Monday to Saturday – 3 buses per hour
Sunday – 1 bus per hour

Route 33 (Stagecoach): Woking – Mayford – Guildford
Monday to Friday – up to 5 buses per day
Saturday – 4 buses per day

Route 34 / 35 (Arriva): Guildford – Woking – Camberley
Monday to Friday – up to 3 buses per hour
Saturday and Sunday 1 bus per hour

Route 134 / 135 (Arriva): Guildford – Woking – Camberley
Tuesday to Friday (term time only) – 1 bus per day

- 19. Many of the objections and comments received during the consultation in regard to congestion and traffic flows along Woking Road reflect the pre pandemic peak hour traffic situation.
- 20. Extending the bus lane operating times to less busy times of the day should not generally have a significant impact on congestion as traffic will flow more easily. It is possible that changes to working patterns following the pandemic may lead to a longer-term reduction in peak travel demand creating a more even traffic profile through the day.

21. It is also anticipated that there will continue to be times when congestion occurs on the main corridors into Guildford outside of traditional peak travel times, given the proximity of this location to the A3.
22. It is not intended to deal with the wider traffic issues associated with Slyfield Industrial Estate and the A3 as they are beyond the scope of this report.
23. The longer operating hours will however benefit southbound buses and cyclists using this part of the A320.
24. The bus lane can be used by cyclists and also forms a useful link between the Wey towpath and cycle facilities at Stoke Cross-roads and Parkway. Extending the operational hours will improve this facility.
25. Bus usage and patronage has been in decline for a number of years and the current levels of usage in the pandemic are not representative. However, buses will form an important part of the local and national transport picture in the future as highlighted by the new Department for Transport (DfT) publication 'Bus Back Better' aimed at putting buses at the centre of the public transport network.
26. Surrey County Council are committed to provide enhanced bus priority to assist further development of bus services in the Guildford area, as travel patterns return further back to normal, and beyond. In respect of concerns regarding the impacts upon other traffic, any changes to their journey times would need to be weighed up and compared with the increased reliability of bus services, making them more attractive to existing and potential bus passengers.
27. Intelligent priority for buses at traffic signals can be considered at appropriate locations such as Stoke Cross-roads in the future to improve bus reliability, which is a proven key determinant in attracting more people on to buses.
28. Motor cycles are currently not permitted to use the bus lane and because the width of the lane is only 3m (the most that can be provided in the space available) the DfT do not permit motorcycles to share the lane with buses/cycles.
29. The Weyside Urban Village development is currently at planning application stage and its implications on the local highway network have not been finalised or agreed by SCC. There may be minor adjustments to the layout of the bus lane as a result of the development however the proposed extended operational hours should be taken into account as part of the planning process for the development.
30. It is therefore recommended that the bus lane operating hours are extended as advertised.

<u>RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS:</u>

31. Based on compliance surveys of the bus lane carried out in 2018/19 there is a risk that non bus traffic will use the lane to avoid queues approaching the Stoke Cross-roads. In this event bus lane enforcement cameras can be used in accordance with our Bus Lane Enforcement Policy.

Financial and Value for Money Implications

32. The estimated cost of changing the operating hours of the bus lane is £9,000. This cost comprises changing the bus lane signs and refreshing the road markings as well as the legal cost of amending the traffic regulation order. This will be met from the Highways revenue budget.

Section 151 Officer Commentary

33. Although significant progress has been made over the last twelve months to improve the Council's financial position, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2021/22 remains uncertain. The public health crisis has resulted in increased costs which may not be fully funded. With uncertainty about the ongoing impact of this and no clarity on the extent to which both central and local funding sources might be affected in the medium term, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority in order to ensure stable provision of services in the medium term. The costs associated with changing the operating hours of the bus lane scheme, and future operating costs, will be met from the existing service budget. As such, the Section 151 Officer supports the recommendation.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer

34. Surrey County Council has the power to enforce bus lane contraventions under section 144(3)(b) of the Transport Act 2000 and Schedule 8 of the Traffic Management Act 2004 and to delegate, if we so choose to Borough and District Councils. The delegation to Borough and District Councils is under powers in the Local Government Act 2000, together with associated regulations. The geographical area of Surrey has been designated as a Civil Enforcement Area for the purposes of enforcing bus lane contraventions.
35. Traffic orders for bus lanes can be introduced under sections 6 or 9 of the RTRA 1984 & in accordance with the procedures set out in the Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996 (as amended).
36. In exercising its powers under the 1984 Act the County Council has a duty to secure the expeditious, convenient and safe movement of vehicular and other traffic (including pedestrians) so far as practicable having regard to a number of matters including 'the effect on the amenities of any locality'... 'the importance of facilitating the passage of public service vehicles and of securing the safety and convenience of persons using or desiring to use such vehicles' and 'other matters appearing to be relevant'.
37. The Traffic Management Act 2004 requires the County Council to manage its road network to secure the expeditious movement of traffic on the authority's network (its 'Network Management Duty').

Equalities and Diversity

38. The recommendations in this report have no material impact on existing equality policy and therefore a full equalities assessment was not deemed necessary.
39. Before any changes are made on the highway, relevant and proportionate consultation was carried out with users and interested parties.

Environmental sustainability Implications:

40. Enhanced, convenient and punctual bus services can make them more attractive, helping to improve patronage and reduce vehicle emissions and congestion.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

41. If approved the changes to the bus lane will be implemented during the school summer holidays.
42. Bus lane enforcement will be evaluated in combination with the changes described above. This will be in accordance with our bus lane enforcement policy.

Contact Officer:

David Curl, Parking Strategy and Implementation Team Manager

Consulted:

SCC Passenger Transport Team
SCC Transport Policy Team
SCC Transport Development Team
Guildford Borough Council

Annexes:

None

Sources/background papers:

- Bus Lanes and Bus Lane Enforcement, Cabinet, 25 February 2020
- LEP Funded Schemes in Guildford, Guildford Joint Committee, 18 September 2019.
- Cabinet Member for Transport 9th June 2020 Bus Lane Operation in Guildford report.

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