

# Transport innovation in historic towns

Shrewsbury 28 -29 March 2007

After an introduction from **Brian Human, Chair of EHTF**, commenting on the fact that transport is and always has been crucial, **Councillor John Everall, of Shropshire County Council**, welcomed delegates to Shrewsbury. John noted the juxtaposition of 'innovation' and 'historic' which reminded us that historic towns are not museums but living breathing organisms and must be managed in such a way that they meet the needs of modern living. Solutions to problems are as varied as the issues, but must always be integrated and sometimes be radical, and always respect and enhance the unique character of historic towns for generations to come.



Historic towns - modern uses!

**Phil Crossland, Assistant Director of Traffic & Highways at Shropshire County Council**, talked about the challenges facing highways authorities: - competing priorities, funding, value for money, public consultation, engineering difficulties, maintenance and environment vs enforcement. He discussed each of these in detail in relation to transport management in Shropshire. With regard to demonstrating value for money, Phil said that some were easier than others. For example reduction of accidents and delays due to congestion can readily be measured and therefore a value put on them, but quality of life improvements and perceptions of safety were more difficult, as were enhancement of the environment, footfall, and modal shifts.

The results of public consultations reflected the diverse needs and requirements of different sectors – business, residents and visitors, but also only achieved a minority response. There were also issues around the level of understanding of consultation drawings by the public and the feedback to communities following consultation exercises. Engineering difficulties often result from the basic fact that the streets in historic towns were not designed for the motor vehicle, this alone limits the solutions available to modern problems such as access and HGV use. Historic buildings so close to the highway, are also subject to vibration, damage to cellars and often involve complex land ownership issues.

Maintenance brought with it another set of challenges including many associated with materials, budgets – including issues about whole-life costing, cleaning regimes, and safety and fitness for purpose.

Enhancement of the historic environment and enforcement do not mix, Phil asserted and gave several examples of direct conflict of ideas, asking "which is worse – indiscriminate parking or signs and lines?" He also offered the example of the archway with and without warning signs, which remains an unsolved problem in Shrewsbury.



**Rob Surl, Head of Special Projects, Shropshire County Council**, set the context of Shrewsbury, as a virtual island, which has meant that demand management has been part of his life for many years. Three major issues dominated his work: - congestion, parking control and access. The incomplete 'ring' road means that traffic is forced into the town centre, so road building is actually being seen as part of a holistic solution. Rob talked about Park & Ride, car parking, public transport and cycling provision in the town, together with the need for enhancement of the town centre environment. Although he felt that a great deal had already been achieved there were still some needs to be met: - the new NW relief road, funding for public transport and a way of coping with growth in a way which protects the natural and historic environment.



Shrewsbury

Turning to the Transport Innovation Fund, Rob said that there was over £2bn available only to local authorities which are able and willing to develop innovative transport packages which include tackling congestion, improving public transport and some form of road pricing. Shropshire County Council was one of ten authorities applying for the pump priming grant to help to develop TIF packages. He emphasised that at this stage there was no firm commitment from either party, and technical advice and financial support was being sought for very detailed studies and research. The TIF study would look at a road user charge, better public transport, environmental improvements and the relief road – for which a preferred route has now been agreed, at a cost of £50-70m. Roadspace re-allocation forms part of the plans, in particular along the river side – reinvigorating the currently 'dead' space.

The long term plan is to provide world class public transport with more frequent, less polluting buses, smaller buses for narrow streets, linked journeys – not just to and from the town centre, further Park & Ride provision, mini-interchanges – for more flexible journeys, better integration between rural and urban journeys and smart payment systems for all forms of transport.

On road charging, Rob said that a 'London-style' system was not envisaged, as its aims were different. The plan was for a scheme which was simple and easy to use, low cost, linked to discounts on car parking costs, from which all income was re-invested in transport, which provided high quality alternative routes and transport, and was flexible in order to meet local needs. Durham and Stockholm, he said, had already proved that schemes in smaller towns can work as part of a whole management strategy

**Graham Hughes, Director of Sustainable Infrastructure at Cambridgeshire County Council**, began by saying that there are no magic solutions but he could demonstrate what Cambridgeshire is currently doing in relation to TIF and what other Authorities might consider. He said that the pressures on the County are enormous: 47,000 new homes and a predicted population increase of 83,000 between 1999 and 2016. The transport implications are such that doing nothing is not an option, and change is essential to preserve the economy and the character of Cambridge. Since the establishment of the Long Term Traffic Strategy in 1990, considerable progress has already been made, in stabilising traffic entering Cambridge, increasing bus patronage, the use of Park & Ride and cycling. This has been achieved through bus priorities, a real time bus information system, pedestrianisation, a guided busway, investment in Park &

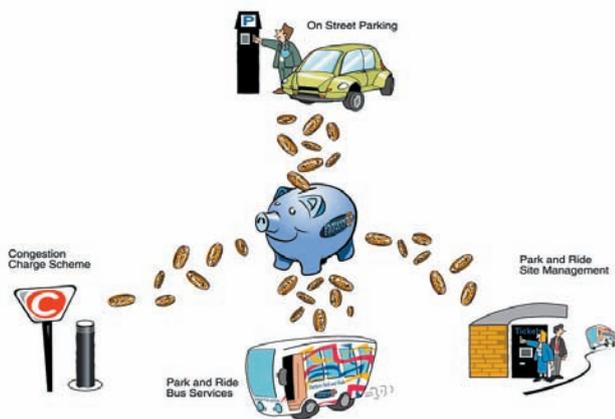
Ride, close working with the bus company, a 'travel for work' programme and pioneering rising bollards to safeguard the town centre. Graham also explained the modelling which had been used to shape future policies.



High tech industries are vital to the economy of Cambridge

The TIF study required £1.4 pump-priming funding and would tackle congestion and include a package of measures for a) cycling, walking, public transport and highways and b) demand management strategies which include road charging. He explained the objectives in tackling congestion, safety, access, the environment and the economy and the principles of the study – all of which must be 'best in class'. This should achieve a 10% reduction in traffic despite 30% growth – equating to a 40% reduction. The development of this involves stakeholder involvement, political work and close work with the DfT. The next steps would draw more details from the modelling and refine the proposals. He was sure that compromises would have to be made and that many more historic towns would be facing similar challenges in the future, but everyone is in agreement that something has to be done to change current practices.

**Roger Elphick, Head of Highway Management at Durham County Council**, described the similarities and differences between Shrewsbury and Durham and the Demand Management Strategy which had been in place since 2000 and was revenue neutral – ie: self financing, a big 'plus' for the public.



The parking strategy had diverted long stay out of the City centre but had not solved the problem of congestion. He emphasised the need to balance parking options and to provide high quality facilities. The road charging scheme introduced in 2002 was the first in the country and was part of a carefully considered scheme with measures to exempt residents and accommodate loading needs etc. Although Saddler Street had not been pedestrianised, traffic had been reduced by 90% as a result.

There were lessons which could be learnt and shared from the experiences in Durham, which included:

- Strong political leadership and officer commitment
- Public acceptance of the need for action
- Access charge seen as preferable to a total ban on vehicular access
- Public transport improvements preceded the introduction of charging
- Involvement of partners
- Widespread consultation and publicity campaign

Roger emphasised simplicity – of the scheme and the technology, and the need for a local solution to a local problem. There remain problems of congestion and environmental impact which need to be addressed, which is where the TIF comes in.



Durham: the charging point on exit

The aim of the fund is to support smarter, innovative, local and regional transport strategies for demand management such as road pricing and better public transport, with innovative mechanisms that raise new funds together with the funding of regional, inter-regional and local schemes. Funding will be available from 2008/09 with £290m in 2008/09 growing to £2,500m in 2014/15.

For Durham the common objectives of work programmes will be:

- to determine locations of congestion
- to identify key development/land use pressures
- modelling of future options
- establishing local future vision for transport
- a substantive bid for TIF funding
- involvement on national Road Pricing Liaison Group

A package of travel and transportation improvements will deal with future congestion and ensure the future vitality and viability of the city.

The package will consider options including:

- more park and ride services
- enhanced public transport
- reallocation of road space
- better facilities for pedestrians and cyclists
- demand management measures - including further road user charging
- highway infrastructure improvements
- linkage with new Vision for Durham City

Roger considered that the key strengths of the Durham bid were its proven track record on innovation and delivery, on sharing best practice and on commitment – politically and from all stakeholders.

There is a vision for Durham in 2020 which involves further objectives for improving transport and accessibility which include significantly reducing the amount of through traffic and congestion, changing the balance of vehicular and pedestrian needs in the City, providing better alternatives to the private car and examine further restrictions or disincentives to its use,

reallocation of road space, and improved bus reliability. The Visioning exercise gives Durham City a unique opportunity to take best advantage of the Transport Innovation Fund.

Before adjourning for coffee, Brian thanked the speakers and commented on the success levels of Park & Ride, not many years since it was thought to be an outlandish solution to traffic management!

**Colin Richards, Conservation Officer at South Shropshire District Council**, painted a picture of Ludlow's move from a quiet market town more or less unchanged from the last period of prosperity in the late 19th century, to its 'discovery' in the early 1990s. He said that as the townscape received much attention the spaces in between, the roads, pavements and market areas, appeared greatly neglected and in need of enhancement. The inequity for users of the town centre and the 21st century demands on a 12th century townscape began to compromise the town's environment and investment in the historic buildings needed to be matched with investment in their surroundings.

A Conservation Area Partnership scheme jointly funded by Shropshire County Council, South Shropshire District Council and via English Heritage the Heritage Lottery Fund, provided an opportunity to contribute monies to an enhanced floorscape design within the overall plans for improved traffic management in Ludlow. A guiding principle for the design ethos was simplicity of form and layout, retention of the varied palette of historic surface materials where they survived and the use of high quality natural materials on the pavements and other pedestrian areas. Because the town's streets were subject to use by slow moving heavy goods vehicles and buses exerting great torque or leverage on surface materials, bituminous macadam was considered best suited for the task.

Despite public frustration at disruption inherent in undertaking the enhancement works, the scheme has been well received and acted as a catalyst for further private investment in conservation projects. The project also served to establish a working partnership between officers and members of all authorities and their advisors, setting a dialogue and team identity which may otherwise not have occurred.



Ludlow market square

Colin said that "In a town such as Ludlow traffic management involves imposed change on established human behaviour where restriction of freedom on the individual is imposed for the collective wellbeing of both residents and visitors alike. Such measures invariably attract great public interest, input and often great opposition." A strong team is required to support the project through this.

He explained some of the details of the enhancement schemes and the problems of implementation and enforcement, if fewer signs and lines are used. He suggested that **"The Ludlow experience clearly illustrates the need to develop a category of highway regulations, which are more**

**appropriate to historic towns and heritage locations.** Such an approach must have legal authority to be enforceable but must be less strident in terms of physical presence. It may be that information can be provided at the entrance to designated areas which puts greater emphasis on individual responsibility and culpability rather than the attitude that the controlling authority must relay, reinforce, then repeat traffic advice to a point where significant duplication and overkill occurs. Such a change in direction can only occur with the direct engagement of the Department of Transport and in such instance the English Historic Towns Forum is ideally placed to lobby on behalf of all its members and so avoid the experience that has occurred in Ludlow."

He concluded that although the economy of Ludlow was buoyant, it was also fragile. 'Solutions' must be sustainable and happen with the consent of stakeholders.

**Paul Russell, Town Clerk for Ludlow Town Council**, considered that, if asked, people in every town would site parking and traffic as a problem. But self regulation is difficult due to our 'marriage' to the car. However, solutions must be found and, he considered, can only be successfully developed with full participation.



Ludlow has parking & traffic problems!

From his experience in Ludlow, Paul said that lessons could be learned:

- aspirations do not normally meet practical implementation
- interpretation of highway regulations can have a significant impact on the street environment
- communication by all parties needs to be maintained constantly.

With regard to communication he said that "honesty is a integral part of implementing a successful scheme and to maintain the confidence and trust of all parties involved; no matter how much consultation is carried out someone complains and consultation needs to be full, frank and clear".

He concluded that there needs to be a degree of flexibility but that ultimately someone must make a final decision. He agreed with Colin that "a strong case needs to be made on behalf of historic towns to be treated as both unique and special cases from a highway point of view".

**Jeremy Salisbury, Acting Principal Engineer (Projects) at Shropshire County Council**, explained his role as engineer to the client for the Oswestry Town Centre regeneration scheme and the problems of the medieval town centre, which faced competition from other centres, had narrow pavements, hazards for pedestrians, congestion problems, a poor quality environment and illegal parking. The aims of the scheme were to make the town a safer place for pedestrians and vehicles; to improve the attractiveness of the town centre which in turn would raise levels of trading, increase footfall and enhance the conservation area. This, with no significant increase in traffic on residential streets and to provide for people with disabilities.

The scheme centred on the widening of pavements, creating loading bays, and informal ramped crossings and the timed closure of one street and other pedestrian crossing facilities. Provision for blue badge holders and loading was also a

crucial part of the scheme. The scheme took three years to design and was carried out in three phases – one street at a time, in short sections, carried out outside of working hours, in order to minimise disruption to traders. Even so there was a variety of engineering difficulties to be dealt with including: site debris, pedestrian access, maintaining deliveries, traffic signal controller, old cellars and traffic diversions. There was a public enquiry in September 2005, due to the impact on deliveries but the scheme was upheld by the Inspector, with certain additional provisions.

Graham concluded some important points for consideration when approaching such a scheme:

- Loading
- Blue Badge Holders
- Construction Phasing
- Competent Contractors
- Constant Liaison with Traders required
- Sympathetic Design
- High Quality Materials
- Holistic approach to the needs of all users

He showed images of Cross Street before and after completion of the scheme and considered that a number of benefits had been gained which included better facilities for users of wheelchairs and pushchairs, freedom of movement for pedestrians, increases in visitor numbers, seating provision and safety as well as visual enhancement. He added that engagement with traders and blue badge holders at the design stage is essential and contractors must be of a very high standard.



Cross Street, Oswestry before and after

**Colin Davis, consultant of CJDA Ltd**, explained his role in the Oswestry scheme – from the design point of view. He emphasised the need for an interdisciplinary team and to look at the whole town- not just the centre. He said that the difficulties with balancing pedestrian and car use were not new, but went back over a hundred years. He considered that car parks should be nice, green places and that small towns should be made up of memorable spaces linked by roads, passages and streets. Road width could be used to indicate where a car can be parked and cross roads could be more than just traffic junctions. The courtesy crossings, pioneered in Shrewsbury in 1994, could also be more widely used.

Showing images from 1972 and '73 Colin illustrated the fact that for more than thirty years some inspired traffic engineers had 'got it right', but the movement had not spread, although he now welcomed the Manual for Streets which goes some way to guiding practice for the future. He insisted, for example, that roads were safer without guardrails. He implored practitioners involved in the design of traffic schemes to consider what it looks like, as well as how it functions. At last the Ministry of Transport has said that 'streets are for people not just traffic'.

So strong is his belief in interdisciplinary working that Colin has set up inter-disciplinary training in order to bridge the 'culture gap' between organisations involved in all areas impacting on the streetscape. He also runs a Public Realm Foundation Course 'to develop skills in the production of memorable places and competence in local traffic engineering and highway design'.



'every street is a public space'

Brian thanked all of the speakers which he said gave a good picture of the issues and some potential solutions, as well as examples of 'how it is done' from those with first hand experience.

After lunch, delegates enjoyed guided tours of the Shrewsbury schemes and an opportunity to talk in small groups with the expert speakers.

The conference coincided with the launch event in London of the "**Manual for Streets**" published by the Department for Transport. Brian gave the EHTF response to the document, which can be seen in full on [www.ehtf.org.uk](http://www.ehtf.org.uk)

He broadly welcomed the document suggesting that its application to residential streets could be applied more widely in historic town centres.

He invited discussion with speakers and delegates, which included comments on:

- the change to guidance on forward visibility – more = higher speeds!
- the move to more driver and pedestrian responsibility
- creating more active frontages
- the need to champion the document

Copies of the presentations are available on [www.ehtf.org.uk](http://www.ehtf.org.uk) or by calling 0117 975 0459.



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