

Section 6

Connecting People to Places: The Importance of Transport for the Borough

Transport is so fundamental to connecting people, businesses and services; whether it is connecting our residents to jobs, education, leisure or community facilities, or connecting visitors and residents to our vast open green spaces and sports stadiums. There are transport connections associated with almost everything we do, and this section will explore these links to provide a better understanding of the opportunities, themes and joint values that need to be exploited to provide wider benefits as a result of transport enhancements and improvements.

Economic Development

Transport's role is hugely important for connecting people to opportunities - getting residents to work, education and training, connecting businesses with suppliers and customers, as well as providing easy access for tourists and visitors to get to events, leisure activities and shopping. The borough's economic success will depend on a well-connected, integrated and attractive transportation system, so that people will choose us a place to live, invest in, set up a business or visit. We have to make the experience of being here enjoyable and of good quality, and ensure that people can travel to where they want to and need to go.

Businesses benefit from more efficient logistics (road or rail), access to new markets for their goods and services, improved productivity and the ability to use a wide pool of labour from local communities. Transport is also a major employer in its own right, and there are numerous opportunities for transport related employment within the borough.

Good transport can help promote tourism in the borough. Improving the service and integration of our transport networks with key visitor destinations such as, our Greenheart sites, Leigh Sports Village, and the DW Stadium, is important. We need to ensure that there are added benefits for improving travel choices for these key visitor centres including better access, connections, interchange, information and convenience.

Providing good access into and around our town centres is crucial to their viability and vitality. Leigh has benefitted recently from car parking improvements and the arrival of the Leigh Salford Manchester Busway in 2015 will bring added benefits. Wigan town centre will benefit from better integration of buses and trains through the Wigan Hub and from improved car parking provision. Similarly Ashton and our smaller town centres rely on good quality car parking and good bus services.

Transport is crucial in getting Wigan people into work and keeping them in employment. When seeking employment opportunities, transport choices, routes and costs play a deciding factor and therefore we need to ensure that the transport provision helps and supports people to make life choices that improve their quality of life particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Health and Well-Being

The borough experiences high levels of health deprivation and significant health inequalities, with areas of multiple deprivation being concentrated primarily in the inner parts of the borough.

In the 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation, 29 of the borough's more deprived areas were in the 10% most deprived in England, with the 3 most deprived areas being in the Norley Hall, Worsley Hall, and Marsh Green areas of Wigan. Key health issues for the borough include:

- life expectancy levels that are 2 years below the England average for men and women; and
- high levels of obesity for adults and increasingly more children, and further concerns with regards to obesity levels that are set to rise to 80% for adults and 50% for children by 2050.

Transport has a key role to play in addressing health inequalities in the borough. Increased opportunities for active travel and for reducing the negative environmental impacts of transport, will help.

People need good access and connections to jobs, training, food, goods and services to enable them to have healthier lifestyles. People also need good access to health services, both within and outside of the borough.



Active Travel

Lack of physical activity leads to poor physical fitness and can contribute to obesity, cardiovascular disease, strokes, diabetes and some cancers, as well as to poorer mental wellbeing. Cycling and walking (sometimes referred to as modes of 'active travel') are very simple ways for people to incorporate more physical activity into their lives and are very important for increasing access to jobs and services for many people. When replacing trips by car they can also help reduce emissions and ease local congestion.

Road Safety

While the Borough's road safety record has improved in recent years, there is still more that we can do. It is critical that efforts to address road safety problems involve work across organisations and disciplines, including educational, engineering and enforcement activity. There is a significant amount of good practice that has been developed locally and this is reflected in the Borough's Road Safety Strategy.



Air Quality

In recent years air quality in the borough has improved but there are still some unacceptably high levels of pollution in some areas/ In Wigan, pollution caused by road traffic is of particular concern, as around 10% of the population live directly along main roads. Serious health problems, such as respiratory or cardiovascular illness, and even premature death, are associated with air pollution; they are most commonly felt by sensitive and vulnerable groups, due to their age and/or general state of health.

New road vehicle exhaust emissions standards have successfully led to reductions in road transport pollutant emissions, and when the latest standards are introduced, new road vehicles are expected to emit over 90% fewer solid particles than current vehicles (air pollutants are thought to be most damaging to human health). However, in many urban areas, road transport is still a major contributor to excessive levels of nitrogen dioxide, and particulate matter remains a health concern, even in areas compliant with European limits.

Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) have been established to monitor pollution and help in the work towards achieving government air quality objectives. All AQMAs in Wigan follow the routes of main roads and motorways, as this is where the majority of emissions occur. The AQMA Action Plan is integrated within the GM LTP due to its importance.

Reducing congestion, especially for the most polluting vehicles, is the key to achieving better air quality. Technology has already helped to reduce the impact of the sheer volume of cars and the proportionately higher contribution that larger, heavier vehicles make.



New electric vehicles technologies can reduce this further in the future. Therefore, a priority for now needs to be tackling the total number of trips by reducing the need to make them in the first place, and by shifting as much as possible of the remainder to less polluting modes. For private cars, this means shifting trips to public transport, cycling and walking. Larger and heavier vehicles, such as buses and lorries, need protecting from congestion, through priority schemes, decarbonising (hybrid vehicles and alternative fuels), or modal shift (from bus to rail, from lorry to rail or canal).

While noise is an inevitable consequence of road transport infrastructure, it is also an unwanted intrusion that adversely impacts on quality of life, health and well-being, and it also imposes a substantial cost burden. As 10% of the borough's residents live directly on main roads, traffic noise is a particular concern locally.

Climate Change

Wigan Borough's challenge is to make its own contribution to the national target to reduce UK carbon emissions by 80% by 2050 (and at least 34% by 2020) and to develop climate-resilient local services, places and people. The transport strategy has an important role to play in achieving these ambitious targets.

Although CO2 emissions from buses, lorries and taxis are proportionately more per vehicle, their combined impact is still lower than the total for cars. There is some scope for modal shift but our efforts in this area need to prioritise efficiency, through technology (promotion of electric / hybrid vehicles), improving driving skills, and sustainable travel priority in congested locations.

In adapting to climate change our transport network needs to be resilient to extreme weather conditions. That way, we can keep the Borough moving and provide people with transport choices, whatever the conditions.

Sustainable Communities

Transport can have a major impact on communities; affecting social interactions and community cohesion. Pedestrian friendly streets create opportunities for people to meet and interact, helping to create community networks.

Traditional transport planning tends to emphasise vehicle mobility improvements, for example, streets designed primarily to maximise traffic flow, and the built environment designed to maximise parking convenience. There is now increasing appreciation of the importance of sustainable communities.

We now realise however that roads often play multiple roles as both travel corridors and places for community interaction and many communities now favour highway improvements that reduce traffic speeds and limit traffic volumes, to help improve and enhance their local environment.

Social Inclusion and Equality

Everyone, but particularly people with disabilities, older people and families with young children will benefit from an accessible environment which is safe, easy to use and well designed. According to the 2011 Census, 24% of households in the borough do not own a car, which has gone down 3% since the last Census in 2001. But this figure varies widely across the borough: for instance, the highest and lowest figures of non-car ownership by ward are for Ince (44% do not own a car) and Winstanley (8% do not own a car) respectively. However, there is even wider variation between deprived and affluent areas within one ward in the Borough, Wigan Central; only 4% of the residents in Whitley do not own a car, compared to 65% of residents not owning a car in Scholes. We must ensure that we consider everyone's transport needs, issues and requirements, and provide better access for all.

Although 44% of the borough's households have access to one car, this provides similar restricted transport opportunities for certain members of these families, especially when they travel to different destinations. When considering the transport needs of the future, we need to consider the impact of solutions on all users. The concept of "Universal Design" refers to transport projects that accommodate the widest range of potential users and supports accessibility, community cohesion and equity. This approach not only requires an inclusive design process, it requires a form of user audit process, to see how well a given design meets the needs of each group, including users of each modes of transport, especially those with disabilities or other special needs.



Legislation makes it compulsory for the council and others working on the highway to take into account the needs of vulnerable groups. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 introduced measures aimed at ending the discrimination which many disabled people faced. Now the Equality Act 2010 requires that anyone providing a service to the public, such as a shop or restaurant, think ahead and make reasonable changes to their buildings to improve access. Reasonable changes are required wherever disabled customers or potential customers would otherwise be at a substantial disadvantage. This is another important factor for the development of the transport strategy in ensuring that we improve accessibility for all.

Integration

One of the biggest attractions of travelling by car is that it is direct and requires no interchange, except for short walks from the parking space to the final destination. However, developing a more diverse transport system where the alternatives are attractive requires a much higher degree of integration than we have at present. Therefore, minimising the need to change or finding ways to significantly reduce the time and cost of doing so is important.

One of the ways we could reduce interchange barriers is by bringing services and modes together in one place. Delivering the Wigan Transport Hub (rail, bus and cycle interchange in Wigan Town Centre) will provide significantly improved interchange facilities. More work is needed to investigate the viability of connected information services and possibilities for extending services to key destinations, such as hospitals, and large retail and/or employment areas located just outside the town centre area, which are currently poorly served by public transport.

The UK passenger railway network is now carrying more passengers than at any time since World War Two, and on a much smaller network. This rise in patronage has led to a need for improved access to and from, and interchange at rail stations. For example, increased car parking, better bus/rail integration, more attractive cycle parking / storage facilities, accessible pedestrian routes, and improving the wider "public realm" around them. While these initiatives are all extremely valuable, they tend to be led by different stakeholders, on different timescales with different objectives. Station Travel Plans could bring together all the stakeholders with an interest in rail stations (rail industry, local authorities, passenger groups, bus and taxi operators, cyclists and others) to develop and agree common objectives and a coordinated, integrated approach to delivering them.

Park and ride sites can also help to improve interchange and can encourage modal shift by removing all or part of the car trip. However, locations need to be chosen carefully, as park and ride can encourage people to drive further (e.g. to take advantage of cheaper rail fares in Greater Manchester), rather than walk or cycle to their local station or stop, or even generate modal shift away from sustainable modes to cars creating localised congestion issues.

We also need to encourage and support the adoption of an integrated ticketing or 'smartcard' system, similar to the 'Oyster' card in London. It will reduce journey time by eliminating the purchase and checking of tickets, especially when used across more than one mode or in different administrative areas. It will also be more attractive to users by reducing costs automatically, optimising fares and charges, without the user having to negotiate complex systems.

Better integration across transport modes will inevitably lead to a more complex network. However, simplicity is the key to attracting more patronage. Therefore, the networks need to be easy to understand and use, so information needs to be accurate, up-to-date, and available across a variety of media, and its interpretation needs to be quick and intuitive. We already have systems in place but most are designed around one mode at a time; these systems also need integrating to ensure consistency and continuity, offering a seamless and convenient experience.

Development and Traffic Growth

Through our land use planning role we can shape our communities and ensure that they are well connected. We can control new development and focus growth on areas that are or can be best accessed by a variety of transport modes. We must ensure that our transport networks and services integrate, complement and enhance the environmental, social and cultural aspects of our communities.

Developments that generate significant traffic movements need to be located where the need to travel will be minimised and the use of sustainable transport modes can be maximised protect and exploit opportunities for the use of sustainable transport modes for the movement of goods or people.

The Core Strategy of the Council's Local Plan, complements this transport strategy in this regard directing the bulk of new development to the inner area of the borough where there are more sustainable transport choices. All developments that generate significant amounts of movement will need to be supported by a Transport Statement or Transport Assessment and a key tool to facilitate sustainable transport will be through a Travel Plan.

We need to plan new development areas effectively, so that we ensure that they are in the right place, to reduce the need to travel by private car and maximise the opportunities for connecting public transport, cycling and walking, with residential, employment / business sites and other key destinations while also exploring opportunities for more efficient logistics.

Developers need to work closely with us to ensure that their proposals are policy compliant and to help maximise opportunities for sustainable transport choices to be incorporated into their master plans and designs, so that future occupants have well-connected, attractive and accessible transport choices from the start.

We also need to ensure that they work in partnership with us, so that they take full account of the potential impacts on the neighbouring road network and provide designs and improvements to help the efficiency of the local networks, including accessibility and connectivity with local services, amenities and facilities. For example, the designs need to ensure that there is sufficient access for buses into the heart of major new developments, cycle storage is provided together with changing facilities at commercial developments, and that easy, safe and accessible walking and cycling links are made to public transport access points, community facilities, schools, and the open countryside.

The Community Infrastructure Levy presents an opportunity for bringing transport infrastructure projects forward and the Council will need to have this in place by 2014. The Council and partners will need to be co-ordinated in respect of making robust bids for those public sector funds that can support transport projects such as Regional Growth Fund and the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. By capturing the value that development can bring in helping us travel more sustainably in the future, we need to have a clear and robust plan of what we want to achieve as early as possible in the development process. We also need to need to ensure those aspirations are rigidly implemented irrespective of how long or in how many phases the full development takes.

Transport Modelling and Studies

In 2011, Greater Manchester Transportation Unit (GMTU) and Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive (GMPTE), now Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM), were commissioned to undertake some transport modelling work to help provide a more robust understanding of how our road networks are performing now and in the future (2026) following the proposed programme of development identified within the Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy.

The modelling work was followed on from an earlier comprehensive examination into the impacts of LDF development options and potential complementary transport infrastructure proposals, to understand the impacts of various scenarios and to determine their viability. This work not only helped to identify the immediate impacts on the highway network, but also helped to identify locational influences on mode split and the associated impacts on air quality.

Traffic growth was estimated using forecasts from the Greater Manchester Forecasting Model (GMFM) released in September 2010, and for goods vehicles, growth was estimated using rates from the National Transport Model (NTM). In accordance with the methodology agreed with Wigan Council and the Highways Agency, GMTU interrogated the TRICS database to determine the modal splits for a variety of land uses and site locations.

The anticipated growth in traffic over the five-year period is expected to increase total travel time and total travel distance by all vehicles on the road network. Adding the LDF development sites into the modelling work, showed a comparatively smaller additional impact on the road networks to the overall anticipated traffic growth.

In addition to the high level modelling work commissioned, this work was complemented by an initial transport assessment for each of the proposed development sites in terms of its ability or potential to align with the objectives and principles of this transport strategy, opportunities for connecting to sustainable transport choices and potential impacts on the network as a result of car based trip generation.

For the borough as a whole, the modelling work forecasts that carbon dioxide emissions are to increase, while both nitrogen oxides and PM10 particulates are anticipated to fall, reflecting improvements in engine efficiency and technology. This all needs further consideration as we reflect on this modelling evidence in line with the other work being undertaken, together with comments from our communities and businesses.