

Report to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport
Report submitted by: Head of Service - Highways
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Part I

Electoral Division affected:
Preston City

Preston City Centre Traffic Management
(Appendices 'A' – 'C' refer)

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Executive Summary

Traffic congestion in and around Preston city centre has been a regular occurrence for some years. The improvement scheme for the Fishergate Public Realm has been welcomed and now provides a much more attractive and friendly space for those coming into the city centre. However, there continues to be an intermittent problem of congestion along Fishergate with a particular issue of delays for vehicles exiting the car parks serving the St George's shopping centre, the Fishergate shopping centre and Preston railway station. The delays created by the volume of traffic have an impact on Fishergate, with queueing traffic restricting the volume of traffic moving through the Lune Street/Fishergate/Chapel Street junctions.

This report sets out proposals to introduce traffic orders to manage the traffic flows in the city centre during the busy trading period from the end of October through to early January.

The proposals are set out on the plans at Appendices 'A' and 'B'.

Recommendation

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport is recommended to approve that;

- (i) the experimental order for the prohibition of the right turn from Butler Street is made permanent by the making of a Traffic Regulation Order,
- (ii) a new experimental order for the introduction of the bus gate on Fishergate between Butler Street and Corporation Street is made,

- (iii) a new experimental order for the introduction of a bus street on Fishergate between Mount Street and Corporation Street operating between the hours of 11am and 6pm is made
- (iv) a new experimental order to reverse the one-way operation of Mount Street so that traffic travels in a southerly direction from Fishergate to Garden Street is made,
- (v) a new experimental order to make Garden Street one-way from Mount Street to Winckley Square is made,
- (vi) an experimental traffic regulation order is made to relocate the disabled parking bays from Theatre Street to Fox Street and to introduce a goods vehicle loading restriction on Theatre Street in place of the existing disabled parking spaces,
- (vii) an operating procedure for camera enforcement of bus lanes, set out at Appendix 'C', is approved and Notice is published under the relevant statutory Regulations before enforcement commences, and
- (viii) the proposals are funded from the 2016/17 Cycling Safety unprogrammed allocation within the highways capital programme.

Background and Advice

Traffic congestion in and around Preston city centre has been a regular occurrence for some years. It is recognised that in order to build on the investment currently being made as part of the City Deal programme, action needs to be taken to address the concerns over the congestion and to encourage people to continue to visit Preston.

There are proposals being developed to mitigate the traffic issues in the longer term but it is recognised that there is a need to do something for the short term to provide a measure of relief for city centre visitors.

The improvement scheme for the Fishergate Public Realm has been welcomed and now provides a much more attractive and friendly space for those coming into the city centre. Surveys have shown that those visiting Preston now find it a much more pleasant environment and are pleased with the results.

Whilst competing traffic movements are generally accommodated by the 'give and take' nature of the road layout, there continues to be an intermittent problem of congestion along Fishergate with a particular issue of delays for vehicles exiting the car parks serving the St George's shopping centre, the Fishergate shopping centre and Preston railway station.

The delays created by the volume of traffic have an impact on Fishergate with queueing traffic restricting the volume of traffic moving through the Lune Street/Fishergate/Chapel Street junctions. Delays occur at times of increased

shopping demand and particularly from the October half-term through to the festive shopping period. These delays occurred prior to the Fishergate Improvement scheme and have continued after the completion of the scheme.

There is an established temporary traffic management arrangement to try and mitigate the delays. This established arrangement is primarily an experimental prohibition of the right turn from Butler Street onto Fishergate. The reason for this turning prohibition is that the turning movement blocks the left turn from Butler Street as drivers wait for a gap in the traffic heading west along Fishergate which is joined by traffic that is coming from Corporation Street.

During busy periods the volume of traffic coming from these directions limits the availability of suitable gaps for right turning traffic, hence the blocking of the left turn movement. Also the volume of traffic making the right turn movement onto Fishergate/Corporation Street is such that it queues back from Ringway as far as Fishergate, further limiting the right turn opportunities. A significant proportion of drivers ignore the prohibition and continue to try to turn right, causing queueing on Butler Street and this adds to the delays experienced by drivers leaving the car parks.

Historically, Police officers have attended this junction to provide traffic management at peak times during the festive period prior to the implementation of the Fishergate public realm improvements.

Proposals

Prohibition of right turn from Butler Street to Fishergate

It is proposed that the present experimental Order be made permanent. An experimental order has been introduced to prohibit the right turn from Butler Street into Fishergate. The prohibition is signed in accordance with the regulations but approximately 25% of drivers are not obeying the signs and continue to make the right turn movement. Whilst this is not having a significant impact at this time, as traffic levels increase later in the year it will contribute to delays. It is not a priority for police enforcement due to limited resources.

It is believed nevertheless that the prohibition has had a value in assisting the traffic management round the City and in particular how the ring road functions and is a prohibition which should remain in place.

The introduction of a bus gate on Fishergate at the pedestrian crossing point between the Butler Street and Corporation Street junctions (see below) will be a further measure at this location. It is proposed that the experimental order currently in place to prohibit the right turn from Butler Street onto Fishergate will be made permanent and a new experimental order for the proposed bus gate will be introduced.

Fishergate Eastbound bus gate at the Butler Street/Fishergate junction (the plan at Appendix 'A' refers)

It is recognised that enforcement of the right turn prohibition above is difficult and that drivers need to be discouraged from ignoring the prohibition. Without the enforcement being a priority for the Police, it is considered that the Highway authority try to put in place some discouragement which can be enforced.

Consideration was given to extending the existing eastbound bus lane on Fishergate. The existing traffic regulation order would have to be amended and would be subject to public consultation. In the event of objections, these would have to be considered by the Cabinet Member and could delay or prevent the introduction of the amendments. This would mean that there would be no changes to the existing arrangements in time for the build up of traffic in the period leading up to Christmas. Taking this into account it is proposed that a bus gate be introduced on an experimental basis.

A bus gate is a short length of bus lane through which only buses and authorised vehicles can pass and at this location it will be buses and cycles only. All prohibited vehicles, including taxis, will have to turn left. This will then allow the use of bus lane enforcement cameras to enforce against those who are not permitted to pass the bus gate. The use of bus lane cameras was introduced as part of the Pennine Reach transport project and these cameras can now be used throughout Lancashire. It is proposed that certain vehicles will be permitted use of the bus gate and the Order proposed will reflect these authorisations.

Fishergate westbound bus street proposed (plan at Appendix 'B' refers)

At a meeting with stakeholders in January, a proposal to restrict traffic on Fishergate between Chapel Street and Corporation Street was discussed. In exploring this option, a number of factors have been considered including access to premises for deliveries, access for residents directly affected, access for hackney carriages, access for buses and access for cyclists and parking for blue badge holders.

The scheme would introduce a bus street on Fishergate from the junction with Mount Street to the junction with Corporation Street. The bus street would permit use by hackney carriages and cycles and would operate from 11am to 6pm and no access for loading will be permitted. In addition to this a small number of vehicles will be expressly authorised by the County Council to access the land off Theatre Street.

Outside of the restricted hours vehicles will continue to access this section of Fishergate and it will provide for loading/unloading of good vehicles delivering to premises. The times of operation are the same as the times of operation of the closure of Guildhall Street to provide consistency.

In order to allow the bus street to operate effectively, the direction of the one-way operation of Mount Street will be reversed. This will also require a one-way order to be re-introduced on Garden Street from East Cliff Road to Winckley Square.

The existing parking for blue badge holders on Theatre Street will be relocated to Fox Street, close to the junction of Fishergate.

The proposals will be introduced through an experimental traffic regulation order which allows for the introduction of the measures with a consultation period covering the first 6 months of its operation. During the following 6 months, the operation of the measures is reviewed along with any consultation responses that are received. At this point a report will be prepared setting out the review of the scheme, a response to the consultation responses and making recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport as to whether the scheme should be made permanent in its installed form, amended or removed.

The traffic modelling work that has been undertaken indicates that the volume of traffic in the evening peak will be reduced on Fishergate at the Corporation Street and Butler Street junctions, leading to reductions in queue lengths and delays at these locations. However, the traffic that can no longer use this route will be diverted to other roads on the networks leading to some increased queuing at other junctions but this will have less of an impact as it is distributed across a wider network.

Modelling has shown that the proposals for Fishergate are not sustainable when the bus station redevelopment is completed and this will be further exacerbated by the redevelopment of the market area. Acknowledging that measures need to be introduced to mitigate the congestion during the festive period this year, the Fishergate proposals will be introduced on an experimental basis as a short-term measure whilst longer term element proposals are identified to mitigate the volume of conflicting traffic at the Corporation Street/Fishergate/Butler Street junction.

Camera enforcement of bus lanes (enforcement protocol at Appendix 'C' refers)

The enforcement of bus gates, bus lanes and bus streets (collectively referred to as bus lanes below) using cameras has been introduced into Lancashire. In December 2015 approval was sought from the Secretary of State for the penalty charge level of £60 for bus lane enforcement in Lancashire. Said approval was given in February 2016. Following publication of the relevant statutory Notice, enforcement may commence and this allows the use of cameras to record images of vehicles using the bus lane. Vehicles that are permitted to use the bus lane will not have a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) issued to the owner. For vehicles that are not permitted to use the bus lane it will provide for a PCN to be issued against the owner of the vehicle. The images recorded will be reviewed by a Civil Enforcement Officer and the vehicle in the image will be checked against a list of vehicle registration marks that have been notified to the authority and recorded as belonging to permitted vehicles. The detailed procedure proposed for Lancashire is attached at Appendix 'C'.

Changes to Traffic movement and loading in Mount Street, Garden Street and Theatre Street.

The Orders proposed for these streets are required to facilitate the changes as detailed above

Consultations

Meetings have been held with stakeholders including Preston Business Improvement District (BID), Preston Chamber of Commerce, Preston City Council, Virgin Trains, the managers of the Fishergate Centre and St George's Centre and managers of other city centre retailers/businesses. Bus operators and taxi operators have also been consulted.

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk Management

- Traffic Management

Whilst the proposals will not completely remove congestion, it will reduce the congestions and delays at the Fishergate/Corporation Street/Butler Street junctions. A decision to not approve the recommendations would lead to a repeat of the severe congestion issues that have been experienced in previous years with some significant delays on occasion. This will lead to high numbers of complaints, adverse comments on social media and in the press with a negative impact on the authority's reputation.

- Road Safety

The proposals will improve facilities for cyclists and reduce the risk of conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians.

Financial

The estimated cost of introducing the proposals is £50,000 which includes the purchase of the cameras to allow the bus lane enforcement to be undertaken. It is proposed that measures set out in the report will be funded from the 2016/17 Cycling Safety unprogrammed allocation within the highways capital programme. The measures proposed will make provision for use by cyclists and will improve safety for cyclists by reducing the risk of conflict between vehicles and cycles.

The revenue costs of enforcement are expected to be covered by the income received from PCNs issued against drivers who contravene the restrictions. Any surplus income from enforcement will be subject to section 55 account rules which restrict the use of surplus income from transport related activity to investment in transport related expenditure.

Equality and Cohesion

There are no adverse impacts on any group of individuals sharing protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

Legal

The use of experimental traffic orders provides for a period of up to 6 months from the date of introduction to consider the impact of the order and the effectiveness of the measures. It also provides a consultation period during which time representations can be made and received. Following that period of consultation, a decision will then be taken whether to make the order permanent, to amend the order or to abandon the order.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A