

## Reading Transport Innovation Fund Bid – Update

I outlined in my March update the main elements of the Reading Borough Council's bid for some £300m of Government funding for transport improvements in the Reading Urban Area. I stated that I hoped that a cross boundary steering group would be established to move the project forward, as recommended in the Independent Transport Commission Report. Congestion in the Reading Urban Area is a real problem and the measures to resolve this cannot be achieved without the cooperation of neighbouring authorities. Several of the key elements such as Park and Ride locations and an additional Thames crossing lie outside Reading's geographical area of control. Since March, there have been several meetings of the local authorities which have highlighted not only the benefits but also a number of issues.

A TIF submission must include an analysis of a Road User Pricing scheme – in layman's terms, congestion charging. West Berkshire is totally opposed to any road pricing/congestion charging scheme in its area. Wokingham supports that position and opposes any form of congestion charging within its boundaries without a binding consultation with its residents.

All the Park and Ride locations would be located in adjoining authorities' areas and will have to be agreed with those authorities. One suggested location is Playhatch which has implications for Sonning since it would draw additional traffic through Sonning in order to reach the Park and Ride site.

South Oxfordshire has traditionally strongly opposed an additional Thames crossing since it fears that it would create a strategic route, increasing through traffic in its area and become a catalyst for housing development. The Reading Cabinet has given its commitment that an additional Thames crossing would be a local congestion solution, not a precursor to a strategic route. South Oxfordshire has now indicated its support for an additional crossing but only for public transport, cycles and pedestrians. That would not resolve Sonning's traffic problem, much of which emanates from South Oxfordshire, but at least this is progress after some 85 years!

At the meeting of the Wokingham Executive on 30 July I asked Keith Baker, Executive Member for Highways and Transport, a question on the current status of the TIF bid. I summarise his reply:

"I am pleased to say that negotiations are ongoing with Reading Borough Council and they have agreed in principle to provide us with all of the information that has been developed around the TiF bid so that it can be fully investigated by our own Officers and consultants.

.....we will now be working closely with Officers at Reading to understand all of the implications of the bid so that a detailed report can be prepared for Executive to consider before we make a final decision to support the bid. A draft has been submitted to the DfT by Reading Borough Council and the final version is anticipated to be submitted later this year."

I then asked the following supplementary question:

"In view of the significant benefits that a successful TIF bid would bring to this Borough and in particular to the residents of my ward in Sonning and since it is a rapidly changing situation at the moment, could I ask that all Members of the Council do get updated on exactly what is happening with regard to the negotiations?"

The answer was that he is absolutely committed to that.

There is still much to be resolved; however, I hope that with the relevant authorities now engaged in discussions, a consensus will be reached; failure to do so can only lead to increased congestion. A successful bid will ease congestion in the area benefitting thousands of residents for many, many years to come. **SC 3 August 09**