

# **R&DLP submission to the Reading Transport Commission**

## ***Executive Summary***

Reading & District Labour Party wants Reading to be a great place to grow up in, to live and work in, and in which to grow old.

We believe that reducing traffic congestion improves the quality of the urban environment; enables people, and goods, to move about town quickly, safely and economically; and is essential for the town's continued development and its economic prosperity. Reducing traffic congestion also helps contain global warming and is an investment in our long-term future. It cuts atmospheric pollution and improves the health of our people. Failure to reduce congestion would lead to the strangulation of our town.

**Our thinking about transport therefore puts the reduction of congestion at its heart.** There are four main strands to our proposals:

- **Alternative routes for through traffic, taking it out of the town centre**  
Looking at each part of town in turn, we believe we could something like halve the 155,000 cars coming through the town centre daily by:

- Building a third Thames bridge - of four lanes - linking to the A329M, which could take around 55,000 cars out of the town centre every day
- Improving access to the A329M at Sutton Seeds roundabout
- Improving access to the A33 relief road at the Oracle roundabout
- Building the Oxford Road relief road as part of the new station

We also want to reduce the number of lorries traveling through Reading. We want to 'downgrade' the A4074 Woodcote Road and apply weight restrictions there, and to introduce better signing and weight restrictions to keep lorries out of residential roads across the Borough.

- **Tackling individual bottlenecks particularly on radial routes**

We want, in consultation with local people, to make any changes to the road network which would bring freer movement of traffic without adverse impact on the environment or road safety. Possibilities include:

- A one-way system round Prospect Street, Westfield Road and Gosbrook Road in Caversham
- Increasing the capacity of London Road west of Cemetery Junction and having two lanes of traffic northbound along Sidmouth Street
- A one-way system through the Reading University campus, with entry at The Chancellor's Way and exit at The Queen's Drive
- Changes to the Norcot roundabout on the A329 - when the relief road is built - to support local traffic and public transport

- **Improving public transport**

Increased use of public transport reduces pressure on the roads and benefits the environment, so we want to attract more people onto both trains and buses. We see taxis and private hire vehicles as public transport too.

We want to:

- Create an integrated public transport interchange at the new station for trains, buses, taxis, pedestrians, and cyclists
- Increase peoples' use of trains to come into Reading from suburban stations, including the new station at Green Park
- Maintain and extend bus priority measures across the town to promote faster and more reliable bus services
- Promote the use of bus season tickets for regular bus users
- Keep pensioners' bus passes, improve the Reading ID scheme, and explore discounts for people traveling to hospital appointments
- Extend the provision of taxi ranks in town, and, following the trial in Kings Road, open other bus lanes also to private hire vehicles
- **Providing quality pedestrian and cycling routes**

Walking and cycling complement public transport. They help reduce congestion and emissions; are socially inclusive and accessible to everyone; and they promote a healthier, more active lifestyle.

We want to see a network of quality pedestrian routes in the town centre, including:

- South-east from the station across Forbury Road, through Forbury Gardens, Forbury Square, and across the Holy Brook to Kings Road.
- South-west from the station through the new development there to Friar Street, Chatham Place and the new civic quarter
- North from the station to De Montfort Avenue and over a pedestrian bridge across the Thames to Caversham.
- From the civic quarter over the IDR to the streets behind the Salvation Army.
- From the Oracle over the IDR to London Street / Southampton Street

Similarly, we support the development of quality cycling routes linking the town centre to communities "Greater Reading", and look forward to the detailed proposals be published by the Council shortly. We are aiming for a further 20% increase in cycling by 2011.

Recognising the contribution of to congestion of the school run, we are also proposing a new partnership with schools to share the costs of paid "conductors" for walking buses so as to try and get more of them "on the road".

### ***Conclusion***

Planning the transport needs of the modern city underpins everything that makes it work. Especially in rapidly developing places like Reading, infrastructure needs to be constantly reviewed and adapted to take account of changing circumstances both local and global. Changing anything which is familiar and secure is never easy, and R&DLP is pleased the Commission is providing this public forum to help citizens of the town develop a greater understanding of the challenges posed and debate the choices ahead. While we do not pretend to have all the answers, we are grateful for this opportunity to put our suggestions forward.

## ***Introduction***

Reading has been independently judged to be one of the fastest growing local economies in the UK. It is a powerhouse of the southeast region, home to some of the UK's - and the world's - largest and most successful companies. It is a leisure and retail centre too, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.

But with success comes challenges. Any growing city requires infrastructure to make it work: efficient public services; a safe and clean environment; affordable housing; and quality education and training. A modern city should not strive to be successful for its own sake, city leaders must ensure that all citizens share in its prosperity and can fully participate in the cultural, recreational and learning opportunities that such success can bring about.

Planning the transport needs of the modern city underpins everything that makes it work. Especially in rapidly developing places like Reading, infrastructure needs to be constantly reviewed and adapted to take account of changing circumstances both local and global. Changing anything which is familiar and secure is never easy, and Reading and District Labour Party (R&DLP) is pleased that the Reading Transport Commission is providing this public forum to help citizens of the town develop a greater understanding of the challenges posed and facilitate a debate about the choices ahead, and grateful for the opportunity to put our suggestions forward.

Transport planning has changed significantly from the days when urban and suburban areas were built for and made subservient to the private car. This is a legacy the politicians of today are now grappling with, as well as the threat of climate change and the problems of environmental degradation.

Towns and cities are becoming choked by congestion, which reduces the quality of the urban environment; prevents other elements of the transport network from functioning properly; and stifles potential for further growth and success. What this means for Reading is that without a concerted effort to tackle the problem of congestion, it will become a less attractive place to shop, play and do business, and that is something we must fight to avoid.

Conversely, reducing traffic congestion improves the quality of the urban environment; is an essential basis of an effective transport network that enables people, and goods, to move about town quickly, safely and economically; and in both these ways is essential for the continued development of the town and its economic prosperity. Reducing traffic congestion also means a smaller contribution to global warming and is an investment in our long-term future. And it cuts atmospheric pollution and improves the health of our people.

All of these outcomes are important components of R&DLP wanting Reading to be a great place to grow up in, to live and work in and in which to grow old, and thus our thinking about transport puts the reduction of congestion at its heart. Failure to do reduce congestion would result in the strangulation of our town.

## ***The Reading context***

Reading has experienced almost unrivalled levels of economic success over the past two decades. Between 1996 and 2004, the population in Reading grew by 4.7% - the 11<sup>th</sup> highest rate of growth in the country. Employment over the same period grew by just over a quarter - the 4<sup>th</sup> highest rate. Whereas other major urban centres have high concentrations of unemployment and poor skills, in Reading less than 10% of the working population lack a qualification. These trends point to increasing growth and economic vitality in the future but, like many towns and cities in the UK, this potential will be constrained without significant investment in transport infrastructure. We know this is a major concern of the town's business community.

The importance of the town centre to Reading cannot be underestimated. As well as being the historic and commercial core of the town, it will be the focus of the town's future growth, offering more housing and employment and becoming a cultural and recreation centre of increasing importance and significance. The success of the town as a whole depends on being able to manage access to and around the town centre.

Reading Borough is a densely populated urban area, constrained by an archaic administrative boundary which means we are not the masters of what little green, open space is on our doorstep. The council rightly favours seeing the town grow, develop and regenerate and this means new homes and centres of employment have to be located on already developed land at increasingly high density. In the longer term, planning policies will help create communities that are less reliant on the private car, simply because homes, employment, services and recreation will be located nearer to each other and because of lack of space to accommodate more car parking.

Reading is an important destination across the Thames Valley and beyond, with one of the largest acute hospitals in the region, and two university campuses. The town also serves many large suburban communities, dependent upon and owing their existence to Reading which in themselves are often poorly served in terms of public transport, local services and jobs.

Looking ahead at the evolution of the centre of Reading in the coming years, the Chatham Place development will be completed, providing new homes and commercial space. A planning application for the redevelopment of the area between the station and Friar Street is due to be determined in the coming months, and the station itself will undergo massive redevelopment. Proposals for a new civic quarter - council offices, library and theatre in the current civic centre area - are also being formulated. Now is the time for a new, comprehensive approach to the management of traffic in the town centre aimed at meeting the town's future needs.

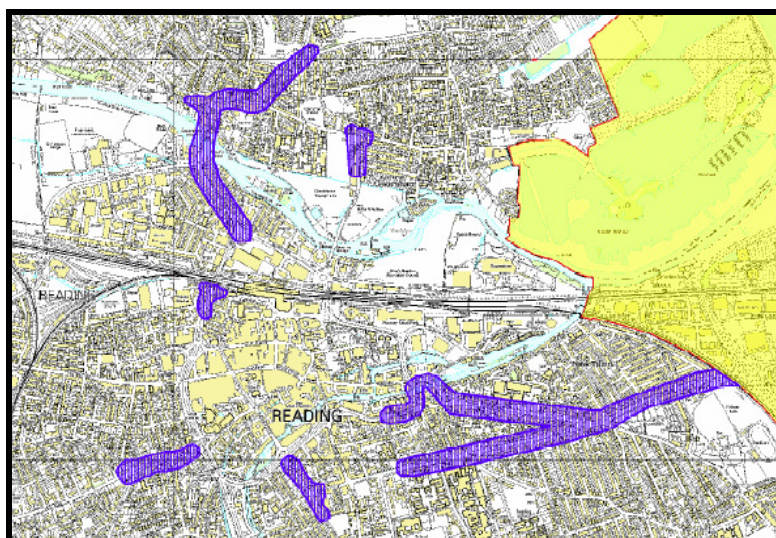
## ***Reading's transport infrastructure***

Reading Station - a major hub in both the local and national rail network - is a major bottleneck, unable to accommodate the projected increase in demand for rail travel in the coming years. An ambitious scheme costing £500 million, promoted by the council, to increase capacity and reduce congestion at the station was announced by the secretary of state in the summer of 2007. This will be a huge advantage not just to Reading but to the whole of southern and western England and south Wales. It will however place an additional burden on the infrastructure in the town centre.

Turning to that infrastructure, the Inner Distribution Road (IDR) was part of a comprehensive 1960s development which included Broad Street Mall, the civic offices, the Hexagon theatre and the Renaissance Hotel. The years since its construction have seen a huge expansion in commercial office space in the town centre, the creation of the Oracle shopping centre which has cemented Reading's position as a premier shopping destination, and the opening of five major hotels in the town centre.

The last two decades have also seen a growing number of people making their homes in the town centre, so that approximately 12,000 people and 5,300 households live in the central action area defined by the Local Transport Plan. The reality of the IDR for them is an unpleasant and unhealthy environment right on their doorsteps, isolating them from other communities nearby and choking the air with emissions.

Road transport has been identified as a major source of poor air quality in Reading. A consolidated map of the Air Quality Management Areas in Reading is shown below, with particular hotspots including Cemetery Junction, the Vastern Road/Caversham Road area and Castle Hill. The tragedy is that that some of Reading's most economically disadvantaged and excluded communities live and around in the town centre: it is these people who do not contribute to the congestion problem but are having to bear the brunt of its horrendous environmental consequences.



Traffic growth in Reading over 2002-2007 was estimated at 12%, and traffic growth for 2007-2012 is forecast to be 16%. The present infrastructure cannot sustain this sort of growth: doing nothing is not an option.

Taking the IDR as an example, not only is it no longer serving the purpose it was intended for - promoting access to the centre of Reading by separating local and through traffic, reducing congestion and connecting the principal access points - but its junctions at peak times are at breaking point. Network management has successfully increased capacity at some junctions by as much as 10%, without creating any additional road space, but the ability to do any more is limited. Because it is at full capacity, the IDR requires constant oversight and management: a single incident can have a ripple effect causing havoc and delay throughout the network.

However, the basic network of the IDR, arterial roads and local roads in the town centre is fixed and we have to look to adapt it as far as we can to meet the future demands that will be put on it.

The proposal for a one-way IDR was put forward by Council officers as a means of doing that, and Labour Councillors accepted their recommendation. That scheme has now been withdrawn, and we would wish to emphasise that we expect the Commission to look with a completely open mind at all possible options for the IDR and to recommend the best way of achieving safe and efficient use of road space - both for the IDR itself and for other roads and streets in the town centre and beyond.

Buses in Reading already experience a higher level of ridership than virtually anywhere else outside London, and must play an even more important role as a viable alternative to the private car if congestion is to be reduced and the environment protected. The reliability and performance of bus services is adversely affected however by congestion on the road network, and particularly in the town centre, because almost all bus routes terminate in or pass through there. Measures that give priority to buses and the enforcement of bus lanes have achieved a huge amount, but more priority measures would be required to improve the bus network further.

There can be no doubt that a major cause of congestion in the town centre, affecting private cars, buses, lorries and taxis and private hire, is the volume of through traffic. There are ~330,000 car trips in the town centre between 07:00-19:00, and 47% of those cars are just passing through.

As well as through trips by private cars, through trips by commercial vehicles (LGV's and HGV's) are major contributors to congestion, and also have very detrimental effects on the quality of life in many residential areas which find themselves penetrated by goods vehicles that not only have no business there but do not even have any business in the town. We know for example that only 11% of the ~2600 Light Goods Vehicles and only 5.5% of the ~650 Heavy Goods Vehicles entering the town from the north daily have business in the town centre, and many of the remaining vehicles are traveling on towards London or other destinations.

## ***The R&DLP submission***

As outlined above, we believe that reducing traffic congestion improves the quality of the urban environment; is an essential basis of an effective transport network that enables people, and goods, to move about town quickly, safely and economically; therefore contributes substantially to the continued development of the town and its economic prosperity; and reduces our contribution to global warming and is an investment in our long-term future and improves the health of our people. This submission therefore puts the reduction of congestion at its heart.

We are in no doubt that there is no single solution or panacea to the problem of congestion in Reading: planning for the future transport needs of the town must take a holistic, integrated approach if any single proposal is to be successful. We have identified four major strands:

- 1 Finding alternative routes for through traffic taking it out of the town centre**
- 2 Tackling individual bottlenecks particularly on radial routes so as to make journeys within the town easier and quicker**
- 3 Improving public transport so as to reduce the number of car journeys to/from the town centre in particular**
- 4 Providing quality pedestrian and cycling routes to/from the town centre as an alternative to motorised transport**

Much of this work will require investment, and, since it became a unitary authority in 1998, Reading Borough Council has positioned itself as one of the most effective and successful transport authorities in the country and its excellent-rated Local Transport Plan has made Reading the highest funded transport authority per capita in the country. The Council is therefore well placed to secure future funds through the Transport Innovation Fund (TIF), which is to be the main vehicle for funding major infrastructure projects, and we would hope and expect that the work undertaken by this commission will offer an important evidence base for bids for future TIF funding, in which we would also hope to have the continued support of neighbouring authorities and other stake-holders.

The following sections discuss each of these strands in turn.

## **1. Get through traffic off Reading roads**

As noted above, Reading's roads carry a huge number of vehicles which do not originate in Reading and do not intend to stop there. In central Reading, recent counts show that during a 12 hour period 330,000 car trips were made arriving at, leaving or passing through the town centre. Of these, just under half represents traffic just passing through.

More detailed figures show that of those 155,000 car trips going through the town centre daily 13% are between North and East - in both directions (*e.g. between Caversham and London*), 14% between North and South, 15% between North and West, 19% between South and West, 21% between East and West, and 18% between South and East. Reducing that through traffic requires seeking responses to each of those flows in turn.

Starting with the NE quadrant, R&DLP has long campaigned for a third Thames crossing to alleviate the pressure on Reading's urban network by cars (particularly those travelling between Caversham/South Oxfordshire and London) and by HGV's travelling north south between the M4 and M40/Oxford - an important strategic transport corridor.

We believe the case for a third Thames crossing is unanswerable, and that it is unacceptable that it be impeded by Oxfordshire authorities all too willing for their residents to impose extra traffic burdens on central Reading. A third Thames Bridge linked to the A329(M), four lanes wide and with the potential of bus lanes as well as ordinary traffic, could be expected to take pretty well all the N-E traffic, most of the N-S traffic and some of the N-W traffic - perhaps 55,000 car trips in total - out of the town centre every day.

In the NW quadrant, the A329 Oxford Road, from the town centre to the Borough boundary is a key arterial route, bus quality corridor and also carries a significant number of HGV's. For much of its length it is a key district commercial centre and serves a very densely populated residential community. At peak hours, the road is unable to function, causing huge delay and choking much of west Reading with emissions.

R&DLP therefore welcomes and supports the proposed Oxford Road "relief road" linking Richfield Avenue to Scours Lane, a by-product of the Reading Station development, which could be expected to take the rest of the N-W traffic, say 15,500 car trips daily, out of the town centre.

That development also provides opportunities for re-categorising the Oxford Road, improving bus priority measures, and offering more facilities for cyclists and pedestrians, both enhancing the local centre and offering alternative modes of travel to the town centre itself.

As regards the SW quadrant of Reading, R&DLP campaigned successfully for the A33 Relief Road, but believe there need to be junction improvements, particularly round the Oracle roundabout, allowing easier and quicker access to that road from the west if its full potential is to be realised.

In the SE quadrant, the need for alternative routes is largely met by the A329M, but we believe there is scope for improvements at the Sutton Seeds roundabout to improve access there also. We would look to the combination of the Third Bridge, the A329 and the B3270 to provide an alternative N-S route to relieve pressure on, for example, the A327 Shinfield Road.

We would hope through this package of measures to shift much of the E-W through traffic onto the M4, and, together with the junction improvements at J11, remove another 15,500 car trips daily from the town centre.

**We would thus hope through this set of measures to something like halve the amount of through car traffic in the town centre of Reading, which would be a huge contribution to the quality of life of people living and working there and greatly ease the journeys of those who actually travel to and from the town centre itself.**

The issue of through commercial traffic requires to be looked at separately. As of now, ~24,000 LGV's enter Reading daily: 18% of them from the north, 1% from the east, 54% from the south, and 27% of them from the west. And ~12,000 HGV's enter Reading daily: 23% from the north, 7% from the east, 45% from the south, and 25% from the west. Obviously in both cases, the south includes M4 J11, and therefore many actual origins are likely to be east and west of Reading.

There is insufficient data available on lorry movements within the town, but while maintaining access to the commercial centre of Reading for service and delivery vehicles is essential for us to remain attractive to shops and businesses, it is certain that many of the lorries using roads such as the A329 Oxford Road and the A4074 Woodcote Road, through densely populated residential areas, are just passing through Reading to go elsewhere.

The third Thames Bridge, the Oxford Road relief road, and the other improvements described above will of course provide better desire routes for that through commercial traffic, and help take much of it out of the residential streets where it not only impedes local traffic but is also a major source of pollution and a major cause of road accidents.

However, as well as the 'carrot' of better transit routes, we believe that the interests of local Reading residents also require in some cases the 'stick' of restricting lorries to certain preferred routes and banning lorries, other than for local access, from some residential roads.

In particular, we would look to 'downgrading' the A4074 Woodcote Road and introducing weight restrictions to tackle the excessively high volume of HGV traffic currently using the road, particularly at night. The council should also lobby the Highways Agency and Oxfordshire County Council to introduce signage and other measures to guide HGV's away from urban and village centres towards the appropriate north-south trunk routes (i.e. M40/A34/M4 or M40/A404/M4). Similarly, lorries coming along the M4, for example, wishing to access the Oxford Road from the west should be encouraged to do so from the A34 rather than by using residential roads within the Borough.

## ***2 Tackling individual bottle-necks***

One of the key outcomes we are looking for is to enable people from Reading - in which we include the surrounding "Greater Reading" area - to move about the town quickly, safely and economically on their way to work, to school or college, to shop, to leisure facilities, to visit family and friends, and so on. Quick, safe and economical local travel plays an important part in everybody's quality of life.

The basic structure of the road network in Reading, as elsewhere, is historical and, while some modification may be possible it is very difficult for example to widen or reroute roads in a dense urban environment. However, as noted above, infrastructure needs to be constantly reviewed and adapted to take account of changing circumstances, and in consulting Labour Councillors and activists in formulating this submission we have identified several parts of the network where changes might be made which would promote freer movement of traffic without adverse impact on the environment or road safety.

We would propose in each of these areas, and others that may be identified by local communities or their representatives, firstly to survey local people and users of the local roads to gain a good understanding of the issues, then to commission a technical review of options for change, and then to consult on which if any of those options to take forward. Our initial list of areas, which is not intended to be exhaustive, is as follows:

- 1 The area round Prospect Street, Westfield Road and Gosbrook Road in Caversham, where we would like to consider a one-way system to ease traffic movement and reduce congestion
- 2 London Road between Cemetery Junction and Sidmouth Street where increasing capacity to three lanes, removing parking from the west side of Sidmouth Street and having two lanes of traffic northbound along Sidmouth Street would aid the movement of traffic westbound along London Road from the A329(M)
- 3 The Reading University campus, where we would like a one-way system to be considered with entry to the campus at The Chancellor's Way and exit onto the A327 at The Queen's Drive, which would greatly relieve pressure on the junction of the A327 with Northcourt Avenue, Elmhurst Road and Redlands Road and ease access to the University and to the Royal Berkshire Hospital.
- 4 The Norcot roundabout on the A329, where major changes will need to be made to accommodate the Oxford Road relief road (the primary response to congestion in the area) but it will be important to ensure that the interests of local traffic and of bus transport are protected.

The Council has a deal of experience of implementing small scale traffic management schemes in response to localised problems, more often than not in response to concerns raised by local people and their elected representatives, and should build on this and seek to ensure that these studies and the associated consultation are thorough so that the detailed changes that result will be the best that can be designed.

### ***3. Improving public transport***

Public transport already plays a huge part in helping local people to move around Reading, and particularly to access the town centre. As of now, 25,000 people arrive in Reading town centre by bus every day, and another 16,000 arrive by train - probably ~6,000 of them on their way to work.

The new Reading Station will greatly improve the throughput and reliability of trains serving the town, and that will itself lead to more people using the train for example for commuting to London and other workplaces. We would however also want to look at increasing the use of the train by people coming to work in Reading itself.

There is already a good network of local stations serving the Greater Reading area: Pangbourne, Tilehurst, Henley, Twyford, Winnersh Triangle, Wokingham, Bramley and Theale. The Secretary of State has approved a scheme for the building of a new station at Green Park, which will be of huge benefit to people commuting into Reading from the south.

We would want to work with neighbouring authorities to improve parking facilities at some of these stations, so as to enable them to support Park & Ride, and with the train operating companies and Reading Buses in particular to promote Plusbus tickets that enable, for example, onward travel by bus for people who have arrived in Reading by train. We should also seek to extend Park & Ride bus services from the outskirts of Reading.

Buses, as we have set out, already make a huge contribution to meeting the transport needs of Reading residents. 25,000 people arrive in the town centre by bus every day, about 25% from the north, 19% from the east, 29% from the south and 27% from the west, showing that all parts of town are well-served. Outside London, only Brighton and Hove has higher rates of bus patronage, while more journeys are made into town centre on buses than the private car - a situation almost unique to Reading. Elsewhere in the country, the decimation of local bus services after deregulation in the 1980s has seen a slump in passenger numbers as private bus companies have hiked up fares and run services on only the most profitable routes.

Reading Borough Council's position as the majority shareholder of Reading Transport Ltd has enabled both organisations to maintain an effective working partnership to ensure the bus company plays an active and essential role in planning for the town's transport needs, and the policy of selling off the bus company, long advocated by the Conservatives, would be seriously against the interests of Reading residents.

A further increase in capacity in the bus network, and further increases in passenger numbers, is only possible if the bus priority measures - bus lanes, bus gates and the effective enforcement of those restrictions through civil penalties - introduced by the council are maintained and are extended to other parts of the town. The benefits of such an approach are that more bus space will make bus travel quicker and better for many people and

reduce car usage, which will also make travel easier for people on those occasions when they do have to use the car.

Again, we would look to a series of measures across town that will improve bus access and hence bus reliability. The Oxford Road relief road will have huge benefits for bus services in West Reading, the proposal already mentioned for the university campus will benefit buses at the junction just north of the main university entrance, and another scheme envisaged is at the junction of Amersham Road and Send Road in Caversham.

If people are to be encouraged to use buses, fares must be kept competitive with the cost of using the private car, which is likely always to have some advantage in terms of convenience, and season tickets should really reward regular users who make perhaps daily use of the bus service.

The recent introduction of the Reading ID scheme has been welcomed by young people in Reading, and encouraged them to become regular bus users, but there is room for further improvements to this scheme.

Back in 1972, Labour Reading was only the second local authority in the country to introduce concessionary fares for pensioners, and our scheme remains one of the most generous anywhere. We are of course fully committed to maintaining that scheme.

We are conscious of the problems faced by people who want to travel to the Royal Berkshire Hospital by bus for out-patient appointments, and will discuss with the Royal Berkshire Hospital NHS Foundation Trust whether we can introduce discounted travel for these journeys.

Finally, we believe we need to regard taxis and private hire vehicles as part of the total public transport offering, supplementing the trains and buses. Easy availability of taxis means, for example, that someone can take a bus or train to their destination but know that they will be able to get a taxi home when they need it.

The development of the new station offers a huge opportunity to create a public transport interchange which is worthy of the developing and growing European city that Reading aspires to be, and in that interchange proper provision for taxis is essential. We have already opened the bus lanes to taxi drivers, and an experimental scheme which has also enabled private hire vehicles to use the in-bound Kings Road bus lane is proving popular and successful, so we will look to open up further bus lanes also to private hire vehicles.

#### ***4. Providing quality pedestrian and cycling routes***

Supporting desirable and viable alternatives to the private car wherever these are practicable must also form a central part of any future strategy.

Walking and cycling offer many benefits: they help reduce congestion and emissions; as means of travel they are socially inclusive and accessible to everyone; and they promote a healthier, more active lifestyle.

As, except for taxis and private hire, public transport rarely offers door-to-door service, use of public transport also generally both begins and ends on foot or, sometimes, on a bicycle. Recognising the needs of pedestrians and cyclists is, therefore, also part of the promotion of public transport.

R&DLP therefore supports the development, particularly in the town centre which is the end-point of so many journeys, of a network of quality pedestrian routes linking the town centre to communities nearby, and from which homes, shops and other facilities can be accessed easily.

One such route is being planned from the station across Forbury Road, through Forbury Gardens, Forbury Square, and Davison House, across the Holy Brook and through to Kings Road. We will be looking for another such route through the development site south-west of the station linking the station to Friar Street and the new Chatham Place and civic quarter developments, and for a route from the station to De Montfort Avenue and over a pedestrian bridge across the Thames to Caversham. The civic quarter itself is expected to include a bridge crossing the IDR to allow access to the streets behind the Salvation Army. We also need to look for such a route from the Oracle over the IDR to London Street and Southampton Street, and will look at other possibilities as the new town centre takes shape.

Similarly, we support the development of quality cycling routes linking the town centre to communities across Reading, again including “Greater Reading” beyond the Borough boundary. The Council has employed the Transept consultancy to produce detailed proposals for such a network, and they will be published shortly for consultation, so we will not go into detail here. Cycling in Reading was increased by 42% from 2001-2006, and the objective is to achieve a further 20% increase by 2011.

Within local communities, home to school transport is clearly a critical issue, and the “school run” is widely perceived to be a main contributing factor to peak time congestion. The council has now implemented safe routes to schools for all state primary and some secondary schools in the borough: the more the council can do to reassure parents that it is safe to enable children to walk to school - accompanied or unaccompanied - the more likely it is that the impact of the “school run” can be reduced.

One way in which this can be achieved is by increasing the number of “walking buses”, but it has proved difficult to support these on a voluntary basis. We would therefore like to explore with our schools a scheme in which the Council could share with them the costs of paid “conductors” for walking buses so as to try and get more of them “on the road”.