

Birmingham Transport Plan 2020

A response to the consultation from Birmingham Friends of the Earth

Please note: this response was also submitted via the consultation form on the 'Be heard' website.

Vision

Question - to what extent do you agree with the Vision?

Strongly agree

We also agree with the aims in the Introduction.

However, the Big Moves appear to be in the wrong order. This should be a process, not a list. We suggest that first for action should be measures to reduce the demand to drive into the City Centre, i.e. reducing car parking and increasing prices, and closing off through driving routes. This, along with the Clean Air charging zone, will cause a modal shift and generate ring-fenced local transport money. That will in turn allow 'rat runs' to be cut off through local neighbourhoods, starting with those adjacent to the city centre, redesigning them for 20mph hence much more friendly to walk and cycle, so supporting local centres and further reducing the demand to drive. All this will reduce peak traffic flows on the radial roads and could make expensive, disruptive, unpopular reengineering of these roads, unnecessary and unjustified.

Challenge

Climate Emergency means that there is a need for Birmingham to accelerate towards zero carbon. Given this urgency and resources constraints, BCC should prefer low cost methods that can be applied city-wide, not just a few expensive projects. We need you to solve problems not to justify schemes. That requires options and cost effectiveness comparisons. Birmingham should be asking national government for power to decide transport priorities at local or regional level. There should be a mechanism to enable schemes which are currently planned or proposed to be assessed against the 2020 Birmingham Transport Plan. If any schemes contradict the plan they should be redesigned or cancelled; for example, the planned Dudley Road widening scheme contradicts this plan in a number of ways.

We suggest that ambitious targets should be set for modal shift from private car use to public transport and a clear plan on how they are to be achieved by given dates. The targets should be phased and actual progress against these targets should be monitored annually. Also, an estimate should be made of the size of the modal shift away from private car use which will be required for Birmingham to cut CO2 emissions by the amount necessary in order to become carbon neutral by 2030.

Ambitious targets should also be set for increasing the proportion of journeys cycled and walked and progress towards the targets monitored annually. Spending on walking and cycling measures should be sustained to a minimum of £10 per person per year.

Additionally, a target should be adopted to eliminate all serious injuries and deaths on roads in the city by 2040. TfL has already adopted such a target.

A huge modal shift away from private car use to active travel and public transport is clearly required if the city is to achieve the necessary cuts in emissions and attain its wider environmental and social goals. A substantial shift from private car to bus use will have a key role to play in this and will require radical improvements to bus services. However we believe this will only be possible with a re-regulated bus network, where TfWM specifies routes, timetables and ticketing. We hope BCC will engage with the West Midlands Combined Authority, its constituent councils and the bus operators to ensure that such a re-regulated bus network becomes a reality as soon as possible.

Opportunities

Social benefits – these should be stressed. A city for people, not cars would have a positive impact on inactivity and obesity, clean air, space for small parks and playgrounds, social inclusion and cohesion, and a reduction in crime.

Electric vehicles are essential, but not to replace all petrol, diesel vehicles. There is a historic opportunity, as sales of petrol and diesel fall, to reduce car dependency and rebuild other forms of transport that have long been held back. Friends of the Earth has calculated that a certain level of electrification of transport is possible, but there also need to be many fewer powered vehicles on the road (*"How will we power the electric car revolution?"* FOE¹).

The sharing economy using digital technologies can allow more sharing, via car clubs, and a bike sharing scheme, electric bike sharing, these are all more energy efficient and space efficient than private cars.

Co-production. The transport plan is a chance to work with local communities to improve the places they live. Schemes will be successful in so far as they are not imposed, but co-produced.

Rail stations. There are many opportunities to reinstate railway suburbs around reopened rail stations and get travellers off the roads altogether, onto the underused rail network. This should be 'stride and ride', not 'park and ride'. Examples can be Balsall Heath station and Dudley Road station, both of which need to be brought forward instead of road widening. We support the Midlands Rail Hub.

High Speed Rail – We disagree that HS2 represents an opportunity. It will use up valuable land, destroy nature and generate car traffic to the interchange station by the airport. It is a high carbon form of transport which is being justified by increased leisure trips and commuting journeys that are better avoided. HS2 Ltd will absorb billions that should be spent on local solutions to give a network alternative to the private car and for de-carbonising other sectors.

Nature – recovering space from the car should mean less tarmac and more space for nature in the city with all its benefits.

Big Move: Managing demand through parking measures

Strongly Agree

We strongly support the move to manage demand for private car use by using car parking measures, and where appropriate, redeveloping some car parking spaces and car parks for more productive and beneficial uses.

Rationale

We strongly support the objective of a more precise and consistent method of parking demand management to reduce car use and support improved public transport and active travel.

In many local centres there is too much off-street car parking which results in an unnecessarily high volume of car journeys. Those areas with excess car parking could have some spaces released for cycle parking, redevelopment or green space. However, in a few areas there is too much pressure on limited spaces leading to unsafe parking on roads and footways. In this case there should be measures to ensure these spaces are used more efficiently with priority for blue badge holders and also to promote cycling, walking and public transport in the area to reduce demand for the spaces.

User groups

We strongly support the guiding principles in this section.

Free parking induces car use and is a financial and environmental cost to society. Providing car parks is expensive in capital outlay and ongoing costs.

Parking bays could be used to increase the provision of cycle parking. The replacement of one parking bay with around 6 cycle parking stands, makes a powerful point on how inefficient a use of space car parking actually is.

On the non-pedestrianised streets in the city centre, it is noticeable how low the proportion of cycle parking spaces is compared to car parking spaces. There are many new locations in the city centre which would benefit from cycle parking. The demand for cycle parking is likely to increase as e-bikes become more popular. E-bikes are likely to broaden the demographic uptake of cycling, increase the proportion of the population who cycle and also increase the range of trips which are cycled, as lengthier journeys become more practical.

Given the above, we believe the provision of covered cycle parking stations and lockers should also be increased. We would like to see targets set for increasing the locations and provision of cycle parking spaces. Conversely, we would also like to see a target set for reducing the number of parking spaces in the city centre by a given percentage while maintaining the number of blue badge spaces.

We would like to see more electric car charging points installed on city council car parks across the city. However, although electric cars have a role to play in reducing emissions, cutting car use is by far the most important and effective measure and will create a more liveable city.

Parking provision should be consistent with council targets to reduce traffic in the city.

Land use

We are pleased that the plan recognises the huge opportunity cost of space used for car parking and that such space could be put to more productive and beneficial uses such as retail, commercial, housing, green spaces or 'parklets'. A parklet is a parking bay which has been repurposed for recreation use for example by installing planters and benches.

Enforcement

We support proactive enforcement and note it is lacking in some areas. There are numerous locations in the city where bus lanes, bus stops and footways are routinely blocked by parked cars. We would like to see funding for more parking enforcement officers. Perhaps these could be funded from the revenue generated by a potential Work Place Parking Levy.

Parking costs

It is stated that the city council will work with public transport operators and partners to manage the link between car parking costs and public transport fares. While we welcome this proposal we do not see how this will actually work, since BCC and WMCA have little control over bus operators' fares and services. To make this possible we believe re-regulation of bus services will be necessary, where TfWM specify ticketing, routes and timetables.

We support the 'aim to engage' with providers of non-residential parking to fund sustainable transport provision. We are unclear as to how this would work on the ground. Would it be similar to a WPL but applied to commercial parking providers? We would like to see more detail on this.

Research has shown that improving public transport, walking and cycling is essential to reduce car use but on its own is not enough, as many people will still drive no matter how good the alternatives. So we strongly agree that the linkage between parking charges and public transport fares is managed and used as one of the measures to disincentivise private car use.

Key delivery components:

We strongly support the progression of a feasibility study into a Work Place Parking Levy and would support such a measure being introduced in principle. We note that the introduction of a WPL in Nottingham has been successful in providing a funding stream for public transport, pedestrian and cycling improvements.

For the longer term, we believe that a WPL should ideally be conurbation-wide, given the role the WMCA has in funding and coordinating public transport. We would suggest that BCC work with the WMCA and its constituent councils for a conurbation wide WPL as a longer term objective.

The funds raised should be ring fenced for public transport, cycling and pedestrian measures such as those schemes suggested in the plan.

Controlled Parking Zones

We support the plans to remove free parking from within the A4540 Middleway, adjoining neighbourhoods and local centres. However we would add that there should still be

adequate provision for blue badge holders, loading bays, and pick-up/drop-off points for private coaches.

Parking SPD

We support the policies contained within the Parking Supplementary Document and the commitment to protect levels of disabled parking provision in convenient locations.

Park and Ride provision

We feel that there has been too much emphasis on park and ride in Birmingham and the West Midlands conurbation over recent years. In general, we do not support the expansion of existing park and ride sites or the provision of any new sites, either in Birmingham or within the West Midlands conurbation. We believe the city and the conurbation already has sufficient sites and spaces and we would note that there has been significant expansion at a number of sites in recent years, such as at Longbridge.

Our main concerns about park and ride are as follows:

- People who would previously have caught the bus or walked / cycled to the station would instead drive there with a park and ride facility.
- They may undermine local bus services especially those serving the less densely populated housing estates on the outskirts of the conurbation e.g. Longbridge.
- Although they may reduce the length of car journey undertaken, they do not reduce the number of car journeys and just redistribute the traffic to other parts of the road network.
- They may create even more car journeys.
- The road network around the park and ride site becomes more congested.
- They perpetuate car dependence.
- They are not socially inclusive (i.e. you need a car to benefit).
- They can undermine active travel options to reach the station / park and ride site.
- Drivers may make long detours to reach large park and ride sites.
- They are an inefficient use of land which could be put to more productive use.

Park and ride may be appropriate in an extremely limited number of specific locations on the edge of the conurbation but such sites should only be pursued as an absolute last resort after all other options have been exhausted.

We note that extensive research has been undertaken which identifies the problems resulting from park and ride. Overall it notes that park and ride schemes are important for traffic management but unfortunately they can lead to greater traffic overall and greater emissions.^{2,3,4}

Cycle parking could be provided at certain key bus stops in areas where bus routes are less dense, such as on the edge of the conurbation.

Big Move: Transforming the city centre

Strongly Agree

We agree with the general principle of restricting car traffic in the city centre, including the removal of through traffic in order to make it a more liveable and pleasant environment for work, leisure and residents.

Rationale

We agree that the aim of delivering inclusive growth is dependent on good quality public transport with affordable fares. In terms of bus services, a radical improvement in frequency, routes tailored to the needs of communities and low fares is necessary if the necessarily large modal shift from private car to public transport is to be achieved. Such a modal shift is essential for meeting targets on air quality, reduced carbon emissions and addressing social inclusion. This will only be possible by re-regulating the bus system in the West Midlands. This will enable coordination and integration of bus, rail and metro services for seamless journeys and good value fares across all modes.

We support the strategy of improving the viability of living in the city centre through redevelopment of land including redeveloping land released from council car parks

We note the large scale redevelopment projects in the city centre, such as Smithfield and see these as a golden opportunity to create a more liveable, walkable, cycle friendly and greener city centre. A city park in the Smithfield area, or a series of smaller parks of similar total area, linking with blue and green infrastructure in the redevelopment of the Rea Valley quarter could form a key part of this strategy.

Supporting Inclusive Growth

We agree that there should be a radical overhaul of public transport leading to a huge improvement in services to ensure that there is a large modal shift away from private car use. As already mentioned we strongly believe that bus services need to be re-regulated in order to deliver the required improvements and help to deliver equitable access to job seekers and employers.

This should also be matched by radical improvements for cycling and walking to increase the proportion of trips walked or cycled, both into and within the city centre. There is plenty of scope for increasing this and it will be an important means of reducing private car use.

Improving Air Quality

We note with disappointment the postponement of the CAZ and believe it is essential it is introduced at the earliest opportunity.

In order to achieve the aspiration of moving towards a zero emission bus fleet operating into the city centre, a re-regulated bus system specified and coordinated by TfWM is essential, rather than relying on legally binding agreements between the city council and the numerous bus operators.

Supporting the growth of the city centre as a place to live

We strongly support the removal of through journeys by private car across the city centre and the aspiration for a centre which is easier to navigate on foot. We support redesign of wide dual carriageways in the city centre. We particularly welcome the planned remodelling of Digbeth and Deritend High Street where carriageway space is to be reallocated to pedestrians, public transport and cyclists.

Key delivery components

We welcome the initiative to divide the city centre into a series of traffic cells between which travel by private car is not possible without detouring to the Middleway.

We agree that the continued role of the A38 as a main road through the city centre should be re-assessed to see if through traffic could be removed. This road currently acts as a barrier to the Jewellery Quarter and is responsible for a number of air pollution hot spots such as near the Children's Hospital. With through traffic removed from this stretch of road, carriageway space could be reallocated to metro, dedicated bus lanes, green spaces and an active travel corridor. The A38 tunnels could form the basis of a new north to south cross-city metro route.

However, we do not think that the Middleway should be upgraded to accommodate the current traffic volumes displaced from the A38 through the city centre. We assume this would involve increasing capacity by road widening and constructing grade-separated junctions. We would strongly oppose such an upgrade because increasing highway capacity on the Middleway directly contradicts the city council's aim of reducing private car use, stated elsewhere in this document. It could undermine the planned Clean Air Zone and result in air pollution hot spots on the city centre section of the A38 being transferred to residential areas through which the Middleway passes such as Ladywood and Highgate. If the aim to significantly reduce the overall number of car journeys and hence traffic is actually achieved, then there should be no need to even consider increasing capacity on the Middleway.

The Middleway is already dual carriageway throughout and was upgraded at a number of locations to increase capacity as part of the 'pinch point programme' initiated in 2011. It was later found that the 'pinch point' schemes did not cut journey times.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-47845050>

Given the above, upgrading the Middleway to further increase its capacity should be ruled out altogether. Long distance journeys using the Motorway network should be routed via the Motorway 'box' rather than using Birmingham city centre as a short cut.

We would welcome the reintroduction of cross-city bus services. We also think a zero emission 'Centrebus' service should be introduced which would take a circular route around the city centre to link up important places, in a similar manner to the previous 'Centrebus', before it was withdrawn. We believe such a service should be free to users. As we have stated in previous sections, re-regulation of the bus services in the West Midlands will be necessary to deliver the radical improvements that are necessary.

Expansion of rail capacity into Snow Hill and Moor Street stations is inextricably linked with the construction of the Bordesley Chords. BCC should ensure that the planned construction of these chords is not obstructed or delayed in any way by proposed developments near or on the projected line of route. BCC should work with Network Rail, TfWM and Midlands Connect to ensure that the chords are completed at the earliest possible date.

Walking and cycling

Currently it is difficult to navigate across the city centre by bicycle because of one-way streets, dual carriageways which are difficult to cross and the Midland Metro route. Cycling across the city centre should be made easier with more contraflow cycle routes, and better signage. We would also welcome linking the A34 and A38 cycle tracks to create a continuous cross-city route.

More benches should be provided in the city centre to help people who are unable to walk very far without taking a rest. There are still many locations where dropped kerbs are absent at crossings of side roads and entrances, such as the entrance and exit to Moor Street car park on Allison Street. These inadequacies need to be remedied as soon as possible.

The scarcity of public toilet facilities in the city centre should be addressed by identifying locations for new facilities.

Logistics

We agree that logistics transport and deliveries in the city centre should be subject to management measures. Additionally, we believe that more radical measures should be considered to reduce the volume of HGVs and LGVs entering the city centre.

The city council should work with logistics companies and city centre businesses to establish local break of bulk or micro depots to enable goods to be trans-shipped for onward delivery to city centre businesses and shops by e-cargo bike, cycle couriers or zero emission vans. There is evidence that cargo bikes are efficient and can speed up deliveries, because they are easier to park than vans.⁵ Cargo bikes and city centre transshipment or micro depots are already being used by logistics companies in cities such as Berlin and Utrecht.

More generally, the city council could establish an e-cargo bike initiative with business partners to promote the concept and offer help and support to businesses located in or delivering to the city centre to consider using them. E-cargo bikes can replace vans for a number of purposes including 'last mile' parcel delivery, food delivery and visits by trades people using heavy equipment (e.g. electricians).

The council could investigate the possibility of a rail connected 'break-of-bulk' transshipment depot on the edge of the city centre for last mile deliveries to city centre locations. Additionally it should also investigate the possible use of city centre stations such as New Street and Moor Street for trans-shipment of goods for onward delivery to shops on, and close to these stations.

A water freight partnership could be set up by the city council with other organisations such as the Rivers and Canals trust to investigate the use of canals for delivery of non-time sensitive goods to canal-side locations.

Residential

We support expanding residential development within the city centre including the redevelopment of land currently occupied by council car parks. Residential development should comprise a good mix of housing including social and family housing. To support these communities, there should be sufficient parks, play areas and health facilities to reduce the need to travel.

Big Move: Prioritising active travel in local neighbourhoods

Strongly agree.

Most journeys are short and much car travel can be prevented by changes to the ordinary street network. If traffic volume and speed reduce, then people will feel safe to walk and cycle. It is very positive and welcome that BCC is committing to eliminating road danger and 20mph as the default speed limit. Most of the streets were laid out before mass car use, so you are returning them to more like their original functioning.

We now want to see firm commitments. Where will it happen and what will be done?

The principles of a Green Travel District should be rolled out across the city. We want the maximum effect, so low cost measures should be preferred, which can be implemented quickly. Changes must be planned along with local communities, who suffer issues of parking, safety and who know their area.

If change begins in inner areas, then thousands of residents can walk and cycle into the city centre. Birmingham Cycling Revolution began with a focus on 20 minutes cycling around New Street Station. These areas are densely inhabited and they have streets that predate the car. Crossings of the Middleway should be made people-friendly.

Walking and cycling to local centres and rail stations would be the next priority, allowing more door-to-door journeys without using a car. In the urban area, we do not want park & ride, but 'stride and ride' or 'bike and ride'.

Trips to school account for 20-25% of peak car journeys. Reducing these should be an early priority and will be very cost effective and popular way to reduce the number of trips made by car which are less than 1 mile, for example the Walking Bus. Sustrans Safe Routes to school are a good model. We would also like to see the Car-Free School Streets initiative rolled out to many more schools.

Pedestrian crossing improvements are welcome. On major roads these should include longer crossing times especially when crossing 4 lanes of traffic. Roads need to stop holding up pedestrians so use more zebra crossings, instead of traffic light controlled crossings, as has been implemented in Coventry city centre. All zebra crossings and certainly many signal controlled crossings should be on 'raised tables' or humps to calm the approach of traffic. In Solihull many crossings have this feature, even on main roads.

We want safe local cycling networks, serving for example schools, stations and shops, which could join up to allow longer routes. At 20 mph, cyclists can share with vehicles and they do, in every city. Cyclists should not be held up more than absolutely required, but helped across busy roads, an example being the Greater Manchester 'Bee Lines' network. Where pedestrian and cyclist numbers are low, shared use paths are possible.

20mph – requires that ordinary streets be de-engineered and take away linear features such as guard rails, also light controlled crossings. Design for slow steady movement.

Blocking off roads, to make lines of no through roads, will be effective. One such area already exists in North Moseley/Balsall Heath, where little more needs to be done to allow cyclists through.

Not all streets have to be two-way for vehicles, rather one side can become a blue cycle way for example Wrentham Street. Many more can be created.

Legislation to ban pavement parking is being considered nationally and this may be an opportunity for Birmingham to reclaim its footways for walking and for wheelchairs and buggies.

Create small spaces for people to sit and be, e.g. benches, flower beds, play spaces. These create a reward for walking not driving

Big Move: reallocating road space

Reallocating road space to public transport, cycling and walking is the way forward in the city centre, where you are looking to reduce traffic flows quite quickly, and we strongly support this. Key sections of bus and cycle only streets could be decisive and encourage the required modal shift.

However, space reallocation will be more problematic on radial roads, used by commuter traffic, buses and HGVs, where space is at a premium. The key concept should be efficiency. Segregating buses and cycles from general traffic along radial roads could be a less efficient use of space and it may be taken to justify road widening, which we oppose. There is already too much tarmac, movement and severance of communities by multi-lane highways. The cost, in terms of loss of pedestrian amenity, the functioning of local high streets and the loss of trees could be excessive.

Past trends in traffic and congestion should not be projected into the future to justify schemes, rather problems should be solved by reducing traffic through the other three Big Moves.

Residents in an area should be asked what kind of infrastructure would be most beneficial, not faced with a single 'answer'.

Look to build infrastructure where it is currently lacking - the current picture across Birmingham is very inconsistent. We want public transport in the areas where there isn't any. We want key routes connected.

Use infrastructure that already exists. Where there is a rail line, reopen the stations for passenger services. In some cases new linkages and capacity may be required to make this possible e.g. the Bordesley Chords.

Be careful to protect high streets and retain places where small businesses can thrive. Encourage people to shop locally, as this in itself reduces need for travel into the city centre. It has a social justice benefit, as well, preserving access for those without cars.

Bus lanes may be appropriate. However, consider the difficulties of enforcement. 'No parking' rule in bus lanes needs to be enforced, but drivers may need an off street alternative in some cases.

Giving buses priority at traffic light junctions by using signal sensors should be used to speed up bus journeys and will be more effective than using bus lanes in many places.

Sprint could be an efficient way of getting people around. However, replacing double decker buses with single decker Sprint is not necessarily a more efficient use of space and it should not be used to justify road widening for bus lanes. Should one Sprint route be piloted and evaluated before schemes are rolled out across multiple routes?

Radial roads are often tree-lined and Sprint could require mass tree felling for example up to 1,800 trees along the A45 Coventry Road, which is not acceptable. Any case for a new kind of transport should look ahead to a generally much reduced use of private car, when the existing road width should suffice.

Metro lines should take space away from cars rather than release road space for car drivers. The East Side extension looks good, but destruction of trees is something we want to avoid as much as possible.

Cycling Revolution. More cycling will be a substantial part of achieving net zero carbon transport. We think that the target numbers are not ambitious enough and they underestimate the huge suppressed demand to cycle, as has been released in other cities. Birmingham starts from an abnormally hostile environment and a low level of cycling, due to traffic danger. The opportunity to change this is very great. Cost effectiveness should be used to provide as many miles of safe cycling as possible.

Spending should focus on routes that cyclists want to take, as a door to door means of transport for local journeys. A preferred cycling route and a preferred driving or bus route are not necessarily the same, with size of vehicles, their relative speed, along with noise and pollution acting as deterrents to cyclists. Crucial to cycle journey time is how often the cyclist has to stop e.g. for lights to change, and the steepness of any hills.

A cycle hire scheme is essential as most cities enjoy, because not everyone has a bike, nor a place to keep it. The city centre is the obvious place to begin. Brum Bikes has provided bikes for people who cannot afford them and this needs to be continued.

References

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