

Bus Priority Scheme for Alcester Road and Moseley Road

Response from Birmingham Friends of the Earth

Bus Priority - DISLIKE

Birmingham Friends of the Earth generally supports measures to make buses operate efficiently, as one way to get people out of private cars and onto public transport. We recognise that the 50 bus route is long and subject to delays in peak times and we have many members living along the bus route. However, we cannot support this scheme from TfWM, having considered it in detail, because it disadvantages pedestrians and cyclists, in order to give more space to road vehicles compared to the current design of the road through Balsall Heath. We do not think it should be approved by Birmingham City council as the Highway Authority.

This scheme design did not have any input from people along the Moseley/Alcester Road who could have suggested improvements to traffic flow, to the bus service and public space, while conserving what is good about the place. Instead, people's time is wasted in making objections at the end. They are an asset, not an obstacle. We have found, not surprisingly, that they dislike the result, so residents were eager to sign our petition with hundreds of names, and this has been sent to connected@birmingham.gov.uk "Yes, we want less delay to bus journeys, but this can be achieved by using the road more efficiently, rather than widening it. We ask Birmingham City Council to halt plans to widen parts of the Moseley Road in Balsall Heath."

People will not leave their cars at home if you widen the radial roads. City wide measures to deter car use and provide alternatives are required. The bus lanes as proposed for A435 will be open to all traffic in both directions outside the peak, with a general traffic lane in each direction, so potentially doubling the number of vehicles that can squeeze through, given that it is currently only one lane each way for most of the time. All experience in Birmingham is that providing more road space just encourages more driving and more parking.

There is no reason to predict a rise in demand for commuting journeys in the peak period along this route, unless they are generated by providing more road space. New housing and business space are to be mainly located in the brownfield central areas of Birmingham, according to the Big City Plan with no new developments being planned for the A435 corridor. This road widening and increased capacity contradicts other measures which are aimed at reducing the number of car journeys. The A435 should experience less congestion in future, so widening will not be justified. The Clean Air charging zone that is soon to be introduced for the city centre will deter many car journeys (-9% predicted). The coming Birmingham Transport Plan 2031 will include further measures to deter car commuting. The Climate Emergency requires the city to plan for a future in which people do not need a car, and enjoy the benefits of a post-car city, not only in the city centre, but in the suburbs as well.

The 50 bus route is already the busiest in the West Midlands. The 50 bus runs every 4 minutes and is already full and standing in peak times, so getting more

people on the bus may not be realistic. The bus is trying and failing to replace our lost train service.

The A435 is excluded from the Sprint bus proposals of WMCA, and that is correct, because the road is too narrow and has many local functions, as a chain of High Streets. There is a parallel rail line where three passenger stations are due to open shortly, giving a fast service into New Street station. A station at Balsall Heath would allow residents to reach jobs across the conurbation, by fast rail services, as well as visitors to access the many restaurants in the evenings; so we want the station reopening to be brought forward. The Midlands Rail Hub can increase the frequency and capacity of these services if/when the Bordesley Cords are built to allow trains into Moor Street and Snow Hill. Buses running through dense urban areas cannot be made to perform like trains or trams.

One quarter of daily car journeys in Birmingham are under a mile, so it is urgent to provide for safe walking and cycling, but the scheme would take space from those modes, making conditions less safe and less attractive. The A435 through Balsall Heath is a 20mph zone, but adding another lane of traffic would make the safe 20mph limit more difficult to enforce outside peak times. This is a ward with low car ownership.

Bus lanes are not a good place to cycle, especially if another lane of traffic prevents you overtaking the bus. The 3m bus lane is already too narrow and we agree with the submission of Pushbikes the Birmingham Cycling Campaign that wider bus lanes are required for bus and bike to share the lane. Where traffic is 20mph and single lane, then cyclists does not require segregated lanes, but they do need wider traffic lanes. The narrow lanes in the TfWM scheme would make cycling conditions dangerous/impossible. Cycle stands have now been put on the pavements, funded by the Birmingham Cycle Revolution, but 2.2m pavements would preclude them reappearing.

The Moseley Road would look and feel like it is for cars and severance will get worse, making the road into a barrier instead of a central meeting place. The city should support local high streets, such Balsall Heath which is included in the recent Shopping and Local Centres Plan. We know that this works, because in Acocks Green and Kings Heath the pavements have been made wider and the road narrower, to the benefit of businesses. Pedestrian space is adequate in the centre of Balsall Heath with 3m pavements, so local businesses are regenerating, and that success should not be threatened by reducing the footways to a mere 2.2m width. Moseley and Kings Heath are included in the council's Walking and Cycling Strategy, and Balsall Heath should have the same status.

Neighbourhoods such as these that were designed to provide facilities within walking distance are an asset to be conserved so that people will want to live in them and not just drive through.

Removing the current bus shelters and putting in slim- line versions would reduce protection from wind and rain at these busy stops with no shade from trees and bench to sit, on the 2.2m pavement.

The line of trees on both sides of the Moseley Road, for last 100 years, are valuable, but we count 11 large trees to be cut down in the plans, including 6 in

the centre of Balsall Heath. They provide on-street shelter, shade and cooling in hot weather, as well as taking out dangerous particulates from the air. BFOE has measured air quality in the centre of Balsall Heath and found it is already unhealthy. We remember that this area was struck by a tornado (2005) due to the "urban heat island" and the city's climate continues to warm up. BFOE has an aim to conserve and indeed to double tree cover. We note the Birmingham Tree Policy and its bid to become a Tree City, but trees are being lost an alarming rate. Birmingham's Climate Emergency Route to Zero plan will require many more trees, to soak up carbon dioxide at scale.

The scheme is very inefficient as a way to save bus passengers' time. The anticipated savings to bus time through Balsall Heath we understand to be 3 minutes in the morning peak, which could be achieved by better management and enforcement, stopping illegal parking and right turns on the Moseley Road, making redundant the expensive and destructive engineering the scheme proposes. We note that the scheme adds another set of pedestrian lights that will stop the flow of traffic, only made necessary if the road were widened.

The short distance through the centre of Balsall Heath means only a small time saving to bus passengers from re-engineering the road, so the most destructive element of the scheme could be taken out with minimal impact on bus times.

Specific changes that might help buses and all road users, avoiding expensive engineering works: in brief.

Highgate Middleway - the traffic lights should respond more rapidly to the bus at the crossing point. There should be safe space for cyclists and pedestrians to cross here: this is where Moseley Rd has been cut by the Middleway.

Highgate Road/Moseley Rd lights

There are long delays at this junction and no phase for pedestrians. Cars block the yellow box. It needs a drop off point for students at Joseph Chamberlain College.

Balsall Heath centre - enforce parking regulations to prevent parked vehicles blocking bus lanes. This may mean require installation of cameras. Since the morning peak is more intense, perhaps the bus lane should be inbound and not outbound. Prevent cars mounting the pavement to park on forecourts, and leave in place the obstructions to them doing that. Buses could utilise the paved area in front of the garage, which is used for storing cars. Side streets could be made one way, to reduce cross movements, Clifton Rd, Lime Grove and, Montpellier St. Something should be done to protect cyclists at Haden Way junction with Moseley Road. A pedestrian crossing here would be useful from St Pauls Road.

Wider traffic lanes, not narrower ones, for the safety of cyclist and drivers. 2.85m lanes for HGVs would not be safe for anyone. Currently buses are often held up by HGVs in the general lane, which buses cannot pass. HGVs should be diverted onto suitable routes on motorway and dual carriageways, not the A435.

Brighton Road - vehicles back up from pedestrian lights at Lidl, so having a single crossing point for them at the junction would remove some delay.

Lesley Bradnam, one of our members, has submitted many detailed suggestions for better management of the road so as to reduce delays to buses.

Environmental Improvements - DISLIKE

We are not convinced by the justification for widening the Moseley Road. The scheme, by removing trees and laying more tarmac for more traffic, cannot overall be called an "environmental improvement", nor a good use of resources. Mostly, the environmental improvements will not be needed if the scheme does not go ahead. Narrowed pavements would not allow enough space for the felled trees to be replanted and images showing new trees in the 2.2m footway are clearly misleading.

The construction phase for the scheme would have a very unwelcome environmental impact in terms of disruption for pedestrians, drivers, and bus passengers.

It is essential that any changes to the street scene such as "decluttering" are not as mitigation for a generally worse pedestrian environment, but are designed with input from local people to make this a more attractive part of the city to live, work or visit.

Information provided - DISLIKE

The letters sent to people along the route hardly mentioned the physical widening of the road or its effects. The scheme was unknown to the local communities affected for the 12 months of designing it, so they could make no input, but that was not stated in the letter. People were not told of the justifications, to balance the damage to local communities. Nothing about the cost of the engineering as proposed. Or that no pedestrian count had been done in Balsall Heath. No information about how Birmingham City Council as the highway authority would assess and decide on its merits (we hope they will). It was sales job, and not a good one.

The maps published had some crucial road names incorrectly labelled. Computer generated images showed four traffic lanes shown as occupying the same space as 3, footways the same colour as the forecourts of buildings although they are not public footpaths and trees where they would have no space for their roots.