

Appendix: Alternatives to The Proposed Trolleybus

Introduction

Insofar as they are consistent with its own, the present North West Leeds Transport Forum (NWLTF) welcomes the principles underlying the current initiative, which we understand to be i) to modernise the public transport system on the A660 to a standard commensurate with the City's aspirations; ii) to increase the use of public transport by improving the quality of experience and reducing journey times; iii) to improve inner city air quality.

We also understand the promoter's desire to gain control of franchising of routes and timetabling throughout the City, enabling the implementation of an integrated, or at least co-ordinated, public transport service. Similarly, we understand the role of a Transport Works Act Order in easing the burden of administration and achieving the power to operate a new public transport system. We also understand that a TWAO could not have been applied for had the proposed system not been "guided".

However we believe that the concept of a new system running in parallel with the residual bus services and having its own separate stops is inappropriate on this route. Rather, we believe that substantial improvements to the public transport on offer could be achieved much more cheaply, much more quickly and with much less deleterious impact on the local communities.

We note that, in his 1998 Decision Letter in respect of the Public Inquiry on Merseyside Rapid Transport trolleybus scheme (MRT), the then Secretary of State concluded that *'the objectives of the scheme might be met more cost-effectively by more modest measures, such as by way of high quality buses and priority measures'*. We suggest that the same conclusion applies in respect of the Leeds Trolleybus proposal.

This document sets out some key features of the A660 route and outlines a series of measures which provide an alternative to the proposed trolleybus system.

Characteristics of the A660 'Corridor'

This part of Leeds is often referred to as the 'A660 Corridor' in the NGT literature. However we feel that this term is misleading because the area is much more than a bland 'corridor' for through traffic. For much of its length the A660 is an attractive residential suburb lined with mature trees, imposing buildings, and historic associations. Those living along the route see it primarily as a local access road with the characteristics of a high street and as a service road for a wide range of uses, and only secondarily as a corridor for through traffic.

The sector is essentially residential but provides all the necessary local infrastructure of schools, churches, local shops, restaurants, personal services (hairdressers etc), as well as an iconic

cinema. The many small businesses do not have major public transport requirements, but do have requirements for deliveries and customer parking (the latter being particularly important for the churches, cinema and local restaurants which have a particular need for this parking at off-peak times)

Local employment is dominated by the three university campuses (two in the southern part of the route and one at Beckett Park). The universities attract a large number of students to Leeds and many of them live in this sector of Leeds - but the current trend is for reduced numbers of students to be housed in the northern part of the sector (e.g. a 57% reduction in students resident in the Far Headingley area between 2008 and 2012) due to closure of halls of residence and construction of new ones nearer the city centre or in other sectors of the city (e.g. on Meanwood Road and on Burley Road).

The area is characterised by a high quality of townscape and an unusually large number of trees which impart a very pleasant ambience. These qualities are recognised and (hopefully) protected by the grant of Conservation Area status, recognition by English Heritage and by Neighbourhood Design Statements.

Although the A660 does carry some long distance traffic, it is primarily the axis for a local distributor network, very dendritic in character, and only very secondarily a through trunk road. The residential areas served by roads to the north-east of Headingley Lane, from Hyde Park to Wood Lane, and to the west of Otley Road, from St Chad's Church to Kepstorn Road, have no alternative access. There are mixed usage and 'active frontages' along much of the route's length. This situation was recognised in the Buchanan Report in the 1960's, which advocated leaving the particular character of Headingley untouched and developing the Kirkstall and Meanwood Roads as alternative main roads.

Less than 20% of vehicles using A660 into the city centre originate beyond the contiguous Leeds conurbation. The prime role of the A660 is not to shift large numbers of vehicles or people from outside the periphery into the centre, but to facilitate local travel for local residents. Proposals for traffic and transport management must fully take this distinction into account – noting also that by no means all of the users of the A660 end their journey in the city centre. Major cross movements occur at the Ring Road, in Headingley (with a dog-leg movement from Shaw Lane to North Lane) and at Hyde Park /Clarendon Road.

The A660 is full, beyond effective capacity and with consequent congestion and delay, during the morning peak period and an extended evening peak during combined school and university terms. Outside of these terms, evening peak flow can be inhibited, but much less severely. Through the rest of the day traffic is slow but is generally without major hold-ups. According to the proposers' own data, the A660's traffic and transport problems are considerably less marked than those on any other route (Investing in Public Transport: A Framework for Leeds, LCC & Metro, April 2009).

The congestion, although limited in duration, detracts from the urban environment – particularly through the centre of Headingley where a pollution monitoring station regularly records some of the highest levels of aerial pollution due to traffic in Leeds.

Despite the peak period congestion, the A660 does have a claim to be a green transport route by virtue of the high usage of active modes and of public transport – both no doubt associated

with the high population of students. (The A660's proportion of active mode users is more than twice that of any other main route into Leeds and its proportion of bus users is almost twice that of its nearest rival).

Public transport comprises a number of famously profitable bus services which ply up and down the route and extend into the residential areas to the north. The services into the northern part of the area are maintained at a higher level than would be justified if there were not significant revenues to be had from the A660 itself.

The existing bus service is frequent (an average of one bus per 3 minutes) but is characterised by high fares, slow journeys (due to very long dwell times at bus stops and to peak period congestion) and unreliability (due primarily to bunching associated with the long dwell times at bus stops).

The use of residential streets for commuter parking and for unofficial park and ride (park in the residential street then ride the bus to the City centre) has been a contentious issue which has led to increased parking restrictions and the designation of zones for residents parking only. (Unfortunately, both of these measures reduce the space available for the customers of local businesses).

Key features of an alternative solution for the A660

NWLTF has concentrated on the situation in the A660 Route and does not claim to have studied the situation on the South Route. We would, however, contend that the arguments against a trolley bus technology apply also to that route and we are concerned that the success of the proposed Stourton Park and Ride Facility is likely to be compromised by the absence of an express shuttle service to and from the City Centre and by recent policy decisions to increase the supply of commuter parking on the Southern edge of the City Centre.

Turning then to the A660:

It is neither possible nor appropriate to seek to increase the flow of general traffic along the A660. But nor is it wise to so delay the traffic on the A660 that it diverts onto rat runs through residential areas. It is therefore necessary to take steps to reduce demand. Encouragement of the use of active modes and of public transport is obviously key to this. We think that this could be achieved by

1. Giving high priority to active mode travellers. For example by:
 - i. relocation/redesign of some existing pedestrian crossings to reflect desire lines
 - ii. provision of additional pedestrian crossings across the A660 (carefully sited to coincide with desire lines – particularly those associated with bus stops)
 - iii. removal of obstacles from narrow pavements (street furniture, redundant driveways, etc)
 - iv. discouraging articulated buses because of their danger to cyclists
 - v. allowing greater priority to pedestrians and cyclists in central Headingley by means of a comprehensive traffic management and streetscape improvement scheme.

2. Providing a park and ride facility at Bodington serviced by frequent express shuttle buses during the peak period and by existing express bus services (the X84) at other times.
3. Improving public transport by means of:
 - a. Actions to reduce dwell time at bus stops:
 - i. introduction of cashless payment (removing the option of payment of cash on-board) via smart cards backed up by efficient card readers on board the buses
 - ii. consideration of in-vehicle (rather than at-entrance) self-validation of cards as is common in many European cities
 - iii. introduction of two-door buses.
 - b. Actions to remove inefficient routing. For example:
 - i. rerouting of southbound buses via Blenheim Walk so as to remove the diversion via Blenheim Terrace and Blackman Lane which, because it is a longer route and entails delay when buses re-join the main traffic stream, adds significantly to southbound bus journey times.
 - c. Actions to reduce the impact of traffic congestion on buses:
 - i. rigorous enforcement of bus lane priority (including, perhaps, exclusion of taxis from bus lanes at peak times)
 - ii. provision of automatic priority for approved buses at some signals
 - iii. provision of bus priority at the Lawnswood roundabout (but within the existing carriageway) as part of a signalisation of that roundabout.
 - iv. redesign of the Hyde Park /Victoria road junction to provide greater priority for buses and improved siting of the stops
 - v. improvement/extension of existing bus lanes; giving very careful consideration to:
 - a) the possibility of a northbound bus lane on Headingley Hill
 - b) the introduction of “bus gates”
 - c) the introduction of tidal bus lanes
 - d) the possibility of giving greater priority to buses in central Headingley (this would require a comprehensive traffic management scheme which might include severe restriction of general traffic - or at least of southbound general traffic – passing through central Headingley).
 - d. Other actions to improve the customer experience. For example:
 - i. simplification of fare structures
 - ii. introduction of transferable through ticketing
 - iii. extension of at-stop real-time information to all bus stops
 - iv. introduction of CCTV where appropriate
 - v. improved driver training and standards of bus cleanliness.
 - e. Phased introduction of buses which rely less on fossil fuels and produce less emissions – We envisage that this process might begin with wider use of dual fuel buses but soon graduate to gas powered vehicles and/or to electric (battery) powered vehicles perhaps drawing their charge at points along the route using induction and perhaps making use of regenerative braking.

Whilst not wishing to encourage the growth in general traffic, we do recognise the need to increase the efficiency of traffic movements and the needs of local businesses. We therefore propose the following improvements to sit alongside those listed above.

4. Measures to improve traffic flow – not least to reduce congestion and its associated emissions:
 - a. banning of Heavy Goods Vehicles at peak times
 - b. discouragement of articulated buses (e.g. via a Quality Bus Partnership or a Bus Quality Contract or, if this is not possible, by denying the automatic priority mentioned at cii above to articulated buses)
 - c. vigilant monitoring of the efficiency of traffic signal settings and adjustment of settings where appropriate
 - d. provision, where appropriate and possible, of bus bays at bus stops
 - e. giving appropriate priority to local traffic (that which joins or leaves the A660 between the Outer Ring Road and Clarendon Road) and to the cross movements at the Ring Road, at Shaw Lane/ North Lane and at Hyde Park/Clarendon Road (probably involving signalisation of Lawnwood Roundabout and appropriate prioritisation of cross movements at the other named locations).
5. Measures to assist local businesses. For example:
 - a. provision of additional, but time-limited, parking for customers of businesses in Central Headingley
 - b. suspension of some bus lanes to allow time-limited customer parking on Otley Road outbound in the morning and inbound in the afternoon/evening.

Many of our proposals have the merit of requiring neither approval from central government, nor major disruption, nor very large sums of capital investment by any partner at any one time. Improvement of conditions on the A660 could begin almost immediately (instead of in 6 years time). Changes to the bus fleet could take place by natural turnover over a 5-10y period. Changes to ticketing arrangements and to signalisation systems could be implemented soon after they are agreed (bringing public transport providers into the dialogue is clearly essential and urgent). The use of Quality Bus Partnerships is an obvious route to implementation but the use of a Bus Quality Contract might be required if bus operators are not willing to co-operate otherwise.

Some of the improvements we propose would take longer to achieve and would require significant infrastructure expenditure (though much less than is envisaged under the TWAO) and although much could be achieved from within the “local” contribution envisaged to fund the works included in the TWAO, additional funds from Central Government would clearly be welcome.

NWLTF has also considered the wider picture of transport in Leeds and, with reservations, is broadly supportive of the published strategy for the City Region. We are particularly supportive of plans to make better use of the local rail network and have identified some potential locations for rail-based park and ride which could be of value even for the A660. We note that the aspirations to improve transport facilities for disadvantaged communities and to aid urban regeneration apply with much greater force in other sectors of Leeds (including the proposed south route of NGT) than they do for the A660.

NWLTF does not have the wherewithal to prepare refined projections of traffic flow or to draw up detailed plans but would be more than happy to assist the relevant bodies in drawing up more detailed proposals.