**Local Transport Plan**

Wokingham Borough Council is consulting on its transport vision up to 2036. It states that it wishes ‘To deliver and maintain a safe, reliable and joined-up transport system that connects new and existing communities, businesses, commercial centres while providing leisure opportunities.

‘The vision will future-proof the transport network for new and emerging technology; reduce social exclusion; improve network resilience; accommodate climate change; reduce congestion and improve productivity.’

Many residents locally will be particularly interested in public transport, and it is pleasing to report that Cllr Pauline Jorgensen is keen to look at improving the public transport network in our area. Following a question raised by Cllr Mickleburgh in the Council Chamber, Cllr Jorgensen picked up on a key MERA request on our local bus services.

She stated: “The Council appreciates that some residents would like a direct service to Wokingham Town Centre from Lower Earley and Maiden Erlegh areas. Once the LTP has been adopted, a revised Borough-wide bus strategy will be written.”

MERA was represented at a meeting hosted by Earley Town Council in which Wokingham Borough officers gave a presentation of their vision for the future. The views MERA, based on what residents have told us and the discussions that have taken place at our meetings, are set out below.

If you would like an opportunity to respond, public consultation will commence later this year. Details will appear on the Borough Council’s website shortly.

**LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 4**

**Public transport**

We do not understand how the council proposes to improve affordability and availability of public transport. Fares are too high, but this cannot be avoided due to running costs.  There is no additional funding available from central or local government to reduce fares to the levels that would attract an appropriate increase in the number of passengers that would make a difference in terms of encouraging people to use public transport instead of their cars.  We are conscious of the fact that it costs far too much to take a family into town by bus - rather more than by car, in fact - even when you take account of car parking costs in Reading. Some areas do not have a frequent enough bus service, and the Hatchmill Estate has none at all.

Many older people use the 19a/b/c bus services operated by Reading Buses to transport them to the doctor's surgery, to the Royal Berkshire Hospital and into Reading town centre.  The small vehicles used on the Maiden Erlegh routes have a step after the first few seats at the front of the bus which people with mobility difficulties cannot negotiate.

The bus stop infrastructure needs improving. More shelters and seats need to be installed wherever possible and real time information provided, particularly where bus services are less frequent.  It is suggested that CIL money could be used for this purpose.  This would improve the attractiveness of the bus as a mode of transport, although we believe that increased frequency and choice of destinations is the key.

Express bus journeys into London are no longer available, although they were once popular, with two operators providing a regular service into the capital. This is a cheaper way of commuting to London than by car or train, and if reinstated would help to reduce congestion on the motorway and on the trains.

Consultation with the public shows conclusively that there is support for affordable, accessible public transport. This really needs to be a priority and deserves to be promoted more widely.  Overcrowding, high fares and slow journeys all deter the public from leaving their cars at home.

**Cyclists and pedestrians**

The council has invested in improving the number of cycleways in the Borough, and we welcome this.  However, we believe that cycleways and pavements should be separated from the roads wherever possible. Cycleways on roads can be useful, but many cyclists believe they are dangerous and won’t use them.

Many footpaths are badly maintained and quite a few in Maiden Erlegh slope too much towards the road. Silverdale Road between Avalon Road and Kenton Road is just one example of such sloping which can cause problems for mobility scooters; and pedestrians can lose their footing, twist their ankles or fall over.

We should also be doing more to discourage motorists from parking on footpaths and grass verges.  We are pleased to note that the government appears at last to be taking this matter seriously, with consultation having taken place on new legislation to extend the laws on pavement parking in London to the rest of the country.

**Motorists**

We have considerable concerns regarding speeding in residential areas, which is not helped when motorists ignore the speed limits imposed.  It is suggested that the lower 20mph limits could in many cases be changed to variable speed limits on through roads, using electronic signs. The concern is that motorists tend to ignore speed limit signs that appear to be unreasonable, and 20mph limits in force when there are no pedestrians about are likely to be disregarded. Once motorists convince themselves that the lowest speed limits can be breached in quiet periods, this mentality can become engrained and applied in all other circumstances, thereby increasing safety issues for pedestrians and cyclists.  We would urge the council to consider ways of ensuring that speed limits are appropriate as well as further measures to improve safety on our roads.  Road humps have proved to be unpopular as they can be uncomfortable or even painful to negotiate for those experiencing back pain, and some residents have complained about vibrations when large vehicles negotiate humps just outside their homes.

It is a common complaint that traffic lights actually cause delays, thereby increasing pollution.  We would like to see more ‘intelligent traffic lights’ installed around the Borough which respond to traffic volumes.

Lack of electrical charging points is one of the main factors that deter people from purchasing electric cars. It is very important to ensure that there is a big increase in provision around the Borough. Induction loops on roads which can charge vehicles as they are being driven could be the answer, although we appreciate that there may be a substantial cost in implementing this.

Separation of vehicles from pedestrians and cyclists should be prioritised with all new developments.  Consideration should be given to ensuring that planning conditions require this wherever appropriate.

All newly constructed roads should incorporate technology for under-road heating to ensure that traffic is not disrupted during freezing conditions.

The deliberate restriction of parking spaces for new builds (housing, work places, hospitals) appears to be short sighted because this invites inappropriate parking and intense frustration.  Motorists driving around looking for parking spaces merely increases congestion and pollution.

The level crossing in Wokingham Town Centre causes major traffic congestion. There needs to be a plan to address this.

**Highways**

It is becoming abundantly clear that many of Wokingham’s roads are far too narrow, particularly having regard to all the new developments in the Borough.

The new roads being built are appreciated, but we also need to improve our existing roads.

**Street lighting**

We would be interested to learn the conclusions that have been reached with the experiment to switch off designated street lamps after midnight. Residents have concerns that this makes the streets less safe and encourages criminal behaviour.

**Working from home**

Increased broadband provision is identified as a way to increase the ability of people to work from home. This must be extended to everywhere in the Borough as a matter of priority. Broadband providers must be given every assistance to achieve this.