

**Meeting:** Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2009  
**Subject:** Central Bedfordshire Congestion Strategy  
**Report of:** David McVicar, Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities  
**Summary:** The purpose of this report is to advise members on the progress on the development of the Central Bedfordshire Congestion Strategy and to seek any views at this early stage of development.

Contact Officer: Basil Jackson, Assistant Director Highways and Transport  
Advising Officer: Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities  
Public/Exempt: Public  
Wards Affected: All  
Function of: Council  
Reason for urgency (if appropriate)

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1. Members are asked to note:**
  - (a) the current position in the development of the Central Bedfordshire Congestion Strategy; and**
  - (b) the key stakeholder workshop which is due to take place in Autumn 2009.**

#### **Background**

1. Congestion is the major transport problem facing Central Bedfordshire. The delays experienced by private motorists, businesses and those using public transport affects quality of life and impacts on opportunities for growth.

2. Tackling traffic congestion is therefore one of the twelve priorities identified by Central Bedfordshire Council. This paper gives a brief outline of the Council's strategy for delivering that objective. It is focused on a four-point plan based on the following principles:

<b>Network Management</b> Making better use of the existing road network by identifying the most congested junctions and roads, and introducing low-cost improvements to increase their capacity.
<b>Smarter Travel Choices</b> Promoting high quality alternatives to private motoring to reduce congestion for essential journeys. These choices include walking, cycling and especially public transport..
<b>Demand Management</b> Managing the supply of parking to promote short-stay for shoppers in town centres, and long-stay for commuters in edge of town park & ride.
<b>Network Enhancement</b> Providing new infrastructure to remove traffic from congested areas, e.g. the Northern Bypass and Woodside Connection in Dunstable.

It is envisaged that the four areas of work will be complementary and a bespoke mix may need to be applied to different parts of the district. The impact of the Strategy will be measured using National Indicator 167, which records the average journey time per mile in peak hours.

3. Transport policy for Central Bedfordshire is currently derived from the Second Local Transport Plan for Bedfordshire, although this document is due to be replaced by LTP 3 in April 2011.

It is intended that this Strategy will form the core policy document for the Highways and Transportation Service of Central Bedfordshire Council. Its principles will inform all of the work undertaken in the division, including solutions to parking problems.

## Information

4. Analysis undertaken by officers shows key congestion points in Central Bedfordshire to be in town centres or on the major cross-country routes. An integral part of the proposals for growth in Central Bedfordshire is the regeneration of town centres, which will increase their roles as destinations for retail, leisure and employment, leading to increased demand for access on already crowded roads.

5. In Central Bedfordshire the slowest moving roads are:

The A5 through Dunstable

The A505 through Dunstable

The A5120 from Ampthill to Dunstable

The A5 through Hockliffe

The A421 from Bedford to the M1

The A507 at Ampthill

The A1 at Sandy, and

The A6 / A507 at Clophill

Whilst all of these junctions and routes are integral to Central Bedfordshire's congestion problems, it is important to note that Trunk roads (the A1, A5 & A421) fall under the control of the Highways Agency (HA). It will therefore be important to maintain the closest possible links with the HA in achieving our objectives.

6. Reducing congestion is as much about influencing travel behaviour as it is about directly providing physical solutions. An important leadership role for Central Bedfordshire Council therefore is to provide incentives that will result in a change in travel habits.

### **The Way Forward**

7. If we are to meet the travel and transport needs of an increasing population, we need to understand why people travel and which services and facilities are important to them. An understanding of the travel patterns in Central Bedfordshire is crucial in determining how best to develop strategies to combat congestion.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

8. Officers have set up a consultation work shop seminar in Autumn 2009 with key stakeholders, including:
- Chamber of Commerce
  - Education Dept
  - Children's Services Dept
  - Police
  - Emergency services
  - Council Portfolio Holders, OSC and Task Group Chairmen.

The aim of the workshop is to discuss the approach to Congestion Management as outlined in this paper. The information and opinions gathered from the key stakeholder workshop will inform the development of the Congestion Strategy before wider consultation. Overview and Scrutiny Committee's views on the Strategy are sought at this very early stage of its development. Members may also wish to see this item come back to Committee before the document is finalised. It is envisaged that a finalised Strategy will be taken to Executive by March 2010.

### CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

**Council Priorities:**

Tackling Congestion in Central Bedfordshire.

**Financial:**

Cost of workshop and development of strategy document included within existing highways budget.

**Legal:**

None as a result of this report

**Risk Management:**

None as a result of this report

**Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

None as a result of this report

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

None as a result of this report

**Community Development/Safety:**

None as a result of this report

**Sustainability:**

None as a result of this report