



York Civic Trust

A Strategy for Managing Car Use in York
Summary Paper
April 2021

This is a summary of our report, *A Strategy for Managing Car Use in York*. It is one of a set of seven modal strategy documents, written in the context of our earlier report *Towards a Transport Strategy for York*, and prepared as input to York's new Local Transport Plan, LTP4. We consider the role of car use, the need to manage levels of car use, the requirements for reducing emissions from cars, and the ways in which these might be done. We do not cover how the road network is managed, or the role of improvements to competing modes, all of which are covered in companion reports.

The car is a highly attractive mode of transport. It is often the only possible means of travel, apart from taxis, to places where public transport is poor, at night when public transport is limited, and when goods or heavy luggage are carried. However, use of cars in built-up areas contributes to congestion and delays, pollution and danger, as well as negatively affecting active travel modes and the environment.

We propose a set of policy objectives in our report *Towards a Transport Strategy for York*. While effective provision for car use can contribute to our objective of improving access, targeted management of levels of car use can achieve benefits in terms of improved efficiency, reductions in air pollution and carbon emissions, public health, road safety and liveability. Depending on the resulting patterns of car use and the allocation of road space, it is also likely to achieve benefits for public realm, heritage and the economy.

The spring 2020 lockdown resulted in a substantial reduction in traffic flows, the virtual absence of congestion, a 40% reduction in NO_x concentrations, less traffic noise, reduced severance for pedestrians and cyclists, and potentially greater safety. We accept that future trends are uncertain, but suggest that it is worth seeking to achieve a level of car use between the pre-lockdown conditions and those achieved during the lockdown, while at the same time providing for appropriate levels of accessibility.

The Council's target for York as a carbon neutral city by 2030 determines the level of car use reduction; it is clear that simply switching to electric vehicles will be insufficient. To this end we propose targets of reducing car travel by 20% by 2027 and 35% by 2037. Some decline in car use will arise through actions to reduce overall travel, which we consider separately, but transfer to other modes should aim to reduce the mode share for travel by car to 49% in

2027 and 40% in 2037. The remaining cars will also need to be less polluting. We advocate increasing the percentage of cars on York's roads which are electric or at least of Clean Air Zone standard to 75% by 2025 and 90% by 2037. We discuss the need for tackling congestion, but note that proposed reductions in car use should be sufficient. We also suggest that the Council consider, on safety grounds, specifying a target for car size. While these targets are challenging, national surveys now demonstrate majority support for reducing urban traffic levels and hence tackling carbon, pollution and congestion.

To these ends we assess 19 different measures which might be used, covering promotion of alternatives, changes to supply and regulation, pricing, and support for specific types of car. We argue that achieving changes in car use needs a hearts and minds approach, and advocate intensive use of Personal, Workplace and School Travel Plans, and broader incentivisation programmes focusing on carbon reduction. We anticipate that these, together with improvements to alternatives to the car, if sustained, could reduce car use by 10% to 15%. The remainder will require some restrictions on car use.

For the city centre, we propose that removal of what the Council refers to as non-essential car use should be achieved by restricting through movement, increasing parking charges and selective reduction of parking space. Expansion of the Clean Air Zone to include cars would help achieve our low emission targets. It may also be appropriate to consider a permit system for access, enforced as Coppergate is currently. We propose the extension of residents' parking zones to all areas where residents themselves are supportive, and the provision of on-street charging facilities where off-street charging is not possible.

If further reductions in car use are needed, road pricing may offer the most effective method, given the reduction in demand which it can achieve and the revenue which it can generate to support enhancements to public transport, cycling and walking. This would be particularly relevant to addressing congestion in and around the city centre but also in the out of town centres. We recommend that the Council initiate a study of options, and a process of public engagement, so that a preferred scheme can be implemented if required. Any study would need to consider the basis for charging, any provision for exemptions and rebates, and the resulting impacts on the environment, the economy and equity.

Change achieved through a hearts and minds approach should be welcome. However, measures designed to restrict car use are controversial and unpopular with some, and politicians are typically reluctant to implement them. It is thus essential that the need for them is made clear, by stressing the objectives which they are designed to achieve, demonstrating that there are no more cost-effective alternatives, directly addressing the equity impacts, and seeking to encourage the public support of the majority. The promotional measures which we advocate rely on revenue funding, and the management measures on effective enforcement. Both need to be sustained.

We see the management of car use as central to the new Local Transport Plan. It can be reinforced by our proposals for reducing travel and for managing the road network. It needs to be developed synergistically with our proposals for improving public transport, cycling and walking. The improvements to the outer ring road will offer an unmissable opportunity to encourage complementary changes in car use in the city.