



York Civic Trust

Comparator Case Studies for York's 2024 Local Transport Strategy Freiburg im Breisgau April 2024

Introductory note

This is one of nine case studies originally produced in draft in May 2021 at the request of the City of York Council. At the time the Council intended to publish a new Local Transport Plan in December 2021, and had invited York Civic Trust, through its Transport Advisory Group, to offer advice on content. The nine case studies, of cities chosen in discussion with the Council, were developed sufficiently fully to allow the Council to decide which it wished to incorporate in its Local Transport Plan. That decision was never taken, and the 2021 Local Transport Plan was never completed. In February 2022 York Civic Trust collated its advice into *A Transport Strategy for York*, Section 6 of which summarises the key messages from the nine case studies. In February 2023 the Council produced a first draft of a Local Transport Strategy. In March 2023 the Council's Scrutiny Committee on Economy and Place reviewed the nine case studies and recommended that "the Executive Member for Transport work with York Civic Trust and relevant officers on taking the report forward with two or three case studies and focus on building public buy in into medium and long term traffic strategies".

In March 2024 the Council's new administration agreed to publish a Local Transport Strategy for the city in June 2024, based on a consultation on key principles launched in November 2023. The Trust was invited to update the nine case studies, within the limited resources available to it, and to produce brief summaries of key messages for York's Local Transport Strategy. While these summaries and updated strategies are now being published on the Trust's website, it is important to stress that they have not been fully researched, and thus may not be wholly up to date.

Summary (290 words)

[Note: illustrations can be provided if required]

Freiburg in south west Germany is of similar size and density to York, with 230,000 inhabitants, 90% of whom live within three miles of the city centre. However, it has markedly different travel patterns, with almost 80% of all journeys on foot, cycling or by bus, as compared with around 50% **[check]** in York. It has achieved this high level of

sustainable travel by adopting a consistent land use and transport strategy since the 1980s, overseen by a series of governing coalitions.

In land use planning, Freiburg promotes itself as “the city of short distances”. All development takes place within three miles of the centre, located on public transport arteries with strong local centres. Vauban, with 5000 inhabitants, is built around a new tram line, with all parking on the periphery and half the roads designed as play streets. It could be a model for York Central. York has elected to locate most of its new strategic developments outside the outer ring road, making it even more important that similar principles are incorporated into its Sustainable Transport SPD.

The five main planks of its transport strategy are extension of the public transport network, promotion of cycling, promotion of walking, liveable streets and limitation of individual motorised vehicle traffic. All of these are reflected in York’s Policy Focus Areas. The last two are of particular relevance to York’s Movement and Place Plan. Freiburg has continued to invest in the design of streets as places to dwell and enjoy city life. Speeds are limited to 50km/h on main roads, 30km/h on all residential roads, and 10km/h on the extensive network of play streets. In these play streets no parking or stopping is permitted outside marked areas, and children are actively encouraged to play.

Context

Background

Freiburg is in the state (Land) of Baden-Württemberg in south-west Germany. It lies between the Black Forest and the Rhine, some 60km north of Basle and 80km south of Strasbourg, and only 20km from the French border. It has a population of 230,000 (2021) and is the fourth largest city in the state after Stuttgart, Karlsruhe and Mannheim. It lies at the centre of a metropolitan area with a population of some 660,000. Recently the urban population has been rising by around 1% per annum.

Historically, the city has acted as the hub of the Breisgau region. A famous old German university town, and archiepiscopal seat, Freiburg was founded as a free market town (hence its name) in 1120. It was occupied by many different countries from the start of the Thirty Years’ War (1618) onwards, and became part of Baden in 1805. It was heavily bombed in the Second World War.

It lies at the intersection of major trade routes, grew rich in the fourteenth century as a result of the local silver mines, and developed into a major commercial, intellectual, and ecclesiastical centre of the upper Rhine region. The city is known for its medieval minster and Renaissance university (which has around 30,000 students), as well as for its high standard of living and advanced environmental practices. The city is situated in the heart of the major Baden wine-growing region and serves as the primary tourist entry point to the scenic beauty of the Black Forest (Wikipedia).

Freiburg is a compact city, with 90% of the population living within 5km of the Münsterplatz, and 95% within 10km. It is relatively flat, but the foothills of the Black Forest limit growth to the east.

Governance

The federal government has important planning responsibilities influencing urban development; these are the definition of the overall national spatial planning principles, the construction and maintenance of federal transport infrastructure and the law on urban development. Spatial and transport planning for the federal and the state governments are based on a common framework.

Below the federal level the 16 states are the major administrative authorities. They all have their own transport planning processes and plans, which have to be coordinated with national policy. The federal government does not require the states or cities to produce Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs), and there is thus no financial support for them from the federal or the state level. Since there is no requirement for SUMPs, there is no statutory guidance.

Freiburg's city council is responsible for urban and transport planning, and has chosen to develop its own land use and transport plans. The Green Party has had the largest share of the vote for many years, but even so they only have 13 out of 48 seats on the Council. The CDU and SPD are the next largest with six seats each. Government is thus by coalition. The Mayor is Martin Horn, an independent elected in 2019 who was previously aligned to the SPD.

Current transport provision

As in other German cities, all public transport is provided by a Verkehrs Verbund, which operates all the bus and tram services, and receives significant financial support from the state.

Transport planning

Local transport plans

While the European Commission now encourages all cities to produce Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans, the German government has not yet made these mandatory. However, Freiburg has pursued a consistent land use and transport policy since the 1970s. A Land Use Plan and Transportation Plan ("Verkehrsentwicklungsplan" (VEP 2020)) were published in 2006, based on a set of "citizens' visionary goals" which were specified in 2003. There are detailed plans covering transport noise, air pollution, cycling and public transport. Performance against the targets in VEP 2020 has been monitored regularly, but it appears that there is yet to be an update to it.

The land use plan aims to achieve a compact city, with short travel distances and no urban sprawl. The 2006 document referred to Freiburg as being "the city of short distances". Development is focused on public transport arteries, with strong local centres. All new development is targeted on the "inner city", defined as the area within 5km of the centre. In 1995, the city council determined that all new buildings must comply with low energy specifications.

Priority objectives of the Plan

The Transport Development Plan (VEP 2020) affirmed that the primary aims are to avoid traffic through a coordinated urban development and transport policy and to make eco-mobility (walking, cycling and public transport) more appealing. The aim is to make the remaining car traffic as environmentally and city-friendly as possible by minimising noise, exhaust fumes, and hazards. Freiburg prides itself as being an environmental city. It was Germany's environmental capital in 1992, Federal climate protection capital in 2010, and was also European city of the year in 2010. Environmental objectives therefore dominate the Plans. Accessibility is clearly also an important objective, with an emphasis on proximity.

Strategic approach

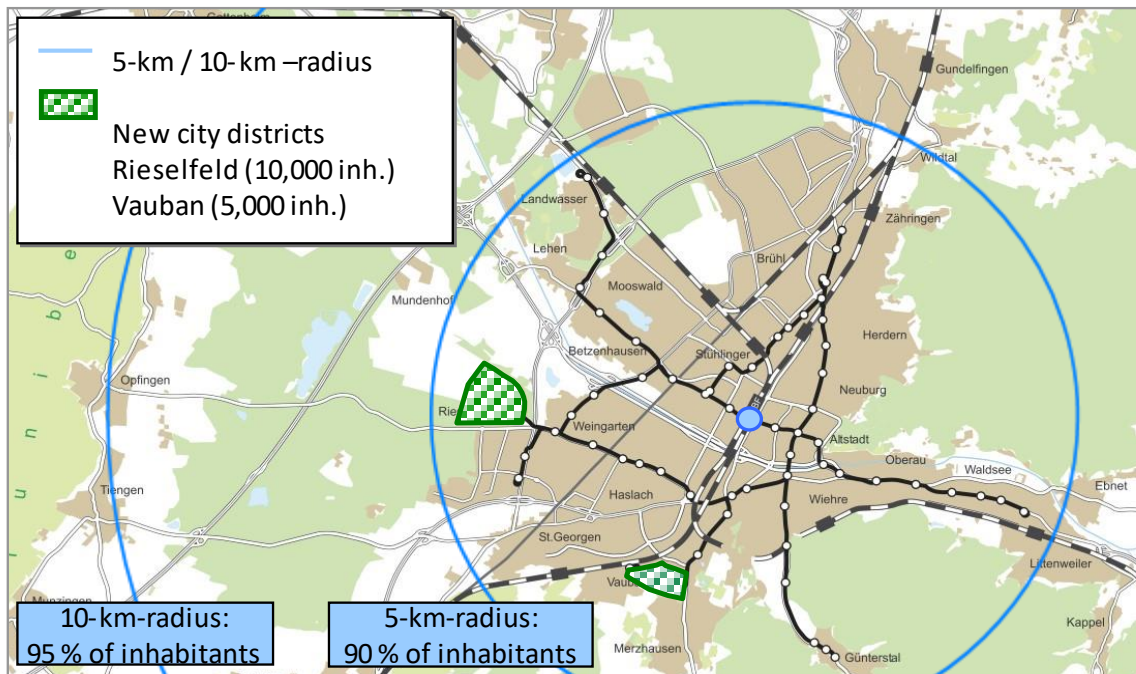
For many decades, the city has been expanding light-rail lines and cycle paths, enlarging and enhancing pedestrian zones and neighbourhood centres, optimising traffic-light settings, and improving traffic regulations. The transport strategy is defined as having five pillars:

- extension of the public transport network
- promotion of cycling
- promotion of walking
- liveable streets
- limitation of individual motorised vehicle traffic.

Principal policy measures

Public transport is based on buses and trams. There are three main tram lines and several spurs (see map). Trams run through the city centre pedestrian area and are not separated or signal controlled, though they are limited to 25km/h. Trams and pedestrians have equal rights in such areas.

Integrated urban and transport planning



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There is an extensive network of cycle routes with a range of designs to provide priority and directness.

Traffic speeds are limited throughout the city to 50km/h on main roads, 30km/h on all residential roads, and 10km/h on the extensive network of play streets. In these play streets no parking or stopping is permitted outside marked areas, and children are actively encouraged to play.

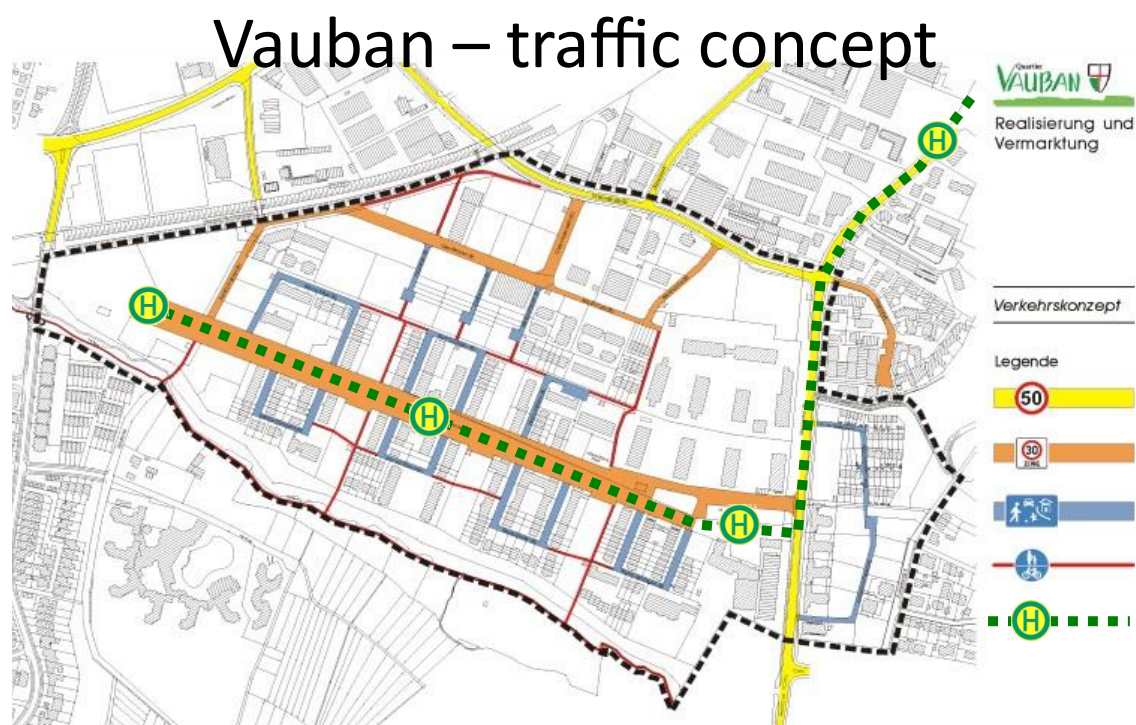
Provision for disabled travellers

Parking for disabled people is permitted at ten locations in the pedestrian zone. There are also 15 separate locations where publicly available disabled toilets are provided. Some of these are secured with a “Euro-key”.

Demonstrator new neighbourhoods

All new developments are designed to be liveable and to rely on sustainable short distance travel. They are built around existing or new bus and tram lines, with parking only permitted on the periphery. The two major new developments (see map) are Vauban (5,000 population) and Rieselfeld (10,000).

The concept for Vauban is shown in the diagram. H are tram stops, blue are play streets and all parking is on the periphery. The tram extension from the existing line (see map above) was 2.5km long and cost €18m. Of this, 85% was paid for from federal and state grants, and 15% from land value capture.



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Modal shares

Even in 1982 61% of all journeys were by sustainable modes. The latest figures are for 2016. These give a sustainable mode share of 79% (cycling 34%, walking 29%, public transport 16%) and 21% by car. The city claims that this was the highest sustainable mode share of all cities in Germany.

Relevance to York

Useful lessons and pointers

Freiburg is of a similar size to York, and probably of a similar density, and is similarly free-standing (though it appears to have a more heavily populated hinterland).

It has adopted many of the policies to which York aspires, including greater priority for pedestrians and cyclists and development focused on public transport. It has an extensive pedestrian area in the centre, but appears to have resolved the need for access more effectively than did York in 2021.

Its approach to the management of car traffic appears to be worth investigating further, including its use of a clear policy over speed limits, residential streets and play streets.

Its logical and consistent approach to the design of new developments is of particular relevance given the number of new developments envisaged in York's Local Plan. In particular, Vauban offers a useful model for the more detailed design of York Central, which will have a similar population.

Any aspects which make it less relevant to York

Its use of trams which, as in many European cities, appear easier to finance, may potentially make it less relevant, though high quality bus corridors in York could potentially have a similar impact.

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Revised 12th April 2024.