

REPORT TO: Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 17 March 2010

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director - Environment

SUBJECT: Highway Capacity–Murdishaw Roundabout

WARDS: Norton South

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To advise Members of the extent and likely cause of congestion on the Murdishaw Avenue arm of the Murdishaw roundabout, to consider the likely impact of the Linnets Football Club on traffic flows and road capacity, and to explore potential options for improving capacity.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) the proposal discussed in section 3.7 of this report should be progressed, as the preferred option, and that a detailed evaluation of its feasibility be carried out, with a view to its implementation during the next financial year subject to feasibility, safety and affordability constraints. Such a scheme would include widening of the Murdishaw Avenue approach and eastern side of the circulatory carriageway to two lanes, and installing visibility barriers on a trial basis;**
- (2) the Highways Agency proposals should be studied in detail by Council officers, to check whether there will be any reduction in delays as a result of any of the Agency's schemes; and**
- (3) the outcome of these studies be conveyed to the elected Members for this area and the Chairman of this Board so that they will be aware of whether a scheme or safety measures can be progressed and when.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Recent traffic surveys and observations have shown that highway capacity problems are occurring on the Murdishaw Avenue arm of the Southern Expressway/ Murdishaw Avenue/ Chester Road junction. Queues are experienced during the am peak, which have been observed to stretch back to the roundabout junction with Barnfield Avenue. These queues and the consequent delays and potential for rat running through adjacent residential areas have been the cause of concern for some time. Following specific concerns expressed by one of the elected Members for the area, Officers were recently requested to investigate the extent of the problem and report back on potential solutions.

- 3.2 These issues were brought further into focus during the consideration of planning application ref. 09/00335/HBCFUL - a proposal to upgrade the existing sports ground to house the Runcorn Linnets Football Club. Whilst considering the application it was not considered necessary to demand traffic flow information, as the applicant had stated that match traffic would be on Saturday afternoons and Tuesday evenings (with a 7pm kick off) – that is, outside of the am peak period when the problem is most significant. At the Development Control Committee meeting, Members discussed the proposal for the Club and the potential increase in traffic flows should the number of spectators increase beyond those predicted. It was resolved that the Chairmen of Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board and Development Control Committee meet together with Officers in order to agree a scope to address the traffic flow concerns in the surrounding area to Halton Sports. This report follows on from that resolution and from the concerns expressed about traffic problems in the am peak period.
- 3.3 A local safety scheme was implemented at the roundabout in 2004. This scheme was designed to address a number of issues, including excessive speeds on the approaches and high circulatory speeds (the latter making it difficult for waiting traffic to join the roundabout), and loss of control/weaving incidents. This was achieved by: installing speed control measures and dedicated lane markings on the Southern Expressway approach; reducing the entry at Murdishaw Avenue to a single lane width, and reducing the circulatory carriageway of the roundabout to one lane.
- 3.4 Generally, the operation of the roundabout has improved with the reduction of the circulatory area from two lanes to one, but capacity has been reduced, which results in queues in the am peak.
- 3.5 A possible solution to these queues may be to restore the Murdishaw Avenue approach to two lanes with separate turning markings, with a corresponding widening of the circulatory carriageway, downstream of this entry, i.e. on the east side of the roundabout.
- 3.6 Dealing purely with the approach from Murdishaw Avenue, the area immediately before joining the roundabout has long been a location for nose to tail shunts and the situation appears to be deteriorating:

Year	RTAs
2008	5
2007	3
2006	2
2005	0
2004	1
2003	3
2002	4
2001	3

As queue lengths increase, so does the pressure on drivers to take chances entering the roundabout and although not recorded by the Police as a causation factor it is believed many of the incidents stem from waiting drivers looking at the circulatory traffic flows and anticipating the behaviour of the driver in front. Murdishaw Avenue itself is traffic calmed. It is therefore considered worthwhile to install a barrier on a trial basis (monitoring accidents over 12months) to block the view to the right for drivers travelling towards the roundabout from Murdishaw Avenue, to prevent this happening. The barrier/blocking would extend to within one car length of the give way line.

- 3.7 Restoring the circulatory area to two lanes immediately 'downstream' of the Murdishaw Avenue access, which would allow the Murdishaw Avenue approach to be widened to two dedicated lanes, may also be feasible, as this side of the roundabout was not a particular problem area before the 2004 scheme. With the higher traffic flows in the area at present it would, however, be necessary to carefully consider weaving space on the east side of the roundabout, if two lanes were to be restored here. A potential scheme is being prepared that will allow the incorporation of the widening and barrier measures to be evaluated and a plan of the proposal will be prepared for Members to view prior to the meeting. The Murdishaw Avenue access has been identified as an accident cluster site and was already scheduled to be considered as a Local Safety Scheme for measures in 2010/11, so it is possible that a scheme could be implemented using existing budgets during the coming financial year if it is feasible, safe and affordable.
- 3.8 In addition to the above analysis by Council Officers, AOne+ are currently carrying out traffic assessments in the area on behalf of the Highways Agency, relating to the potential replacement of the A56 bridge over the M56 motorway. The Council is awaiting their final traffic data and modelling results.
- 3.9 A number of additional options have also been considered as follows:
 1. **Introduce traffic signals on the Expressway approach and related circulatory carriageway approach** – This option would give an indirect opportunity for drivers to exit Murdishaw Avenue, by providing a break in the flow of traffic from the Expressway towards Preston Brook. It is a somewhat over engineered solution, however, as signals would not normally be required on a roundabout with this level of traffic flow. The capital scheme cost is relatively high (approx £100,000) and also carries revenue funding implications for maintenance and electricity costs (approx £1000 pa.). A potential sub option was also considered to directly signalise the Murdishaw Avenue arm, but there is less queuing length available within the circulatory carriageway at this point which could result in more accidents; and

2. **Allow all purpose access via the Busway from A56 Chester Road to Murdishaw Avenue (near to Navigation Close).** This would release some capacity at the roundabout by allowing a shorter route out of Murdishaw for traffic which is travelling between the two ends of this stretch of Busway. (ie. towards M56/Warrington/Northwich). Whilst there are only a limited number of bus services using this link, the cost of implementing such a scheme would be expensive due to the alterations needed to signal timings and junction radii to allow for movements on and off the busway and associated utility diversions at the A56 (fibre optic cables and gas pipeline). There are, however two low bridges along the route (one of which carries the M56), which could result in serious accidents if high vehicles inadvertently use the route. This issue and the precise nature of any alterations to the signal junctions would need to be considered in more detail before this option could be progressed any further. Some additional traffic may also be encouraged to travel through Preston Brook as a result.

3.10 In the short term it is considered that the proposal discussed in section 3.7 above should be progressed, as the preferred option, and that a detailed evaluation of its feasibility be carried out, with a view to its implementation during the next financial year subject to feasibility, safety and affordability constraints. It is also proposed that the Highways Agency proposals should be studied in detail by Council officers, to check whether there will be any reduction in delays as a result of any of the Agency's schemes. Finally, it is proposed that the outcome of these studies be conveyed to the elected Members for this area and the Chairman of this Board so that they will be aware of whether a scheme or safety measures can be progressed and when.

3.11 As stated in paragraph 3.2, the likelihood of congestion at the roundabout coinciding with peak flows into the Linnets Football Club is very small. If this does occur then the junction of the carpark with Murdishaw Avenue could be protected by a yellow hatched box to force queuing traffic to allow right turners into the Club. An overflow carpark is also to be provided which will be accessed from Stockham Lane via the main carpark, which will be stewarded during matches. A number of questions were raised during the planning application process in relation to possible expansion scenarios. These questions, together with the answers given are included in Appendix 1, which shows that the Club have a number of plans in place should spectator numbers increase.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no policy implications, as such, but the Busway option would further diminish the dedicated Busway network within Runcorn.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 It is proposed that the preferred scheme be implemented if more detailed studies prove it is feasible and affordable using existing Local Safety Scheme budgets for 2010/11. The other options described above have various implications for Council resources as previously discussed. However, having considered the advantages and disadvantages of all of the options proposed, the option discussed in 3.7 above emerges as the preferred option.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

There are no direct implications, but any proposal to reduce congestion may have positive impacts upon local air quality, benefiting children and young people. Conversely congestion and delays to motor vehicles may encourage walking and cycling.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

There are no direct implications.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

There are no direct implications, but any proposal to reduce congestion may have positive impacts upon local air quality, benefiting health. Conversely congestion and delays to motor vehicles may encourage walking and cycling.

6.4 A Safer Halton

It is anticipated that the preferred option will reduce injury accidents occurring on the roundabout.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Reducing congestion would bring with it economic benefits in time savings.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 Should the final option be pursued, it is likely that a risk assessment will be required due to the low bridges.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 The proposal does not influence equality and diversity, therefore no assessment is deemed necessary

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

- 9.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.

APPENDIX 1 – RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS RAISED DURING FOOTBALL CLUB PLANNING PROCESS

- Sustainable travel options need to be explored and suitable measure put in place on identified routes

The Club runs a fans minibus to home and away games. If the demand is there it runs and picks up at various points around the town. There are at least 3 public transport options from the town and surrounding areas. Routes 15,20, 20A are listed and HBC Transport route 61 would meet the kick off times and departure times for Runcorn based fans.

- A parking management plan needs to be devised, especially for games with large crowds

This is true, but probably a very long way off. The total ground capacity would be of the order of 1,600 and there have only been a handful of games that have attracted crowds of this magnitude over the last 10 years. A typical "large crowd", which in itself is atypical (perhaps once in 3 years), would still be expected to be less than 500.

- Possible to the above alternative parking sites should be sourced for a park and ride facility

It would be an extraordinary match that would warrant such a provision at our level, or the next couple of levels above. Such a match would be known of well in advance and provision could be made subject to the anticipated demand.

- Management of blocking Stockham lane needs to be addressed especially as spectator facilities will be provided on the opposite side of the road to the ground

Our ideal solution to this would be to close it for the duration of the match, and for a short period prior to it, although it could be acceptable, though much less desirable, to man the crossing with stewards which would enable access down Stockham Lane to the general public before and during a match without having to detour around the Ground.

- Expansion plans?

There is sufficient room within the existing footprint to increase the capacity of the ground to potentially cover a couple of promotions, but Conference levels require total ground capacities of 4,000-5,000 in order to qualify, and this would more than likely require that the footprint be increased (possibly to the East). With regard to traffic management, the average attendance of the Football Conference, which is four full divisions above where the club currently sits, is still only around 1800. However, park and ride schemes would need to be contemplated to be able to operate at that level.