

## LEEDS TRANSPORT STRATEGY – CONNECTING LEEDS

Consultation Response from Roundhay Environmental Action Project – REAP [info@reap-leeds.org.uk]

### A] INTRODUCTION

1] REAP is a local voluntary organization set up over 10 years ago to promote practical local action on carbon reduction and the environment. Having consulted with both REAP members and trustees, both individually and via a special Zoom meeting set up by Ruth Gelletlie, we are pleased to have the opportunity to provide these comments on the LCC Draft Transport Strategy [ the Strategy from here on].

2] REAP generally welcomes the overall vision of the Strategy, with its strong emphasis on climate change and the environment, health and inclusive growth.

3] However, whilst recognizing that this is a high level strategy, and not a detailed action plan, there are a number of elements, within the document, that require explanation and clarification. In addition, whilst the overall vision is laudable, some of the ways outlined to achieve it lack ambition.

4] At the heart of the Strategy is the vision that Leeds becomes, by 2030, “ a city where you don’t need a car, where everyone has affordable zero carbon choices in how they travel”, with the city aiming to become carbon neutral by that date.

5] This response will outline, initially, some broader issues concerned with clarity and level of ambition, concentrating largely on the “modal shift” in means of transport/ getting about described in the Strategy [ pp 6-7]. Next, we highlight more detailed comments, relating to the different modes of transport, made by members and trustees of REAP. Finally, we comment on some longer term concerns, as regards the Strategy, brought into focus by the potential changes in lifestyle post Covid 19.

### B] “MODAL SHIFT”- QUESTIONS OF CLARITY AND AMBITION.

1] As mentioned above, LCC is committed to a carbon neutral city by 2030. However, the Strategy [Exec Summary p.9] outlines the fact that the reduction measures envisaged as resulting from the 6 Big Moves [Exec Summary pp 5-7] will only account for a 43% reduction in the transport carbon footprint. This leaves a further 57% still to be achieved by, as yet, unknown means. There is, therefore, a question about the level of ambition in the Strategy, as well as a need to identify exactly how this 57% gap is going to be dealt with.

2] The question about level of ambition can be further illustrated by examining the “modal shift” envisaged by 2030 [see reference in para 5 above]. These proposed changes to the way we get about in Leeds are both crucial to the success of the Strategy, and in need of a massive “buy-in” from the public, in order to make them a reality. The proposed changes, by 2030, are as follows; **walking+ 30%; buses+130%; trains[local] +100%; cycling +400%; Cars – 30%**. It is difficult to gauge from the Strategy where, when and how the investment in respect of bus and train expansion would be made available, with many of these decisions lying beyond LCC’s immediate control. The increase in cycle journeys looks

## LEEDS TRANSPORT STRATEGY – CONNECTING LEEDS

very impressive, but only raises the number to 4% of total journeys [notwithstanding continuing issues with the viability of the cycle network- see next section]. The standout number, however, concerns car journeys.

3] Given that the vision for Leeds by 2030 is predicated on the headline “you don’t need a car”, a reduction of 30% in car journeys will not be enough. Further, there is a lack of clarity about what is actually being suggested. Elsewhere in the Strategy [see section on de-carbonising transport for example] there is a call for a dramatic increase in electric vehicles of all kinds [including cars], along with the associated necessary increase in infrastructure. It is not clear what is being asked - is it simply reduction in polluting cars, or of the number of cars overall? If the volume of traffic remains the same as at present [albeit made up of mainly electric cars and vans] the proposed expansion of public transport [+130%] will be far more difficult to achieve.

4] More detailed comments on the different modes of transport are included in the next section of this response. However, there remains one more general point about the level of ambition contained in the suggestions as to how individuals can help in achieving the modal shift [see Exec. summary p.8]. The suggestions are as follows;

- leave the car at home one day a week
- visit places by public transport
- have a web meeting instead of travelling to the meeting
- walk the children to school.

5] Given the urgent need to reduce car use by 2030, it may well be possible to leave the car at home for many more days than one. We will comment in a subsequent section on changing work patterns post Covid, but there does appear to be an inexorable shift towards more home working. This would also suggest that web meetings will become far more frequent. LCC needs to urgently scope these changing work patterns, since this will be a key element in determining the final strategy.

6] The suggestion of “visiting places by public transport“ is vague and makes the assumption that buses actually go to the places where people want to go This raises the whole question of the flexibility and reliability of public transport which is picked up in the following section.

7] Finally, the aspiration that more children are walked to school is an extremely laudable one, but also one that will need a large amount of community consultation, and behavioural change, in order to make it a reality. This is also touched on in the next section.

### **C] CARS, BUSES, CYCLING AND WALKING – SOME FURTHER COMMENTS FROM REAP MEMBERS AND TRUSTEES**

1] CARS

## LEEDS TRANSPORT STRATEGY – CONNECTING LEEDS

Reduction in car use is both laudable and necessary, but getting people to reduce their use will be a major challenge. There are a number of points to make here;

- In many circumstances, people will need a realistic and genuine alternative before giving up the convenience of the car, e.g. more accessible/ flexible public transport.
- electric cars are expensive and will not become popular until the price drops. There remains the issue of charging where home charging points are difficult/ impossible to install
- Some people [nurses on night shift, other essential workers] will continue to need cars therefore important not to have a workplace car park levy and /or have safe alternative transport
- LCC needs to seriously consider the impact on car use post Covid, given that many work patterns may well change permanently.

### 2] BUSES

Most of the comments reflected on the poor performance of the current bus service. Massive improvements were seen to be needed in terms of frequency, reliability, cost, accessibility and available routes/destinations. The need for buses to go where people wanted them to go [from Roundhay to St. James Hospital, or Leeds train station for example] was perhaps the overriding concern. One comment from a REAP member sums up many of the issues;

**“I tried to imagine the impact the proposed changes would have on women- retired, partially disabled [but not blue badge], busy working mums, pregnant women, mothers plus children. I cannot envisage any of these women walking or cycling into Leeds Centre. Cheap, reliable public transport is crucial. Getting from Roundhay to the train station or St James requires two buses. The walk from the Corn Exchange to the train station may not seem far, but add COPD, a dicky knee, several small children, a suitcase or shopping, and it becomes a considerable barrier.”**

An idea, voiced by many, was for smaller [electric] access buses, connecting across the city as well as radially - linking different areas as well as serving the hospitals and the bus/train stations. In addition, and, as previously mentioned, good late night public transport for key workers [especially NHS staff] is essential.

It was recognized that many of the public transport issues fell within the remit of West Yorkshire Combined Authority. It was felt to be essential for LCC to bring as much pressure to bear as soon as possible to ensure that buses are cheap to use, reliable and cover the routes needed by the people of Leeds [and for this latter point, consultation is urgently needed].

### 3] CYCLING

As regards cycling, the “modal shift” [see above] envisages a 400% increase in cycling journeys by 2030. This, apparently massive, increase would bring cycling journeys up to 4% of total journeys – still relatively low. There may well be a problem in achieving even this modest increase, however. Certain sections of cycle ways are safe, but crucial bits [especially around busy roads and junctions] are very

## LEEDS TRANSPORT STRATEGY – CONNECTING LEEDS

unsafe, so that inexperienced cyclists and children are unlikely to use them. Whilst recent initiatives to add to/improve the cycle ways are to be praised, there remains much to do in finishing off various sections [some just peter out], and improving the width of others. Another initiative that may well kick start greater cycling uptake in Leeds would be the availability of electric bikes for hire.

### 4] WALKING

Comments on walking were largely confined to the issues about enabling more children to walk to school [ and there will hopefully be a trial in Roundhay later in the year] The School Streets initiative is clearly one with a future but it also raises the more general question about consultation with local communities in order to engage the support of neighbourhoods. Whether it is a question of school streets, diverting traffic to other areas, traffic calming, deploying planters to block off certain streets used as through runs, all requires a clear conversation with local people.

### D] CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE LONGER TERM

1] As has been previously stated, there is considerable merit in LCC setting out a vision for its Transport Strategy that links together climate change and the environment, health and inclusive growth. So far in this response, we have pointed to some areas where ambition and /or clarity were seen to be lacking.

However, there is a train of thought which suggests the impact of Covid 19 may be extremely far reaching [with many major employers already suggesting that working from home, at least in part, is here to stay]. We suggest that these changes will impact on how people think about work, leisure, where they live and how they shop. In the next paragraph we offer a view on the Strategy from a post-pandemic perspective

2] This transport strategy is a strategy that serves a pre-pandemic vision of Leeds, full of offices and shops. However, the strategy needs to serve tomorrow's vision of Leeds whereby people live, work and play increasingly in their own communities, and the city centre is transformed into a place of green space, cultural experiences and homes. In future it is predicted (see Reed Recruitment Agency research) that people will work much more from home and much less from offices, as has been shown to work well during the pandemic, so the same number of people will not be commuting into Leeds every day as pre-pandemic. In addition, many people will continue to shop online rather than make the journey into town to shop. Add to this the fact that there are vastly reduced numbers of office workers in town (see previous point) to go shopping in their lunch hour, and it ends up with large shops not being viable. A proportion of the town centre will then be freed up to create more living spaces rather than encroaching onto the green belt. Alongside this, local neighbourhoods should be developed (in conjunction with the Planning Department) so that the 20 minute neighbourhood becomes a reality, with the accompanying impact on the reduction of loneliness. This vision of the Leeds of tomorrow has huge implications for the transport systems. Buses that connect communities to each other and to hospitals and schools will be just as important as buses that go in and out of the city centre. The buses

## LEEDS TRANSPORT STRATEGY – CONNECTING LEEDS

will need to be smaller and there needs to be many more bus routes, so that the bus system is much more flexible, and able to respond to people's transport needs.

3] And finally.....

The Transport Strategy mentions the expansion of Leeds Bradford Airport (LBA) as a national not a local issue, and therefore beyond the scope of the strategy [noting, however, that until new technologies are developed “ **aviation growth and meeting zero carbon targets are fundamentally incompatible**” Strategy p. 11]. Given that the CO2 savings envisaged in the Transport Strategy are totally negated by the CO2 increases resulting from the Airport expansion, REAP wishes to strongly implore LCC to recognize this fact and desist from any plans to expand LBA.

**This consultation response has been prepared by Nigel Jones on behalf of his fellow REAP trustees and members. Please contact [info@reap-leeds.org.uk](mailto:info@reap-leeds.org.uk), if you wish to follow up on any of the points raised in this submission**

**9 APRIL 2021**