Bus Lanes Update

EDTCE Scrutiny

Date of meeting: 18 October 2023

Lead Directors: Andrew Smith/Daniel Pearman

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All Wards
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1.	**Purpose of Report**
1.1	To provide the Commission with an update on the city's bus priority and bus lane networks.

2.	**Summary**
2.1	The City Council has continued to expand bus priority systems – including both bus lanes and bus gates – across the city in support of sustainable passenger transport journeys.
2.2	The increase in bus lanes has raised some questions and objections, including for example linked to adverse impacts on traffic congestion and air quality.
2.3	There is evidence that bus lanes have a positive network on the city bus network, when combined with other bus support measures, reducing delays, increasing punctuality, and supporting additional growth city bus operations still recovering from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.
2.4	The continued provision of bus priority systems, and encouragement for people to switch to active and sustainable travel, is a key method of challenging congestion, climate change and poor air quality whilst also tackling transport inequality.

3. Detailed Report

Nature of Bus Priority

3.1 Bus priority features in the city predominantly take the form of bus lanes and bus gates. Bus lanes take the form of lengths of carriageway that authorised vehicles pass along, whilst bus gates are access controls that authorised vehicles must pass through.

3.2 In most cases, authorised vehicles are buses, minibuses, and coaches; emergency service vehicles; bicycles; and hackney carriages.

3.3 Most features are found on 13 key transport corridors. All 44 main network services in the city benefit from priority measures on part of the route.

3.4 Priority measures are intended to improve punctuality, reduce journey time, and increase bus patronage.

3.5 They additionally help to manage traffic flow across the network and ensure the most efficient usage of road space.

3.6 Improvements to punctuality and journey time attract new users, which in turn leads to more investment from private operators and fewer private car journeys.

3.7 This in turn bolsters the local bus industry and supports increased frequency and less congestion, which in turn attracts more users.

In Operation

3.8 Evidence from current city bus lanes has shown:

- A 6% reduction in overall journey times along Groby Road
- A 3 minutes peak time saving on Abbey Park Road
- A 2.5 minute time saving on Aylestone Road, during the busy morning period.
- A 25% increase in usage on Firstbus routes
- An increase of 6% in user satisfaction on bus punctuality since 2019/2020– satisfaction is now at 71%
- 89% punctuality (bus adherence to timetable) along Melton Road.

3.9 Nationally, similar increases have been found in:

- Chorlton, Greater Manchester – 23% increase in bus patronage since bus lane installation
- Kirkstall Road, Leeds – 9% increase in patronage since bus lane installation
- Chatham Hill, Rochester – 40% reduction in bus journey time at busy periods since bus lane installation
- Reading – increase in bus usage to be the 2nd highest in the UK since wide ranging bus priority systems installed.

3.10 The provision of bus priority features remains a feature of the National Bus Strategy and the guidance on Bus Infrastructure Plans.

The Local Bus Market

3.11 The Leicester bus market is, by number of journeys, the eleventh highest outside of London. 21.9m trips are started within the city boundary every year.

3.12 There are 24 routes with a frequency of at least one bus every 15 minutes.

3.13 33% of Leicester households do not have access to a car, much higher than the England average of 24%.

3.14 Over a third of bus trips are undertaken by elderly or disabled residents.

3.15 All operators are committed to the network, and have shown strong desire for continued investment in routes, training, and vehicles within the Leicester Buses Enhanced Partnership. Supporting quotes from bus operators will be shared at the scrutiny meeting.

3.16 The majority of the bus network is commercially operated, which allows the city council to direct subsidies towards strategic routes such as the Park and Ride, outer ring loop (Orbital), and inner ring loop (Hop!)

3.17 User surveys have shown that most respondents:

- Wanted resources focused on making buses punctual and quicker
- Thought that dedicated bus lanes were the best way to ensure reliability
- Wanted more daytime service frequency
- Research by the DfT has additionally found that the two key barriers to bus usage are the reliability of services and cost.

Partnership Working and Investment

3.18 The Leicester Buses Enhanced Partnership includes 100 legal commitments to be delivered over a 3 year period across five service areas – electric, frequent, reliable, easy, and great value.

3.19 Bus lanes directly support the frequent and reliable service areas and associated targets and commitments.

3.20 Government support grants require continued investment and support from the council and bus industry, including promoting service frequency and reliability.

3.21 The strong performance of the city bus market has leveraged £31.5m investment from operators in electric buses, with 150 due to be operational by summer 2024.

3.22 Grants totalling £22m for investment in electric buses are reliant on the complementary investment and management of measures including bus lanes.

3.23 Operators across the city continue to provide strong support and positive feedback for bus priority and the benefits to service delivery they bring.

Previous Findings

3.24 A previous scrutiny session – in April of 2016 – concluded:

3.24.1 With car ownership/usage, congestion, and pollution increasing the key solution would be to enable and encourage modal shift.

3.24.2 Bus lanes make buses more punctual and decrease journey times, therefore making them more attractive to use.

3.24.3 The Aylestone Road bus lane led to an 18% increase in bus usage along the corridor.

3.24.4 Other measures, including fare levels, car parking charges, quality of vehicle and ride, and frequency all have an impact on modal shift success.

3.24.5 Bus lanes additionally assist other users including coaches, minibuses, cyclists and hackney cabs

3.24.6 Bus lanes should not be sacrificed to cycle lanes to the detriment of bus services, given the difference in number of bus passengers when compared to cyclists.

3.24.7 Clarity of messaging around 24/7 bus lanes makes them the preferred approach.

Negative Perceptions

3.25 Congestion is mainly caused by junctions reaching capacity.

3.26 Bus lanes usually end before junctions, therefore retaining capacity for vehicles to queue and allowing general traffic to flow.

3.27 A significant impact in congestion has been the increase in private car ownership and usage – this is forecast to increase even more over the next 20 years, based on DfT traffic data.

3.28 Modal shift remains the most effective means of combating congestion. One bus can replace 30 private cars.

3.29 Transport accounts for 26% of all domestic UK emissions. Private cars are 52% of all transport emissions.

3.30 As with congestion, modal shift remains the most effective way to decarbonise transport. Over 50% of the city network will be electric by summer 2024, further improving local air quality and vehicle emissions.

3.31 Air quality monitoring has found no evidence that bus lanes have increased or contributed to an increase in pollution.

3.32 There is less confusion for drivers with bus lanes that operate 24/7. Some city bus lanes are part time only – for example Saffron Lane – and require review to ensure they operate at the correct times and provide the desired benefits.

3.33 Emergency vehicles, cycles, and hackney carriages benefit from bus lanes at all hours.

3.34 Most key bus routes are in service between 06:00 and 23:00, therefore covering the busiest periods of road usage.

3.35 Since the pandemic, traffic patterns have changed. There is now, longer/busier periods through the afternoon and evening.

3.36 Extra capacity (such as two lanes) for general traffic is not required outside of the busiest periods – known as the traffic peaks.

3.37 The governments recently published “Plan for drivers” has promised new guidance, which may mean a future need to review bus lane operations – including what vehicles are permitted and hour of operation.

3.38 Traffic signals across the city are already able to dynamically adjust sequencing in response to local traffic levels. Additional features such as smarter signal controllers, and allowing extended green light periods for approaching benefits are being investigated.

3.39 It is important to ensure measures of this nature do not have an adverse impact on traffic from other directions, and are balanced across the network.

3.40 Bus lanes are internationally recognised as an effective solution to urban transport and public transport priority.

3.41 Bus lanes are delivered after careful consideration, including interaction and interface with other road safety, general traffic, or walking and cycling measures.

3.42 All monies from fines must be spent on the transport network. Cameras are solely a tool to ensure compliance with the bus lane.

3.43 Bus lanes without enforcement show less overall compliance, which impacts local services.

3.44 All fine data is reported on the open data platform.

3.45	On new camera sites, warnings are issued for a period after installation before fines are issued.
3.46	We maintain a robust appeals process in line with national guidelines.

Conclusion

3.47	Bus lanes continue to demonstrate the same benefits as found by the April 2016 Scrutiny Committee
3.48	Evidence shows that bus lanes continue to have a strong positive impact on local bus services, specifically for patronage, journey times, and punctuality.
3.49	The cumulative impact has supported continued investment by government, the city council, and operators. This has included a rapidly growing fleet of electric buses and led to national recognition for both the network and our support and investment.
3.50	In most cases, the negative perceptions of bus lanes can be attributed to the root cause they are intended to tackle – congested exacerbated by the increased volume of private cars on the existing highway network.
3.51	The continued provision of bus lanes continues to be a tool to support modal shift and the resultant benefits to decarbonisation, air quality, and congestion.
3.52	The city council will review, when available, Government guidance on bus lane operation as promised in the ‘Plan for Drivers’

4. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency, and other implications

4.1 Financial

The Council received just under £1.3m in income from fines for Bus Lane infringements in 2022/23. Regulations specify the purposes for which any surplus income can be used, including environmental improvement, passenger transport services and highway improvements.

Stuart McAvoy, Head of Finance

4.2 Legal

Traffic Regulation Orders are introduced under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and the Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedures) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.

In determining the restrictions to be recommended, Officers must have regard to the requirements under Section 122 of the 1984 Act to ensure the convenient, safe and expeditious movement of traffic, whilst considering the requirements for parking facilities on and off the highway.

In determining the restrictions to be recommended, Officers must have taken due regard of the Councils' duty under Section 16 of the Traffic Management Act 2004 for securing the expeditious movement of traffic on the authority's road network and in carrying out necessary public consultation under the 1984 Act and 1996 Regulations.

4.3 Equalities

There are no direct equality implications arising from this report as it provides an update. However, it is important to ensure that equality considerations are taken into account when looking at future schemes.

Sukhi Biring, Equalities Officer

4.4 Climate Emergency

As noted within this report, the continued provision of bus priority systems is a key part of the city council's work to reduce carbon emissions from transport. Transport is responsible for around 25% of carbon emissions in Leicester, and has grown as a proportion of the city's emissions over recent years. The city council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and has set an ambition to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030. Transport is one of the key sectors to tackle, particularly in those areas where the council has the greatest level of influence such as public transport.

Enabling and encouraging people to use sustainable transport options, including through improvements to the network, is vital in reducing transport-related emissions, with public transport journeys producing significantly fewer carbon emissions per passenger than private transport. This is supported by other work delivered through the Enhanced Partnership, including the introduction of zero emission electric buses throughout the city's fleet. As noted within the report, the role of bus lanes in congestion management can also deliver further benefits in terms of carbon reduction.

Aidan Davis, Sustainability Officer

4.5 Other

No other implications for this report

5.	**Background information and other papers**
5.1	Bus Lanes Scrutiny Review – submitted to the Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission on the 7th April, 2016
5.2	Bus Lanes Scrutiny Report – submitted to the Economic Development, Trasport and Tourism Scrutiny Commission on the 7th February, 2018
5.3	Leicester Enhanced Bus Partnership Plan