Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan 2017: Consultation
Response from Transition Town Letchworth
15ᵗʰ January 2018

1   <u>TRANSITION TOWN LETCHWORTH'S INTEREST IN TRANSPORT</u>

1.1   Transition Town Letchworth (TTL) are concerned about climate change so are keen that Hertfordshire's transport strategy sees the county as leading the way in reducing the reliance on fossil fuels. We are also keen to see the quality of life improvement that will come from more sustainable transport options and reduced air pollution.

1.2   TTL support the overall approach outlined in LTP4 of switching from the private car to sustainable transport wherever possible (P5). However its important that the quality of peoples journeys are maintained and ideally improved. Sustainable and public transport journey times will need to be comparable to car journey times for the switch from the private car to occur.

1.3   Before giving detailed feedback on LTP4 in Section 2 we first consider how we expect new technology to impact on the mode and number of future journeys. In Section 3 we discuss how the overall 'Transport Hierarchy' approach aligns with the North Herts Local Plan which is currently at the examination stage. Section 4 then provides detailed feedback on the LTP4 by transport mode with recommendations for how the plan could be improved.

2   <u>POTENTIAL IMPACT OF NEW TECHNOLOGY</u>

2.1   As part of TTLs review of Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan 2017 Consultation Document (LTP4) we undertook our own visioning exercise for the period up to 2050 as we felt the plan needed to be reviewed from two perspectives, as a solution for transport in the years until 2031 and as a development path to deliver the transport system required beyond 2031. LTP4 recognises the uncertainty in the future of the car but we consider the plan could be more robust if future options for the car were better explored and addressed.

Shift to Electric Vehicles

2.2   We consider it is safe to assume that it will be impossible to buy a domestic diesel car by 2025 and probably petrol cars by 2030. Instead, the car will be powered by alternative energy sources, most likely electricity. We concluded that by 2030 the majority of vehicles on the roads will be electric vehicles and well before this date the majority of new vehicles purchased will be electric vehicles.

2.3   We expect the move to electric vehicles will lead to fuel costs remaining the same or dropping in the long term. Once the majority of electric cars can achieve the expected 300 mile range it is likely that the vast majority of charging could be done at home. For a county with little conventional power generation there will be a significantly increased load on the power grid for which power companies need to plan.

Driverless Vehicles

2.4   The timescales for **autonomous (driverless) vehicles** have more uncertainty about them, we expect them to be on the road by 2025 but it may well be 2040 and beyond before they become the norm. This development will affect both car journeys and car ownership. Car journeys is important for road capacity. Car ownership is important for parking requirements. Autonomous vehicles may not be relevant until the end of this planning period but the infrastructure roadmap that is chosen should take into account future road capacity requirements in an era of autonomous vehicles.

Car Journeys

2.5   Factors which will increase car journeys are:

- Population growth which will increase demand for journeys with or without autonomous vehicles.

- Driverless cars will enable additional groups of the population to travel independently in a vehicle (e.g. those who have never learned to drive, young people, disabled people and older people). The younger generation are currently disadvantaged by the cost of car ownership and there is a trend away from car ownership but this could be reversed with driverless cars.

- The cost of car ownership is likely to reduce, a battery and electric motor with no complex dashboard is simpler and cheaper than the internal combustion engine and gear box.

- Hiring a car is likely to be be much cheaper and easier (car insurance and drivers' licenses will become less relevant and door to door service will be standard). This service will replace taxis.

- If car ownership declines and car hire increases there will be journeys when an empty car is moved to the next hire.

2.6   The following factors will reduce car journeys:

- Improvements in public transport and sustainable transport options.

- Autonomous buses will be more cost competitive than a car.

2.7   Once a car is driverless you can sleep, read a paper just like you could on public transport but with more privacy. Whether people choose a car, sustainable transport or public transport once autonomous vehicles are the norm will be influenced by cost, timeliness of journey and comfort.

Road capacity

2.8   Vehicle density on roads and motorways <u>may</u> increase (by vehicles driving in close convoy) which could reduce the need for more roads but there is a lot of uncertainty on how much benefit will be achieved. Additionally, convoying on motorways may actually increase the

demand for car journeys, because motorway journeys will be more predictable, safer and less stressful. This would also exacerbate the problem of what to do with vehicles at the end of journeys if they are privately owned.

Car Ownership

2.9   For some people car ownership is an important part of their status for others the car is purely a mode of transport. The extent of a shift away from car ownership will be dependent on the ease with which a car can be obtained when required and the cost of this versus ownership. CO2 and financial savings from not owning cars are:

- With each hire car having a higher utilisation than a privately owned car the capital cost (and CO2) per mile driven will be reduced and the number of cars purchased will fall.

- If in the hire process people can opt to share journeys (which will lower the price) this will help minimise the number of vehicle journeys (if there are enough people on a route the vehicle will become in effect a bus with a booked seat).

- Business and home owners do not need off-road parking spaces.

2.10   Our discussions led to the conclusion that total car journeys will increase though overall car ownership may reduce. <u>As a minimum we can assume that roads that are coping today could cope in the future but the existing problem areas are likely to remain troublesome well beyond 2031</u>.

2.11   There are clearly many advantages to reducing car ownership and the council will need to explore the infrastructure investment required to minimise the number of journeys by empty driverless cars if it plans for this scenario. In the medium term effective public transport (e.g. bus rapid transit schemes) and technology which will support shared cars (e.g. car clubs) and shared car journeys (e.g. employer transport plans) will be important to keep a transport network with an acceptable quality of journey experience. A transport roadmap is required to move to a hire car / hire seat future.

3   LTP4 Alignment with North Herts Local Plan

3.1   North Herts local plan, which is at examination stage, has most of its key strategic housing sites in locations which do not align well with a modal shift to sustainable transport. In particular, the local plan is not going to deliver significant higher density housing near rail hubs (p20). ***The LTP4 proposed indicator, percentage of new developments within 30 minutes of passenger transport services (p52) is important for exploring this issue but its ill-defined.*** What is a passenger transport service? Why 30 minutes? Would 15 minutes be more appropriate?

3.2   North Herts local plan does not embed a strategy of mixed land use (p46) within towns. The local plan is also looking to add retail space in out of town locations which encourages car use.

3.3   NHDC Transport Strategy (October 2017), prepared by Markides Associates, identifies North

Herts as a rural area with many villages where the car is the only viable option for journeys outside the village. This means that North Herts has more than the county average for car ownership, car trips per day and distance travelled. This study also identifies there are more houses planned than jobs in North Herts so commuting will increase as a result of the local plan.

3.4 ***Our conclusion is that if the proposed North Herts local plan is implemented alongside this transport plan that there is likely to be an unacceptable transport risk and the plans need to be bought into alignment.***

4   <u>DETAILED COMMENTS BY TRANSPORT MODE</u>

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT MODES

Safety

4.1   The Transport Hierarchy (p30) introduction needs to recognise that a barrier to sustainable transport is safety. Its not as stated a 'perception' that sustainable transport is more dangerous (p79), when the second paragraph on p79 identifies how sustainable transport modes are overrepresented in fatalities. Its important that the council <u>don't address a perception</u> but actually address the risks to those using sustainable transport. Most cyclists will have had near misses and these can be addressed by driver education, road improvements and segregated cycling facilities. ***TTL would like to contribute to the Road Safety Strategy development.***

Behaviour Change

4.2   LTP4 identifies that parking must be restricted to get people to use alternative transport modes (p7, p29), in particular, restricting employee parking seems the main initiative proposed to change people's behaviour (p12). Restricted employer parking often leads to more parking on the road. Road parking needs to be addressed in LTP4 to make people think not only about the need to use a car, but also to own a car. Parking on streets is currently making many roads single track. Policy 12e (p73) to control on-street parking is important to keep the network moving but also to keep roads safe for cycling and walking.

4.3   School traffic has been identified as an issue, so the plan should also include new initiatives that will deter parents from driving to schools. TTL is supportive of initiatives like the STARS scheme (p50) which promotes active and sustainable travel to schools. ***The target to increase children walking to school (p59) is not ambitious enough****. A walking and cycling target might be better given the distance some children now have to travel to both primary and secondary schools. Joined up working on schools admissions policy so that this takes into account sustainable travel would be helpful. **TTL would like to contribute to the Sustainable Modes of Travel to School Strategy.***

4.4   Many of the out-of-town retail developments have free parking so are encouraging the opposite behaviour to this strategy, and if the council follows the policy of charging for parking in town centres (page 61) this may lead to further town centre decline. ***LTP4 needs to include a strategy on retail parking.***

Walking Infrastructure

4.5   The Plan has little to say on walking, but paths are in bad state with overgrown hedges reducing the available space. There are limited crossings across busy roads (often requiring extended walking routes to use them).

4.6   Recommendation: Increased pedestrian crossings and footway maintenance need addressing in LTP4, especially for school routes.

Cycle Infrastructure

4.7   LTP4 (p8) suggests that cycle infrastructure will be improved between Letchworth, Hitchin and Baldock, but improved cycle infrastructure is required to reduce car travel **within** these towns as well as between <u>and its not clear that this is proposed</u>. These three towns should be viewed as a group due to their close proximity and be an additional 'Sustainable Travel Town'. The population of Letchworth, Hitchin and Baldock is 77,230 (add in the Bedfordshire towns in close proximity, such as Stotfold, and its greater still). This population is not very different to the towns / groups of towns which are identified as Sustainable Travel Towns. Figure 63 (p62) provides further evidence of why Hitchin, Baldock and Letchworth should be treated as a Sustainable Travel Town.

4.8   Recommendation: Designate Letchworth, Hitchin and Baldock as a Sustainable Travel Town.

4.9   Recommendation: In LTP4 identify whether the County Council or District Council will be responsible for the implementation of a cycle network within a town.

4.10   LTP4 states that modelling has led to the conclusion that inter-urban cycleways are a poor fit in a number of future scenarios (p36), however, electric bikes may make these conclusion invalid.

4.11   Recommendation: A quality off-road cycle infrastructure which can be utilised by electric bikes (p63) should be considered as an interurban solution particularly between close towns such as Stevenage / Hitchin / Letchworth / Baldock and Welwyn / Hatfield.

4.12   It would be useful to see what evidence can be found from Scandinavian countries on how longer journeys can be achieved combining walking, cycling and public transport. How might schemes to borrow a bike from a station work in towns where traffic flows are more uni-directional at any particular time than occurs in cities? Would better facilities for parking bikes at stations and better options for taking bikes on trains support a more optimal solution?

4.13   TTL would like the opportunity to contribute to the Active Travel Strategy.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Journey Times

4.14   In London a bus journey will have similar journey times to a car, that <u>is not true in Hertfordshire</u>, where circuitous public transport routes to destinations, like the next town or hospital, add considerable time to a public transport journey. North Hertfordshire is more rural than the south and hence has the additional problem that <u>bus services are less economic.</u>

4.15 Route times on inter-urban bus services need to be comparable to car times, to provide a similar journey quality, and persuade people out of their car. Hub and spoke bus services may be important on interurban trips to keep journeys efficient.

4.16 Recommendation: Bus rapid transit schemes should provide higher quality bus journeys in terms of timeliness and a more extensive roll out of these schemes will be beneficial. An ability to book seats on these services should be explored as people need security for some journeys, e.g. to the airport.

Ticketing

4.17 SMART ticketing (p66) will be vital as this technology will make public transport journeys smoother and faster.

4.18 Recommendation: Without concessions buses can be expensive compared to a car (especially when travelling as a family) so pricing strategies need to be addressed.

North Herts Bus Services

4.19 LTP4 contains a plan for a core bus network from Luton to Hitchin. Although a train service exists between Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock, to move from a bus onto the train at Hitchin would lead to extended travel times that could be avoided by extending the core bus network through Letchworth to Baldock.

4.20 Recommendation: The Core Bus Network (p67) should extend from Luton through to Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock and this network should be a Bus Rapid Transit scheme so as to provide an efficient East-West link.

4.21 It is stated that the A1 Corridor is busy between Letchworth and Stevenage and has high car usage (p24). Public transport currently offers a poor alternative to the car on this route unless your points of departure and destination are close to the stations.

4.22 Recommendation: A Bus Rapid Transit scheme between Letchworth and Stevenage may prove superior to the train as a bus service could take people to the hospital, work areas and out of town retail sites which may be more popular options that the town centre which is served by the train.

Rail

Railcards

4.23 An inability to use railcards before 10am may be more restrictive than necessary to keep people off commuter trains and disadvantages those who live furthest from London. With more part time working, ticket options and train schedules need to be flexible enough for rail to be a competitive option. Frequency and journey times of daytime rail services also need to be addressed to encourage off-peak rail journeys.

4.24 Recommendation: Railcard restrictions and off peak services should be reviewed to encourage non-peak travel on trains.

Rail Infrastructure and Services

4.25 Commuting times southwards from North Hertfordshire are increasing due to the introduction of the Thames Link services and building of the 5th platform at Stevenage. The Letchworth commuters group have established that the new timetables and carriages will result in fewer seats (seats have been replaced by standing capacity) and longer commute times and the expectation is that the quality of the commuting experience will only get worse as the population in North Herts grows.

4.26 Northwards, out of the county there are two tracks each way on the main line (fast and slow tracks) plus the single track each way on the Cambridge line. However there is only one track each way over the Welwyn Viaduct which forms a railway bottleneck going south to London (p26). There is even a station on this railway bottleneck. At the same latitude the West Coast main line has 4 tracks plus the potential HS2 high speed line.

4.27 Recommendation: LTP4 should include a strategy to remove the Welwyn Viaduct bottleneck.

4.28 TTL support the strategy of getting more intercity trains stopping at Stevenage (p70)

4.29 The East-West Rail link to the East Coast main line will be important for connections (p22).

4.30 Recommendation: The East-West Rail link should be easily reached from Hitchin station so that commuters coming from Royston and intermediate towns do not have to backtrack to Stevenage to then go north to reach this connection.

4.31 For multi-modal travel to work (p7) sufficient car parking at interchanges is required. Options for multi-storey car parks which could straddle the railway line could be explored. The most significant parking problem in North Herts is commuter parking. North Herts towns already have a residents only parking system to limit all day 'on street' parking. With the exception of Baldock none of the strategic housing sites are within walking distance of a railway station so the demand for station parking is likely to worsen. *A target could be set that 'No rail commuter should have to walk for more than 5 minutes to a reasonably priced parking space'.*

4.32 Recommendation: LTP4 should include plans to increase station parking which is within a 5 minute walk of the stations to meet the demand from commuters who do not have an acceptable public transport or sustainable transport option.

4.33 With SMART ticketing and electronic gates more access points to stations could be made where this can reduce walking times to the station. There should be increased cycle parking. Bus stops should be clearly signed from the station and ideally be located outside stations.

4.34 Recommendation: The plan should incorporate improvements to stations that help to reduce transfer times to and from the stations.

CAR

Electric Cars

4.35 Electricity for electric cars has the potential to be fuelled from renewable sources (reducing CO2) and electric cars are less polluting so they should improve our quality of life and there take up should be encouraged. TTL support the idea for car clubs, particularly electric cars clubs, and for HCC procurement of electric vehicles (p36 / p85). However, LTP4 states (p40) that to date there has been low electric vehicle take-up.

4.36 *Recommendation: LTP4 needs to address infrastructure issues in relation to the charging network, as high accessibility of charging points should encourage faster adoption of electric vehicles.*

4.37 *Recommendation: Car charging for homes which do not have off-street parking, at public places and at places of work needs to be addressed in LTP4.*

4.38 The HCC Transport Vision 2050 Autumn 2016 explicitly states that average commuter times in the county overall will increase by 25% by 2031. LTP4 states "Peak hour trips are forecast to increase by 18% by 2031" (p21). While LTP4 addresses some of the existing problems its not clear that it tackles all the existing problems. Problems that affect North Hertfordshire which need addressing are described below.

A1M Bottleneck

4.39 North Herts is effectively separated from the south of the county and London twice a day by the major bottleneck of the A1M. Picture a palm tree. Southwards you only have the trunk of the palm tree made up of 2 lanes of the A1M. Northwards you have two lanes of the A505, one lane of the A507, two to three lanes of the A1M, two lanes of the A505 and one lane of the A602. A total of nine main trunk road lanes compared with just two on the A1M. This imbalance illustrates the severity of the bottleneck. At the same latitude the M1 has four lanes in each direction. This results in a couple of miles of stationary traffic twice a day during commuter peaks. Worse in bad weather or accident holdups. LTP4 mentions Highways England Strategic Study making the A1 consistent between M25 and Peterborough (p22).

4.40 *Recommendation: LTP4 should clearly state whether the improvements proposed (smart motorway) will achieve a 'consistent' A1M between the M25 and Peterborough and if it will not it should identify what further action is required to achieve this consistency.*

Corridor 7

4.41 Corridor 7 has long single lane sections on the main roads which link Royston to the M11 and Cambridge, so this corridor is not 'well-served by highways' (p38). If it was better served Royston could be developed within the London, Cambridge Stansted consortium.

4.42 *Recommendation: A proposal needs to be made to widen the A505 and A10 from Royston into Cambridgeshire.*

East West Routes

4.43 Better East-West Connections (p9 /p11) would provide links to west coast train services and international gateways.

4.44 Corridor 6 Luton to Stevenage cannot be described as a 'well-served by highways' because through traffic passes through Hitchin (p38). Stevenage and Luton are two large burgeoning towns and better connections should generate economic benefits. However, there is no direct road between them instead you have to go 15 miles via the backroads of Hitchin. As the towns expand they get closer together.

4.45 *Recommendation: LTP4 should address the future potential benefits of a direct link road between Stevenage and Luton.*

4.46 *Recommendation: The poor road linkages through to Stansted Airport from the major housing sites located on Corridor 3 should be addressed (p38).*

LGV MOVEMENTS

4.47 Policy 16 (p78) considers freight and logistics and would benefit from some solutions to minimise LGV movements in urban areas. For example, parcel collection boxes for online orders at locations like stations, local supermarkets (where people can walk or pass through) may reduce emissions and delivery vehicles on local roads.

4.48 *Recommendation: Online parcel collection points should be included in the plan*

5   CONCLUSIONS

5.1 TTL support LTP4 aim for a modal shift to more sustainable transport. However, we feel that the proposals for North Herts are inadequate compared to the south of the county.

5.2 We would like LTP4 to be amended so that Hitchin/Letchworth and Baldock are treated as a Sustainable Travel Town.

5.3 To keep the road network functioning, schemes to encourage a switch to public transport should be a key part of this plan. If local plans with strategic housing sites some distance from the station are approved (reducing the potential for walking and cycling) then improved station parking and better bus services will need to be included in LTP4.

5.4 Bus Rapid Transit schemes should be planned for all routes where there are large numbers of car commuters (including North Herts Towns to Luton and Stevenage) and the ability to hire seats on these services should be explored.

5.5 Infrastructure should be put in place to encourage early take-up of electric vehicles.

5.6 Road problems of today will continue to be problems in the future right up to 2050 so the plan should plan for the resolution of all the present problems. North Herts commuters journeys are hampered because of the road and rail bottlenecks to the south, reducing the quality of life and wasting energy. While LTP4 recognises a number of these issues there is an incomplete set of plans to alleviate them. LTP4 should identify how to address all the known problems with the

Hertfordshire road and rail infrastructure, even if the timescales for projects may fall beyond 2031, the end of the current plan.

5.7 ***TTL would like the opportunity to contribute to the North Central Hertfordshire Local Growth and Transport Plan.***