

Cheshire West and Chester Council

Sustainable Transport Taskforce

Date: Thursday, 12 November 2020

Venue: Microsoft Teams Meeting

Time: 6pm until 8pm

Minutes

Present: Garfield Southall (Chair), Tamara Hunt (University of Chester), Nicola Said (Marketing Cheshire), Paul Morrison (Sustrans), Carol Vella (Chamber of Commerce), Vanessa Bond (Chester Residents' Association Group), David Whitehead (Huntington Parish Council), Rob Pickering (British Cycling), Steve Hughes (Sustainability Forum), Roy Newton (Cheshire & Warrington LEP), Stephen Perry (Active Travel Forum), Bernadette Bailey (NHS Cheshire CCG), David Beer (Transport Focus), Clare Roberts (Poverty Truth Commission), Andy Farrall (Chester BID), Mike Garratt (Road Freight Representative), Cathy Partington (Sustainable Travel for Tourism), John Salt (Great Boughton Parish Council)

Officers: Sean Traynor, Kristy Littler, Lynne McKie, Stephanie Ward

1. Welcome

Sean Traynor welcomed everyone to this virtual meeting of the taskforce and advised that the meeting was being recorded for subsequent publication.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cathy McGhie (Youth Senate), Mike Hogg (Chester Residents' Association Group), Peter Bulmer (Great Boughton Parish Council)

3. Introductions

Members of the taskforce introduced themselves and provided a brief explanation of the group they represent.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Appointment of the Chair

Professor Garfield Southall was nominated as Chair and the taskforce members endorsed this proposal.

6. Background

On behalf of the Chair, Sean Traynor provided a brief background to the formation of the taskforce. In 2019 Cheshire West and Chester Council voted unanimously to declare a climate emergency. This at once a challenge, a responsibility, and an opportunity.

A report by Andrew Lewis (Chief Executive) was produced and presented to Council in 2020. It set out the scale of the challenge in achieving carbon neutrality by 2045 and the type of interventions that would be required. Transport is the second-highest emitting sector locally, only surpassed by industry. Anthesis' report sets out that significant changes in the way we travel will need to occur in order to achieve carbon neutrality.

Currently, 74 per cent of employed residents travel to work by car, with 15 per cent of residents commuting out of the Cheshire West and Chester region. 40 per cent of households own more than one car, and within the Chester urban area, fewer than 10 per cent of journeys to work were undertaken on public transport. The extent of change required is therefore stark, and requires a fundamental change in the way we live and move in the borough, including measures such as:

- By 2025, a 17 per cent reduction in total travel demand will be required, alongside a 25 per cent reduction in car travel. This will be required to increase to 25 per cent and 38 per cent respectively by 2050;
- Where travel is required, however, there is a substantial carbon benefit derived from using public transport. The modal share of public transport would need to increase from less than 10 per cent, to 18 per cent by 2025, increasing to 29 per cent by 2050;
- This public transport would itself be low carbon, either via electrification or the use of low carbon hydrogen fuel, with the achievement of 100 per cent low carbon rail and 51 per cent low carbon buses by 2025;

- Where car travel is unavoidable, these cars would need to be low or zero carbon, with a transition to 100 per cent electric or hydrogen vehicles by 2050;

The active travel projects introduced recently have been informed by the Government's vision for increasing levels of walking and cycling as set out in the "Gear Change" strategy document published at the end of July 2020. This sets out ambitions to seek a step change in cycling and walking in the coming years, which is considered essential to help address some of the most challenging issues that we face as a society including; improving air quality, combatting climate change, improving health and wellbeing, addressing inequalities and tackling traffic congestion.

There is a particular emphasis placed on the need to increase health benefits from more physical activity and the longer-term benefits of this to the NHS, and there is also a clear message from the Government that the response to the COVID-19 pandemic represents a once in a generation change to accelerate active travel.

The Government is also developing a Transport Decarbonisation Plan in 2020, where public transport and active travel will be the natural first choice for our daily activities.

Thus, this taskforce has been established to consider what the opportunities and barriers may be to deliver ambitious inclusive walking, cycling, public transport and integrated transport projects and what can be done to secure positive outcomes.

Observations made by Members:

Andy Farrall agreed that now is the time for transformation and that there is a real opportunity for Chester. In terms of sustainability, it is more than just climate change, it's about economic sustainability as well bearing in mind Chester has one of the biggest clusters of visitor destinations outside London in the UK and a significant retail sector, both of which are struggling

significantly with a great deal of dependent jobs. Chester is an incredibly special place and there's a real opportunity here to think about enhancing its viability and vitality via the things we do here, creating a more liveable places.

Rob Pickering concurred some of the physical and practical changes that are needed within the transport, but this has got to be accompanied by behavioural change in support of the drive to address the climate change emergency. We also need to recognize that this is a borough wide initiative.

Roy Newton endorsed the comments, advising that transport is a means to an end and therefore from a LEP perspective this is about how we build back better in a sustainable way. The Department for Transport also has funding available for the measures that this forum can devise.

David Beer endorsed the comments but also, in terms of the perceived barriers to effecting change, Transport Focus research shows that there are three components; cost, convenience and complexity that need to be addressed i.e. make it affordable for people to be able to change, make it convenient so that when they're making a choice about which mode of travel how to make their journey there is a convenient alternative (and that's door-to-door) and complexity because far too often people are faced with barriers.

Actions:

6.1. To provide a dedicated area for Members to access documentation relating to the Taskforce.

6.2. Cllr Margaret Parker asked if future meetings could be webcast.

7. Public Question Time

A period of 45 minutes was allocated to consider questions submitted prior to the meeting. Over 35 submissions were made and a sample of 8 questions were discussed, with all submissions to receive a written response subsequently. It was noted that responses to frequently asked questions are also provided on the Council's website <https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/residents/transport-and-roads/highways/major-road-schemes/active-travel/active-travel.aspx>

Observations made by Members:

- Endorsement for the provision of an accessible data sharing centre.
- Recognition of the need to keep traffic flow moving

- Taskforce members are able to/will consider matters through the lens of vehicle drivers
- Acknowledged the general frustrations over lack of communication, as residents and key stakeholders want to be part of the decision-making process
- Recognition of the need for meaningful engagement, openness and transparency
- Need to reach out to the silent majority (elderly, minority groups)
- Need to provide a suitable mechanism for wider Parish Council and community engagement

8. Governance Matters – Terms of Reference

The draft terms of reference were discussed by members. General support secured subject to the observations noted below.

Observations made by Members:

- Suggestion made over the formation of sub-groups to progress work themes in between the four weekly meetings
- Need to consider what success looks like, including the development of KPIs
- Offers from representatives of Parish Council's and Active Travel Forum to assist taskforce with human resource as there are a number of willing volunteers in the community.

Actions:

8.1. Terms of Reference to incorporate 'high quality, vibrant and liveable communities'.

8.2. Chair to develop and share proposals for the formation of sub-groups by theme.

8.3. Chair to develop and share proposals for wider Parish Council and community engagement.

9. Any other business which the Chair considers urgent

No further comments were raised.

10. Closing Remarks by the Chair

Chester is unique and has to be protected for its beauty and economy. At the same time, we have to change and make a difference, moving forwards to achieve our targets. Thus, this taskforce will need to learn how to balance this and make it work. The remit is very broad, also borough wide, and so need to get the priorities right through the establishment of task groups. The membership is not fixed and so suggestions on how to engage those groups that can help the taskforce move forwards are welcome.