

Review of Staffordshire's 2011 Freight Strategy

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 As part of Staffordshire's Local Transport Plan, a Freight Strategy was produced in April 2011, which considered all aspects of the freight transport and logistics industry throughout the county and identified a number of strands of work for future development.
- 1.2 The freight transport and logistics industry is an important activity in Staffordshire in terms of the economy and the impact on the transport network and local environment.
- 1.3 The existing trunk road network (motorways and some lengths of A roads) throughout the county carries the majority of the heavy commercial vehicles (HCVs) travelling to and through the area: however, the county does host important sub-regional routes and major freight destinations.
- 1.4 The prevalence of the logistics industry with storage and warehousing facilities in the county is, in part, a reflection of good access and the central position of Staffordshire in the country to serve a national distribution service. It is evident that there is strong market interest for major logistics operations, particularly in the south of the county, and employment in these industries is well above the national average.
- 1.5 However, the County Council recognises that freight movement can have negative environmental and social implications for communities and has pledged to support ways of moving freight from unsuitable roads and neighbourhoods.

2.0 Freight Strategy Actions and Priorities

- 2.1 A number of potential actions and priorities were identified within the Freight Strategy produced in 2011.

2.2 Network Review

- 2.2.1 It was recognised that a comprehensive review of the function and performance of the highway network could lead to a definitive preferred HCV route map for the county. Such a review would assess the designation of road hierarchy below the Primary Route Network; with due regard to the economic efficiency of the haulage industry and the environmental and social impact of HCV traffic on local communities.

- 2.2.2 A complete review of the entire network would identify and designate preferred HCV traffic routes and also identify any gaps in network provision.
- 2.2.3 However, this work would require a dedicated resource to identify and define existing and future origin and destination sites; review traffic data; and establish the performance of the routes. In addition, it would need to involve significant community engagement and attempt to manage the inevitable difficulties of reaching a consensus.

2.3 Restricted Routes

- 2.3.1 The use of Traffic Regulation Orders (Weight/Height/Length Restrictions) could be considered for local routes to restrict their use by HCVs. Each restriction would have to be considered on individual merit, having particular regard to: the impact and volume of HCV traffic; the sensitivity of the area; the population affected; the level of access required; and the availability of suitable alternative routes.
- 2.3.2 Both local communities and the freight industry should be engaged in the consideration of a restriction and particular attention should be given to the potential impact of displacement traffic where HCV flows would be likely to increase.
- 2.3.3 Potential restrictions and positive route signing are often identified as community priorities through the Divisional Highway Programmes. However, these often require investigation of the wider context with regard to access arrangements to freight destinations and the effects of displaced traffic.
- 2.3.4 An alternative to restricting the use of a route by HCVs through village locations could be to help facilitate local communities re-design the public space to encourage driver's respect for the local environment. This could form part of a Neighbourhood Plan, attracting necessary funding from local development.

2.4 Routing Agreements

- 2.4.1 As the Mineral and Waste Planning Authority, the County Council consults with District Planning Authorities and promotes the use of 'routing agreements' in relation to major generators of freight, to minimise the impact of HCVs on local communities. These planning agreements are used to gain commitments from applicants to use their best endeavours to route mineral related traffic away from shopping and residential areas, where such traffic can be adequately accommodated on alternative routes.

- 2.4.2 In addition, the County Council's Waste Local Plan requires consideration of impacts on the highway network and refers to voluntary arrangements for the routing of traffic.
- 2.4.3 As the Local Highway Authority, the County Council also promotes the use of routing agreements to Local Planning Authorities for proposed developments that involve freight traffic.
- 2.4.4 However, routing agreements are not enforceable by the planning authority and effective promotion of the use of contracts between developers and hauliers is required so that action can be taken when breaches of the agreement occur.
- 2.4.5 Travel Plans are currently only used to encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport; based on evidence of the anticipated transport impacts of the development, and do not currently deal with freight and delivery issues.
- 2.4.6 Travel Plans are considered parallel to development proposals and are readily integrated into the design and occupation of a new site, rather than retrofitted after occupation. For existing sites, the County Council could work more closely with businesses and associated haulage associations to try and influence behavioural change, with a view to more efficient delivery systems being put in place.

2.5 Road Safety

- 2.5.1 The County Council works in partnership with the Police, the Fire and Rescue Service and the haulage industry to encourage awareness and training for vulnerable road users in relation to the operation of HCVs.
- 2.5.2 Road Safety activities currently take place in schools demonstrating the dangers of large vehicles. Cycle training is available and covers an awareness of HCVs; and work-based Travel Plans include an action point for businesses to promote cycle training.
- 2.5.3 Cyclist awareness and the use of recognition technology is being promoted nationally with the haulier business.
- 2.5.4 All road safety activities are targeted at areas identified most at need, through continual monitoring of trends and community insight.

2.6 Satellite Navigation information

- 2.6.1 The County Council sends updates of changes to the local highway network to "Geoplace" which manages the National Street Gazetteer Hub and is a partnership between the Local Government Association and Ordnance Survey. However, this information is subsequently only

available to those SATNAV devices with updated maps and there is no facility to promote the use of “preferred” routes.

- 2.6.2 HCV compatible SATNAV systems, with full height and weight restrictions information are now available to hauliers; however, their wider use could be promoted through government, trade and manufacturer organisations. The next generation of tachographs will have a GPS element allowing integration of SATNAV devices and use of these could become part of HCV driver training.

2.7 Operational Best Practice

- 2.7.1 The County Council could work with other councils, the Highways Agency and the haulage industry to promote best practice and a recognition scheme for freight operators in the County. This could include making the best possible use of existing capacity; minimising empty vehicle running; and maximising co-operative working practices to reduce the unnecessary movement of freight traffic; as well as promoting the Department for Transport’s “Safe and Fuel Efficient Driving” training.
- 2.7.2 Ongoing liaison with hauliers through Staffordshire’s Chamber of Commerce Transport Committee suggests most haulage companies do follow best practice in areas such as reducing fuel consumption and ensuring vehicles are carrying maximum loads in order to increase efficiency. However, they do note difficulties with the use of specialised vehicles carrying specific goods and a pressure from consumers for a responsive delivery of goods and services.
- 2.7.3 The Chamber of Commerce also advise that the new mandatory Driver Certificate of Professional Competence is a requirement for all lorry, bus and coach drivers by September 2014 and that best practice is promoted as part of the associated training course.
- 2.7.4 In addition, the promotion of local food production, sourcing and delivery could be undertaken with retail associations, partner councils and other organisations to reduce freight miles.
- 2.7.5 The County Council promotes best practice through the Integrated Transport Strategies for each District/Borough, and as a consultee for the Local Plan and each individual Planning Application.

2.8 Parking Facilities

- 2.8.1 The Freight Strategy promotes the improvement of HCV parking areas, particularly in the Staffordshire M6-A449, A5-M6 Toll and A38(T) corridors. It suggests encouraging Planning Authorities to support planning applications from the private sector for the provision of new or

expanded truck stops and HCV service areas; subject to environmental and residential amenity constraints. It also comments that operators should be encouraged and supported to improve the security of HCV parking areas to European standards.

2.8.2 However, there are only a few identified HCV transport amenities (parking areas and rest facilities) throughout the county and the potential for shared overnight use of existing car parking facilities (and any future park and ride proposals) should be explored.

2.8.3 The County Council has limited influence over the provision of HCV parking on trunk road and motorway corridors but continues to advise on parking facilities in response to Local Plan consultations and consultations regarding issues such as the removal of HCV parking areas along the trunk road network.

2.8.4 Highway directional signage to established HCV parking/rest areas could be improved; however, the promotion of private ventures across the wider network may need careful consideration.

2.8.5 The County Council does have the powers to restrict the availability of on-street parking facilities; but each proposal would have to be considered on the issues identified at each specific location.

2.9 Rail Transport

2.9.1 With Network Rail, other local and regional partners and the private sector, the appropriate provision of new and expanded rail freight terminals in and close to Staffordshire with good access to the Primary Route Network and proximate to existing logistics activity could be promoted. The County Council is currently writing a Long Term Rail Strategy which will recognise the importance of rail freight and currently directly inputs into Network Rail's Long Term Planning Process and other relevant consultations/studies.

2.9.2 Appropriate rail lines are safeguarded as part of the Local Plan process by the Local Planning Authorities; however, land and facilities that could contribute to the appropriate development of freight operation transferring from road to rail (subject to environmental and residential amenity constraints), should perhaps also be protected. These are likely to be individual private investments into rail infrastructure.

2.9.3 As the Local Highway Authority, the County Council works in partnership with the Local Planning Authorities to develop local transport strategies to deliver the relevant Local Plan; and the County Council's emerging Minerals Plan will support the safeguarding of appropriate rail infrastructure required in the foreseeable future.

3.0 Recommended Way Forward

- 3.1 A measured way to progress a network review would be to initially clarify that the Primary Route Network and other sub-regional routes throughout the county are unsuitable for restricted use.
- 3.2 On a needs basis, through the mapping of existing Traffic Regulation Orders and the capture of local community concerns through the DHP process, establish an overview of local routing arrangements. This insight could form the basis and justification for all new weight/height/length restrictions and/or street design improvements.
- 3.3 Continue to promote the use of Routing Agreements through the planning system and promote contracts that include a Routing Agreement between developers and hauliers. It is considered that expanding the role of Travel Plans to include informal routing agreements would have less impact as they would not be enforceable.
- 3.4 Continue to target Road Safety training/education resources to areas of greatest need identified through establishing trends and local community insight.
- 3.5 SATNAV issues will be addressed through technological advances in equipment and information sharing.
- 3.6 Best practice in freight transport should be promoted by ongoing liaison with District/Borough partners regarding development proposals, and continued dialogue with the haulage industry through the Chamber of Commerce.
- 3.7 Continue to promote the need for HCV parking facilities through Local Plan review. Additional highway signing of commercial transport amenity facilities is unlikely realise any tangible benefits and would have to be considered on individual merit.
- 3.8 Continue to promote the Long Term Rail Strategy for Staffordshire to expand rail freight provision.