

Somerset County Council

Transport Policies

FUTURE TRANSPORT PLAN

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2013-2017



October 2013

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1 Introduction

In March 2011, Somerset County Council (SCC) adopted its Future Transport Plan (FTP), covering the period from 2011 to 2026, which outlined the long-term strategy for transport on Somerset. Alongside this document, a shorter-term Implementation Plan was developed, initially for 1 year covering 2011/12, which reflected the uncertainty over funding locally and nationally at that time.

In many ways, the doubt over funding remains in the current economic climate and locally there is a clear remit to reduce costs and secure value for money from the services that the Council delivers. Work has been done to look at all areas of the transport service, with difficult decisions being taken along the way, particularly in areas that are non-statutory in their nature.

It is proposed that this Implementation Plan (IP) will run for a period of 4 years, from 2013 to 2017, to mirror the County Council electoral cycle. Two further periods for IPs will also cover 2017 to 2021 and 2021 to 2026. The Department for Transport (DfT) Guidance on Local Transport Plans⁽¹⁾ (2009) indicates that the main strategy document should remain under review and should this be changed before 2026, there would be a need to revisit the proposed IP timescales.

The IP looks at progress to date since 2011 and examining many of the new initiatives that are now in place such as Somerset's Small Improvement Scheme process, the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) for Bridgwater and the Local Enterprise Partnership⁽²⁾ (LEP) and associated Local Transport Board, set up to deliver major transport schemes.

There have also been additional challenges to deal with such as changes to land use planning regulations, which impact so closely on transport initiatives and periods of extreme weather which caused parts of the local and regional road network to become impassable.

The document concludes with a look at how the Council might make the best of the opportunities that arise in the future and the challenges ahead.

1 <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110509101621/http://www.dft.gov.uk/adobepdf/165237/ltp-guidance.pdf>

2 The Heart of the South West LEP covers the administrative areas of Somerset, Devon, Torbay and Plymouth.

2 Progress to Date

2.1 Impacts of the Government Spending Review

The Government's Spending Review was announced in October 2010, which fixed spending budgets for each Government department up to 2014-15. This exercise was done to reduce the deficit of the public debt in the wake of the banking collapse in 2008. While the Spending Review protected highway maintenance to some extent, other areas of transport have not been afforded the same protection and the knock-on impact at a local level has meant that innovative ways of delivering services have and continue to be sought. As a result, the entire transport service within the Council has been reviewed. This was to ensure the Council delivers the services it needs to make a positive contribution to Somerset.

Transport within the Council was split into two areas for the service review work 1) Transporting Somerset (covering passenger transport) and 2) Highways and Transport (covering highways maintenance, management and scheme implementation).

2.1.1 Transporting Somerset Service Review

The TransportService Review encompassed the following services delivered by Transporting Somerset, which are:

- Special Educational Needs (SEN) & Pupil Referral Unit transport (Children's and Adults services budgets).
- Home to school transport (Children's and Adults services budgets).
- Social care and health transport (Children's and Adults services, and National Health Service budgets).
- Community & public bus services.
- Further education transport; and
- Fleet management.

Four key areas were identified for further development, which were:

1. Change in contractual arrangements for park and ride and public transport services;
2. More robust and consistent need assessment (gateway) and changes to driver training;
3. Improved walking routes to school to reduce demand for free school transport; and
4. Increased charges for discretionary areas of home to school transport.

2.1.2 Highways and Transport Service Review

The Highways and Transport Service Review was set up to look at all elements of highways maintenance, management and scheme implementation. Through detailed consultation with staff and engagement with external bodies, four areas for improvement were identified for further investigation.

1. Reduce costs through changes to the organisation and delivery model;
2. Increase community and district involvement in service delivery;
3. Income generation; and
4. Implement changes to service standards.

2.1.3 Outcome of the Service Reviews

As an outcome of both service reviews, many of the suggestions were rolled forwards into an immediate Medium Term Financial Planning process, which led to the implementation of reductions in budgets and services from 1st April 2013. Other areas, such as procuring elements of the service and evaluating passenger transport service delivery, have been taken forward for further investigation.

2.2 Delivery Against Priorities

The FTP covered a number of priorities which at the time, related to the Sustainable Community Strategy Objectives. Although the Council's key objectives, outlined in the County Plan, have adjusted, the original objectives still remain as a broad indication of the areas within which transport issues can be addressed. Figure 2.1 shows the link between these objectives.

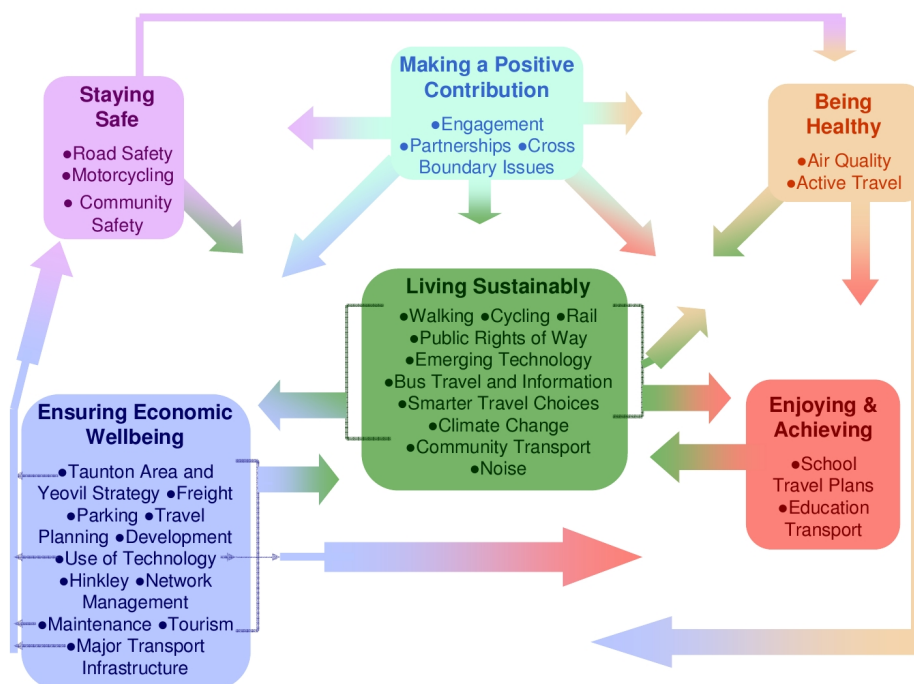


Figure 2.1 The interaction between the FTP priorities

The following sections look at progress made towards each of these objectives as well as discussing new initiatives that have been developed since the adoption of the FTP.

2.2.1 Making a Positive Contribution

Much of the work that the Council now does is through partnership working, which allows the best use of limited resources. In some instances, this also helps to strengthen the Council's position in a lobbying capacity if it is possible to link up with other organisations to agree on a common theme. In other situations, simply the pooling of resources allows the delivery of a broader goal or scheme than the Council could deliver on its own. In some instances, this involves engaging the community to agree a way forward for them to take on a service.

The Council's joint work with other local authorities within the South West Peninsula⁽³⁾ has led to the development of a designated Peninsula Rail Task Force that acts as a lobbying and decision making body for the authorities involved.

The Council continues to work closely with the freight industry to ensure that there is a worthwhile and productive dialogue between hauliers, the Council and communities. There is still more to be done in ensuring the public are aware that freight often has to access communities, even when there are weight or width restrictions in place. In addition, we have to work with other organisations, such as Network Rail or statutory undertakers, to ensure that the work they do on the highway minimises disruption and impact on freight.

The Council has worked closely with health partners to deliver active travel promotions such as Cycle Challenge⁽⁴⁾ and National Bike Week. The Council is also engaged with health professionals in delivering elements of the Bridgwater LSTF project such as Sky Rides and other local initiatives to ensure healthy lifestyles are a key part of the LSTF project. More information about the Bridgwater LSTF project is in Section 2.2.2.

Partnership work also takes place on a regular basis with District Councils in terms of planning the development of their Local Development Frameworks and Local Plans and other transport authorities to ensure any cross-boundary issues are jointly considered.

Small Improvement Scheme

In May 2011 it was agreed to support an initial one year allocation of £2.5m for Integrated Transport new schemes/ improvement works from the DfT capital grant. This was later to evolve into the Small Improvement Schemes (SIS) Programme.

The programme is mainly developed from schemes proposed within the local community with County Councillors acting on behalf of their respective communities. There are also some strategic Officer submissions, which align to the general intentions of the FTP.

Road safety measures, local improvements such as footpaths, dropped crossings and other crossing facilities, network capacity improvements, walking and cycling improvements were encouraged in the submission documents. The desired outcome was a countywide spread of schemes with 'modest investment yields for maximum return' in delivering community priorities to develop localism, improving safety and encouraging sustainable travel alternatives.

66 schemes were initially approved in the 11/12 programme, plus a further 12 schemes, originally not included in the programme which were later agreed subject to feasibility studies. Following a further round of scheme requests 54 schemes were identified for the 2012/13 financial year programme.

The schemes were grouped into similar work type categories and a breakdown of the schemes included in the programmes by 'Scheme type' is depicted in Figure 2.2 (2011/12) and Figure 2.3 (2012/13), clearly demonstrating a bias towards road safety and pedestrian improvement schemes.

3 Cornwall Council, Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council and Torbay Council

4 A competition for businesses based in Taunton and Bridgwater to see who could get the most people cycling to work.

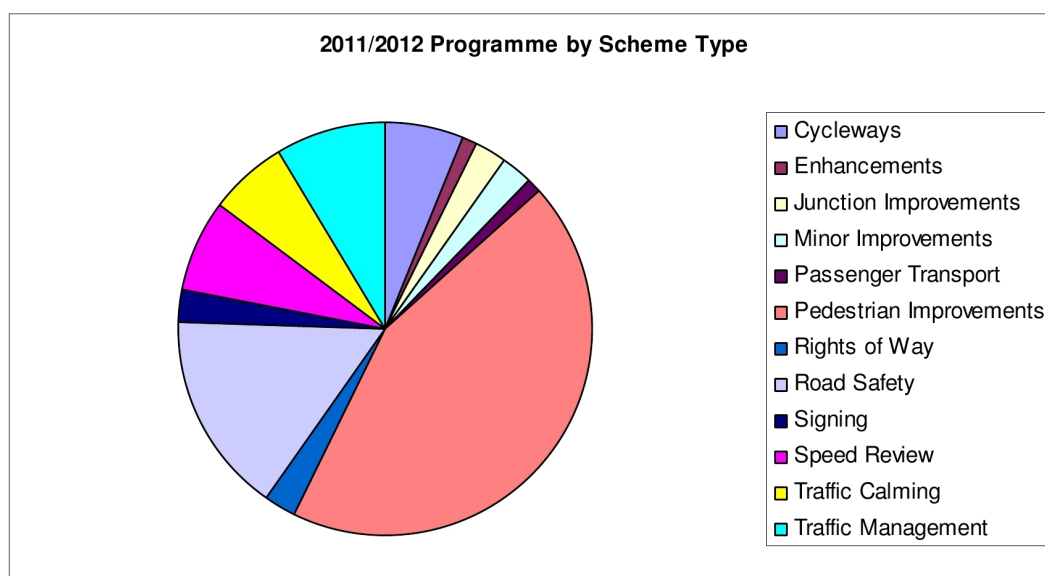


Figure 2.2 2011/12 SIS Programme Delivery

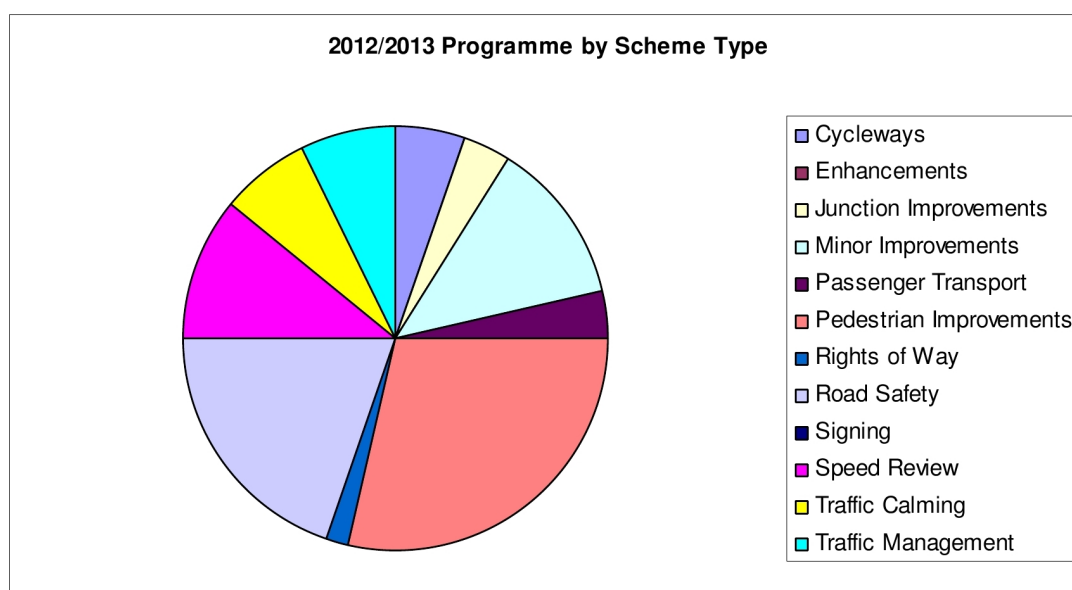


Figure 2.3 2012/13 SIS Programme Delivery

Design and implementation of a large volume of small schemes in a 6–12 month period was always envisaged to be challenging and the constraints of some schemes would dictate a need to carry them over into subsequent years in order to deliver, particularly where land purchase or dedication, legal processes such as Traffic Regulation Order's and consultation was required. In the first year (2011/2012) 15 schemes were completed with £1.1m carried into the next financial year. The progress made in terms of delivery provided momentum for the following year with early construction programmed on a number of schemes. During 2012/2013, 41 schemes were implemented and full spend of the revised £1.9m budget plus the residual 2011/2012 budget was achieved with a marginal overspend. This showed the benefits of a longer term programme to unlock some of the complex issues that can occur when delivering such schemes.

Doing More with less

One area where the Council is making a positive contribution is in its policy of removing unnecessary road signs. This practice has been ongoing since 2010 and has seen the removal of over 1,000 signs on the highway. This activity in Somerset has been highlighted and supported by Patrick McLoughlin, Transport Secretary and the DfT recently released guidance to help other authorities looking to de-clutter the highway. The Council has an online reporting system for residents to identify where they think there are unnecessary road signs, markings, bollards or railings.

2.2.2 Living Sustainably

In August 2012, the Council adopted its Active Travel Strategy, comprising the Walking, Cycling, School Travel and Communication and Information Strategies. This underlined the support for Active Travel within the Council, particularly as it now has responsibility for public health from April 2013. The aims of the Active Travel Strategy are:

- Improve people's health and wellbeing through more active lifestyles;
- Maximise access to local services without increasing congestion;
- Reduce transport carbon emissions and support climate change targets;
- Reduce harmful emissions and improve local air quality;
- Make Somerset a more attractive and safer place to live;
- Enhance mobility and independence for vulnerable groups (such as older people and those social excluded); and
- Reduce congestion and facilitate economic growth.

There are strong links to be made between public health and wellbeing and active travel. In addition, there is strong scientific evidence that increased walking and cycling in both adults and children can act as a preventative measure for tackling obesity and heart disease.

The Council continues to run its Moving Forward⁽⁵⁾ website to promote the use of non-car modes. This includes engaging in promotional campaigns such as Bike to Work day, the Cycle Challenge as well as carsharesomerset⁽⁶⁾.

The Council has also worked closely with the Local Planning Authorities with the County to ensure that policies within local plans address the need for travel planning as well as future proofing of developments by installing electric vehicle charging points and safe walking and cycling routes. In addition, the implementation of the Council's adopted Parking Strategy (March 2012; revised September 2013) encourages District Councils to adopt appropriate parking standards in their settlements to ensure that the use of the private car is minimised in the settlements that can offer viable alternatives, such as Bridgwater, Taunton and Yeovil.

The Council has also implemented a successful bike loan scheme in partnership with Bridgwater College. This allows students to loan a new bike at the start of the year with a view to purchasing it at the end of the year.

5 www.movingsomersetforward.co.uk

6 www.carsharesomerset.com

Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF)

In 2012, the Government announced that Somerset County Council had been awarded £3.8m to implement its LSTF bid for Bridgwater. This is to be delivered between 2012 and 2015. The main elements of the bid, known as The Bridgwater Way, are:

- Implementation of cycling infrastructure focussed on the South of the town;
- Working with communities to deliver locally identified walking routes;
- Business travel planning with identified companies in Bridgwater;
- Area-wide travel behaviour campaign; and
- Partnership working with both internal (health, education) and external (Sustrans, Sedgemoor District Council) bodies.

In the first year of delivery (2012/13), the following initiatives were implemented:

- Delivery of 200m of a shared use and segregated walking and cycling route on Taunton Road
- Design of Cycle routes
- Commissions to deliver:
 - Marketing and communications strategy
 - Travel planning reports for the Bridgwater area
 - Skyride Local in Bridgwater 2013-15
 - Business cycle challenges in 2013-15
 - Bike It Plus in Bridgwater and DIY streets, specifically in Hamp

2.2.3 Ensuring Economic Wellbeing

Extremes of Weather

Over the last couple of years, Somerset has been hit by extremes of weather that have severely disrupted the transport network. In the winters of 2010/11 and 2011/12, the County was hit by snow which brought travel to a virtual standstill for a period of time. In the spring, summer and autumn of 2012, there was significantly higher than average levels of rainfall, which disrupted tourism, farming and laid the foundations for the saturated ground conditions that contributed to some of the worst travel disruption and damage to the highway seen in recent years.

Floods of 2012/13

In November and December of 2012 and into January 2013, relentless rainfall resulted in severe travel disruption across the whole of the South West, with many of the pinch points being identified in low-lying Somerset. In effect, the region became cut off from the rest of the country due to the issues in Somerset.

Some of the most severe disruption was caused to the rail network. The flooding of Cowley Bridge near Exeter, along with Langport on Somerset and Flax Bourton in North Somerset, led to the closure of the main line to London and Bristol, severing the strategic rail connectivity

of the South West, particularly Devon, Torbay, Plymouth and Cornwall. This had knock on effects for Taunton station which became end of the line for many trains and was struggling to cope with the large increase in passengers and rail replacement bus services.

Increases in passenger numbers were witnessed on the South West main line to London Waterloo which was less affected by the flooding as this was the only option for passengers travelling to and from London and the South East by rail.

Highway infrastructure in Somerset was badly affected with significant problems on the trunk road network. The A358, linking the M5 at Taunton and the A303 at Ilminster, was closed with significant tail backs and blockages occurring. This also meant there was no access between the two Trunk Roads during this time. In addition, the M5 diversion route between Taunton and Wellington along the A38 was also closed due to flooding on a number of days, meaning there was no access beyond Taunton to the South West on the M5 or via the diversion during these times. Figure 2.4 shows these problems in more detail.

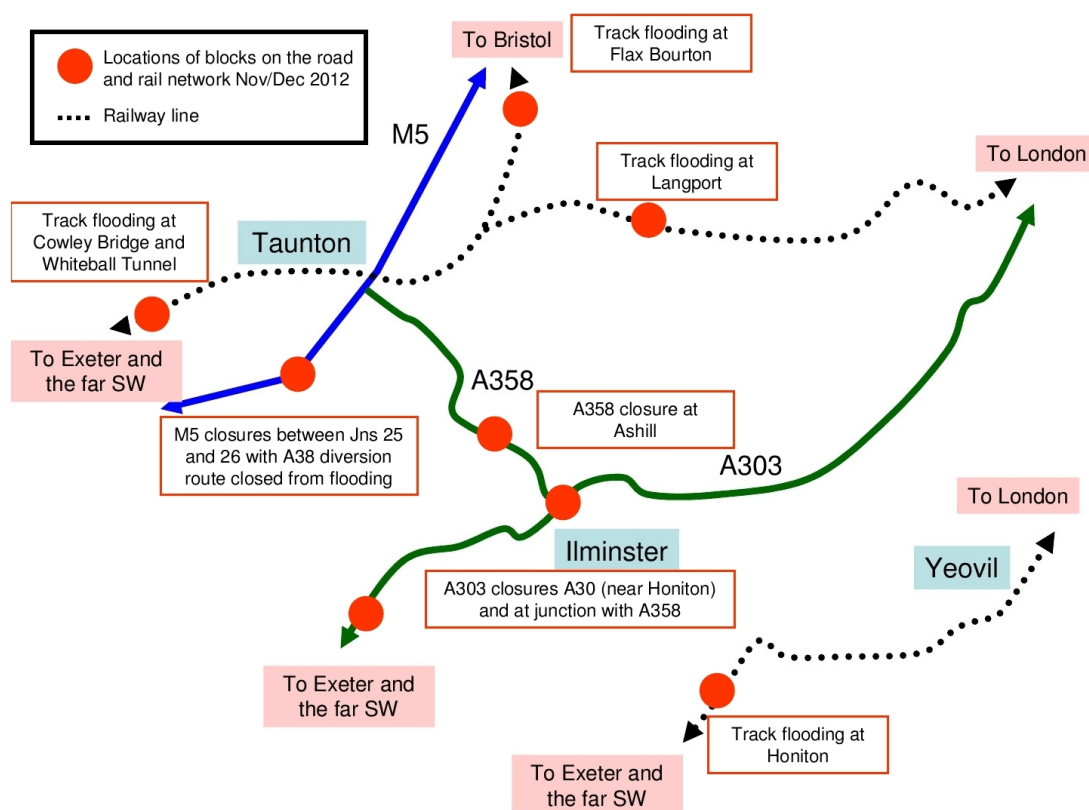


Figure 2.4 The impact of flooding in Nov/Dec 2012 on the Trunk Network and Rail Network within Somerset

More locally in Somerset, the A361 saw numerous closures, particularly between Burrowbridge and East Lyng. In total the closures lasted 60 days (although not consecutively) over the period from November to early February. The A39 was also closed on numerous occasions most frequently at Bilbrook and Carhampton which is the only A road into Minehead and West Somerset. These all compounded to cause further problems for other communities across the area.

In addition, the rising of flood water on the Somerset levels by up to 3m in places meant that villages such as Muchelney were cut off for 12 days between 22nd November and 3rd December. 100 residents were left stranded and supplies needed to be delivered by boat. Other villages, including Moorland and Dulverton had access issues, though to a lesser extent.

The Council also recorded a significant increase in the number of enquiries received relating to highways issues; 927 enquiries were received between November 2012 and January 2013 compared to 242 for the same period the previous year. All five districts in Somerset were affected demonstrating the widespread nature of the flooding. Figure 2.5 shows the full extent of flooding in November and December 2012 in Somerset.

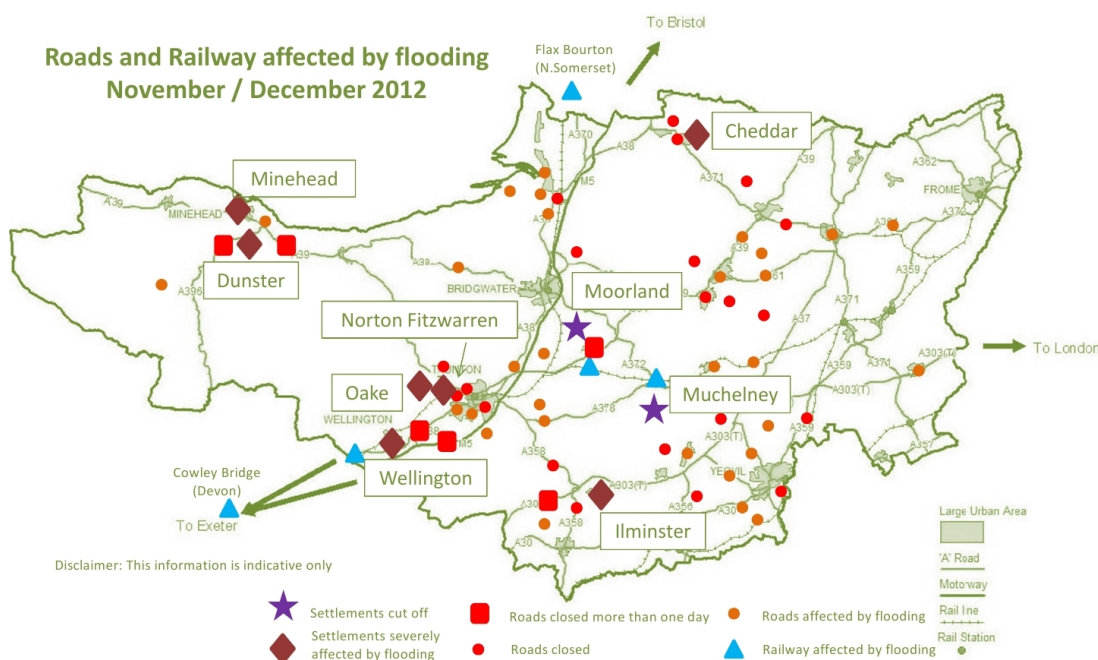


Figure 2.5 The impact of flooding in Nov/Dec 2012 on the Somerset Transport Network

In total the Council has identified 78 maintenance schemes that are required as a result of the November and December flooding. In total the schemes would cost £1.8m to implement with the majority being spent in South Somerset (£1.5m).

Improving the A303

The Council is leading a multi-agency group of partners looking to identify a package of improvements on the A30/A303/A358 corridor. Working closely with a project group including Wiltshire, Devon, Plymouth and Cornwall Councils as well as the Highways Agency, the project aims to identify a package of measures that could be delivered to ensure that current issues with journey time, safety and consistency/reliability are addressed.

The benefits of improvements along this corridor have previously focused on improving connectivity with the far south west region to increase productivity and also to address problems with network resilience (i.e. a reliance on the M4/M5 link). One of the aspects

highlighted in previous work as a priority for progress towards improved economic performance and productivity was improvement to transport networks - noting that "journey times from parts of the region to major markets represent a significant brake on productivity."

Making improvements to the A30/A303/A358 would address these issues and would also enable numerous road safety improvements along the route. The Council believes that improvements to the A30/A303/A358, alongside improvements to broadband infrastructure through the investment in superfast broadband which Somerset County Council is securing for Somerset, will transform connectivity for businesses.

Specific economic benefits from A30/A303/A358 improvements for Somerset potentially include:

- Making Somerset (and neighbouring areas) more accessible for tourists (particularly opportunities to further Somerset's strengths as a short break destination from London and the South East)
- Strengthening Somerset's inward investment attractiveness by reducing journey times to markets
- Helping to strengthen and develop local supply chains - including benefits for the aerospace and advanced engineering sector clustered around Yeovil and Augusta Westland

Over the last two years, the Council has spearheaded a campaign to promote the much needed improvements to the A303 and has provided the technical evidence needed to quantify the economic benefits of the improvements. In June 2013 the council successfully made the case to Government that the A303 is one of the most notorious and long-standing road hot spots in the country, and the Government announced a feasibility study for the scheme prior to finalising its roads investment programme in 2015⁽⁷⁾.

Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE)

In June 2012, the Council introduced Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) across Somerset. This involved transferring the responsibility for the enforcement of most on-street parking regulations from the Police to the Local Authority. It brought the enforcement of car park and on-street regulations within the same procedures. The Council manages on-street parking across the county and off-street car parks in Taunton Deane, Sedgemoor and Mendip districts. West Somerset and South Somerset District Councils have introduced their own CPE service for enforcement in their car parks.

Managing Events

One of the areas of work that the Council has developed is in the management of planning events across Somerset. In many cases, this involves a multi-agency approach to work with partners such as the emergency services and District Councils to ensure these events, such as Glastonbury Festival and carnivals, can go ahead without significant disruption to the highway network. The Council has a Highways Advisory Group to provide advice to its partners on planned events that will impact on the network. The Council has also undertaken

7 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/209279/PU1524_IUK_new_template.pdf

a strategic diversion network trial in West Somerset on the A39 for when flooding events or traffic accidents occur. If this is successful, it is hoped this initiative can be rolled out across the county.

Maintenance of the Highway Network

The management and maintenance of the highway network, the County Council's largest and most valuable asset, is clearly a vital role and one that has been subject to substantial revenue cuts over time but to some extent protected on the capital funding side. The service area has seen a number of changes and has also been asked to be innovative about the way it delivers its service.

In addition, the extreme weather, both snow and flooding, have not only created additional repairs to be done to the network but also stretched resources above and beyond their limits.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer's Autumn Statement on the 5th December 2012 announced that an additional £1.5 billion of Government investment to improve the highway network and reduce congestion. For the Council this meant that there will be a Capital Grant of £5.033m split over two years. This funding will be used to address two issues:

1. Deterioration of the highway carriageway surface resulting in pothole formation; and
2. Damage caused to the highway by flooding events.

In terms of the data evaluated for highway maintenance, road condition is assessed on the % of the network needing further investigation. For 2011/12 and 2012/13, the data for these areas was as follows:

	%	%
A Roads	5	4
B and C Roads	12	11
Unclassified Roads	12	11

Table 2.1 Percentage of highway network needing further investigation

Hinkley Point C Nuclear Power Station

In March 2013, development consent was granted to EDF for proposals to develop Hinkley Point C Nuclear Power Station. The ten-year project will create around 5,600 jobs during construction and 900 for 60 years during the plant's operation. Clearly, there are significant impacts on the transport network, both in the vicinity of Hinkley and also the wider area to Bridgwater and the M5. Officers at the Council have been liaising closely with EDF to ensure the highway network will cope with the demand as well as making sure there is a transport-related legacy from the project. The Council worked with EDF to scope out and finalise a comprehensive assessment of the local transport impacts of the development and negotiated a £20m transport mitigation package as well as a bypass for the village of Cannington. The Council also negotiated provision of an innovative traffic monitoring and incident management system which has now been delivered by EDF to ensure planning conditions on movement and routing of heavy goods traffic are complied with.

Taunton Third Way Major Scheme

The Taunton Third Way was opened on 27th September 2011. The scheme has provided a new north-south route adjacent to the town centre, including a new bridge over the River Tone. The scheme cost £7.5m, with funding obtained from DfT, developer contributions and the Council.

The Scheme was designed to:

- Improve access to enable redevelopment to proceed in Town Centre regeneration areas so that there are appropriate levels of employment and service provision to meet the needs of the projected population growth;
- Provide traffic relief to the Town Centre to enable further pedestrian enhancement;
- Reduce congestion particularly on north-south routes in order to accommodate development levels set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy;
- Increase accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists to the Town Centre;
- Reduce road casualties within the Town Centre;
- Improve bus journey times; and
- Improve conditions to attract investment and deliver employment growth.

The bridge also won the British Construction Industry Awards winner of the Civil Engineering Project of The Year Award 2012.

Taunton Northern Inner Distributor Road Major Scheme

The Northern Inner Distributor Road (NIDR), is a proposal to construct a new road linking Staplegrove Road in the west to Priory Avenue in the east. The estimated cost of the scheme is £21 million and it is being grant funded by the Department for Transport (DfT), who have contributed £15.2m following agreement to our compelling business case for investment, together with contributions from the Council and developers.

The NIDR provides an additional east - west link, reducing congestion along Greenway Road, Priorswood Road, and the Rowbarton areas. The NIDR will also provide access to brown field development sites at Taunton West Goods Yard, Taunton East Goods Yard and also the Firepool Area. Construction work commenced in June 2013 and will be completed September 2014.

Local Enterprise Partnership and the Local Transport Board

The Heart of the South West (HotSW) Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) was formed under the leadership of the private sector, supported by local authorities of Devon, Plymouth, Somerset and Torbay and the associated District Councils in June 2011. It is one of 39 partnerships created since the Government's Local Growth White Paper published in October 2010.

Key to the LEP's success is working in partnership with private businesses. Businesses are the closest to government than they ever have been, as the LEP brings together the private sector with local authorities via a direct link to central government.

Historically, major infrastructure schemes have been delivered through direct lobbying with Central Government and some element of assessment at a regional level. Since the Regional Assembly no longer exists, the Council has been working within the Government's new parameters for delivering major schemes. This process involves setting up a Local Transport Board⁽⁸⁾ (LTB) in association with the relevant Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The LTB has a robust timescale for preparing initial briefs for any schemes authorities wish to submit for consideration and assessment by the Board.

Somerset County Council submitted 6 schemes for initial consideration, which are:

- Bridgwater Town Centre Pedestrian Improvements and Eastern Distributor Road;
- North East Taunton - Bus Corridor;
- North East Taunton Urban Growth Infrastructure;
- M5 J25;
- Taunton Town Centre Enhancement; and
- Yeovil Western Corridor.

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport on Somerset sits on the LTB, which is made up of elected members from the other authorities and representatives from the business community. Within the HotSW LTB, Government has allocated an indicative sum of £27.1m over 4 years from 2015. This sum needs to be distributed between the partner authorities once an agreed programme has been identified. It is anticipated that additional funding may become available through the LEP's forthcoming 'Single Local Growth Fund'.

The LTB has agreed to a programme of 12 schemes that it would like to deliver including Yeovil Western Corridor, Toneway Corridor and M5 J25 improvements. Funding from the DfT's initial allocation has been set aside for the Yeovil Western Corridor scheme with further funding allocations for other schemes to be considered as part of the LEP growth deal with Government in July 2014.

2.2.4 Enjoying and Achieving

The School Travel Strategy was adopted in August 2012 as part of the Active Travel Strategy. It had a number of objectives, which are:

- Help everyone take part – provide information, advice and resources that can be easily access, adapted and implemented by schools in a manner appropriate to their individual circumstances
- Focus additional resources where there is most potential for change, deliver additional change by working more intensively with schools where there is greatest potential for change, or problems to be tackled.
- Make the most of what we have - ensure the transport services we provide are as efficient as possible and target our work at what pupils need, using the techniques that deliver the best results.
- Work with a changing environment - Ensure school travel provision and the travel planning process are able to respond to changes in the way education is provided and meet the challenges of a new, more flexible school environment and changing resource availability

8 <http://www.heartofswlep.co.uk/local-transport-board>

As part of the Transport Service review, one of the noted options was to investigate the development of new criteria for assessing routes to school that have been perceived as dangerous to walk along. Within this, the Council would examine whether engineering improvements could take place at some locations, which would reduce the need for contract buses to be used. This has significant benefits in encouraging higher levels of walking and cycling to school, which in turn helps improve concentration and reduce the risk of childhood obesity.

95% of LEA schools in Somerset (86% of all schools) now have a travel plan, developed with assistance from the Council's School Travel Adviser team over the period from 2006 to 2011. Over this time, single-occupancy car use for school travel dropped from 29.2% to 25.3%. However, due to the lack of resource, the School Travel Adviser function has had to be withdrawn so future work on School Travel Plans is likely to be minimal.

Smartcards for Education Transport

The Council is part of a group of regional local authorities working on the Smartcard project. All major bus operators in the County have now fitted their buses with smartcard enabled ticket machines which are now (or will shortly be able) to record all journeys made by people holding English National Concessionary Passes and Student County Tickets⁽⁹⁾. This project was delivered through £2.98 million secured from the LSTF fund⁽¹⁰⁾ and is expected to deliver:

- Smart ticketing equipment on all 3,400 registered local bus services in the south west
- The extensive back office software to support this
- Support for the region's Community Transport and Community Rail Partnership in moving towards smart technology

As noted in Section 2.2.2, the successful Bike Loan scheme has also helped a number of young people access education who might not have been able to otherwise.

2.2.5 Staying Safe

In early 2013, the Council adopted its Road Safety Strategy to 2020. This sought to build on the consistent delivery of road safety measures based on three areas of education, enforcement and engineering. The objective of the Strategy are:

- To work with partner organisations to help drivers and riders improve their skills;
- To focus on increased education, particularly among higher risk users;
- To undertake improvements where engineering could make a difference to safety;
- To identify opportunities for effective enforcement activities; and
- To secure road safety measures through planning and development.

Somerset Road Safety undertake active initiatives in the three areas of education, engineering and enforcement to ensure road safety statistics stay low. However, there are growing concerns over motorcycle fatalities and there is need for the Council and its stakeholders to focus attention and road safety resources on this issue over the next couple of years.

9 The County Ticket is the Council's scheme to provide home to school transport to those who are entitled.

10 http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/lstf_plymouth_connect_bid.pdf

Up to and including 2011, accidents on the Somerset road network have been declining in the three key areas of Killed and Seriously Injured (KSI), Child KSI and Slight Injuries. The data for 2012 continued to fall overall although there was a small increase in fatal casualties (incorporated into KSI casualties). This increase is partly due to a serious incident on the M5 in November 2011 involving 34 vehicles, killing 7 people and injuring 51. Although targets are set, history suggests there will always be fluctuations in data against this target from year to year.

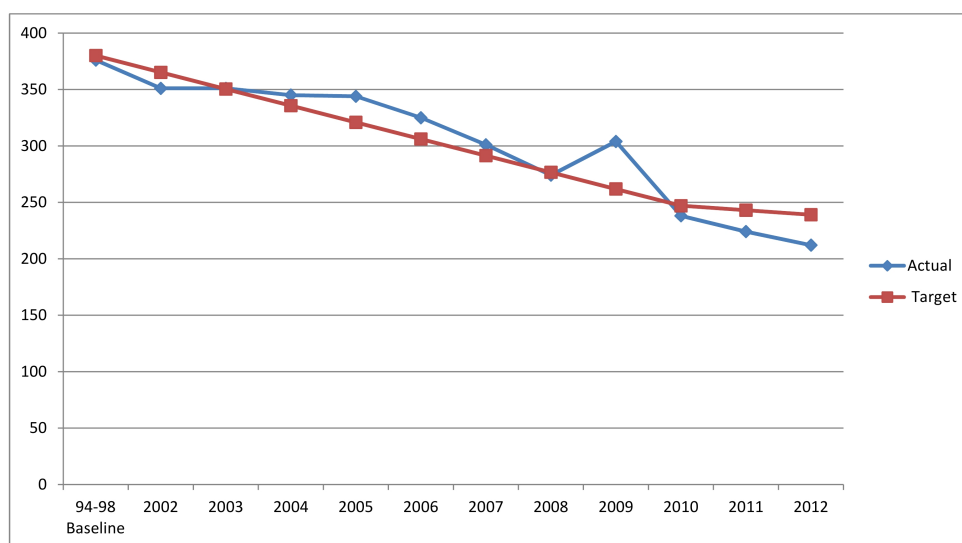


Figure 2.6 KSI

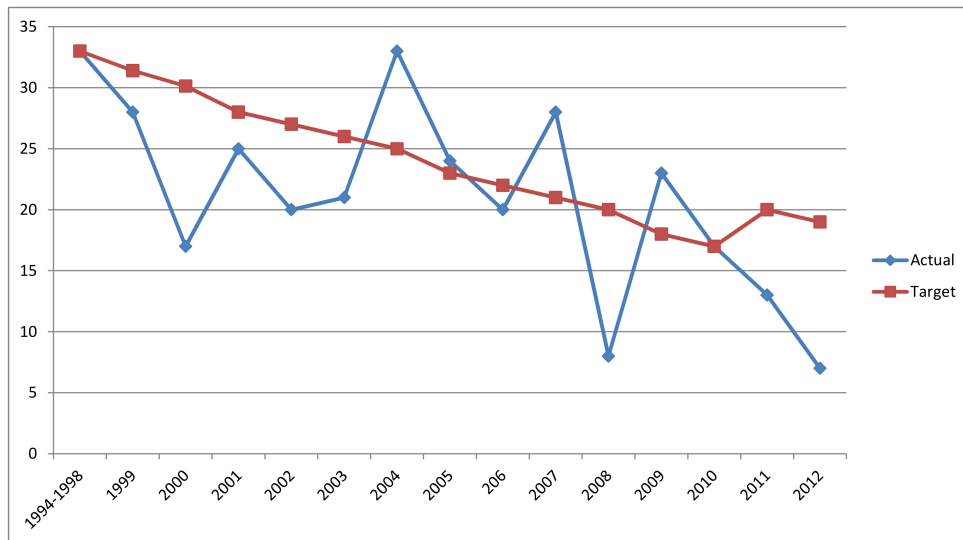


Figure 2.7 Child KSI

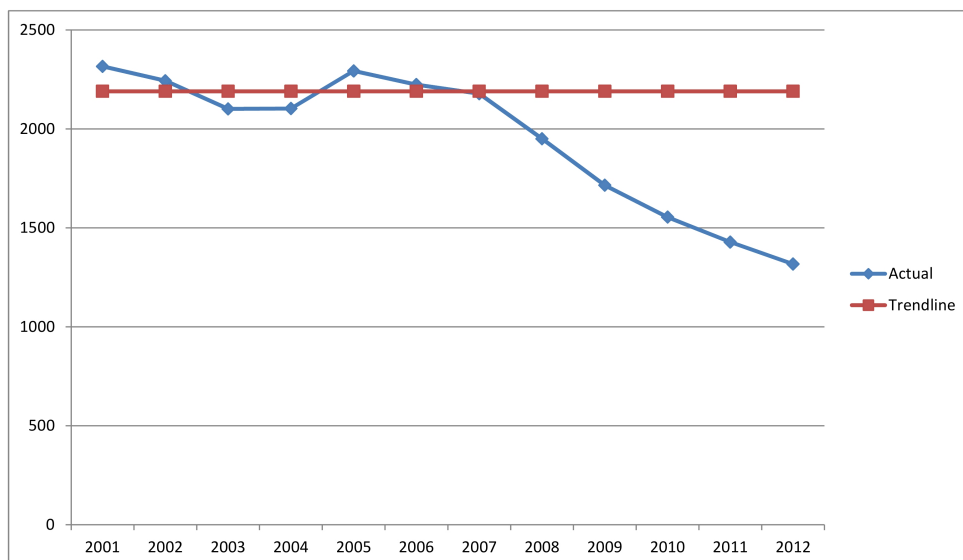


Figure 2.8 Sights

One element of the Council's work that has helped to improve safety is in the proactive stance on pothole repair. In 2011/12, the Council repaired in the region of 19,000 potholes. In 2012/13, this figure rose to over 26,000, which was in part to the extreme flooding that took place in November and December 2012 causing in the region of 3,500 potholes to form.

2.2.6 Being Healthy

As part of the Active Travel Strategy, the Council has developed both a Walking Strategy and a Cycling Strategy. These focus on delivering infrastructure that makes it easier to walk and cycle as well as ensure walking and cycling is designed into new developments.

Access to Cycling project: Autumn 2012-Spring 2013

This project aimed to increase cycling levels by providing a mixture of training, bike servicing and bicycle loans to targeted population sectors. The Council used a tried-and-tested method of cycle training and promotion, adapted to target two specific audience groups:

1. people living with, or recovering from, physical conditions that could be improved by regular physical activity;
2. people living in areas of deprivation (high IMD ⁽¹¹⁾), where levels of health are typically poorer than in other areas of Somerset.

The project combined the following measures known to facilitate cycling:

- Cycle training at Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced levels, based on the National Standards for Cycle Training and delivered in groups of 3-6 adults.
- "Repair and Ride" cycle maintenance and training sessions. Servicing of participants' own bicycles to bring them up to safe, effective working order.
- Bicycle loan. Participants who completed one of the training or maintenance courses were offered bicycles for a 2-3 week loan in order that they could continue practising before committing to buying a bike of their own.

Repair and Ride proved to be by far the most popular sessions. As a result a greater proportion of the funding was directed to this activity. The inclement weather and the extended duration of the winter period meant that people were more inclined to leave their bikes to be serviced under cover as opposed to taking in part in cycle training outdoors.

Public Health within the Council

In April 2013, public health was incorporated into the County Council function. This provides a clearer route for delivery of active travel promotions which are proven to help reduce incidences of obesity and diabetes. It also reinforces the work the Council already does relating to Road Safety education and the work done by the newly-formed Health and Well-being Board.

11 Indices of Multiple Deprivation

2.3 Spend to Date

As noted in 2.1, the 2010 Spending Review changed the landscape of funding for transport against a backdrop of reducing the deficit, facilitating long-term, sustainable growth and tackling carbon emissions. As part of the Spending Review, the government announced a radical simplification of local transport funding, moving from 26 separate grant streams to just four, which are.

- a local sustainable transport fund (capital and resource);
- major schemes (capital)
- block funding for highways maintenance (capital); and
- block funding for small transport improvement schemes (capital).

In addition, prior to March 2011, some elements of funding from government had been split between grant and supported borrowing. However, from this point onwards, funding from government was 100% grant funding.

In 2011/12, the maintenance grant was £20.370m, with Integrated Transport being allocated £2.686m plus an additional £448,000 in December 2011. In 2012/13, these figures were £19.311m and £2.865m respectively.

In terms of major schemes, the Council completed the Taunton Third Way major scheme in 2011, comprising £5.5m government with the additional £2m being made up from the Council and developer contributions. The Council was also successful in securing £15m from government towards a £21.8m Taunton Northern Inner Distributor Road. Preliminary works for this started in 2011/12 with the main part of the development taking place from June 2013.

In Summer 2012, the Council was successful in securing £3.891million from the government's Local Sustainable Transport Fund for a programme of sustainable transport improvements in Bridgwater, matched by £2.407m of local funding from developers and the Council's own funds. The profile of funding was agreed by DfT in Sept 2012 and delivery of the programme will take place between now and March 2015. In 2012/13, £255,000 was spent on revenue projects and £352,000 on capital works.

3 Future Delivery

3.1 Potential Funding Opportunities

This section looks at the different opportunities to deliver transport improvements in the future and where sources of funding might come from.

The role of the Local Enterprise Partnership

Moving forwards to the future, it is likely that the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) will play a greater role in managing and allocating funds within Somerset. Funding for major schemes, a proportion of the Integrated Transport Grant, New Homes Bonus, LSTF capital funding will all be part of the 'Single Local Growth Fund' to be distributed to LEP areas in July 2014 based on the quality of their growth plans. Therefore a key focus for the Council needs to be working with the LEP to prepare the growth plan and demonstrate the economic growth benefits of investing in transport infrastructure in Somerset.

Small Improvement Scheme (SIS) Process

As noted in 2.2.1, the development of the SIS programme has been a successful process, combining the needs of the local community, through their local elected members, and more strategic or operational aspirations that will lead to safety improvements or delivering facilities that will benefit the community. Due to the lengthy time scales involved in delivering schemes on the ground, the programme has been adjusted to a rolling programme over 18 months to allow officers to make better use of resources while still delivering against local priorities.

Major Schemes

As noted in 2.2.3, the major scheme process has been devolved to the LEP's Local Transport Board, which has identified a number of schemes to be developed from 2015. This includes Yeovil Western Corridor at £6.49m from a total fund of £27.1m, which is earmarked for delivery between 2015/16 and 2016/17. The Toneway Corridor Improvement scheme (£4.96m) and the M5 Junction 25 (£8.32m) has also been identified to be developed further in case additional funding becomes available.

New Homes Bonus

The New Homes Bonus is a grant paid by central government to local councils for increasing the number of homes and their use. The New Homes Bonus is paid each year for 6 years. It's based on the amount of extra Council Tax revenue raised for new-build homes, conversions and long-term empty homes brought back into use. The government has set aside almost £1 billion over the Comprehensive Spending Review period (2011 to 2015) for the New Homes Bonus. The final allocations for 2013 to 2014 (announced on 1 February 2013) are £668.3 million. Local councils can decide how to spend the New Homes Bonus. However, it is expected that local councils will consult communities about how they will spend the money, especially communities where housing stock has increased. As an Upper Tier Authority, Somerset County Council currently receives 20% of funding received by each district authority to contribute towards associate infrastructure such as transport and education. However, it is likely that the way the New Homes Bonus is allocated in the future will change as more funding is devolved to LEPs.

Developer Contributions

The community infrastructure levy (CIL) is a levy that local authorities in England and Wales can choose to charge on new developments in their area. The levy is designed to be fairer, faster and more transparent than the previous system of agreeing planning obligations between local councils and developers under section 106 (S106) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. However, planning authorities are under no obligation to introduce a CIL and may continue to use S106 under certain conditions. Each of the five planning authorities in Somerset have to determine for themselves whether CIL is appropriate and the Council plans to work closely with each authority to ensure that plans are in place to fund the transport infrastructure needed to support new development in the County.

In areas where a community infrastructure levy is introduced, land owners and developers must pay the levy to the local council. The charges are set by the local council, based on the size and type of the new development. The money raised from the community infrastructure levy can be used to support development by funding infrastructure that the council, local community and neighbourhoods want, like new or improved road schemes, park improvements or a new health centre. The community infrastructure levy gives local authorities the freedom to set their own priorities for what the money should be spent on as well as providing a predictable funding stream that allows them to plan ahead more effectively. It also gives developers much more certainty from the start about how much money they will be expected to contribute as well as making the system more transparent for local people, as local authorities have to report what they have spent the levy on each year. There are also plans to reward communities receiving new development through the direct allocation of a proportion (15% or 25% depending on whether a Neighbourhood Plan is in place) of levy funds collected in their area. This has implications for the Council where local communities may come forward with schemes that might normally be delivered through SIS. It is important that the Council is involved with communities and District Councils to ensure that any transport infrastructure aspirations that communities have are realistic, affordable and deliverable.

Other Sources of Funding

In addition, as and when opportunities for funding become available, the Council will need to make an assessment of whether it is in the interests of Somerset and its public to bid to these funds. In some circumstances, where high levels of match funding is required, it may not be possible for the Council to commit to these funds.

Actions

In order to successfully secure funding for transport improvements in the future, the council will:

- work with the LEP to prepare their Growth Deal and demonstrate the economic growth benefits of investing in transport infrastructure in Somerset;
- ensure the Council is actively involved in discussion within the LTB to secure funding for Major Schemes;
- continue to implement the SIS programme which combines the needs of the local community and the more strategic aspirations of the Council;
- work closely with District Council to ensure that plans are in place to fund the transport infrastructure needed to support new development in the County;
- work with communities and District Councils to ensure that any transport infrastructure aspirations that communities have are realistic, affordable and deliverable; and
- make an assessment of whether it is in the interests of Somerset and its public to bid to external sources funds, especially where high levels of match funding is required.

3.2 Challenges to Delivery

Resources with the Council

As noted in 2.1, the 2010 Government Spending Review lead to two major reviews of how our resources are spent. In addition, each year there is a process of Medium Financial Term Planning, which seeks to reduce the deficit of the Council. One obvious knock-on effect of this is a reduction in resources to deliver services, which may then either need to be stopped or transferred to another sector, such as the local community or volunteers. The Council has moved to a Commissioning Model and, in the long-term, this should help to make sure strategic decisions are made relating to services for the benefit of the community.

Fit for Purpose

In managing the highway network, the Council needs to ensure that it has the appropriate tools to do the job. Continuing changes in technology and new innovations create opportunities to manage traffic efficiently to help reduce congestion to support the economy. In order to do this, the Council is looking to develop a designated facility that can help officers manage traffic efficiently. Alongside of this, the Council needs to review all of its traffic signals and other equipment to ensure traffic can flow smoothly across the county. While the Council is proactive in managing planned events on the highway network, there is still further work to be done in improving the way unplanned events, such as flooding and major traffic incidents, are managed.

Partnership Working

Moving forwards, it is imperative that the Council finds the most effective and economical way of delivering services. The Council must work with other authorities particularly in the South West, to deliver improvements on major road and rail infrastructure. This will ensure a single message is being heard by the government on the issues affecting the region. The main mechanism for this will be the HotSW LEP and associated LTB.

The Council will work with the Highways Agency to deliver a workable solution to improving the A303. The Council must also ensure that it works closely with the appropriate stakeholders to keep the Somerset roads safe, especially where certain user groups are identified as a higher risk.

The Council must also liaise with government organisations such as Network Rail to ensure the Council can push for future improvements to the rail network in Somerset. The Council will encourage measures such as the level crossing app released by Network Rail to alert drivers about level crossings on the highway network. The Council must also work with the Environment Agency and other bodies dealing with flooding and water management to identify solutions to the transport issues caused by extreme flooding events in Somerset.

The Council will need to work closely with District colleagues to deliver any major transport schemes and infrastructure through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) as well as major national infrastructure projects such as Hinkley Point C Nuclear Power Station.

The Council will work with charities, such as Sustrans and volunteer organisations such as community transport operators, who deliver important aspects of the transport service. The Council will seek to encourage communities to deliver services in an environment where the public purse is reduced.

The Council work with Government departments⁽¹²⁾ to ensure delivery on statutory requirements to the highest standards. The Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on any proposed changes in legislation and guidance.

Distance from major cities

One particular issue that has been discussed at length within the South West region is the issue of peripherality in relation to the major cities in the UK. The lack of resilience of the transport network also hit confidence levels of businesses both those currently in the South West looking to expand and also potential investment from outside the South West. The South West Spine Report⁽¹³⁾ makes the case for greater investment across the South West peninsula railway network. In the context of unprecedented passenger growth and the importance of the rail network to the South West, the report makes recommendations for key investment plans. The report stresses the fragility of the rail network against severe weather conditions, highlighting the events of late 2012/2013 as a key demonstration of this fact.

12 Department for Transport, Department for Communities and Local Government and Department for Energy and Climate Change

13 http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/the_south_west_spine.pdf

The South West Chamber of Commerce (SWCOC) have also expressing concerns over the lack of investment in the South West transport network especially in the context of the disruptions caused by the flooding in 2012/13. Recently published statistics by HM Treasury⁽¹⁴⁾ show that the average public sector spend per head in the South West for transport in 2010/11 was £212. This was the lowest figure in the country and is just over 25% of that spent per head in London, which amounted to £774 in the same period. The SWCOC are in the process of conducting a survey to capture views of businesses on increased investment in the South West's transport infrastructure.

Competition within the LEP

One area that will need careful management is the likely need to compete with our LTB partners for not only major scheme funding, but also potentially funding for smaller schemes, through top-sliced Integrated Transport Fund budget and also New Homes Bonus funding, which may be managed by the LEP. Good relations will need to be built in order to ensure that funding is fairly balanced and distributed across the LEP geographical area.

Managing the Funding Gap

Even with the implementation of CIL, it is already accepted that there will not be sufficient funding available from all available sources to fund major infrastructure identified as crucial to growing and sustaining the Somerset economy. It is likely that schemes will need to be prioritised against more stringent criteria in the future, with some communities losing out. It is hoped that the funding coming through the LEP process will help to minimise this gap but it will need to be carefully managed, especially given the considerations already discussed regarding competition within the LEP area.

Climate Change

As the recent events show, highlighted in Section 2.2.3, Somerset is vulnerable to extremes in weather both due to the low-lying areas prone to flooding and the higher areas of Hills and Moorland, which are more likely to suffer from snow. The Council must work with other bodies, such as the Environment Agency, Exmoor National Park Authority and the Somerset Levels Drainage Board, to ensure that access and transport routes can be kept open in times of extreme weather. Furthermore, the Council needs to ensure that every opportunity for adaption and mitigation is explored to minimise the impact of climate change on Somerset.

The Uncertainty of Rail

The delay to the announcement of the Greater Western Franchise⁽¹⁵⁾, which covers three of the four train routes in Somerset, means there is ongoing uncertainty around what type of services might be run in the future. This was due to start in April 2013 but due to problems within DfT surrounding the way the franchise bids were assessed, this has now been put back to July 2016. With additional uncertainty around the cascade of rolling stock to the south West post-Electrification, there is a real concern that the region will be given a lower priority against over regions with greater social and economic problems.

14 Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses November 2012

15 <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport/series/rail-franchising>

Localism

Localism can be viewed as a positive process, as it has the potential to allow communities to take on local services, such as Community Transport or volunteers maintaining a local footpath. The Council needs to ensure that these opportunities are encouraged and fostered wherever possible. As noted in Section 3.1, communities will also have more opportunity to secure funding through the CIL process. It is important that the Council is prepared for this eventuality and has all its policies relating to volunteering, delegating local services and scheme implementation up-to-date. Moving forward, it will be important to find ways of engaging and involving communities still further in helping the Council deliver the services it needs to.

Actions

In order to address these challenges, the Council will:

- continue working with the local community or volunteers to maximise the opportunities for communities to take on functions that are currently done by the Council;
- seek to ensure that it has the appropriate tools to manage traffic efficiently to help reduce congestion and support the economy;
- review all of its traffic signals and other equipment to ensure traffic can flow smoothly across the county;
- improve the way unplanned events, such as flooding and major traffic incidents, are managed;
- work with other authorities particularly in the South West, to deliver improvements on major road and rail infrastructure;
- work with the Highways Agency to deliver a workable solution to improving the A303;
- work closely with the appropriate stakeholders to keep the Somerset roads safe, especially where certain user groups are identified as a higher risk;
- liaise with government organisations such as Network Rail to ensure the Council can push for future improvements to the rail network in Somerset;
- work with the Environment Agency and other bodies dealing with flooding and water management to identify solutions to the transport issues caused by extreme flooding events in Somerset;
- work closely with District colleagues to deliver any major transport schemes and infrastructure through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) as well as major national infrastructure projects such as Hinkley Point C Nuclear Power Station;
- work with charities, such as Sustrans and volunteer organisations such as community transport operators, who deliver important aspects of the transport service;
- work with Government to ensure the Council is delivering on statutory requirements to the highest standards;
- build good relations within the LTB in order to ensure that funding is fairly balanced and distributed across the LEP geographical area.
- carefully manage the funding gap for infrastructure to ensure the Council does not overspend or commit to transport schemes that do not offer value for money
- ensure that every opportunity for adaption and mitigation is explored to minimise the impact of climate change on Somerset
- continue to push for improvements to rail in the region within the context of a delayed franchise of the Great Western Railway line
- find ways of engaging and involving communities still further in helping the Council deliver the services it needs to

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