

Briefing Note

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Buses and Bus Facilities in Town Centre Areas

At the Highways Committee of 27th March 2008, discussions took place on the impact of bus lanes on local trade and community venues. It was proposed that the Council's policy with regard to bus services be fed into the Scrutiny Committee dealing with local town centres.

The Council's key transportation policy document is the Local Implementation Plan (LIP) which sets out the Council's priorities in the context of the Mayor of London's Plan. Sustainability and public transport are at the heart of both documents. The Mayor of London has invested heavily in bus services – frequency, reliability, journey times – to provide adequate capacity for London travel whilst longer term rail/underground improvements are undertaken. Brent Council has taken account of the relatively low car ownership of the population, particularly in the south of the borough, and the recognition of the demands for additional housing units, which lead to greater density of population and redefines the modes of travel. Support has therefore been given over a considerable period to the prioritising of bus movements through key junctions and links, and in the town centre areas.

Brent Council does not own or operate significant car parking sites in its town centres, neither is there a compelling business case for private operators to be attracted. Existing roadside space has been prioritised for disabled users and short term shoppers to support local trade. However the provision of bus stops and bus lanes within town centres have shown to be essential for two reasons. Firstly, it provides a service for local residents to access the shopping areas with short walking distances when carrying shopping, pushing buggies etc. This provides custom and patronage to local traders for those who do not have access to a car, and is instrumental in providing an alternative to the use of the private car. Secondly, the provision of bus lanes are effective in reducing journey times over the bus route, and for those passing through. The reliability, and penetration into the town centre, are key benefits to the choice of bus travel.

Whilst supporting bus access into town centre areas, Council policy has always given consideration to other factors such as days/hours of operation of bus lanes, disabled parking, loading and unloading to serve shops and businesses and on-street and off-street parking. Transport for London have a particular interest on the borough's strategic routes (Harrow Road, Edgware Road) to ensure that through traffic movement is not compromised by congestion and parking. Key to the effective use of road space, is a robust parking/traffic enforcement regime which will ensure the viability of short stay access to shops and businesses whilst deterring unregulated resident or commuter parking in such locations.

The Council's planning policies, and housing demand are reliant on the provision of higher densities at town centre locations, where public transport is sufficiently good to allow low ownership, or indeed car free developments. Regeneration opportunities depend on strong public transport services, and a model shift away from private car ownership.