

Lowestoft Transport Strategy

Introduction

Lowestoft is a major seaside town and port and a significant proportion of its economy is reliant on the tourism sector. Attractions are focused on the seafront and businesses wish to draw the visitors into the main shopping area north of Lake Lothing and to the local shopping area in Kirkley, south of Lake Lothing. Two of the most popular visitor attractions in the East of England are also located to the north and south of Lowestoft in Gunton and Kessingland.

Prior to the recession Lowestoft had been going through a period of regeneration following a sustained period of economic difficulties. Economic recovery for Lowestoft is expected to focus on the energy sector and development of port related industries. There are ambitious plans for further regeneration of Lowestoft that could lead to significant growth in housing and employment over the next 20 years, with a likely growth of 2,200 homes and up to 5,000 new jobs. This will add to current levels of congestion if current travel trends continue with a reliance on the car for short journeys within the town, particularly at peak times. The focus for growth in Lowestoft is around Lake Lothing and the town centre and could lead to long-term changes in the area and its land uses.

Due to its size and prominence as a key service centre Lowestoft benefits from a mostly commercially operated bus network and rail services to Ipswich and Norwich. Lowestoft also benefits from a reasonable cycling network throughout the town, mostly focussing on north-south travel linking to the town centre. There are, however, some significant barriers and gaps in the cycling network. As would be expected from an urban area there is a good pedestrian network throughout the town, unlike other urban areas is the fact that travel over Lake Lothing can only be achieved alongside the two road crossings. This can add significant time to journeys by foot and make what would otherwise have been a short walk a journey that is then made by car.

The bus services cover key corridors through the town, with all serving the town centre from outer lying areas. Key service provision is between 0700 and 1900, with a dramatic service reduction outside of these periods. Where operating between the north and south of the town, or when travelling from the south to the town centre, services can suffer from severe delay to their journey when disruption is caused by congestion around the Bascule Bridge.

Rail services connect Lowestoft with Norwich and Ipswich and thence to London. Oulton Broad, Somerleyton and Beccles are all served. Services to Norwich currently operate approximately every hour, with some additional services in the peak, while services to Ipswich are every other hour. Service provision to Ipswich is limited due to the lack of a passing loop, though the completion of the Beccles loop by the end of 2012 will enable an hourly service to be operated. The county council expect this commitment to be made through the new franchising arrangement that will cover Lowestoft. The

railway station acts as a key gateway into the town, and so there is concern at the current condition and service provision available to users. Links to the station present a mix of standards, with a well used car park, generally used but poor quality cycle parking, bus connections close to the rail terminus, and poor pedestrian connectivity, with accesses from the south sometimes closed so forcing users to negotiate through the taxi rank to access the station from the opposite side.

While there is a reasonable cycle network, significant barriers and gaps act as disincentives to greater use. Cycle to work statistics from the census has demonstrated that approximately 12% of residents' cycle to work. Lowestoft is ideally suited for supporting cycle, being generally flat and with most of the town fitting within a five kilometre radius (or 15 minute journey time). The key barrier to cycling in Lowestoft is the need to share the carriageway on the narrow-laned Bascule Bridge with heavy volumes of motorised traffic. Removing this barrier would provide a more attractive journey option for cyclists, particularly novices or those who would simply prefer to travel off-road. Other barriers and gaps include, for example, requiring cyclists to travel around the town centre, cycle provision alongside the A12 trunk road, and provision of routing through some parks.

The road network in the town can easily be categorised between the north and the south, with only two crossing points of Lake Lothing. The network crosses at the eastern end of Lake Lothing on the A12, where it becomes a trunk road to the north and inclusive of the Bascule Bridge, and western end on the A1117 over Mutford Lock. The constricted nature of these two opening bridges can result in congestion around the crossings, with a particular issue being when the Bascule Bridge is closed to motorised traffic to allow waterborne traffic to access the quayside. This congestion can be further exacerbated when the road is closed to traffic at the level crossing by Oulton Broad North train station.

A key characteristic of Lowestoft is that approximately 80% of people who work in the town also live there. Thus the majority of journeys to work are relatively short, with one third of journeys being less than about a mile and two thirds less than about three miles. This means that many regular journeys could be taken without the car.

Transport strategy for Lowestoft

Reducing demand for car travel

We will work with Waveney District Council to ensure that new jobs and services are close to housing so that people can more easily travel without the car. We want to ensure that developers actively promote walking, cycling and buses as natural choices for residential and employment locations. Travel plans, with robust targets for parking and car use, enforced through the planning process, will form the basis of this approach.

Travel Plans will be supported by developers either providing or contributing to the cost of infrastructure and services to support people travelling to and

from their sites by sustainable modes in order to minimise car use. This includes integrating the development site with the current walking, cycling and public transport network. The integration of development within Waveney District Council's further preferred options Area Action Plan to the walking, cycling and public transport network will have a significant role in reducing the additional amount of car traffic that would otherwise be generated within an already congested part of the town.

We will also work with current employers, education and service providers and households to develop voluntary travel plans to reduce traffic. This work will build upon our successful TravelSmart Lowestoft project that reported significant increases in walking, cycling and the use of buses by residents and forms a significant element of our Lowestoft Local Links project.

In addition to the promotion of school travel plans our work with schools will focus on providing cycle training and a supportive environment for children, their parents and teachers, to feel confident about cycling. This will see the continuation of 'Bikeability' cycle training in schools, and, within our Lowestoft Local Links project, the provision of a 'Bike-It' officer to work with schools to encourage cycling and walking to school. These measures will help to address the congestion issues that have been highlighted outside of schools. The improvements map indicates the need for physical improvements to the cycling and walking networks to support these initiatives.

Working with employers the provision of adult cycle training or refresher course may also be possible to help employees who may otherwise want to cycle to work but may not have used a bike for a long time or may lack the confidence to ride on the road.

We will work with Waveney District Council to develop a balanced plan for on and off street parking with the aim of discouraging peak hour traffic movements associated with cheap long stay parking in congested areas of the town. This plan will balance the needs of managing long-stay commuter parking and reducing peak-time congestion with the needs of short-stay shoppers who are more likely to travel outside of the peak hours. The areas of key focus will be around the town centre and its surrounding streets and the area along Marine Parade, Kirkley Cliff and extending further into Kirkley. We will investigate the best approach to managing parking throughout the day and minimising the impact of long-stay commuter parking on residential areas and areas where shorter-term parking linked to retail and leisure may be more appropriate.

We will also continue to work with bus operators and community organisations to develop better links between Lowestoft and its hinterland to provide better access to key services. Rural transport provision is currently being reviewed by the county council. We have been developing more flexible demand responsive transport services, and new services are now operational to the west and south of Waveney. The whole of the district will be covered by 2014. Demand responsive transport is provided for all public transport users, with services allowing passengers to access the wider transport network by

feeding into commercially operated bus and rail services. Lowestoft will be a significant hub for those to the north-east of the county due to the availability of other transport services to key destinations throughout Suffolk, Norfolk and the rest of the county. Lowestoft will also act as a destination for many trips within the area due to the town's function as a key service provider.

Efficient use of transport networks

There is a basic traffic management and control system within Lowestoft and we intend to improve this over time so that people walking, using bicycles or the bus are given greater priority and traffic flows are better coordinated. We will increase the attractiveness sustainable travel by reducing the level of delay they can experience and by improving convenience and journey time reliability. This system will also be developed to provide more travel information using the internet, mobile phones or using variable message signs to alert users to incidents.

When fully operational the traffic management and control system will enable smoother traffic flow at peak times and when there are higher levels of congestion.

Improving infrastructure

We expect to be able to make significant investment to transport in Lowestoft during the period of this local transport plan. In the short term we have identified a number of key improvements using a variety of funding sources. We have submitted a bid to the Local Sustainable Transport Fund for our Lowestoft Local Links project, a package of measures to support sustainable transport in the town. This project will include the provision of a new cycle bridge, improved bus interchange at the railway station, extensive travel planning and bus route improvements. A bid to the Regional Growth Fund to remodel the A12/Commercial Road junction to support port development was recently turned down. We will look for other opportunities to secure these improvements.

Improving the bus and rail interchange forms a key element of the Lowestoft Local Links project. This will provide the opportunity to improve accessibility to the rail station for all users while improving the integration with bus services to improve the journey experience for users. The scheme will also enable the county council, and other partners in the project, to improve the public realm around the station and enhance it as an entry point to the town.

Improvements to the cycle network will be based on the cycle improvements that have been identified within the key improvements map. The main objectives are to overcome barriers or gaps in the current cycle network that will make journeys easier for users. Key improvements include a new shared pedestrian and cycle bridge crossing Lake Lothing, allowing cycling along all sections of London Road North, providing an off-road facility alongside Battery Green Road, and improvements to the network from Pakefield towards the Bascule Bridge.

We want to reduce reliance on the car for short journeys within the town for residents and visitors by making cycling a convenient and safe alternative. The physical improvements to the network will also be complemented by other incentives, for example the provision of cycle training.

The walking network will also be improved, by the installation of new crossings of busy roads where people want to cross. The recent installation of a controlled crossing point at the junction of London Road South, Belvedere Road, and Pier Terrace is an example of the sort of improvement that will be provided.

We aim to reduce future traffic congestion by increasing the use of walking, cycling and public transport for local travel. This will reduce the demand placed on the road network, providing more reliable journeys for users. This will have greatest impact at those locations that currently suffer from the highest levels of congestion due to their strategic locations within the town.

Waveney District Council has extensive proposals for the regeneration of Lowestoft that are supported by the county council. This is being taken forward through an area action plan for the Lake Lothing area with detailed future master planning for sites south of Lake Lothing. Developers will make significant contributions towards the provision of infrastructure to mitigate the traffic impacts of their developments and that will therefore enable easier and more sustainable movement throughout the town.

The county council is contributing £1 million towards a £4 million project by Network Rail to carry out line improvements and signalling work that will make possible an hourly service on the rail line between Ipswich and Lowestoft. This will improve access to jobs and services and provide better connections to east Suffolk, Ipswich and London. We will expect to see commitment to the enhanced services as part of the new Greater Anglia rail franchise. The project has been programmed for completion by the end of 2012.

Throughout the plan period we will also be investigating opportunities that may arise to take forward larger scale infrastructure projects. This will include completion of the Northern Spine Road, which will relieve Bentley Drive and provide an alternative route for the A12 through the north of the town, and better access to development land south of Lake Lothing. The county council will also continue to support the Highways Agency in developing and securing funding in the longer term for a third river crossing of Lake Lothing for motorised traffic. We recognise that the Highways Agency does not have any current proposal to provide a bridge. We also recognise the need to support the future viability of the Port of Lowestoft and to avoid blighting future development opportunities in the port area.



Figure 1- Key improvements to the Lowestoft transport network

Short term objectives 2011 - 2015

In order to better manage local given the significant congestion that can be caused around the Bascule Bridge on the A12 Trunk Road and the railway level crossing at the Oulton Broad North station, we have introduced an Urban Traffic Management and Control System. In addition to providing dynamic bus priority at traffic signals, this system will be used to manage congestion and help dissipate queues caused by the Bascule Bridge openings. It is understood that Network Rail are planning to upgrade the signalling equipment that will reduce the delays caused by the level crossing.

Lowestoft Port is split between two sites either side of the A12. Access difficulties are experienced at the junction of the A12 and Commercial Road, particularly for large lorries that are required to initially travel north-bound around the town even when requiring to travel south due to the banning of right turns across the A12. We will work to identify a funding source to resolve this issue prior to 2015.

Lowestoft has a reasonable cycle network but there are a few key points on the network that discourage cycling. The most notable is on the Bascule Bridge where the A12 crosses Lake Lothing. The bridge has three narrow traffic lanes of about 3 metres each with the central lane being tidal flow. This arrangement is very intimidating for cyclists and there have been accidents involving vulnerable road users. To provide an alternative to this we have submitted a bid to the Local Sustainable Transport fund that, if successful, will allow for the construction of an additional crossing for cyclists and pedestrians.

In the next four years we aim to reduce congestion levels by using the urban traffic management and control system and by improving the alternatives to private cars. Measures that we plan to introduce to reduce car use include:

Passenger Transport

- A bus service linking holiday camps, college, large employers and the town centre.
- An improved bus/ rail interchange

Road Network Improvement

- Improved access at A12/Commercial Road junction for port access

Cycle Network Improvements

- Cycle bridge across Lake Lothing
- Permitting cycling in the main shopping area
- Improved cycle facilities along London Road south
- Creation of new cycle route in Normanston Park
- New cycle facilities along Battery Green Road
- Improved cycle facilities between the train station and Katwijk Way.

Pedestrian Network Improvements

- Upgrading uncontrolled crossings to suitable accessibility standard
- Improve pedestrian crossings at London Road South/ Kensington Gardens junction

Lowestoft Links project

The county council has submitted a bid to the Department for Transport to secure funding that will support the delivery of some of the objectives for the next four years. The package of funding is valued at £6.25 million and includes the construction of a shared pedestrian and cycle bridge of Lake Lothing, improvements to bus interchange at the railway station, and funding for the introduction of a new bus service.

The scheme will also enable the county council to provide greater levels of cycle training and the introduction of Bike-It officers in schools, and to work with employers in the development of travel plans.

Full details for the scheme can be found at:

www.suffolk.gov.uk/TransportAndStreets/Policies/Lowestoftlocallink.htm.