

CHAPTER 2:

Local Context

Summary

Darlington is an attractive market town, well served by national and regional transport links and where quality of life and accessibility for all are seen as key drivers in promoting economic prosperity.

Building on the regional and sub-regional analysis in Chapter 1, this chapter continues to set the context for Darlington's Second Local Transport Plan by setting out the transport implications of:

- Current transport and travel patterns.
- The extensive consultation and travel behaviour research programmes undertaken through the six months from September 2004 to March 2005.

Key Messages

- Improving quality of life and accessibility is a top priority to achieve economic regeneration and support social inclusion in Darlington.
- Managing road traffic congestion, improving actual and perceived road safety (particularly for pedestrians and cyclists), improving accessibility for specific groups and purposes, and managing and improving transport networks and car parking to support the economy are key challenges for the LTP.
- In national terms Darlington has lower than average levels of car ownership and relatively high levels of bus patronage. Without good alternatives to the private car, increasing economic prosperity will give rise to higher car usage as a result of increasing car ownership.
- Research suggests that Darlington residents would like to see emphasis placed upon improving infrastructure for the three sustainable travel modes (walking, cycling and bus), as well as improving the effectiveness of the existing transport network for all modes.

Darlington Description

- 1 Darlington is an historic market town, situated adjacent to the River Tees and is a pleasant and attractive place to live, work and relax in. 85% of the population of Darlington Borough live within a compact urban area, with the majority of the remaining residents concentrated in a few outlying villages. The town has a

wide variety of sports facilities, theatre, cinema and arts venues, restaurants and pubs and a good choice of schools and colleges. Residents have good access to open space and parks, both in the town and in the surrounding rural area. Recent research revealed that 94% of respondents liked living in the town¹. Darlington is the 5th largest major retail centre in the North East.



- 2 Darlington is laid out on a traditional radial road pattern, with the focus of the town's transport network being the town centre. This physical layout is partly reflected in the statistic that 49% of town centre users either walk, cycle or take the bus to the town centre. It also concentrates travel activity and thus creates a potential for traffic congestion.
- 3 The A1(M) and A66(T) Trunk roads pass around the edge of the urban area, providing fast and efficient north-south and east-west connections respectively, whilst Darlington's position on the East Coast Mainline provides fast and frequent national rail services. In addition local train services provide rail travel to the Tees Valley, County Durham and North Yorkshire. The rapidly expanding Durham Tees Valley Airport is improving access to air travel for both business travellers and tourists, especially since the introduction of new BMI Baby flights to continental Europe – it is forecast that more than 1 million passengers will fly from the Airport in 2006. Darlington's resulting accessibility has attracted major employers to establish their businesses in the Borough and further developments are underway to continue to attract inward investment.

¹ Darlington; Sustainable Travel Demonstration Town; Travel Behaviour Research Baseline Survey 2004

- 4 Population in Darlington fell during the period 1991 to 2001, but since then has recovered to 1991 levels. During the period 1991 to 2001 there was a net increase in jobs in Darlington. Lost manufacturing jobs have been replaced by service sector jobs. Unemployment at 3% is below the regional average and the lowest in the Tees Valley, but is still above the national average. However this hides some of the problems in the Borough such as very high unemployment rates in specific wards such as Central, where they are eight times higher than in other wards². The average wage level in Darlington is very low, at 77% of the national average, and is lower than the North East and Tees Valley averages, which are themselves lower than most other regions. Substantial economic disparities within Darlington lead to equivalent disparities in health and other social indicators.
- 5 Economic regeneration is therefore the top priority in the Darlington Community Strategy, adopted by all partners. Gateway to Economic Quality: Darlington Economic Regeneration Strategy 2004-09 is built on two special characteristics of the Borough: quality of life and accessibility. Research undertaken in 2003³ identified that these two characteristics could not only attract inward investment to Darlington, but that Darlington could capitalise on them to make a significant contribution to the prosperity of the wider region. Major new developments are therefore being focused on sites that are well connected to sustainable transport facilities such as walking, cycle, rail and bus routes. **Figure 2.1** opposite shows the main transport networks and development patterns in Darlington.
- 6 In 2004 the Department for Transport (DfT) selected Darlington as one of three **Sustainable Travel Demonstration Towns** in England. This 5 year project, Darlington: A Town on the Move, funded by the DfT aims to promote travel choices to the residents of Darlington to tackle emerging congestion and reduce car driver trips in particular for short journeys.
- 7 In 2005 Darlington was selected by Cycling England as a **Cycling Demonstration Town**. This 3-year project aims to increase levels of cycling in the Borough through the implementation of cycling infrastructure, training, information and events. This will help to tackle emerging congestion as well as promote accessibility and will have additional health benefits through increased levels of activity and a reduction in harmful road traffic emissions. In 2005 Darlington was also shortlisted as a **Beacon Council for Road Safety**. This recognises the excellent road safety record that Darlington has achieved, its continuing innovation and a strategy that seeks to identify

and address broader safety issues associated with travel such as personal safety and perceptions of safety when travelling on foot, by bike, by bus or train.

- 8 In 2006 Darlington was shortlisted for the Institute of Highways and Transport Accessibility Award 2006 in partnership with Darlington Association on Disability for the Wheelygood website (award announcement in May 2006).

Quality of Life

- 9 As described below, Darlington faces several issues that could develop into problems that:

- prevent the continued economic regeneration of the Borough;
- make accessibility to services worse, not the same or better; and
- prevent the continued work to achieve social inclusion.

- 10 These issues are:

- Accessibility to services, including those outside the Borough
- Tackling traffic congestion
- Realising the potential for change in travel habits
- Maintaining our good road safety record
- Supporting healthier communities

- 11 These issues have a negative impact on local peoples' quality of life. The Department for Transport defines the Quality of Life issues as follows:-

- Healthier Communities
- Sustainable and Prosperous Communities
- Quality of Public Spaces and Better Streetscapes
- Climate Change and Environmental Noise
- Landscape and Biodiversity

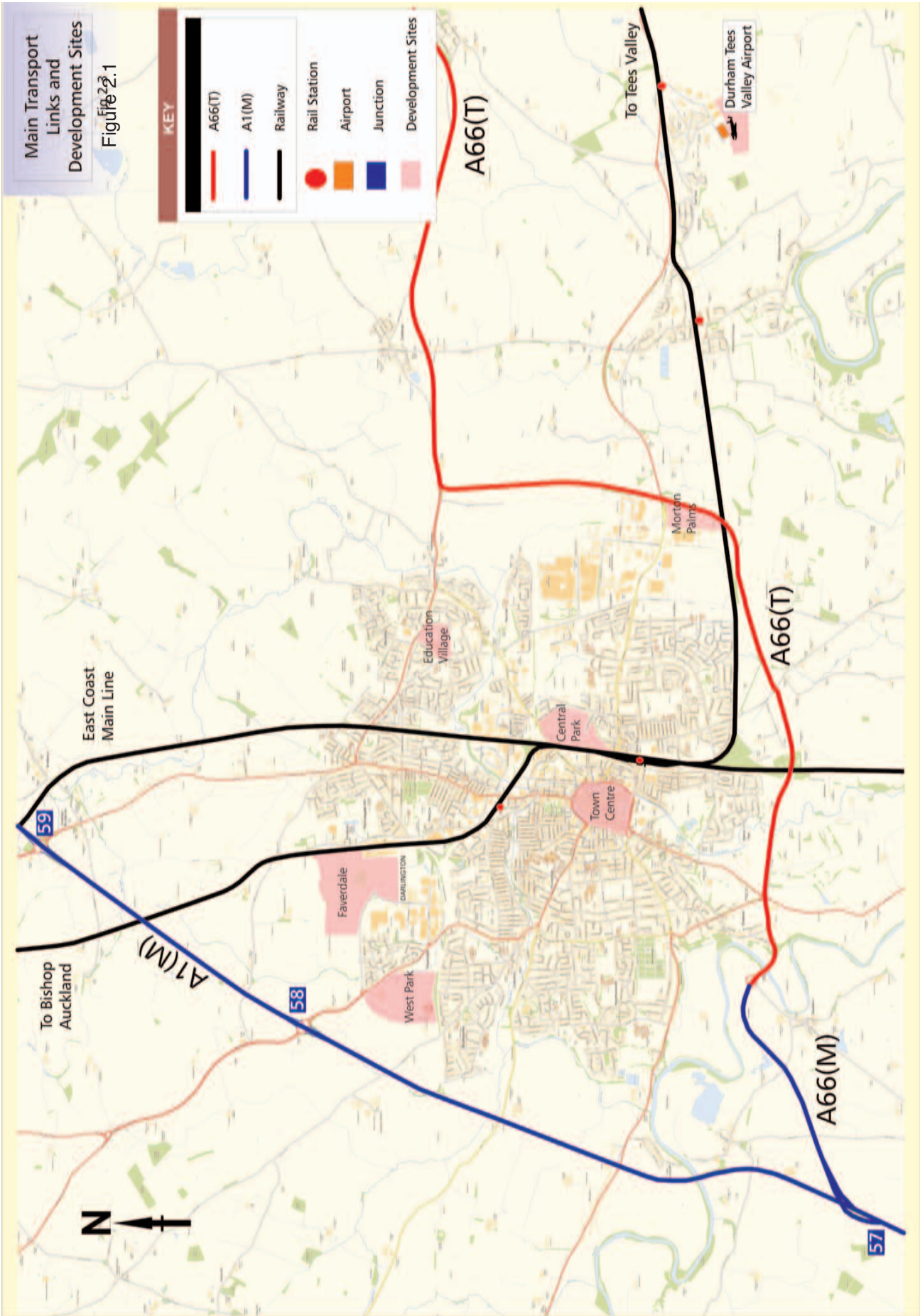
- 12 In discussing this shared priority in both this and the next chapter, we are focusing on the contribution that transport makes to the overall outcomes affecting peoples' lives, rather than a more narrow focus on transport outputs.

Current Travel Patterns

- 13 In 2004/05 the Council carried out several pieces of research and consultation, giving one of the most comprehensive 'snapshots' of local travel behaviours and opinions available nationally, and probably one of the best bases for any Local Transport Plan.

² Central: Unemployment rate 7.2%; Heighington unemployment rate: 0.9%
Source: Office of National Statistics, November 2004.

³ Darlington Gateway Development Framework 2003; research undertaken by Donaldsons and SQW.



- 14 The work included travel behaviour research for Darlington: A Town on the Move. The research was carried out by Socialdata, and it has provided a fascinating insight into travel patterns in Darlington. The full report forms **Annex 2**.
- 15 In terms of travel activity, the survey shows on average Darlington residents travel for an hour a day, travel 22 km and make a total of 296,000 trips per day. The amount of time spent travelling does not vary a great deal whether the journeys are made on foot, bike, bus or car, but the distance travelled does vary.
- 77% of all trips (228,000 trips per day) are made within the urban area of Darlington, with 47% (139,000 trips per day) of all trips being journeys of less than 3 kilometres or just under 2 miles.
 - 25% (74,000 trips per day) of all trips were made on foot with 12% (36,000 trips) by bus, and 62% (180,000 trips) by private car. However levels of cycling are very low at 1% (3,000 trips).
 - Further analysis of car trips reveal that 7% of car trips (21,000 trips) are less than 1km in distance, which in most cases would be quicker to walk.
 - 32% of all trips (95,000 trips) did not use realistic alternative means of transport to the private car due to perceptions of their suitability by the resident involved.

- 16 The modal split of all trips made by residents were:
- 62% of all trips are made by car - 180,000 trips per day;
 - 25% of all trips are on foot - 74,000 trips per day;
 - 12% of all trips are made by public transport -35,000 trips per day; and
 - 1% of all trips are made by bicycle -3,000 trips per day.

17 This can be further analysed by trip purpose to highlight difference in travel behaviour. For instance 18% of all shopping trips are undertaken by public transport but only 8% of leisure trips. 46% of trips to education are on foot, reflecting high numbers of children that walk to school. However 30% are still driven to school or college and only 1% cycle. Trips to work are dominated by car drivers but these trips only account for 10% of all trips. See **Figure 2.2**

Comparison with other similar towns and national travel patterns

18 Darlington has relatively high levels of sustainable transport use (38% of trips) in comparison with Worcester and Peterborough, the two other sustainable travel demonstration towns, and higher than the national average of 35%. However cycling levels are very low in Darlington and whilst bus patronage is currently high it has shown year on year decline since 2001. See **Figure 2.3**

Figure 2.2

Mode Choice by Trip Purpose

Darlington

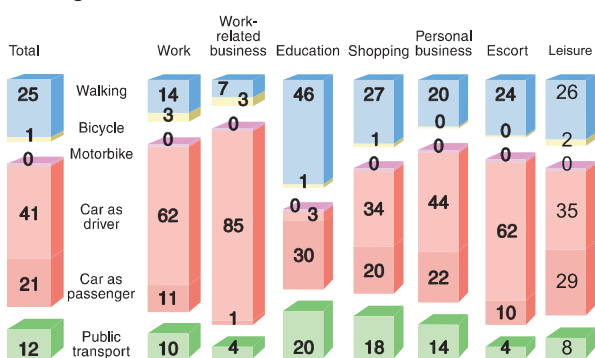
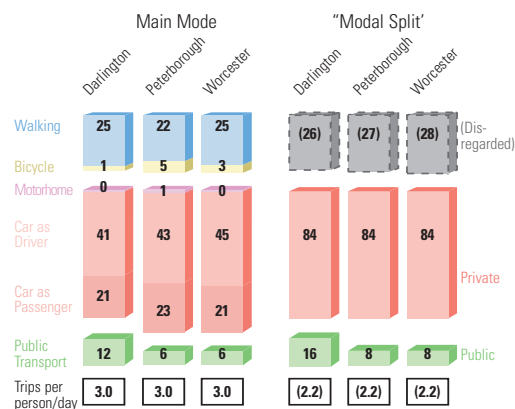


Figure 2.3

Mode Choice



Potential for change

- 19 The research has highlighted the potential for change from car based trips to more sustainable modes. The greatest potential is in cycling as 34% of trips per day currently undertaken by car within the urban area of Darlington could be replaced by cycle trips. This equates to 19 million additional cycle trips per year. Whilst it is understood that only a small percentage of trips would be changed from car to bike, this would still have a significant impact on cycling levels and a reduction in car trips. Our proposed target is to increase trips made by cycle threefold.
- 20 Darlington already has relatively high bus use, 10% of trips compared to 6% nationally. However there are still an additional 2% of trips for which there are no constraints, people are well informed and are positive about public transport but still choose not to use the bus. However of the 10% of trips currently undertaken by bus only 5% have no alternative and therefore without continued investment in public transport patronage could decline by 50%.
- 21 A quarter of all trips are already undertaken on foot. A further 20% of all car trips could be changed to walking trips. The main barrier is the perception that it takes too long to walk. There are many ways to combat this through an Individualised Travel Marketing⁴ programme, better signs incorporating time as well as distance, improved maintenance and cleansing of footways and improvements to the local environment through the StreetScene⁵ programme.
- 22 Further analysis of the data is being undertaken to identify specific target groups and to gain a better understanding of what measures are more likely to succeed.

Traffic Patterns

- 23 Traffic flows on the key radial routes used in our indicators have fallen slightly during the period 2000 to 2006 by 5% (or 195 trips per average weekday peak hour). This pattern of slight reduction is also noticeable at counters monitoring flows approaching the inner ring road, where between 2003 and 2006, traffic levels fell by 6% or 1,500 in an average peak hour.
- 24 This reduction in traffic flow at these selected locations is not a complete picture of traffic flows in the urban area. This is because trips do not always cross count sites in the direction monitored in our indicators. Total traffic flows per annum are increasing – between 2004 and 2005, levels rose slightly by 17,000 trips. This implies that the traffic increase has been on roads around Darlington, rather than on the key radial routes. These increases in traffic flows, and the pattern of their movement, have resulted in traffic congestion at key junctions, especially on radial roads. It has also resulted in a greater use of minor roads, with the potential for detrimental effects on residents' quality of life through safety and environmental concerns.
- 25 **Figure 2.4** overleaf shows the current position of the highway network in terms of average vehicle speeds for the worst weekday hour related to speed limits. As shown on the figure, most of the sections of road with low vehicle speeds (used as a surrogate for queuing traffic) are generated by specific junctions. Of particular note, as a result of traffic patterns discussed above, are the junctions at:
- West Auckland Road/Cockerton Green;
 - North Road/Whessoe Road;
 - North Road/Salters Lane junction; and
 - Haughton Road/McMullen Road junction.
- 26 Capita Symonds Limited, the Council's term partner, has carried out phase 1 of a study into traffic congestion in Darlington. The initial finding is that most consultees believed that the Council had the right approach to traffic congestion by encouraging the use of alternatives, whilst tackling local "hotspots" in conjunction with management of car parking. A number of small low cost measures to alleviate congestion have been identified including lane discipline measures, parking control, bus priority, reallocation of road space, signal timing and on-street parking.
- 27 Phase 2 of the traffic congestion study will use an enhanced section of the Tees Valley Multi Modal Model to generate a tactical model of junction congestion using Paramics software. Additional work has been carried out to provide mode choice coefficients for park and ride, as a new mode for Darlington Borough. In modelling the transport network, to such a fine level of detail, we anticipate being able to make informed judgements about the precise effect of proposals brought forward by this Plan, including those measures identified in Phase 1 of the congestion study.

⁴ Individualised Travel Marketing is being carried out throughout the urban area between 2005 to 2008, as part of the sustainable travel demonstration town.

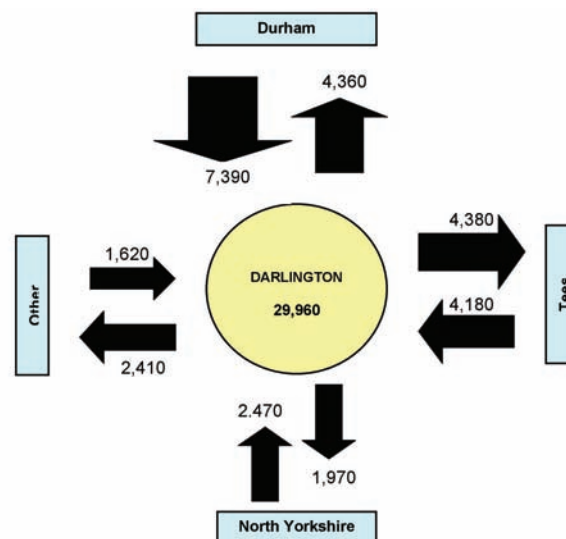
⁵ The Streetscene initiative forms part of the Council's Leading Edge programme and is seeking to deliver all Council services affecting the street environment in an integrated manner.

- 28 Delays at these and other junctions throughout the town result in delays to all road users, including bus passengers and pedestrians as well as cars, as the roads become more congested and harder to cross on foot. This is therefore a quality of life and accessibility issue that needs to be addressed by this Plan.
- 29 As also shown by **Figure 2.4**, traffic congestion is an issue on the A66(T) around the town. In particular, users of the sections of road near Blands Corner, Yarm Road and Stockton Road often experience traffic congestion, as a consequence of the capacities of the associated junctions. As discussed with the Highways Agency, we are proposing to tackle both the congestion itself (Darlington Eastern Transport Corridor & Tees Valley Gateway) and the effect of traffic on local people (protected crossing points over the A66(T)).
- 30 We have made significant progress in developing School Travel Plans, through our partnership with local Schools and Government. Since 2004, car trips to school have fallen by 1% per year.
- 31 Research from the school travel plan surveys shows that whilst car use is falling for the journey to school, cycling is increasing. However, some of the cycling trips are converting from previous walking and bus trips. We plan to undertake more research into the reasons behind these trends, to better understand the correct response required.

Travel outside the Borough

- 32 Darlington is working with the other four Tees Valley authorities to identify issues and opportunities for travel, in particular relating to access to employment opportunities and acute health services. Darlington is relatively self contained with over 29,000 work trips per day within the Borough and only 13,120 trips out of the Borough. A third of these are to the other Tees Valley authorities (mainly Stockton and Middlesbrough) and a third to County Durham. Accessibility is thus a sub-regional issue for Darlington, as well as a local one.
- 33 There are 15,700 travel to work trips into Darlington, over 4000 from the Tees Valley (mainly Stockton) and almost 7500 from County Durham (**Figure 2.5**). 90% of these trips are by car, contributing to significant traffic levels on North Road and approaching the urban area from the westbound A66(T). Further work is required to explore how these traffic levels can be tackled to minimise congestion, through demand management and alternatives, such as park and ride and increased use of bus and rail services.

Figure 2.5



Accessibility

- 34 The strategic mapping undertaken for the development of the Accessibility Strategy (**Annex 12**) demonstrates that access to key services within Darlington is very high by public transport. 96% of the population of Darlington can reach Darlington Memorial Hospital in 30 minutes or less by bus and 99% can reach their nearest GP surgery in less than 30 minutes. Similar high levels of accessibility exist for access to key employment sites, primary, secondary and further education sites and supermarkets.
- 35 However this does not mean that Darlington has no accessibility issues. Not all residents attend their nearest GP surgery or school and not everyone can access conventional public transport, especially as there are relatively few accessible buses operating in the Borough. To develop accessibility issues further requires ongoing partnership, consultation and implementation at two levels – strategic / long-term planning to achieve outcomes and tactical/short-term implementation to achieve outputs.
- 36 Whilst accessibility in Darlington is currently very good, this Plan needs to focus on the need to ensure that future changes to the transport network, land use and service provision make accessibility no worse, or preferably better. There are accessibility issues for some population groups (such as disabled and young people), and some geographical areas of the Borough (such as some rural wards and wards with low car ownership). The Plan also needs to continue our tradition of partnership with input from specific groups such as Darlington Association on Disability.

37 As a sub-regional issue, accessibility to other parts of the Tees Valley City Region (as outlined in the Northern Way strategy) and neighbouring areas of County Durham and North Yorkshire is key. As described in **Chapter 1**, we will work in partnership with our fellow highway authorities to achieve objective 2 of the Tees Valley approach.

38 Taking all the issues above, we will improve accessibility for all, especially priority groups, through the use of our new accessibility checklist (**Annex 12**) at the heart of all transport and corporate service planning. The Council's Corporate Management Team have agreed to use the checklist (developed by the County Durham and Darlington Transport for Health Partnership), to put accessibility planning at the heart of the corporate project methodology, service decisions and Leading Edge projects.

Social Inclusion

39 Analysis of the basic travel characteristics shows quite a range of travel behaviours between areas of the town. (**Figure 2.6**) In particular, there is a significant variation in mode choice and relative importance of different modes to individuals' travel needs within different communities. Socio-demographic factors, geography and differences in the availability of the travel modes are likely to form part of the reason for this variance.

Mode Choice Per Ward

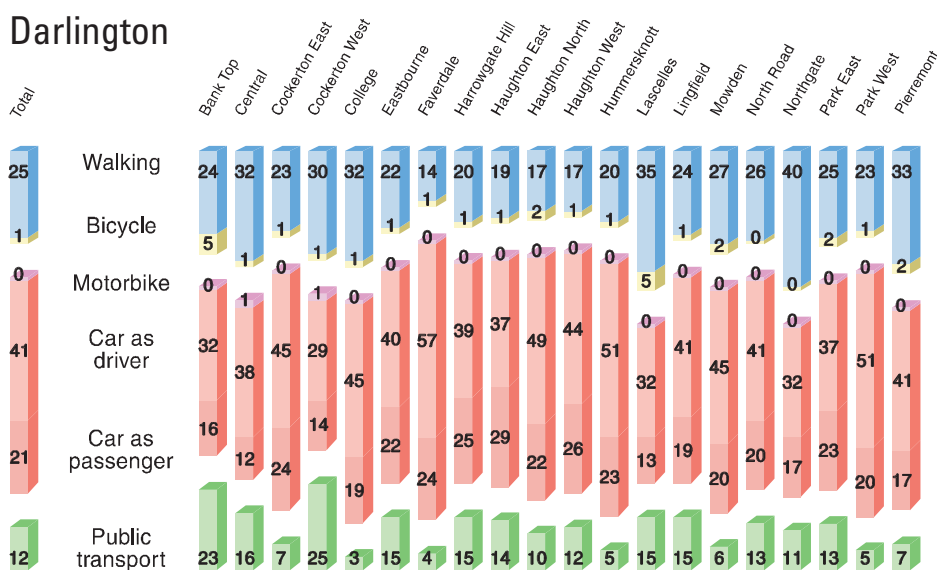


Figure 2.6

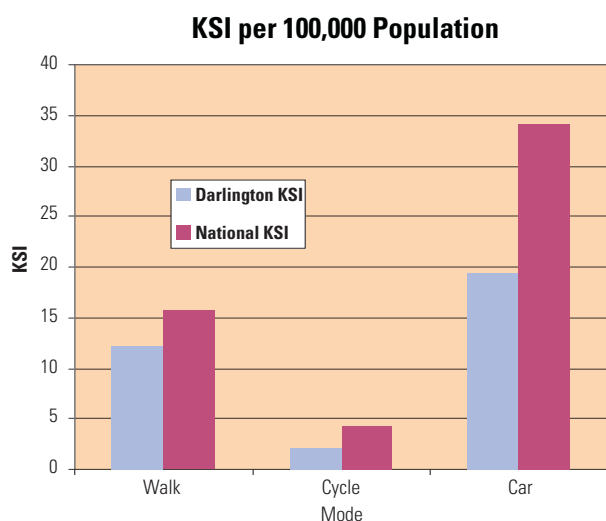
40 Car ownership levels vary widely across the wards of Darlington, from 51.2% of households having no car to 6.1% of households having no car. At the other extreme 52.6% of households in one ward have two or more cars. These variations obviously impact on the travel choices that people can make but other factors also influence how people travel. For instance in a rural ward where car ownership is very high, almost a fifth of the working population opt to work from home. In areas where car ownership is much lower, people opt either to travel by bus or car share. In the ward with the lowest car ownership, over 22% travel to work by bus and 11% car share. Levels of walking to work are very high in the areas nearest to the town centre, one of the prime employment areas for local people.

Road Safety

41 Darlington has a good road safety record and an extensive programme of engineering, education, encouragement and enforcement has delivered a continuing reduction in casualties. Darlington has been shortlisted as a Beacon Council for Road Safety.

42 Analysis of exposure to risk demonstrated that Darlington residents are exposed to less risk of a fatal or serious accident than the national average across all modes of transport, see **Figure 2.7**. The actual numbers of accidents are low but this is at odds with residents' perception of road safety risk and will be addressed through education and information.

Figure 2.7



⁶ DfT National Travel Survey and Socialdata research, 2004

43 It has also been recognised that safety, in particular personal safety, is an issue for all journeys and influences the travel choices that people make, indeed whether people choose to travel at all. Initiatives already underway, including increasing use of CCTV on buses, at bus stops and in the town centre, improved street lighting and security in car parks, will be expanded in the Travel Safety Strategy, as detailed in **Annex 13**. This strategy recognises that motorcycle accidents are increasing and action will be taken in this Plan to tackle the root causes.

Air Quality

44 Despite this increase in general traffic levels, Darlington Borough does not experience any serious air quality issues related to traffic sources and does not intend to declare an Air Quality Management Area at the moment. However, action may be required to tackle the levels of PM10 emissions (related to the use of diesel engines), if the proposed 2010 national target of an annual mean value of 20 micrograms per cubic metre is introduced. We intend to review air quality in 2006/07, working in partnership with our neighbouring Tees Valley local authorities. Further details, outlining why we do not feel that an air quality management area is required, both now and during the achievement of the vision for 2011 are contained in **Annex 6**.

Public Transport

45 Bus use since 2000 has followed the national trend and has declined year on year from a starting point of 10.2m trips per year in 2001/02. However, patronage in Darlington remains higher than average (10% of all trips compared to national average of 6%⁶) due to low car ownership, high frequency bus routes, relatively low bus fares and good concessionary fare schemes. Patronage in 2005/06 is expected to be 9.15m trips and it is anticipated that numbers will decline further before they recover. Thus a key action for this Plan is to provide the basis for that recovery, in partnership with local bus operators and others (**See Bus Strategy, Annex 10**).

46 The reliability and punctuality of bus services is a concern to most people; both users and non-users. Whilst reliability is generally good, punctuality is poor – survey results show that 48% of all departures surveyed were outside the Traffic Commissioners' time bandwidth. It is therefore important for this Plan to investigate the causes of this and propose remedial measures through the Punctuality Improvement Partnership outlined in the Bus Strategy.



47 Rail use has also followed the national trend upwards. Patronage at Darlington Station has increased by 13% between 2001 and 2005. This reflects the additional use generated by travel conditions on national trunk roads coupled with a pattern of people using Darlington as a railhead for the Teesside area. This increase has brought with it more demand for car parking near the Station, which has had some impact on neighbouring residential areas. The pattern of growth is also evident at Darlington's local rail stations, albeit with a lower value of 6%. This Plan needs to recognise the consequences of these two growth values and take steps to manage their improvement in order to meet outcomes.

48 As described in **chapter 1**, Durham Tees Valley International Airport is a key facility for the sub-region, as identified through the Regional Spatial Strategy. Between 1996 and 2004, passenger numbers grew by 77% and it is expected that 1 million people will fly from the Airport during 2006. The travel demands that this will place upon the local transport network within the Borough need to be recognised and addressed by this Plan. The role of the bus and rail industries will be paramount, along with that of the Highways Agency.

Health

49 The health agenda is a major issue currently with many proposed changes in provision and management of services. Darlington is currently served by Darlington Primary Care Trust, County Durham and Darlington Acute Hospitals NHS Trust (primarily from the Memorial Hospital near the centre of Darlington) and County Durham and Darlington Priority Services NHS Trust (from its site at West Park on the edge of Darlington).

50 Darlington has a huge disparity in health between wards. There are wards that appear to be very healthy (<2% of people needing care, a mortality rate of <5 / '000 population and no pregnancies in under 18 year olds) and those that have serious health issues (10.5% of the population needing care compared to the English average

of 5.9%; 100 pregnancies / '000 under 18 year old females compared to the English average of 43; and 10.8% of babies born <2500g compared to the English average of 8%.)

51 Local people are being served by a changing suite of facilities. The Primary Care Trust is in the middle of a process of developing new services at new sites. In 2005 a Walk in Centre was opened near the town centre and a GP surgery moved to a new location at Bondgate, also near the town centre. Building work is also underway on a new Rehabilitation Centre at Hundens Lane, which will include a falls service, podiatry services and a community equipment shop. Park Place Health Centre is also being rebuilt to incorporate new services such as a community dentist and an audiology unit. The transport needs of these locations need to be incorporated within the thinking of this Plan.

52 Most Darlington residents are treated at the town's Memorial Hospital just off Woodland Road – one of the planned Corridors of Certainty. However, some services are now being delivered from Bishop Auckland General Hospital, creating a new need to travel (we have already included this need in the free bus pass scheme from April 2006). Increasingly, as a new referral system called 'Choose and Book' is introduced from early 2006, local people will have more choice on which hospital they wish to attend for their first outpatients appointment. This will potentially create new travel needs to other health facilities such as James Cook University Hospital in Middlesbrough. The Darlington and County Durham Transport for Health Management and Steering Groups are investigating these issues.

Sustainable and Prosperous Communities

53 Economic development and creating employment opportunities are key issues for Darlington and for the wider Tees Valley. Certain wards in the Borough have high levels of unemployment (7.6% - people claiming Job Seekers Allowance as a % of working age population – compared to English average of 2.3%) and high rates of joblessness (38.5% - % of working age people without a job – compared to 26.3%).

54 Darlington has been successful in attracting new companies to the region and has growing expertise in the logistics, warehousing and distribution sector, high value-added service sector industries as well as mixed use developments providing sustainable communities, combining residential developments with offices, schools, retail, health and leisure.

55 Transport has a key role to play, recognised in the regeneration strategy as 'accessibility'. Darlington is easily accessible by road, rail and air and the town is compact, enabling the majority of trips within the Borough to be made on foot, by bike or by public transport.

56 The Local Transport Plan needs to ensure that access to the Borough from surrounding areas remains good. This includes the construction of the Darlington Eastern Transport Corridor, Tees Valley Gateway Study improvements, continued expansion of Durham Tees Valley Airport, improved parking at Bank Top Station, improved access from local rail stations, and improved bus services to key employment sites. Access from the rural communities in the Borough to employment and training opportunities also needs to be considered.

57 Developments in the Borough also need to be sustainable and accessibility planning must be used to ensure that sustainable travel to the site is a priority. There are close links between the Local Transport Plan and the core strategy of the Local Development Framework, to promote sustainable development.

58 Transport also has a role in delivering the Tourism Strategy. Two of the National Cycle Network Routes are planned to cross the Borough and these provide excellent opportunities to promote cycling as a tourist activity either for day visitors or those staying in the area for longer. Darlington is a Cycling Demonstration Town and this will encourage cyclists from out of the area to visit.

59 The Rail Museum is built adjacent to North Road Station and a feasibility Study will be undertaken to improve access to the Station as well as provide a link directly into the Museum. There are opportunities to promote rail travel between Darlington Rail Museum and Locomotion at Shildon.

60 The Tourist Information Centre is to be enlarged and its role as a provider of travel information will be extended through the Town on the Move project. The town centre is undergoing a transformation with the pedestrianisation already underway and a new major shopping and leisure development in the planning stages.

61 It is therefore necessary for the Second Local Transport Plan to support local peoples' quality of life by:

- maintaining, or preferably improving, accessibility to services, especially for the priority groups, through a focus on the transport network, land use and service provision;
- tackling traffic congestion to ensure that it does not become a problem negatively affecting quality of life and economic regeneration;
- realising the potential for change to more sustainable

means of travel within Darlington, whilst delivering improvements for those trips that need to be made by car;

- continuing to achieve a good road safety record, and work on initiatives to help more generally with travel safety;
- ensuring that links to the County Durham, North Yorkshire and the Tees Valley sub-region are improved to achieve accessibility outcomes to employment and health, delivering bus transport improvements through the Tees Valley Bus Network Review and Transit 15; and
- supporting initiatives for healthier communities brought forward by the health authorities.

Consultation

62 Unless local people want, and use, each part of Darlington's transport network, then it will not achieve its full effectiveness by providing solutions to local issues within the guidelines set down by national Government.

63 The comprehensive research and consultation on local travel behaviour and opinion carried out by the Council in preparation for this Plan included:

- Travel Behaviour Research, Baseline Survey 2004 for Darlington: A Town on the Move, referred to previously, using the methodology used internationally for many years;
- the innovative Local Travel Summit for Darlington, which brought together, over two days, very high quality data about Darlington (and international comparative data) with a complete cross section of Darlington groups, sectors and stakeholders, advised by international transport experts such as Lynn Sloman and Werner Brög, to generate best value-for-money transport solutions relevant to Darlington. (It was linked, on the third day, to the first national Smarter Choices conference in Darlington);



- consultation with the public and local stakeholders on the issues for the Second Local Transport Plan through workshops, one to one meetings, focus groups and a questionnaire to all residents. Further additional consultation was undertaken in 2006 for the preparation of the final document including;
- consultation with the Highways Agency about the Plan, in particular issues relating to accessibility, Park and Ride, HGV parking, travel plans and safe crossing points over the A66;
- discussions with Darlington and District Motorcycle Action Group regarding the role of motorcycles in addressing the Shared Priorities;
- ongoing discussions with GNER in particular regarding integration between rail and bus, cycle and walking routes;
- consultation with young people, in particular regarding bus travel, as part of a Young People and Transport Conference organised by young people;
- ongoing discussions with health organisations, in particular concerning access to health services and active travel, at the Transport for Health Partnership bi-monthly meetings;
- discussions with the Rural Transport Partnership, in particular identifying ways forward to address rural transport issues following the demise of the Partnership;
- consultation with the Darlington Partnership on the issues surrounding accessibility to local facilities; and
- consultation with the public about issues surrounding the provision of concessionary fare travel schemes for bus services and taxis.

Synopsis of views

- 64 A full account of these wide-ranging activities forms **Annexes 1 and 2**. The consensus of opinion was that traffic congestion should be primarily tackled through the provision of effective alternatives, such as public transport facilities, rather than through restricting the use of the private car. Of the replies, 48% and 32% thought that the effective solution lay in limiting car traffic and making car parking more difficult respectively. This emphasis on travel choice, rather than increasing the current range of demand management measures, reflects the local concern over regeneration and accessibility. A strategic focus on improving accessibility through the provision of travel choice, is thus seen as a greater priority locally in order to achieve the outcomes of the Shared Priorities for Public Services, particularly that of Quality of Life.
- 65 However, 44% of all car trips were made because they had no other option than to use a car, either because of personal circumstances or the nature of the trip that they were making. Bringing forward measures to assist necessary car travel is important, as well as measures to assist sustainable travel modes (public transport, walking and cycling).
- 66 A wide ranging consultation process has been undertaken to inform the decision making process for the Transport Strategy and its delivery through the Second Local Transport Plan. This process was in two parts: a stakeholder consultation and a general debate with the public on the issues.
- 67 Analysis of the stakeholder consultation showed:
- congestion is seen as the most significant problem and one that will get considerably worse unless we continue to implement policies to address it. Congestion should be addressed through improving alternative modes, changing attitudes towards transport; and some traffic management measures;
 - improving accessibility is seen as the most important aim of the plan, particularly focusing on the needs of more deprived people/areas; and
 - improving safety and air quality are not seen to be as high a priority (as less problems) and it is felt that addressing the other priorities will make a positive contribution to them. The broader concept of 'travel safety' is seen as providing a good link to the community safety element of the Community Strategy.
- 68 Whilst stakeholders broadly supported the strategy, they did of course raise issues that need to be addressed, where possible, as part of the delivery of the Plan. These issues are listed in **Annex 1** and will be considered when preparing the detail of individual schemes.
- 69 During March 2005, a questionnaire printed in the Town Crier was sent to every household and business in Darlington Borough. This part of the consultation process was targeted at all Darlington residents, to ensure everyone had the opportunity to give their views. 413 questionnaires were returned.
- 70 Many respondents to the questionnaire said that:
- there were problems of delays on journey times due to congestion;
 - there is speeding traffic in residential streets; and
 - that they would be encouraged to walk and cycle more if it was safe to do so.

Summary

71 In summary, therefore, the key transport issues arising from this overview of the broad vision for Darlington, and the way in which it is being translated into physical and service development, include:

- **Darlington is a compact market town, well served by national and regional transport links. Quality of life and accessibility for all are seen as key drivers in promoting economic prosperity, which is the top priority for all partners.**
- **In national terms Darlington has lower than average levels of car ownership and relatively high levels of bus patronage. Increasing affluence for Darlington particularly could result in substantial increases in car travel and traffic unless alternatives are planned for and promoted.**
- **Promoting accessibility from deprived wards and for key population groups will help achieve social inclusion and economic targets.**
- **Reducing road traffic congestion, improving actual and perceived road safety (particularly for pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists), improving accessibility for specific groups and purposes, and managing transport networks and car parking to support the economy are key challenges for the Plan.**
- **Darlington's status as a Cycling Demonstration Town aims to capitalise on the potential for cycling.**
- **The Plan will aim to maximise the positive impacts of transport on the Quality of Life.**

