DARLINGTON LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK
CORE STRATEGY REVISED PREFERRED OPTIONS
TECHNICAL NOTE

DARLINGTON CROSS TOWN ROUTE (CTR)

Purpose of Note

1. To consider the case for safeguarding the central section of the Cross Town Route (CTR), within the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework (LDF) for Darlington.

2. This note summarises the findings and issues in relation to the CTR arising from a comprehensive study, the Connections Study, commissioned to examine the relationship between possible future development patterns in Darlington and transport needs. The Study, and consequential work, specifically examined what case could be made for the CTR.

3. The note supports the decision not to include a safeguarding policy for the CTR in the LDF Core Strategy.

Proposed Scheme

4. The proposed scheme is for the construction of a 7.3m single carriageway road between Haughton Road and Rotary Way, in part parallel to the alignment of the Stockton & Darlington Railway. This would then form an east west link through the middle of Darlington, from the A1(M) to the A66(T). The road would cross two railway lines and the River Skerne by bridge[1] and would have at grade junctions at North Road and Whessoe Road. The current through-about at Haughton Road would be replaced by a staggered signal controlled junction. The design speed for the road would be 40mph with 30mph at each junction. Part of the proposed scheme, the junction between North and Whessoe Roads could be built by 2013, if the current bid for funding under the Tees Valley Bus Network Initiative (TVBNI) is successful. The new bridge sections of the road would not have facilities for pedestrians or cyclists. The road would be lit.

5. A plan of the route of the CTR is attached as **Figure 1**.

Transport Strategy

6. The current Transport Strategy sets out three actions to tackle traffic congestion. These help provide a more reliable and predictable transport network and are:-

   (a) to increase road capacity at pinch points,
   (b) to better manage the road network to reduce delays, and
   (c) to provide for, and to make people aware of, real travel choices where appropriate so reducing car use.

[1] The River Skerne will be crossed using the existing Albert Road Bridge.

Background

7. The origins of the CTR lie in a suggestion made by the former North Yorkshire & South Durham Joint Committee in early 1970 about the use of disused railway alignments in the town. The case for the CTR was originally assessed in 1977, when it was compared to routes north and south of the urban area from the A1(M) to the A66(T). The route to the south of the urban area is now the A66(T) Darlington Bypass. Two component parts of the CTR have also been built; Rotary Way to the west and the Darlington Eastern Transport Corridor (DETC) to the east.

8. The CTR was envisaged to have 3 main purposes

   (a) to complete a strategic highway link between the A66(T) and A1(M).
   (b) to reduce the amount of heavy goods vehicles using existing local roads, including the B6279 Haughton Road and A1150 Salters' Lane North.
   (c) to encourage employment and business opportunities in the vicinity of the CTR, by increasing accessibility of development land.

9. Most of the route of the proposed CTR is safeguarded in the adopted Darlington Local Plan (Policy T6). This note considers whether safeguarding of the proposed scheme should be continued.

Findings of Connections Study

10. Consultants, Urban Initiatives, were commissioned to undertake a study into the feasibility of the CTR. Their findings, and consequential work from these, are set out below.

Cost

11. The proposal is estimated to cost at least £86m, of which £3.5m may be funded through the TVBNI bid. This is about six times the cost of the DETC and reflects the significant civil engineering work required.

12. Funding for the proposal would need to be identified in the Regional Funding Allocation budget. Currently, the RFA1 budget has been set until 2016. The scheme would exceed the RFA budget of circa £47m per annum for the whole region. It is likely that the money available to the region will reduce after the 2010 Spending Review.

13. Local funding of at least £8.6m would be required, either from the Council or from another source such as a private developer. The value of the local funding required is the equivalent of 55% of the current total, pre spending review, indicative budget for the whole five years of the Third Local Transport Plan (3LTP) for Darlington (including spending on maintenance).

14. It is therefore very unlikely that funding will be available for the scheme in the foreseeable future.

    Benefit Cost Ratio

15. Analysis shows that the proposal has an indicative benefit cost ratio of 2.33:1. This work was undertaken using the Tees Valley Multi-Modal Model and Department for Transport (DfT) appraisal methodology assuming an opening year of 2020 and the standard 60 year term. The cost benefit ratio falls to 1.968:1 if £10m of additional costs are included, for example for increases in costs for construction of the major bridge over each railway line. The ratios are of a magnitude that the Department for Transport may or may not consider the scheme for funding since their normal funding threshold is set at a ratio of 2:1.

16. The multi-modal model includes benefits that accrue to other areas of the sub-region. An application for funding would therefore require the use of a specific detailed model that evaluates only the local benefits of the proposal. This method follows DfT guidance concerning the assessment of schemes worth more than £20m. Previous experience in the Tees Valley suggests that the benefit cost ratio would be lower after the removal of external to area benefits.

17. The figures above do not include an assessment of the environmental, health, severance and land compensation impacts that the scheme may have since these would have to be dealt with through a major scheme business case. DfT advice is that the inclusion of these impacts will normally be detrimental in the value for money assessment, again lowering the cost benefit ratio.

18. It is therefore very unlikely that the scheme would qualify for Government funding; it is very likely that there will always be other schemes with better benefit : cost ratios.

Impacts

Traffic Congestion

19. Construction of the central section of the CTR would reduce traffic on Brinkburn Road and West Auckland Road as drivers switch to the new road. Similarly, drivers would switch from using the inner section of Haughton Road (DETC to the ring road).

20. However, more traffic in total would pass through the urban area as drivers using other routes in and outside of the Borough change to using the CTR.

21. The projected CTR flows would mean that the junctions at North Road and Haughton Road would be points of significant congestion and delay; both to users of the CTR and existing roads. The Transport Model indicates that, in 2020, traffic crossing the route of the CTR to town would be delayed by an additional 3 minutes 52 seconds at Haughton Road during the morning peak period. Traffic on North Road would be similarly affected with inbound trips taking 32 seconds more to negotiate the North Road /Whessoe Road junction (a total delay of 2 minutes 8 seconds). Traffic travelling along the DETC to town would also be delayed by an additional 1 minute 28 seconds, with a bigger delay for outbound drivers (an increase of 3 minutes 29 seconds to a total of 7 minutes 16 seconds).

22. The problem of delays at junctions could be mitigated through the grade separation of the North Road and Haughton Road junctions. Doing this would increase scheme costs significantly (structures and additional land purchase) and would be visually intrusive. As an example, a grade separated junction with North Road would require the land occupied by B&Q and other frontagers.

23. The Transport Model indicates that the impact of increased congestion at North and Haughton Road junctions is that more traffic would use B6280 Parkgate and A1150 Salters Lane North, as drivers seek to avoid the congestion around the CTR.

Vehicle Speeds

24. The CTR would bring benefits for average vehicle speed in the Cockerton area due to the reduction in traffic volumes. However, this would be more than outweighed by the lower speeds experienced on North Road and Haughton Road at the CTR junctions.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

25. One of the original objectives for the CTR was to remove heavy good vehicles from the local road network. The Transport Model shows that the CTR would partially achieve this aim, although at a high cost per vehicle removed and with most goods vehicles still using local roads. In 2020, the CTR is expected to carry 41 other goods vehicles (OGV) eastbound and 27 westbound during the morning peak period. There should be 18 fewer vehicles on Salters' Lane North in both directions (from a total of 101) and 23 fewer vehicles in both directions on Haughton Road past the railway bridge (from a total of 180).

26. In summary, there is very little material difference in the projected routing of goods vehicles with and without the CTR.

Supporting economic activity

27. The majority of benefits accrue to business users including car drivers travelling during work time for work purposes.

28. The CTR provides a better link to Teesside for the distribution based businesses located in Faverdale. However, the junctions with Haughton and North Roads are projected to be locations of considerable delay due to traffic congestion so diluting the potential benefit.

29. Despite the above, the central section of the CTR would not open up any significant amount of development land for employment. This is because the sections of road that have already been built provide access to development land in Faverdale, and around the DETC thus meeting the third objective originally proposed.

Land impacts and Blight

30. Sites containing land currently reserved for the CTR between North Road and Haughton Road could have potential for housing development **Figure 2**.

31. The Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (March 2009) identified that Area B could accommodate 34 dwellings, Area C 35 dwellings and Area D 125 dwellings, amounting to about 200 dwellings in total.

32. An estimated additional 120 dwellings could be developed if Area A and Area E were also developed for housing. This presupposes that constraints, such as contaminated land, relocation of some existing businesses and safeguarding heritage can be satisfactorily and viably addressed.

33. This means that, if this land cannot be developed due to safeguarding for the CTR, then greenfield land for an additional 200 to 320 dwellings will need to be identified.

34. The total costs of land acquisition for the central section of the CTR are estimated at £7.95m inclusive of land compensation claims. If this land continues to be safeguarded, then the Council may be forced by some owners of small businesses to acquire their properties as a result of Blight Notices.

Visual Impact

35. The attached images **Figures 3 to 6** illustrate the potential visual, local amenity and severance impact of the CTR, if implemented.

36. The negative impact of the road on land adjacent to Hensfield Road, Brinkburn is especially significant **Figure 6**.

37. The elevated road structures would be particularly intrusive and uncharacteristic of the quality of the urban area environment in Darlington, being more reminiscent of 1960's and 1970's road building in large urban centres.

Targeted, evidence based, alternative actions

Local Road Network

38. Currently, the three actions to tackle traffic congestion are being applied. Funding for major junction improvements on North Road and West Auckland Road is being sought through the TVBNI bid. If funded, the creation of a new junction and link road at the North Road/Whessoe Road junction would help improve traffic flows on North Road by minimising the period at which the signals are showing red in all directions. This is because there would be one junction not the two, adjacent junctions, as at present.

39. Similarly, traffic signal controlled junctions at Brinkburn Road and Cockerton Green on West Auckland Road would minimise delays to road users through better management of the competing traffic flows using these junctions. In addition, the TVBNI bid includes scheme proposals that would improve the inner ring road at Freeman's Place and Stonebridge, increasing the capacity of these junctions to minimise delay.

40. In parallel with the planned work to better manage traffic flows, work to provide people with real choices about how they travel has already resulted in a change in travel behaviour, less car use and reduced traffic congestion. In 2008, people living in the urban area used their car 9% less than in 2004. This decline equates to 34 million car kilometres and has contributed to an observed decrease in traffic levels around the inner ring road of 6% in peak hours and 5% over 24 hours between 2006 and 2009.

41. Further work to promote travel choice is ongoing with two major scheme bids to Government for money to improve bus services (TVBNI) and local rail services (Metro). The outcome of all three actions – increasing capacity at pinch points, better managing the road network and encouraging greater use of sustainable travel modes – will help to provide a more reliable and predictable transport network.

Strategic Road Network

42. In 2004, the North East Assembly commissioned research into the potential options to provide access to the Tees Valley past Darlington, to reduce congestion on the A66(T) and to enable economic regeneration. The research report recommended improvements to existing junctions on the A66(T) to the east of Darlington, with subsequent construction of a dual carriageway between Yarm Road and the A66(T) eastbound. These schemes have been included in the proposed Area Action Plan strategy for the sub-region's trunk road network for implementation by 2021 depending on funding being identified.

43. The report also examined two proposals that could be considered as alternatives to the CTR for through traffic. These were the construction of north facing slip roads at the junction of the A1(M)/A66(M) and a northern bypass around Darlington. The consultants found that the north facing slip roads did not attract enough traffic to warrant further investigation after a preliminary analysis. In terms of the Northern Bypass, they analysed the impact of a single carriageway road from Great Burdon to Beaumont Hill. Whilst this road did relieve the pressure on the A1150 through northern Darlington, it had a moderate adverse impact on the area through which it passed and was not pursued further as part of a wider scheme package, due to a high cost estimate for benefits gained and high environmental impacts. The Northern Bypass element was estimated to cost £26m at 2004 prices.

Implications for the Local Development Framework

44. The Core Strategy needs to be considered "sound" in that the policies contained within it need to be consistent with national policy, be justified by robust and credible evidence and be the most appropriate strategy compared to reasonable alternatives. The policies must also be deliverable, be flexible to permit unforeseen changes in circumstance and be able to be monitored.

45. Independent scrutiny of the "soundness" of the LDF Core Strategy will take place once the document has been submitted to the Government for examination. This scrutiny of soundness will be carried out by the Planning Inspectorate, and it will be binding on the Council to make any changes to the document that the Inspector recommends. If necessary, the Inspector will declare the entire core strategy unsound if the required changes are fundamental. In this case, the Council will have to withdraw the Strategy and prepare a revised version. Such a scenario has already occurred elsewhere.

LDF Soundness Tests

46. *Would the scheme be consistent with national policy?*

    (a) The Government's latest strategy for transport, 'Delivering a Sustainable Transport System' (DaSTS, Nov 2008) sets out five goals. These are

        (i) To support national economic competitiveness and growth by delivering reliable and efficient transport networks.

        (ii) To reduce transport's emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, with the desired outcome of tackling climate change.

(iii) To contribute to better safety, security and health and longer life expectancy by reducing the risk of death, injury or illness arising from transport and promoting travel modes that are beneficial to health.

(iv) To promote greater equality of opportunity for all citizens, with the desired outcome of achieving a fairer society.

(v) To improve quality of life for transport users and non-transport users and to promote a healthy natural environment.

(b) Constructing the Cross Town Route would conflict with or not meet them all. In summary,

(i) little additional economic development land would be opened up;

(ii) carbon emissions may increase as more traffic travels through the town and a slight modal shift to private car use occurs;

(iii) there would be significant, localized negative effects on health due to impacts on air quality, noise levels and severance, particularly near to elevated sections of the road;

(iv) there are few equality benefits since these are mainly derived by drivers; and

(v) there are potentially very large negative environmental impacts.

(c) The DETC was an integral part of the Second Local Transport Plan (2LTP). In the current process for securing Government funding for transport schemes, a scheme of the size of the CTR central section would need to be seen as a regional priority. Currently the Tees Valley Business Case does not include this scheme.

(d) In terms of planning policy, the Government's PPS13:Transport (2001) states that a full range of alternative solutions to transport problems needs to be explored. The Connections Study has done this and has recommended that the remaining sections of the CTR are not progressed (there is another section from the A66(T) to the A167).

(e) The Cross Town Route is not mentioned in the regional or sub-regional elements of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), which focuses on reducing the impact of travel demand by promoting sustainable travel modes and minimizing the impact of the movement of people and goods on the environment and climate change. The scheme would give rise to a small modal shift to car use, contrary to RSS objectives.

(f) The evidence presented above indicates that the scheme would conflict with or not meet national or regional transport priorities.

47. *Would the proposal be founded on a robust and credible evidence base ?*

(a) The work underpinning the Darlington Connections Study is considered to be robust and credible, insofar as can be achieved without incurring significant scheme appraisal costs estimated at £100,000.

(b) As outlined previously, evidence on the likely impact of the CTR is mixed, with some benefits in reducing traffic on West Auckland and Brinkburn Roads and increased congestion on other principal roads.

48. *Would the scheme be the most appropriate option when considered against the reasonable alternatives?*

(a) Reasonable alternatives to the CTR include:

(i) Do Nothing. This would leave the transport network as it is without implementing the proposed physical improvements. It would have a limited impact on the transport issues identified in Darlington.

(ii) Implement the current Transport Strategy actions. As previously noted, the three pronged strategy to tackle traffic congestion includes significant improvements of key junctions along North Road, the inner ring road and West Auckland Road. Funding for these proposals is currently being sought though the TVBNI project with a decision expected in early 2010. The actions include continuing to better manage the transport network – an example of this is the ongoing application for Civil Parking Enforcement – and encouraging travel behaviour change through committed investment and information provision.

49. *Is the scheme deliverable?*

(a) The RFA is currently allocated to 2016, and the central section of the CTR is not currently within that programme. Since the scheme does not meet the Government's objectives nor regional priorities for transport, it is very unlikely that the Regional Transport Board would recommend that it is included in the RFA programme. The fact that there is little likelihood of securing local funding of upwards of £86m would be a material consideration for the Planning Inspectorate. The views of the Planning Inspector, who the Inspectorate has provided to review our core strategy work, are included in **Appendix 1**.

(b) The land reserved for the CTR in the Local Plan does not exactly coincide with the land that is indicated on initial scheme design plans. A new land reservation that deviates from the existing would need to be identified in the Albert Road area, if the CTR was to be promoted as a scheme supported by the Council.

Implications of continuing to reserve land for the CTR

50. The scheme is unlikely to be funded in the foreseeable future. This section looks at the implications of continuing to reserve the land nevertheless.

51. Land reserved for the CTR cannot be developed for other land use purposes. Therefore, the Council may be liable for compensation claims from landowners within the CTR corridor. The total costs of land acquisition and other statutory compensation are estimated at £7.95m. including depreciation to nearby residential properties which could be substantial due to the nuisance caused by the elevated sections of road.

52. If the Council decides to pursue the CTR as part of Darlington's Transport Strategy, a full business case would be required, at an estimated cost of £100,000. This would need to be

funded by the Council at its own risk.

53. With a poor policy fit with national objectives and a low likelihood of securing funding to the deliver the scheme, the reservation of land in the LDF for the CTR may be considered unsound by the planning inspectorate, thus delaying progress on completion of the LDF Core Strategy. Such delays would result in additional costs to the Council and uncertainty for developers, possibly impacting on investment into new development in Darlington.

Conclusion

54. The CTR scheme would bring projected benefits to road users in specific parts of Darlington – along Brinkburn Road and West Auckland Road. However, this benefit is balanced by the detriment that would occur on other roads within the town especially at the junctions with Haughton and North Roads, where significant additional delays for traffic on these roads would be introduced. By encouraging more traffic to come through the middle of Darlington, the CTR will increase congestion rather than relieve it.

55. Construction of the DETC and Rotary Way has opened up much of the development land that the CTR was originally going to serve; removing the need for the construction of the central section for economic regeneration purposes.

56. The scheme has a cost estimate of at least £86m of which £8.6m would need to be found by the Council from its own resources or from private sector contributions. The cost of substantially more than the annual allocation of funding for major transport schemes for the whole region. The CTR also has no significant policy context, nationally or regionally. It is therefore highly unlikely to be funded in the foreseeable future.

57. Continuing to reserve the corridor for the CTR central section may not be cost free, as the owners of small businesses could force the Council to acquire their properties if they meet all the requirements for blighted land specified in the Planning Acts.

58. The visual impact and impact on residential amenity, of the raised section would be significant in some areas, introducing a form of road-building alien to the quality of Darlington's urban environment.

59. The policy for the CTR may be considered as unsound by the Planning Inspectorate, since the benefits of the scheme are marginal in funding terms, no funding has been committed and credible, proven, alternative actions exist in the three pronged delivery of the current Transport Strategy.

60. The Council's existing transport strategy is focused on tackling congestion by, in the short-term, removing the pinch-points at key junctions (like on West Auckland Road/Woodlands Road) and better managing the network, whilst, in the longer term, reducing demand by providing alternative travel options. This strategy is beginning to show results and provides a better alternative to tackling congestion than planning to construct a road designed to bring more traffic through the centre of the town.

APPENDIX 1

EXTRACT FROM NOTE OF PLANNING INSPECTORATE ADVISORY VISIT OCTOBER 2009

Transport Infrastructure

The adopted Darlington Local Plan (1997) includes a safeguarding line for a new Cross Town Route (Proposal T6), linking the A1(M0/A68 with the A66(T) by-pass. I understand the current status of this route stems from the former Durham Structure Plan. However, recent evidence suggests that this road scheme would not offer the necessary const : benefit ratio to attract DfT funding and would be unlikely to be deliverable within the plan period. The scheme is not mentioned in the current NERSS and is not included in the current Local Transport Plan or Local Transport Strategy.

If the scheme is not included in current transport plan, with commitment and finance for implementation, it is unlikely to be a deliverable project. For inclusion in the CS as a specific proposal, there would need to be a reasonable prospect of delivery, with the necessary commitment and funding. Without this, it is little more than an aspirational scheme and, in the past, such similar projects have been deleted from Core Strategies by inspectors. Safeguarding the line of a road which might never be constructed, causes blight and uncertainty. I also understand that the strategy of the CS will not depend o the construction of this road, and in these circumstances, it would be unwise to include it as a specific proposal in the CS. If there is a possibility that it could be constructed in the future, this could be mentioned in the text of the CS, but without any commitment to its implementation.