

LICENSING AND SAFETY COMMITTEE
1 JULY 2010

USE OF BUS LINKS AND GATES BY TAXIS
Director of Environment, Culture and Communities

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 To inform Licensing and Standards Committee of the issues surrounding the potential use of bus links and gates by taxis.

2 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

- 2.1 The highway network in Bracknell town has a number of bus links and gates. These were predominantly built during the development of Bracknell as a new town, to enable effective and commercial bus routes whilst protecting residential areas from general traffic. 'Bus gates' provide short cuts from which other motor vehicles are legally excluded by a Traffic Regulation Order. As such, Taxis are not currently permitted to use bus gates. Bracknell Forest currently has one 'bus-lane' (Bagshot Road, Northbound) which hackney carriages are empowered to use.
- 2.2 Over the years, these bus priority facilities have had an increasing importance in helping to deliver on the Council's formally adopted targets for bus patronage. Priority measures assist in making bus travel more attractive and help bolster the viability of bus services - in turn delivering on objectives such as accessibility, congestion reduction and older people's goals. The benefits offered by bus priority are key elements within Bus Quality Partnerships and Bus Punctuality Improvement Partnerships.
- 2.3 The Council's current adopted transport strategy on taxis is set against the backdrop of an environment where the Town Centre is being regenerated. It proposes that consideration be given to allowing hackney carriage use of bus lanes, subject to overall considerations of capacity and safety in each case. From a practical perspective, hackney carriages would also need to be easily distinguishable from ordinary motor vehicles to enable enforcement by the Police of the Traffic Regulation Order banning other vehicles.
- 2.4 Prior to commencement of the Council's third Local Transport Plan (LTP3), which will set out transport strategies for the period 2011-2026, a review of the existing transport strategy on taxis will be undertaken. Consultation with stakeholders and interested parties will take place prior to submission of the plan to Government in late 2010. It is anticipated that a planned progression towards taxi access to existing and future bus priority measures, where appropriate, will feature amongst the passenger transport objectives of the new plan.

Downshire Way Bus Link

- 2.5 The taxi trade (through their trade organisation, the BLTF) has asked for increased access to the bus priority network. However, in discussions with Transport Officers (followed up by a BLTF report received in June 2009) trade representatives have explained that general taxi access to all bus priority measures is not their immediate objective. Instead, they wished to gain access across the A322 at the Downshire

Way signalised bus gate - in order to shorten north/south journey times during the peak periods.

- 2.6 The A322 Downshire Way currently carries around 33,000 vehicles during a weekday 24 hour period. An average weekday peak hour carries 2600 vehicles and this is expected to rise by approximately 13% by 2016. It is a crucial link in the Bracknell Forest highway network, forming part of the south-east / north-west (A322/A329) route across the Borough and is a recognised link between the M3 and M4.
- 2.7 A significant study of the whole A322 route is currently in progress, in order establish a long-term strategy for dealing with traffic flow, congestion and air quality impacts. This study will plan the improvements needed to deal with expected traffic growth on the route, and is being developed in conjunction with the LTP3.
- 2.8 Key objectives of the A322 route study include the reduction of current congestion levels and an improvement in journey times. Whilst the action of the bus gate is itself a component part of the study, a logical outcome would be that increased operation of the bus gate for individual taxi journeys would act against these important objectives if considered in isolation. Although the concerns of the trade regarding the current peak hour delays in crossing the A322 are understandable, it is likely that any future options to target this issue (through prioritised access) will be reliant on the initial introduction of broader measures aimed at tackling congestion on this corridor. This route study work is continuing.

Other Bus Links and Gates

- 2.9 There have been suggestions by some in the trade, that taxis might be allowed more general use of bus links and gates. Part of the reasoning for this relates to the potential for a reduction in journey times and fares that would be of benefit to taxi users. This could indeed be the case, in some instances, but there are also bus priority measures within the Borough which BLTF representatives have previously stated would provide little (if any) advantage if accessible by the trade. In these cases, existing bus gates or links will be predominantly focussed towards the practical routing of scheduled bus services and present little benefit to individual taxi journeys.
- 2.10 Equally, not all existing bus priority measures (in their current form) would be physically accessible by vehicles other than buses as they contain established physical restrictions to ensure reduced traffic flow and/or increased safety, such as the bus gates at Oarborough and Holly Spring Lane. In addition to these locations, it was necessary for the Council to install sump traps on Ringmead recently, at the A3095 Crowthorne Road bus link, address the serious injury-accident record resulting from its illegal use by private vehicles. In such cases, opening up access to taxis (often mistaken as private cars by general motorists) would increase the likelihood of illegal use and compromise road safety. In any case, BLTF representatives had previously cited the Crowthorne Road bus link as providing little benefit if accessible by the trade.
- 2.11 The introduction of camera enforcement for moving traffic offences may in the future allow physical means of enforcement to be removed from these bus gates and links. However, there are a number of practical and financial issues around the introduction of camera enforcement which will inform the questions of 'if' and 'when' it is introduced.
- 2.12 So, at the current time, there are only three bus links which could (subject to modification) be considered for use by taxis:-

- The link between Ringmead (Gt. Hollands) and the Southern Business Area;
- The link between Wildridings Road and the Southern Business Area;
- The link between Ringmead (Hanworth) and South Hill Road.

2.13 Each of these bus links would require physical changes to enable their shared use by buses and hackney carriages, whilst eliminating the risk of delaying registered bus services. In addition, a formal public consultation on changes to the associated Traffic Regulation Order would be necessary. There is increasingly limited funding for transport work and these three schemes would be in competition alongside others on the basis of their benefit and contribution towards the Council's transport goals - unless they were subject to separate Borough capital funding.

2.14 It remains the case that the use of bus priority facilities by taxis will be considered when looking at the changes and improvements to Bracknell Town Centre's highway network as part its regeneration.

2.15 The status and location of all exiting bus gates and links are shown in Table 1 and the location plan (below).

Table 1: Status of existing bus gates/links (see attached location plan)

No.	Location	System	Scope for Taxi access
1.	A3095 Bagshot Rd (approach to Station Rbt)	On-carriageway bus lane	Existing access for Taxi's (hackney carriages)
2.	A3095 Bagshot Rd (Link to Crowthorne Road North)	On-carriageway right-turn bus lane	Further investigation in the medium term (alongside A322 route study)
3.	& A322 Downshire Way (Link between Crowthorne Roads North and South)	Dedicated traffic light bus link	
4.	Ringmead (Gt. Hollands) (link to Southern Business Area)	Dedicated single carriageway bus lane	Achievable in the short-term (<u>subject to funding</u>)
5.	Wildridings Road (link to Southern Business Area)	Dedicated single carriageway bus lane	Achievable in the short-term (<u>subject to funding</u>)
6.	Ringmead (Hanworth) (link to South Hill Road)	Dedicated single carriageway bus lane	Achievable in the short-term (<u>subject to funding</u>)
7.	Beehive Road (link to Cain Road)	Bus gateway with rising bollard	Closed (Bollard equipment inactive)
8.	Holly Spring Lane	Bus gateway with sump trap	Consideration in the long term (subject to alternative enforcement measures)
9.	Oarborough	Dedicated single carriageway bus lane with sump trap	Consideration in the long term (subject to alternative enforcement measures)
10.	A3095 Crowthorne Road (link between Ringmead - Hanworth and Gt. Hollands)	Dedicated traffic light bus link with sump traps	Consideration in the long term (subject to alternative enforcement measures)

3 COMMENTS FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 3.1 The relevant legal provisions are contained within the main body of the report.

Borough Treasurer

- 3.2 Any costs of modifying bus links would need to be considered within the Integrated Transport Capital Programme or put forward as a scheme in the Council's budgeting process.

Head of Trading Standards and Licensing

- 3.2 Access to bus priority routes can provide improved taxi services within an integrated transport structure. There are issues to be addressed to enable this to be delivered which are outside the remit of the Licensing section and these are identified within the report

4 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSEMENT

Not required at this time.

5 STRATEGIC RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

None.

Background Papers

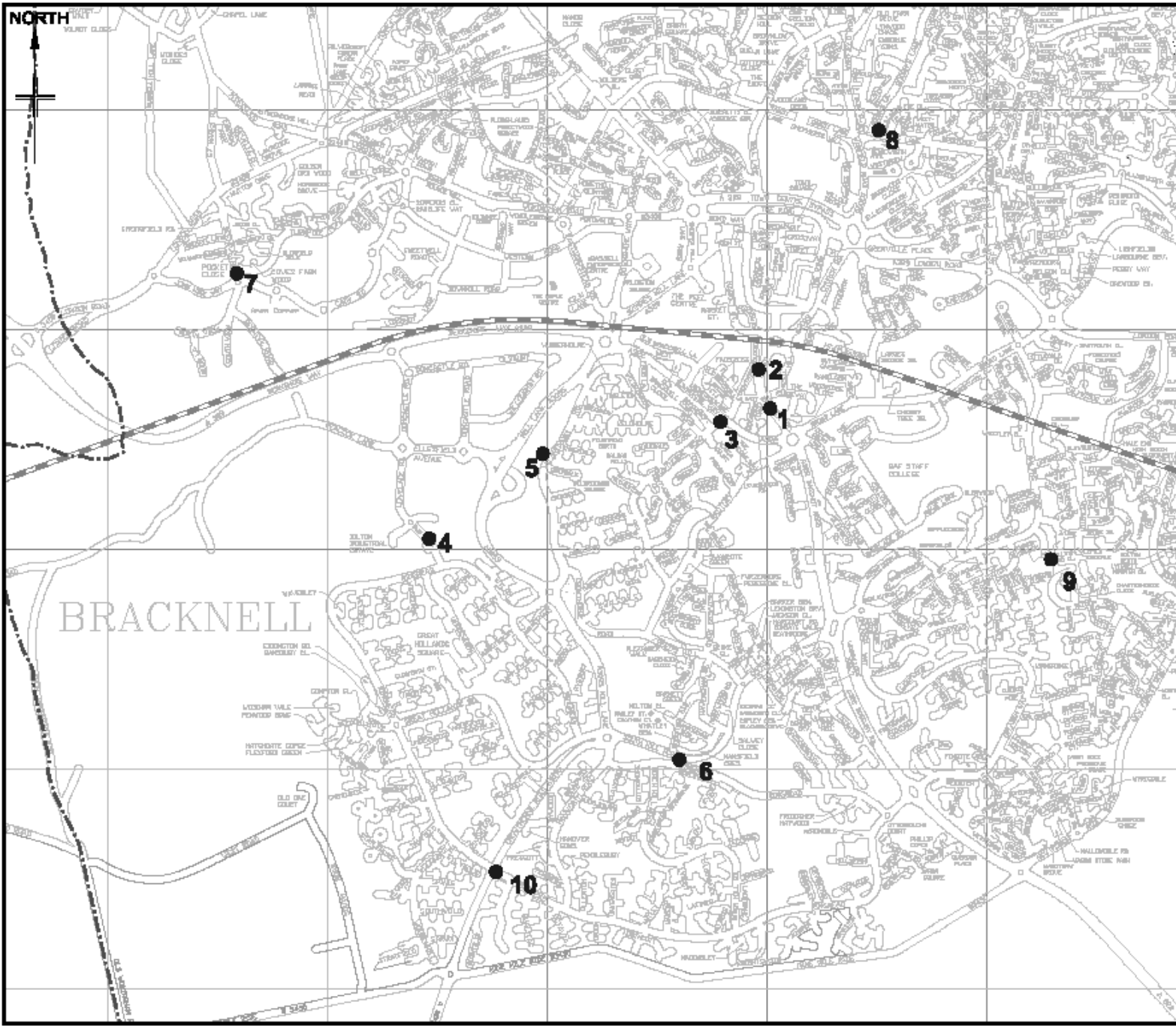
None

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KEY

- LOCATION OF BUS PRIORITY MEASURES
- 1. A3096 Megbet Road (approach to Station Rd)
- 2. A3096 Ringbet Road (Link to Crowthorne Road North)
- 3. A322 Downshire Way (Link between Crowthorne Roads North and South)
- 4. Ringwood (Great Hollands) (Link to Southern Business Area)
- 5. Wildridge Road (Link to Southern Business Area)
- 6. Ringwood (Harworth) (Link to South Hill Road)
- 7. Baulhve Road (Link to Cain Road)
- 8. Holly Spring Lane
- 9. Darborough
- 10. A3096 Crowthorne Road (Link between Ringwood Harworth and Great Hollands)

Amendment	Date	Initials



ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE & COMMUNITIES
Traffic & Safety Group

Project title
BUS PRIORITY MEASURES

Drawing title
LOCATION PLAN

Prepared by	AMT	Checked by	NM
Scale	NTS	Date	MAY 2010

Project Number	Drawing Number	Amend Letter	Print Suffix
	INFORMATION ONLY		