

Surrey County Council (SCC) Draft Transport Plan (LTP4)

Observations and constructive suggestions from the Mytchett, Frimley Green & Deepcut Society submitted as part of the public consultation

Background

SCC have drafted an important and dramatically ambitious new transport plan and are currently seeking views from residents on that plan. The issues of climate change and the reduction in carbon emissions are front and centre in this new plan. There are potentially many significant implications from these proposed changes.

The Draft Plan

It is a substantial, glossy, well-presented report. Clearly a lot of thought has gone into it and the central thrust is to be applauded. There is a fairly good evidence base to support the arguments, though it does look selective rather than comprehensive. The principles and policy ideas are well articulated but the strategy and delivery elements are weaker, tending to repeat what has gone before rather than providing solid indications of what actions need to be undertaken.

The plan contains no costings and, most crucially, it does not properly identify what precisely is within the council's control, what it can influence (but not control) and what is not even within its influence. What is good is that it does not position transport in isolation: it talks about communities, life-styles, the environment and business.

Overall, the report sets out a necessary and visionary way forward. It is ambitious but much the better for that and worthy of being strongly supported. Any criticisms should be seen as helping to improve and strengthen the plan, not to undermine it.

Potential Improvements

There is much that can and should be done to improve the plan. The following points are illustrative rather than picking apart every fine detail.

1. The evidence base should contain much more on the projected demographic changes and the implications of those changes. For example, 17% of Surrey's residents are expected to be over 70 by 2031: so what? Perhaps this means that a higher proportion of residents will not be commuting to work, they may be travelling for leisure purposes; we don't know. It would be good to use market segment techniques to identify the different patterns of behaviour of certain groups and how they will be tackled. The behaviour changes needed by wealthy families with 'Chelsea tractors' will need to be addressed very differently to a non-disabled pensioner with mobility restrictions who lives away from a bus route. Similarly convincing young families on a new estate will take different means than persuading an unmarried commuter in an out of town flat.

Firstly, we need to see the evidence. Then the analysis. Then the tactical approaches to be undertaken, based clearly on that evidence and analysis. There is some of this in the plan but there are also a lot of well-intentioned ideas that are not demonstrably grounded in evidence.

2. The area of traffic psychology and behaviour change is always a tricky one. The plan mentions some approaches but they are not sufficiently convincing. To really move people away from their cars and on to public transport will take a lot more than is set out currently in this plan. People are generally well attached to their cars, they are

convenient and enjoyable, so what if the tactics in this plan don't work? The plan will have more chance of success if it recognises and supports the use of (low carbon) private transport of complex journeys, rural journeys, for larger families and older people and promotes public alternatives for linear movements between major centres, for commuting, and for those choices where the benefits of using a car are marginal.

3. There are a number of areas of potential benefit that would need changes elsewhere. For example, increased walking to school may need changes to how school places are allocated. Creating a web of interconnected bus services may mean more but smaller buses, especially electric mini-buses, that are more reliable than some of the existing services. People need to be able to trust that a bus will come when scheduled. There may need to be more on demand services, especially for the elderly, and all this may be partly dependant on other agencies or contractors. All these elements then need to be woven together into an holistic, viable, costed, time-limited, practical proposition if the plan is to be truly effective and credible.
4. Zero Emission Vehicles (ZEVs) will be crucial as part of any progress both nationally and in Surrey. It is worth noting that electric vehicles are only zero at the tailpipe and that could be made clearer. Nonetheless, they will grow in number and will need to be accommodated. The plan could be stronger in saying just how this will happen, especially regarding on-street charging. The suggestion of moving parking away from where people wish to visit seems ludicrous and expensive, especially in our town centres. If anything, parking for ZEVs should be improved. It is worth noting that 2 people in an electric car use about 20g of CO₂ per kilometre compared to about 30g if they travel on an electric bus (see figure 4.2 in the plan). There are other areas where the plan is not internally consistent but this is an obvious one. Some more detail on the provision of secure parking and charging of e-bikes would also be helpful.
5. On the subject of parking. The plan proposes increasing parking charges. However, it does not say where or how this is to be achieved. Increasing charges in council run car parks and not doing so in out of town retail parks will not have the desired effect. This is one example where it would be helpful for the council to be upfront about what it can or cannot actually do.
6. The concept of the '20 minute neighbourhood' is excellent. It would be helpful to know more about just how this will be achieved, especially for new developments (where the planning decision is not made by the county council) and in existing rural areas. Without some viable indication of what will actually be done it comes over, sadly, as little more than a pipe dream.
7. E-Cargo bikes have a role to play but to suggest they may be cheaper could be over egging it. They require 3 or 4 times as many drivers compared to a van for every 1000kg delivered. It is also unclear how the council will convince businesses to make these changes. Unless there is a clear and workable strategy it again comes over as idealistic rather than realistic.
8. 'Vision Zero' regarding road safety is another motherhood and apple pie area. Essentially it is a sound and worthy concept - one not to be lost - but it does not come over convincingly in the plan. This is quite hard to resolve at the high level of the plan as many of the issues are detailed and location specific. Perhaps a commitment to provide a detailed revised road design manual for the county's highway engineers and

better training would help.

9. The delivery section of the plan is potentially the most important and is currently the weakest part. This needs significant work to identify priorities and articulate them in concrete terms of what will be done, by whom, how and when.

In summary, an admirable first draft. It needs more work before it should be signed off to ensure it is thoroughly practical and realistic. We need to get this right!

The Mytchett, Frimley Green & Deepcut Society
- a residents' association for the three villages

<https://www.mfgdsociety.org.uk>

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