

## **LTP4 Consultation Response by Dorchester transport Action Group**

19<sup>th</sup> October 2025

### **Overall Vision**

Dorchester Transport Action Group supports the vision of a cleaner, safer, and more inclusive transport system but urges Dorset Council to move from aspiration to delivery and accountability. The LTP must commit to firm requirements, measurable targets, and real investment in people-centred transport.

### **LTP Strategy Document**

The strategy document is an aspirational wish list and not a true strategy with milestones, targets, pathways to delivery, prioritisation and a firm timetable. We agree with the classification around key 6 objectives with 3-5 policies each. Indeed, it hard to object to any of them since they contain general positive statements and who does not want “better safety”, “more frequent buses” and “shorter journey times” etc. However, we felt the consultation exercise was a missed opportunity to explore where these priorities lie by letting the public express their views on the harder choices that need to be made.

### **LTP Implementation Plan**

The Implementation is based around the 6 objectives and how they may be implemented in 5 geographic areas over the 15-year period. However, these were full of vague aspirations and lacked concrete proposals except in a minority of cases. None of this is ambitious or far reaching enough to solve many of our pressing current transport problems or address the fundamental challenges of carbon emissions while supporting material growth in the county.

The online consultation just allowed a single rating of the plan in each area with only one opportunity at the end for freeform comments. In addition, no comments at all are invited on the other important sections such as the prioritisation and monitoring. This shows a disappointing lack of trust by the council. Much greater involvement in the details and prioritisation of the implementation plan in each area should have been invited from local people through Town and Parish councils and community organisations such as the Transport Action Groups.

### **General Comments on the Policy Areas**

**1. Climate and Environment.** We agree with the aspirations for a stronger link with the Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy (NECES). We welcome the drive to improve EV charging points, transition to electric buses, decarbonisation of freight and the introduction of greener routes. What’s missing is any sort of targets. For example, all new cars will be hybrid or fully electric by 2030 and this means a huge ramp up in the

electric charging infrastructure accessible to all sectors of society not just the rich urban dwellers. Any drive towards lower emissions needs also to consider supporting behavioural changes and moving people towards lower emissions public transport. So, the link with active travel and a vastly improved public transport network is essential.

**2. Climate and Health.** Transport is one of Dorset's largest sources of carbon emissions and air pollution. Tackling this is inseparable from improving public health. There needs to be annual targets for emission reductions from transport including use of low-impact materials and green corridors in all highway and active travel projects. Walking and cycling can be promoted as preventative public health measures, in partnership with NHS Dorset and Public Health Dorset.

**3. New Developments.** The Local Transport Plan lacks a critical link between new developments and the transport infrastructure required to support them. The Local Plan promotes major housing and employment growth without any robust transport demand management plan so risking even more car use and further congestion. New developments need to be designed from the very start with active travel and public transport at their heart and ideally need to be placed near existing public transport routes. It is absurd that housing developments should be automatically "sustainable" just because they are built close to existing towns and villages.

**4. Cars, Roads and Behavioural Changes.** A strong road network is essential for the prosperity of a modern economy. However, in recent years, Dorset has suffered with very high levels of congestion which brings large parts of the county to its knees wasting billions and preventing economic development and growth in the county. Yet, building more road infrastructure is not the answer as this just encourages the car culture and ends up attracting more and more traffic. The way out of this is through fundamental changes to the way we plan and implement our urban environments with a greater emphasis on public transport, active travel and behavioural changes. Urban environments which are designed from the ground upwards with these principles in mind are pleasanter and less stressful places to live. Part of the transition away from car-led economy is the promotion of car sharing and car clubs. These not only provide a cheaper alternative to the tens of thousands of people who have no access to a car but also reduce the need for second cars in many family units.

**5. Active Travel.** We support the ambition to make walking and cycling the natural choice for short journeys and we support the expansion of the e-bike schemes. Pedestrian safety and comfort can be prioritised through better crossings, rights of way, improved surfaces, and lighting; and retrofit existing streets to rebalance public space in favour of pedestrians and cyclists. A good guide is "Gear Change – A Bold Vision for Cycling and Walking" to inform binding local standards. Dorset also contains several old railway lines that have been partly converted to walking/cycling trackways. These are a very important rural transport corridors in Dorset, and it has been disappointing that the pace of their redevelopment into active travel pathways has been so slow.

**6. Public Transport (bus).** Access to excellent public transport is fundamental to satisfying communities' transport needs. Reversing the decline in provision of bus services is especially important in rural areas which otherwise become isolated and dependent on a car culture. National CPRE's campaign "Every Village, Every Hour" is an important aspiration. The council's bus partnership model linked to the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) needs to be fully implemented with a better working model between the council and the bus companies to prevent the recent debacle over the X51/X53 service.

Dorset's dispersed settlement pattern means that traditional large-bus models are often uneconomic and infrequent. However, we feel that as the population grows, some of the routes which have historically been uneconomic may be worthwhile exploring again. We would like to see Dorset Council trial a more frequent service that starts earlier and finishes later to see if more users can be attracted. Dorset Council could also trial smaller, more frequent buses or minibuses operating on flexible routes that better serve rural and edge-of-town areas. In parallel, express buses between the main towns might provide a faster, more reliable option for longer journeys. Faster, direct bus links also support economic development by improving access to jobs, education, and services. The council could also explore bike-carrying facilities on buses, allowing seamless multimodal journeys and extending the reach of active travel.

**7. Public transport (train).** Investment in trains is also essential as an alternative to private cars for longer distance journeys. The Heart-of-Wessex line needs upgrades to allow an hourly service to enable much needed extra capacity. The Mainline Southwest Railway services through Sherborne to Salisbury in the North and from Weymouth to Southampton in the south also need significant investment including an upgrade to dual track between Moreton and Dorchester and the introduction of a metro service along the south coast. Both of these are of high priority for future growth in the county.

**8. Safety.** Dorset's casualty rates remain unacceptably high. As the DSRSP Strategy (2021–2030) makes clear, preventable deaths and serious injuries must be eradicated. It is suggested that Dorset Council formally adopt "Vision Zero" approach within the LTP with a target of zero fatalities and serious injuries by 2050. Other practical measures include extensive 20mph zones in towns and villages and investment in junction safety improvements throughout the county especially in areas of higher cycle usage.

**9. Innovation.** Dorset's rural nature is often presented as an obstacle, but it could be seen as a unique opportunity. The county's dispersed settlements, limited rail coverage, and lower traffic volumes make it an ideal testbed for rural transport innovation. Dorset Council could position itself as a national leader in trialling new rural mobility models such as demand-responsive transport, shared e-mobility, village-based mobility hubs, autonomous vehicles and low-carbon delivery networks.

## **Comments on Implementation Plans in Central Dorset**

### **1. Reduce transport emissions and safeguard the climate and environment**

- The electric charging network in Dorchester now needs to prioritise smaller car parks and on-street parking to give access to homes which do not have their own driveways
- We should consider a canopy of solar panels over some of the car parks which would help to fuel the EV chargers.
- We fully support a car club in Dorchester/Poundbury and provision of reserved car club spaces with fast EV charging in all new developments >10 homes. Dorset Council could lead by example replacing a portion of its fleet with car club vehicles and shared vehicles for staff business travel. Incentives could include reduced parking permits for shared vehicles.
- The transition to electric buses will require considerable government investment for the purchase of the buses and the charging equipment. However operating costs could be lower.
- A trial of autonomous EV buses operating from a 24h park-and-ride on the southern edge of Dorchester should be properly considered allowing some car parks to be re-used for brownfield development and green spaces.
- We look forward to land being allocated for EV freight refuelling sites which are combined with last-mile delivery services into town.
- An ultra-low emissions zone (ULEZ) in the centre of Dorchester could be considered to promote the transition to EV vehicles (cars, vans and delivery vehicles).

### **2. Support healthier and safer communities with improved travel options**

- DTAG has already responded in the Active Travel implementation Plan (ATIP) with a prioritised list of active travel routes that need implementing in and around Dorchester. These plans need to be firmed up with a clear timetable for delivery.
- Top of the list, and supported by Damers Eco Group, would be implementing safe, separated cycling route from Dorchester to Poundbury along Damers Road.
- Some of the more expensive schemes such as a walking/cycling bridge over the Maumbury Rings junction need properly flagging at regional level (Western Transport Gateway) to ensure that funding is allocated when available.
- Other schemes need to be planned in sufficient detail so that if money becomes available at short notice, there are schemes available to implement.
- The council should adopt the "Cycling Infrastructure Design - LTN 1/20." document as the basis for all Active Travel facilities (cyclists and walkers)
- The council should consider diverting money from road improvements to fund more active Travel schemes

- The council appoints a suitably well qualified and currently active "Cycling Officer", who communicates regularly with a range of local cycle and walking groups and who is responsible for the proper maintenance of all the facilities.
- We support the expansion of e-bikes in Dorchester to other areas. However more flexibility on the hiring of these bikes is preferred.
- Dorchester is a prime candidate for two major and a number of smaller mobility hubs. The first would be at Dorchester South Station. The Second in Trinity Street where we propose a new bus station with waiting room and restaurant facilities as part of a mixed commercial/retail/housing development of the whole Trinity Street car park site.
- DTAG strongly supports the continued restoration of the old railway between Maiden Newton and Bridport as a trackway for cyclists and pedestrians and would like to see progress with landowners accelerated.

### **3. Create Accessible and Prosperous Places**

- Dorset council needs to carefully consider the capacity of the transport network in the Portland-Weymouth-Dorchester-Winfrith corridor if it is going to be able to meet its growth, employment and housing targets.
- One option is for a significant investment in the road network which would have to include making the A35 dual carriageway from Stinsford Hill to Stinsford Roundabout, along the Dorchester bypass and all the way through to Weymouth. However, this would be very expensive and risk longer term traffic build-up.
- An alternative is a significant expansion of the train network with the metro service stretching all the way from Poole to Weymouth, an addition stop at the Winfrith Innovation Park and moving the Moreton station to Crossways.
- DTAG would like to see proper modelling of all the main transport corridors in Dorset and a fully transparent public consultation on the results.
- DTAG supports targeted improvements to the A37 corridor between Dorchester and Yeovil but does not support a new link road North of Dorchester across the water meadows because it would attract large quantities of through traffic at a significant environmental cost that would badly affect the historic setting of Dorchester. Instead, this traffic might be routed along the Dorchester bypass which could be expanded to dual carriageway if required.
- DTAG welcomes a traffic town centre masterplan for Dorchester that would include measures to reduce through traffic without affecting retail and businesses. This can be achieved with sectoring, introduction of one-way streets (for example along Damers Road) and a comprehensive 20mph speed limit in the town. This could be complemented by at least one 24h park-and-ride scheme on the edge of town.

### **4. Enable safer journeys**

- Dorchester’s casualty rates remain unacceptably high and there was a very unpleasant cycling fatality at the junction between Bridport Road and Damers Road earlier this year. Nothing has been done yet about this dangerous junction.
- It is suggested that safety improvements to the Bridport Road include changes to the junction with Damers Road and making part of Damers Road one-way to traffic enabling the construction of a safe-separated cycle route to Poundbury.
- DTAG suggests that Dorset Council formally adopt “Vision Zero” approach within the LTP with a target of zero fatalities and serious injuries by 2050.
- DTAG fully supports the introduction of a comprehensive 20mph speed limit throughout Dorchester and in selected villages outside Dorchester.
- DTAG supports the expansion of “schools streets”.
- DTAG supports the building of a stronger network of safe cycle routes between the NCR2 with the NCR26 and providing a series of safe cycling routes linking schools businesses, hospital, railways, park-and-ride and key transport hubs. This would include a circular walking and cycling route along the path of the old roman walls.
- DTAG supports further improvements to selected junctions in Dorchester with improved signage and lighting to reduce accidents and improve the experience of cyclists and pedestrians.

#### **5. Provide a resilient and fit-for-purpose transport network.**

- Resilience in the transport network can be improved by gentle densification of central Dorchester while gradually removing car parks and car parking spaces.
- The freed-up areas could be used for brownfield housing developments, mixed use retail/commercial developments and new green spaces. This would allow development of affordable and social rental homes close to the centre of town close to where facilities and services are located. These people would be expected to use public transport or car clubs rather than private cars.
- DTAG welcomes improved coordination with utilities companies who are always digging up the streets and delaying traffic. Two particular “hotspot” areas include the Bridge at Maumbury Junction and Clarence Road just south of the junction with Queens’ Avenue.

#### **6. Enhance Public Transport to meet the needs of residents and visitors**

- By Dorset standards, Dorchester has an excellent bus system, and yet significant improvements could be made both to the reach and the frequency of the service.
- Many outlying villages rely on Dorchester for their access to services (medical, schooling, banking, retail, sporting) and employment. Access to a decent bus service is essential and yet it has declined hugely over the last 10 years. Reversing this decline and reducing isolation in outlying rural areas remains one of the great challenges of our local transport system.

- There needs to be a stronger bus service to the West via Bridport and Lyme Regis to Axminster Station. The recent debacle over changes to the X51/X53 service show how fragile the transport system really is and how far the reality is from the stated LTP4 aspiration.
- The bus service to Charlton Down and Charminster is typical of the problems facing outlying villages. There are five buses a day but the first is earliest to connect with the train to Weymouth and the last is far too early at 5.30pm. There is no service on Sat and Sun. Yet these villages are almost wholly dependent on Dorchester for their facilities. Either these villages need to have access to their own services, or the transport system needs to drastically improve. Even better would be both.
- Gaps in the bus coverage can be partly filled with community bus services, car shares and official hitch-hiking sites.
- DTAG supports enhancements to the Heart-of-Wessex line to allow an hourly service and new stations/halts at Stratton/Grimstone and Frampton. Unfortunately, it does not look like funding will be available soon.
- DTAG supports re-laying dual track between Moreton and Dorchester enabling commuter services to Dorchester and the introduction of a metro service from Poole to Weymouth via Dorchester. This would support further housing at Crossways.
- DTAG supports accessible lifts at Dorchester South Station or, even better, a multi-purpose tunnel under the track allowing pedestrian and cycle access.