

**Halesowen Area Committee – 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012**

**Report of the Director of the Urban Environment**

**Review of Bus Lanes in Halesowen**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To inform Committee of the findings of a review of the Bus lanes in Bromsgrove Road and Queensway in Halesowen.

**Background**

2. At its meeting of the 6<sup>th</sup> July 2011 the Committee considered a report relating to a number of transportation issues in Halesowen, including the bus lanes in Bromsgrove Road and Queensway. The Committee requested a further report outlining progress with regard to the future of these bus lanes be submitted to the next meeting.
3. Bus lanes are primarily provided to safeguard bus journey time reliability and raise the profile of public transport in support of West Midlands Local Transport Plan priorities. They may be shared with other designated road users such as Cyclists, Hackney Carriages and in some cases Heavy Goods Vehicles and may be operated at any designated time period during the day for example 24 hour or peak hours. The bus lanes under consideration were implemented as part of the Route 139 Bus Showcase scheme in partnership with Centro and bus operators.
4. Having reviewed the journey time records for an average morning weekday within the West Midlands "Spectrum" data base and made visual inspections of the sites it can be seen that the lanes on Bromsgrove Road and Queensway, (west or bus station bound) shown on the plan attached, do not have a significant role in bypassing general traffic queues. It can therefore be taken that other than the role they play in raising the profile of public transport, in purely traffic terms their impact appears to be neutral. Results of the journey time surveys are shown in the table below:

## Average Weekday Journey Times – AM Peak Period

Bus Lane Link	Overall Distance (metres)	Length of Bus Lane (metres)	Average Journey Time for general traffic (secs)	Queue Length alongside bus lane (metres)	Time Saving to Buses (secs)
Bromsgrove Road (Vine Lane to Mucklow Hill rbt)	523	295	59.7	0	0
Queensway Westbound (Vine Lane to Hagley Road rbt)	429	290	46.7	0	0
Queensway Eastbound (Hagley Road rbt to Vine Lane)	425	350	97.6	350	45

5. However, this is not the case for the Queensway (east or Birmingham bound) lane also shown on the plan attached, which, during the morning rush hour, provides a priority route through the congestion to the junction at Vine Lane. This roughly halves the potential delay to buses and represents a strong economic case for retention of the lane.
6. Although the public transport benefits are significant at this location it should also be noted that Queensway east bound also performs a role in controlling traffic flow through the town. Forming part of the major commuter corridor from the south and west to Birmingham, congestion on this and High Street adjacent to St Johns Church was considered in the "Halesowen Town Centre Access Study" of 2007. The problem of congestion and its impact on the environment of the town at that time was of great concern to the community. It was recognised that a large amount of traffic was "rat running" through the town to avoid delays on the primary route network at the A456 "Grange junction" and A458 "Stag junction".
7. The study concluded that:-  
  

*"A key to resolving the congestion problem in the town would therefore be to, wherever practicable, encourage traffic not wishing to call into the town to seek the most expeditious route to and via the primary route network, whilst at the same time discouraging through traffic from using the town centre for through or "rat running" journeys. This policy would manifest itself in measures to improve the primary route network and to encourage its use and supportive measures to dissuade unnecessary use of the town centre roads".*
8. This policy accorded well with the existing traffic management arrangements (bus lanes) on Queensway east bound which reduce the road space available to general traffic and the one way proposals that were later implemented at High Street that cut that route off, all of which dissuade unnecessary use of the town centre roads.
9. It was reported in 2007 that the journey times from Hayley Green to the Grange roundabout junction increased 6 fold during the morning rush hour resulting in an average journey of 9 minutes. This time penalty encouraged significant volumes of traffic to seek alternative routes of similar or perceived time advantage through the town. In reality this perceived advantage does not exist as it produces a very

similar journey time on all alternative routes with the same origin and destination. Although improvements have been made this principle has not changed and releasing capacity through the town would have little impact on overall journey times for car commuters.

10. It is therefore anticipated that the removal of the Queensway east bound bus lane would not noticeably improve journey times but would almost certainly increase demand passing (rat running) through the town during the morning rush hour. This demand would be queued up in the road space relinquished by the bus lane and increase bus journey times.
11. The role of the bus lanes has evolved since their original implementation and in particular following the completion of the new bus station. Given the significant investment Centro have made it would be appropriate to consider their views when making decisions regarding the future operation of the bus lanes.

### **Finance**

12. The funding required to make changes to the bus lanes in Halesowen would have to be found from a future year's Integrated Transport Block capital budget.

### **Law**

13. Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 empowers the Council to do anything calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of any of its functions.
14. The Council is empowered to improve highways under Section 62 of the Highways Act 1980.
15. Traffic Regulation Orders are made under powers contained in Section 1 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

### **Equality Impact**

16. The contents of this report comply with the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy. Furthermore, public transport enhances equality of opportunity and social inclusion by providing access to a wider population of the borough to services and other desired destinations.

### **Recommendation**

17. It is recommended that:-

That the views of the Area Committee are sought on;

- i) The possible removal of bus lanes on Bromsgrove Road and Queensway (west or bus station bound)
- ii) The retention of the bus lane on Queensway (east or Birmingham bound)

That Centro be consulted accordingly on the two recommendations.

That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be recommended to consider the views of the Area Committee and Centro on the future of the bus lanes.



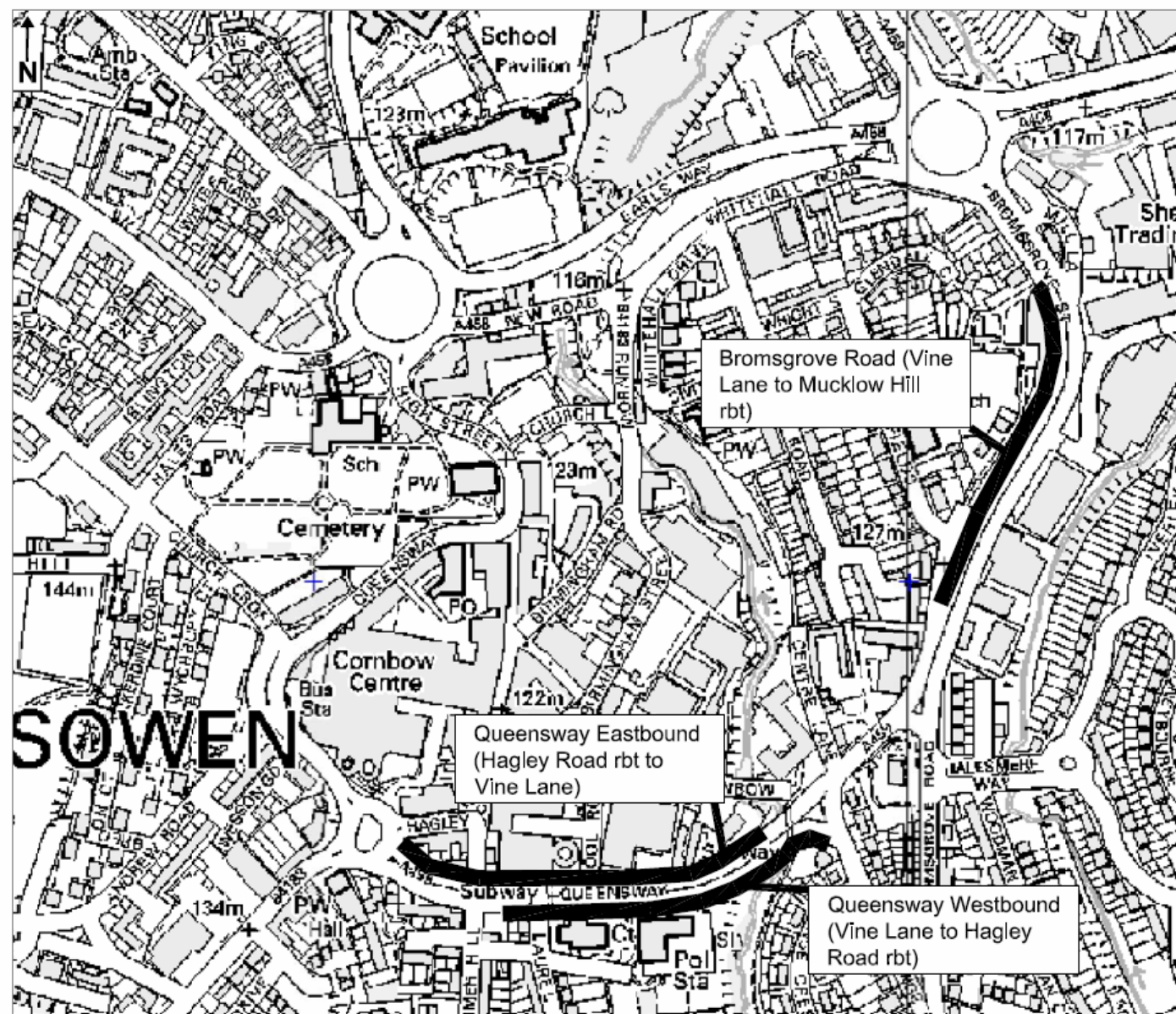
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#### **List of Background Papers**

None



## Halesowen Bus Lanes