

Appendix G Exhibition Feedback Form

East Reading Mass Rapid Transit Route (MRT) Feedback Form

Thank you for attending today's Public Exhibition and taking the time to view the East Reading's Mass Rapid Transit proposals

It is anticipated that a formal planing application will be submitted to Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council later this year. Members of the public will have further opportunity to comment during the public consultation as part of the formal planning process. Please use this form to provide feedback on the scheme proposals or use the electronic version online at:

WWW.READING.GOV.UK/EAST-READING-MRT

Your details:

Title: _____ Initials: _____ Surname: _____

Address: _____

_____ Postcode:

Email: _____

Are you:

☐ A local resident ☐ A local Employee / Business Owner ☐ Other (Specify) _____

Your views:

Please share your comments and views on the East Reading Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) proposals below:

Question 1. Would you use the proposed scheme?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Why? _____

Question 2. If yes, how would you use the proposed MRT scheme?

Mode

- ☐ Bus
☐ Park and Ride
☐ Walking
☐ Cycling

Purpose

- ☐ For Work ☐ For Leisure
☐ For Education ☐ For Shopping
☐ For Other (Specify) _____

Question 3. During which time period do you envisage using the MRT, walking and cycling route?

- ☐ Weekday Morning ☐ Weekday Afternoon ☐ Weekday Evening
☐ Weekend ☐ Unsure

Working with:



East Reading Mass Rapid Transit Route (MRT) Feedback Form

Question 4. Do you currently use the existing towpath?

- ☐ Yes, for walking ☐ Yes, for cycling ☐ No

Question 5. Do you have any opinions on how the bridge could blend into its environment?

Question 6. Do you have any opinions on how landscaping could be used to soften the appearance of the MRT route?

Question 7. Should the MRT scheme include any recreation and leisure facilities along the route?

- ☐ None ☐ Picnic Tables ☐ Playground
☐ Benches ☐ Interpretation Boards ☐ Outdoor Gym Equipment
☐ Other (specify) _____

Question 8. Do you have any general comments on the proposals?

**Thank you for taking time to provide feedback which be
used to inform development of the scheme proposals.**

Working with:



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Appendix H Briefing Note to Design South-East

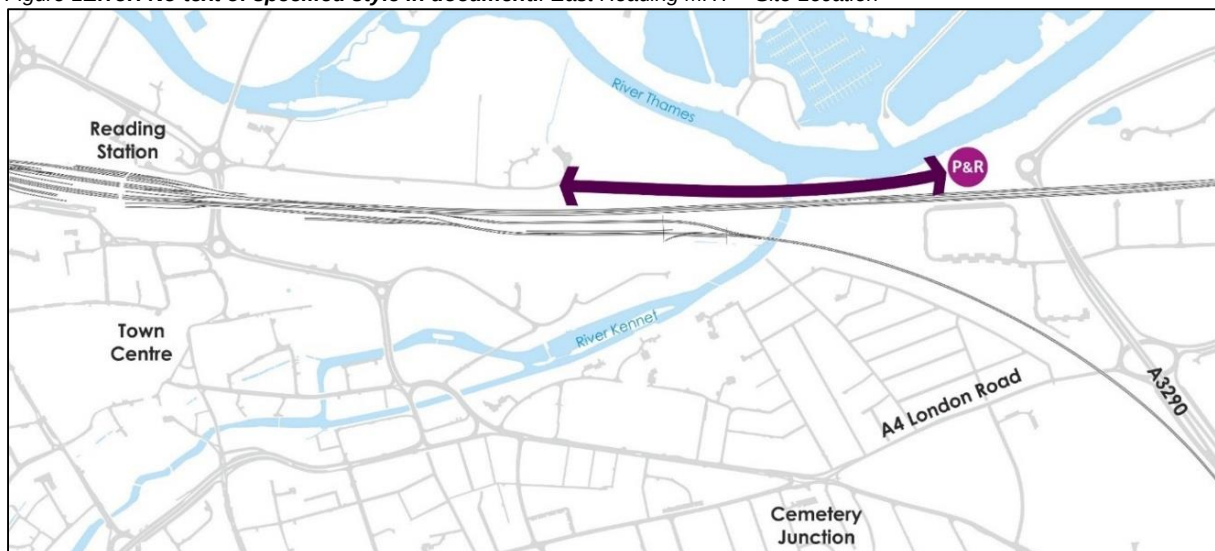
East Reading MRT Project Briefing Note

Overview

The East Reading Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) scheme is a segregated fast track public transport, pedestrian and cycle route that will support enhanced accessibility and continued sustainable growth in Reading, Wokingham Borough and the wider area. The scheme is a long-established element of RBC's strategy to provide urban connectivity and access to wider strategic transport networks and thereby deliver sustainable economic growth and housing for Reading and Wokingham Boroughs. The scheme also provides an attractive, direct, fast and sustainable transport solution to accommodate future growth and encourage a change in people's transport choices for their trips in and out of central Reading.

The site is located at land between Thames Valley Business Park and Napier Road, Reading, to the south of the River Thames and north of the Great Western Main Line Railway (*Figure 1*).

Figure 1 **Error! No text of specified style in document.:** East Reading MRT – Site Location



The proposed development comprises the following key elements:

- creation of a new route for public transport only, including cycle path and footway between Napier Road and the A3290 at Thames Valley Park;
- the erection of a new bridge over the River Kennet;
- formation of a new T-junction with Napier Road;
- connection to the proposed Thames Valley Park & Ride;
- development of new and improved footpath links to Tesco and the towpath; and
- associated infrastructure and landscaping.

The project is being promoted by Reading Borough Council (RBC), working with Wokingham Borough Council (WBC), Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (TVB LEP) and Peter Brett Associates LLP (PBA). The public-sector led project has been allocated funding by TVB LEP from the Local Growth Fund.

Further to ongoing design work and pre-application discussions from mid-2016 onwards (including the scheduled Panel Review), it is anticipated that a full planning application will be submitted in summer 2017.

Transport Context

The A4 London Road is currently the main strategic route for vehicles travelling to and from Reading Town Centre to the east and the link to M4 junction 10. It is heavily constrained comprising two narrow lanes for traffic travelling towards central Reading and a single narrow lane exiting towards the A3290. The A4 corridor and the A3290 are suffering from significant levels of congestion, particularly in the peak periods, which are forecast to increase with the projected level of growth in Reading and Wokingham Borough.

The purpose of the East Reading MRT scheme is to improve the attractiveness of travelling more sustainably, therefore reducing private car trips, easing forecast congestion and air quality along the existing highway network, particularly on the A4 corridor. The scheme will provide urban connectivity and access to wider strategic transport networks, by allowing residents from existing and planned development living to the east of Reading to reach the rail services or visitors arriving from the motorway to use the P&R at TVP, Winnersh or Mere Oak into Reading. The scheme will also provide an attractive, direct, fast and sustainable transport solution to encourage a change in people's transport choices.

This eastern section will form part of a longer term MRT network for the Thames Valley or operate as a standalone MRT route. The link also provides future opportunity to link to a Third Thames Crossing to provide MRT to a Park & Ride north of the River Thames.

The scheme will thereby seek to achieve the following key aims:

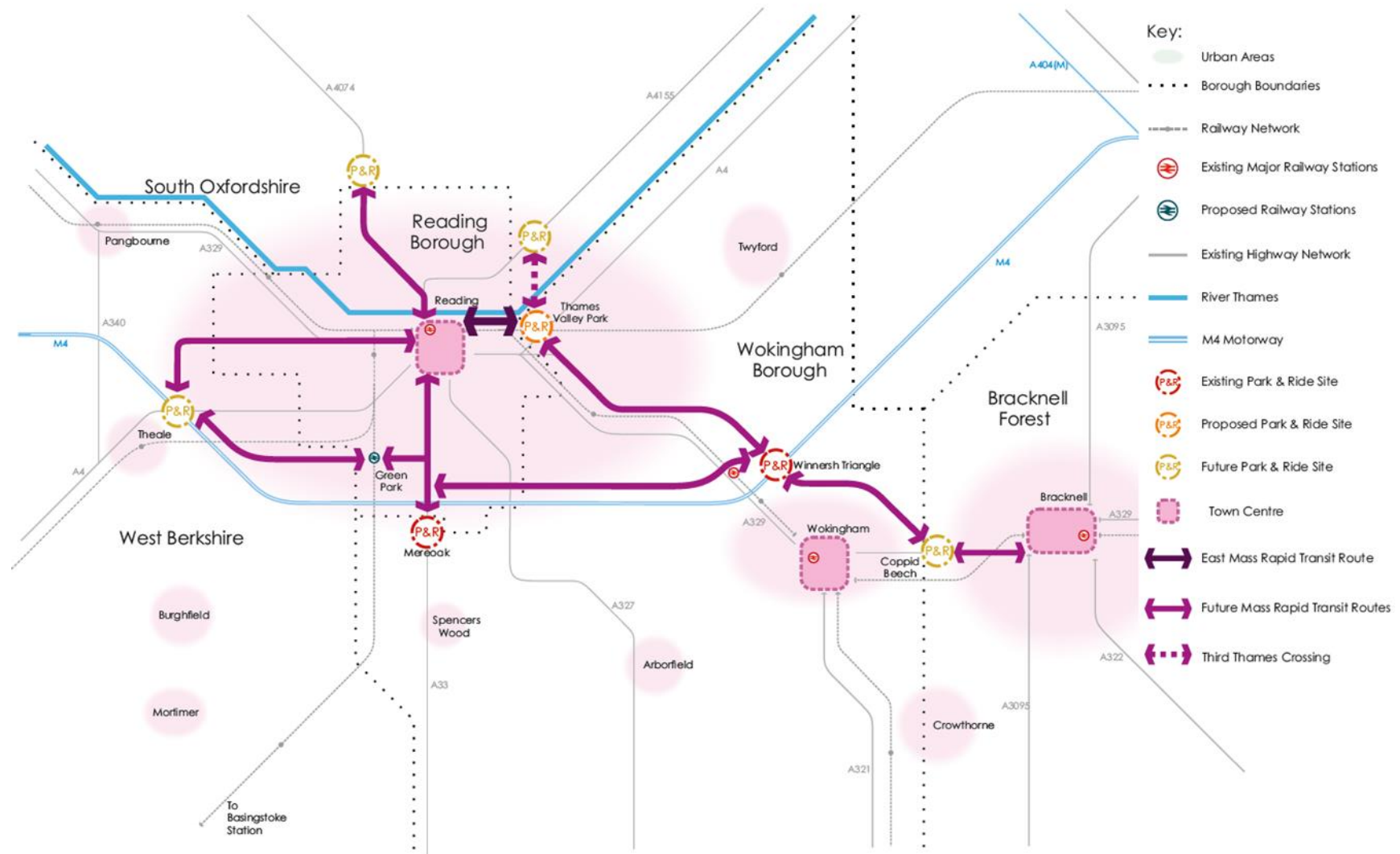
- Provide a sustainable alternative solution to accommodate future travel demand on the London Road corridor;
- Increase capacity for movement of people thereby reducing journey times and forecast congestion, as well as improving reliability of journeys along the corridor;
- Support economic development in Reading Town Centre, east Reading, Wokingham and within the Thames Valley;
- Develop a high quality, sustainable system which provides a sustainable alternative to the private car;
- Facilitate a future MRT network for Reading and the Thames Valley;
- Allow access for mobility impaired and pushchairs.

Figure 2 shows Reading's public transport strategy to provide significantly improved radial and orbital MRT routes.

Notably, Reading is also planned to benefit from significant investment in the following strategic networks over the next few years:

- Crossrail, which is planned to start running in 2018 and is reported to be generating the most homes of all the new rail lines.
- The Western Rail Access to Heathrow (WRaTH) will provide direct access to Heathrow Airport from Reading and is planned to be completed in 2021.
- HS2, which should be completed in the next decade, will reduce journey times from London to Birmingham to 49 minutes, making it easier to commute from Britain's second city to the capital. London's rail commuter network will then encompass Brighton, in the south, Southend, in the east, Reading, in the west, and Birmingham, to the north.
- M4 Junctions 3-12: Smart Motorway.

Figure 2Error! No text of specified style in document.: Reading Borough Council Public Transport Strategy



Site Context

The site is located at land between Thames Valley Business Park and Napier Road, Reading, to the south of the River Thames and north of the Great Western Main Line Railway. The MRT route itself is proposed to link the A3290 at Thames Valley Park, from a proposed new Park & Ride facility, to Napier Road, Reading town centre and the railway station.

The site location is illustrated in *Figure 3*.

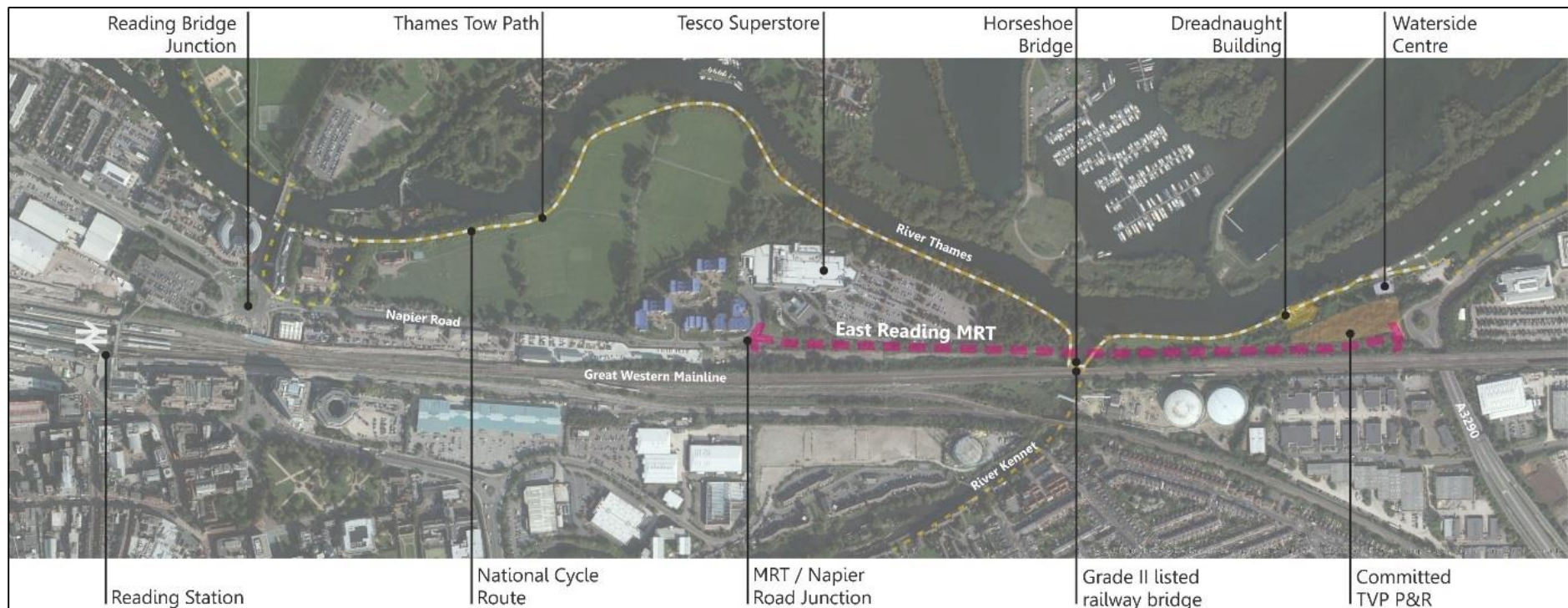
As illustrated above, the site is located alongside an existing transport corridor accommodating the Great Western Mainline as well as utilities infrastructure (e.g. overhead pylons, underground electricity cables and gas holders) and commercial development (e.g. Tesco and Thames Valley Park). The proposed MRT route itself has no direct visibility as a whole from the south and north, owing to the railway line embankment and woodland/vegetation. The majority of views are experienced from along sections of the towpath and the river.

The western section of the proposed route is characterised by the Tesco superstore and large adjacent car park, together with woodland area and towpath. The confluence between the River Kennet and River Thames, at the centre of the proposed development, is currently characterised by a listed horseshoe bridge and railway bridge with other bridges beyond.

The eastern section of the route comprises the towpath link between the horseshoe bridge and Thames Valley Park, including the Dreadnought building and Waterside Centre. The Dreadnought building currently comprises an old boat house fronting the River Thames. Planning permission was secured in February 2013 for refurbishment works however it is understood that the consent has now expired.

The proposed TVP Park & Ride site is located adjacent to the A3290 roundabout at Thames Valley Park and the eastern end of the proposed MRT route. The Park & Ride development was recently granted planning permission by WBC in November 2016 for a facility providing approximately 277 vehicular spaces, motorcycle parking and associated vehicular access and landscaping. It is understood that detailed design work is now progressing prior to commencement of construction. The proposed MRT scheme will run alongside and connect with the Park & Ride development.

Figure 3: East Reading MRT – Site Context



Planning Policy Context

As explained previously, the East Reading MRT scheme is a long-established element of RBC's development strategy to deliver sustainable economic growth across Reading and Wokingham Boroughs – it is included in RBC's Corporate Plan, Core Strategy and Local Transport Plan.

The scheme is also identified in WBC's Core Strategy, Managing Development Delivery (MDD) Local Plan, and Local Transport Plan; and TVB LEP's Strategic Economic Plan.

The route of the proposed scheme is safeguarded for a priority transport project (MRT) in the RBC Core Strategy (Policy CS21), Reading Central Area Action Plan (Policies RC1 and RC3) and the Local Transport Plan. The land is also safeguarded for improvements to the strategic transport network within WBC planning policy, including mass rapid transit along the A4/A329 corridors, improvements to public transport services and improvements to footpath and cycle networks (WBC Core Strategy, Policy CP6, CP10, CC08; WBC MDD Local Plan, Appendix 3, Figure 24).

In addition, land covered by/adjacent to the proposed route of the MRT scheme is subject to a number of planning policy designations, including: safeguarding for Crossrail (RBC Proposals Map and RBC Core Strategy Paragraph 15.3.6), Green Link (RBC Sites and Detailed Policies Document, Policy DM17), Major Landscape Feature and area of public open space (RBC Core Strategy, Policy CS37; RBC Sites and Detailed Policies Document, Policy SA17 and Reading Central Area Action Plan, Policy RC14d), cycle route (RBC Sites and Detailed Policies Document, Policy SA14), Area of Archaeological Potential (RBC Core Strategy, Policy CS33), Major Development Location (WBC Core Strategy, Policy CP9, CP09) and allocation for commercial floorspace or Park & Ride facility (WBC MDD Local Plan, Policy SAL07, SAL09).

RBC has made significant progress in delivering its Local Transport Plan Strategy to date, which has been developed to encourage sustainable transport, active travel, and support planned growth. This scheme is a vital element of the wider strategy.

Pre-Application Consultation

A series of initial pre-application meetings were held with planning officers at RBC and WBC in May, July and November 2016. The meetings included discussions regarding the proposed planning strategy and general design approach.

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping application was submitted to RBC and WBC in November 2016 to determine the required extent of assessment and the content to be included within the Environmental Statement (ES), which will accompany the planning application submission. The EIA Scoping application outlined the site location, proposed viewpoints for assessment, indicative cross-section plan and full EIA Scoping Report. The application was subject to review by planning and technical officers at RBC and WBC.

The following key design advice was received during the initial pre-application meetings and review of the EIA Scoping application:

- Linkages should be considered between the existing towpath and proposed footway/cycleway
- Bridge should be of a quality appropriate to the setting of the listed bridge
- Bridge should use a lightweight structure which is visually permeable (weathering steel may be appropriate)
- Potential impacts on natural environment and landscape require full consideration e.g. loss of trees, impact on species and habitats, fragmentation of the green network, impact on visual amenity from River Thames and River Kennet
- Potential impact of lighting on amenity should be considered

A public exhibition was also held in July 2016 to explain the proposals and present the latest draft design. The following key design feedback was received at the public exhibition:

- Bridge should complement the rail bridge
- Separate dedicated cycle and pathways should be provided
- Bridge should be designed with a contemporary style like the new cycling bridge in Caversham
- The road should be hidden to reduce noise and light pollution
- Development should be used to improve the surroundings, make it safer and more appealing for use by the public
- Design should minimise impact on riverside pathway
- Brick should be used and not concrete
- Coloured materials should be used
- Quality materials should be used in the design
- Include lighting for safety and security
- Pedestrian links should be provided between the MRT and the towpath
- Additional planting should be incorporated between the MRT route and the towpath
- Appropriate landscaping required including earth banks, banks of shrubs, more trees, wild flower verges

The comments received during initial pre-application consultation have been reviewed and considered within the emerging draft proposals.

Subsequently a further pre-application meeting was held with RBC and WBC in May 2017 to present updates on the project and debate further detailed design considerations and the proposed planning application submission. The following key design advice was received during the discussions in May 2017:

- Potential access to the Dreadnought building to be considered separately;
- Potential boat storage provision underneath the viaduct not to be incorporated, in order to avoid creating an urbanising effect and reflect a subtle/simple design approach;
- Bridge should be of a subtle design that is not readily visible as far as possible once landscaping is established
- A 'rusty' design could be considered at the balustrade on top of the bridge rather than galvanised steel
- Queried whether the weathering steel girder could be designed with less visual impact
- Bridge should consider reflecting design elements from the horseshoe bridge
- Queried whether a lower bridge has been considered that swings out/up
- Minimum required height of the bridge should be clarified
- Concerns regarding the pinch-point in the route close to the towpath and whether this can be reconsidered
- Support the inclusion of boat planters, seating and green panels within the landscaping strategy
- Recommend excluding trim-trail equipment from the proposed design due to its urbanising effect (in conjunction with proposed boat storage) and the limited need
- Design approach should seek to prevent use of the structure for sheltering

The most recent feedback (above) is currently being considered in the final iterations of the proposed design.

Proposed Development

The proposed development has been informed by planning policy guidance, pre-application consultation, consideration of the site and surrounding context, detailed design work and technical assessment.

Accordingly, the proposed development comprises the following key elements:

- creation of a new route for public transport only, including cycle path and footway between Napier Road and the A3290 at Thames Valley Park;

- the erection of a new bridge over the River Kennet;
- formation of a new T-junction with Napier Road;
- connection to the proposed Thames Valley Park & Ride;
- development of new and improved footpath links to Tesco and the towpath; and
- associated infrastructure and landscaping.

The proposed site layout is illustrated in *Figures 4, 5 and 6* below.

The proposed design has been based on an understanding of the site context, taking into account local examples and a number of different potential bridge and viaduct forms. Based on pre-application advice, the proposed bridge and viaduct is based on a simple and subtle overall design approach, predominantly taking into account the landscape character of the site, the setting of the listed bridge and flood risk considerations.

The height of the bridge and viaduct is proposed taking into account the setting of the listed bridge and railway bridge, and in order to minimise landscape/visual impacts from the towpath and discourage sheltering underneath the structure. The elevated viaduct design is also necessary to minimise the impact on flood flows and storage.

The width of the proposed structure is based on providing segregated use for public transport, cycles and pedestrians to support the MRT strategy and respond to pre-application feedback. A narrow one-way section is proposed at the bridge itself in order to minimise impacts on the listed bridge and river setting.

Design Rationale

Heritage

- The new bridge will form the setting of listed structures at the confluence of the Thames with the Kennet.
- The new bridge will become the first in a series of bridges and bridging structures at the mouth of the Kennet.
- Whilst the setting is partly open and green in character, it is also important to recognise is also an industrial landscape that points to important parts of Reading's industrial and transport history:
 - The Kennet that was developed as a navigation with wharfage from the 13th century;
 - The navigable river Kennet (1720's);
 - The Great Western Railway;
 - The horse bridge indicating water borne transport;
 - The town gas works;
 - The eastern, working end of the town; and
 - More modern features such as electricity pylons and electricity gantries on the railway.
- The proposed new bridge should enhance, and must not harm this setting.

Form

- The (horizontal) road alignment has a slightly sinuous form, which is intensified by the gently rising and falling road surface (vertical alignment), the curve of the main river span and the cross section of the road that widens and narrows along its length.
- The proposed in-situ concrete deck and soffit allows these four aspects of the road's alignment to be expressed and emphasised with gentle curves, and further enhanced by simple railings with a horizontal emphasis.

Components

The project may be divided into three main structural components, plus the section connecting into the Park & Ride adjacent to The Dreadnought:

- The eastern and western approach ramps (solids);
- The eastern viaduct; and
- The main bridge span.

Main Bridge Span

- The span is expressed by a gentle curve;
- The highest point is aligned with the main railway bridge arch so that views along the river towpaths (Kennet and Thames) will be least obstructed;
- The curve responds to the elliptical form of the main bridge span;
- It has a rugged, industrial appearance, rather than a deliberately lightweight appearance, in response to the partly historic industrial context;
- The main span meets the solid embankment to the west and the viaduct to the east.

Viaduct

- The viaduct has been designed to minimise the overall mass;
- For reasons of economy and also flood impact, but also to create a light structure, the eastern viaduct has been designed as a low-mass structure;
- The column centres and spans have been set at optimal proportions/distances to ensure a relatively thin slab and beams and slender columns;
- Eastern and western embankments

Prominence

- Assessment demonstrates that views of the structure will be limited;
- The structures have generally been positioned and aligned in order to minimise visual impact;
- It is nevertheless of vital importance that careful attention is paid to the appearance and impact of the structure at key points where it is visible;
 - Kennet mouth (main bridge span);
 - Views along the Kennet through existing bridges (main bridge span);
 - Narrowest parts of the riverside strip (the viaduct and undercroft);
- No part of the structure will rise above the height of the railway embankment.

Materiality

The proposed viaduct and bridge will be designed with the following material finishes:

- Weather steel bridge girders and in-situ concrete bridge deck to the main span
- In-situ concrete wingwalls and abutment at the east and west ends;
- Precast concrete beams and in-situ concrete deck and cross beams on the east viaduct approach;
- In-situ concrete columns;
- Galvanised steel parapets (throughout).

The proposed design is illustrated in *Figure 7* below.

Landscape Strategy

The proposed development has been designed in tandem with a fully detailed landscape strategy. This includes, in the western section: new footpath links, new tree planting, wildflower grassland, tussocky grassland, native trees and shrubs, and wildflower grassland. In the eastern section, this includes: feature trees, native trees and shrubs, riparian habitat, tussocky grassland, living willow panels, boat planters and seating.

Figure 4 – East Reading MRT – Proposed Site Layout (western approach)



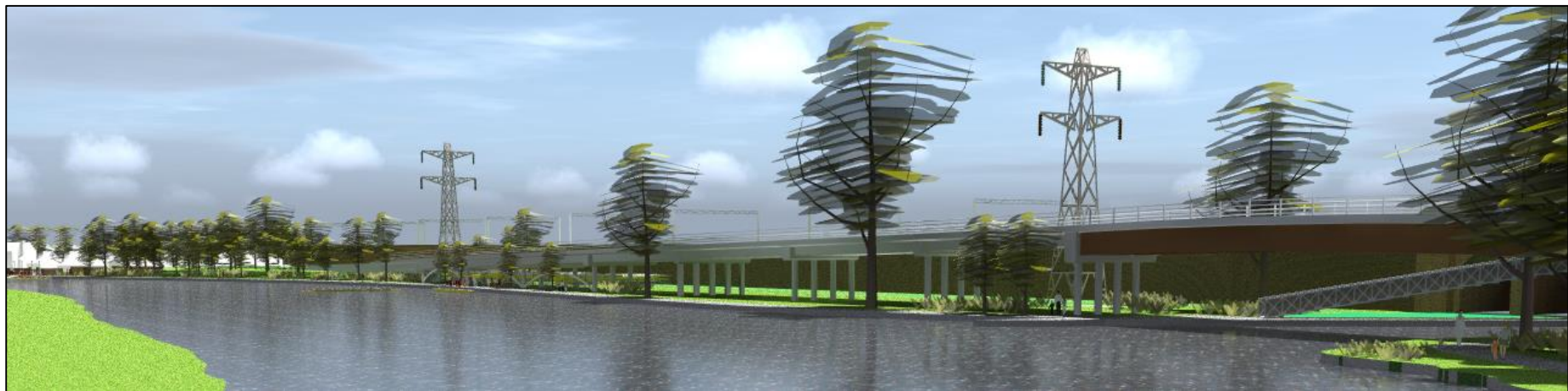
FigureError! No text of specified style in document. 5 – East Reading MRT – Proposed Site Layout (bridge and viaduct)



Figure 6 – East Reading MRT – Proposed Site Layout (eastern approach at Park & Ride)



Figure 7 – East Reading MRT – Proposed Design



Planning Application

It is anticipated that a full planning application for the MRT scheme will be submitted to both RBC and WBC in summer 2017. The description of development, to be outlined within the planning application submission, is summarised as:

“Construction of a segregated fast-track public transport, pedestrian and cycle bridge and viaduct, comprising concrete bridge structure with a river span of 59.5m and a land span of 316m, supported by concrete columns, steel beams and reinforced soil embankment, together with new footpath links and existing footpath alterations, replacement supermarket car parking provision, junction improvements and landscaping.”

The planning application will be accompanied by a full package of application drawings including: site location plan, existing site layout plans, existing elevations, site context plan, proposed site layout plans, proposed elevations, proposed sections, 3D visuals, landscape strategy and tree protection/enhancement plan.

As detailed above, the proposed development has been informed by a full EIA, the scope of which has been agreed with RBC and WBC. The planning application submission will thereby also be accompanied by an Environmental Statement relating to: socio-economics, transport and access, air quality, hydrology, ground conditions, landscape and visual, ecology, and archaeology and heritage.

Discussion Questions

Further to the above, we would be grateful for design advice regarding the proposed bridge and viaduct design shown in *Figure 7* above, specifically relating to the following key questions:

1. **Context:** Is the design approach based upon a thorough understanding of the nature of the site and its wider context?
2. **Bridge:** Is the design of the bridge and its approaches of sufficient quality; is it both appropriate and responsive to the setting?
3. **Visual impact:** Does the scheme succeed in minimising visual impact overall; has the appearance of the scheme in key views been carefully considered?
4. **Public realm:** Has the opportunity been taken to improve the surroundings, make it safer and more appealing to use by the public; and better connected?
5. **Materiality:** Are the proposed materials and details of sufficient quality; are they appropriate to the context; has maintenance, durability, and sustainability been considered; will the materials age well?
6. **Landscape:** Is the approach to landscape design appropriate, of sufficient quality, does it satisfactorily mitigate impacts and enhance the setting overall; and are the proposals clear and sufficiently detailed?

Please note that the following matters are outside the design team's brief:

- The principle of the proposed road link and its broad alignment is already firmly established in planning policy terms. This is therefore beyond the scope of the consultant design team to consider as part of the review process.
- The TVP Park and Ride scheme has received consent. The design team is able to consider the interface with this scheme, but is unable to amend the scheme itself.
- A number of small parcels of land along the route are currently outside the applicant's control. These are subject to on-going negotiations, require agreement, and a degree of sensitivity and discretion is therefore needed at this stage.

Appendix I Design South-East Response

Design Review

East Reading Mass Rapid Transit

East Reading Mass Rapid Transit

Reference: 622-954

Report of Design Review Meeting

Date: 6 June 2017

Location: Peter Brett Associates, Caversham Bridge Road, Waterman Place, Reading

Panel

Jane Briginshaw (Chair), Architect

Scott Adams, Architect/Urban Designer

Paul Appleby, Engineer/Sustainability

Peter Neal, Landscape Architect

Kieran Perkins, Architect/Masterplanner/Urban Designer

Richard Warwick, Architect

Presenting team and other attendees

Huw Trevorrow, Design South East

Richard Eatough, Reading Borough Council (LPA)

Graham Vaughan, Wokingham Borough Council (LPA)

Marie Militzer, Reading Borough Council (Client)

Sarah Matthews, Peter Brett Associates LLP (Transport)

Jonathan Sebbage, Peter Brett Associates LLP (Planning)

Natasha Jones, Peter Brett Associates LLP (Landscape)

Stephen Wren, Peter Brett Associates LLP (Bridges)

Michael Doyle, Doyle Town Planning and Urban Design

Site visit

A full site visit was conducted by the Panel ahead of the review

This report is confidential as the scheme is not yet the subject of a planning application

Summary

The Panel are highly supportive of the principle of the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) and commend Reading and Wokingham Borough Councils on working collaboratively to develop an alternative approach to traffic congestion problems in the area. A good basis for a proposal has been gathered and the project has been well understood from an engineering perspective, however, we feel further design development is required. The proposed structure currently appears too utilitarian in design and risks negatively impacting this sensitive site. An approach that further considers the way the scheme integrates into the surrounding urban environment and explores the wider opportunities associated with this should be undertaken.

In terms of facilitating the movement of buses and cycles, we feel the way the viaduct meets the ground at either end requires further exploration, and there is a missed opportunity in not integrating the proposed cycle route more into the existing network. In terms of the impact on the Thames Path at the lower level, we feel this project should present an opportunity to encourage leisure and tourism along this length of river. A more ambitious, concept led landscape strategy that sets out a vision for how this area could be improved could contribute to this. The proposed structure is of a significant scale, and the creation of functionless covered area risks encouraging anti-social behaviour and negatively impacting this setting. However, exploiting this picturesque location and using this structure to activate the riverside with public uses has the potential to benefit the area.

These issues are complex, and this report aims to identify priority areas and suggest options to address these, however, we feel the input of an architect/urban designer in the design team will be necessary to further develop the project. Also, the landscape architecture should be a more fundamental driver and better integrated into the project. Constraints such as Network Rail land and flood risk are causing limitations, but we feel these should be challenged more assertively to help make the most of this opportunity.

Background

The East Reading Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) scheme is a segregated fast track public transport, cycle and pedestrian route linking the A3290 at Thames Valley Park (from the proposed new Park and Ride facility), to Napier Road and the railway station beyond. This structure is mainly elevated along its length of approximately 1km, with an average width of around 14m. The site is in the floodplain of the River Thames, following the Thames Path for much of its length. The confluence of the River Kennet and River Thames occurs along this stretch, with existing listed railway and pedestrian bridges spanning the River Kennet at this point. This proposal must create a further bridge structure to span this area.

With riverside views, mature trees, and passing through a designated wildlife area, this is a sensitive site. Although close to the centre of Reading, it lies between the River Thames and mainline railway track with few crossing points, meaning there is a high degree of severance from the surrounding town. A future crossing of the River Thames in the Thames Valley Park area has been proposed, but is not yet confirmed.

The scheme is being promoted by Reading Borough Council (RBC), Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) and Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (TVB LEP). The purpose of the scheme is to make sustainable forms of transport more attractive, thereby easing forecast congestion and air quality along the existing highway network, particularly on

the A4 corridor. It is planned that multiple buses will function on this route, some of which will run between the Park and Ride and station, while others will continue on to the wider area and towards Heathrow.

Pre-application meetings with RBC and WBC were held in May 2016, July 2016 and November 2016. A public exhibition was held in July 2016.

Wider area ambition

The River Thames is Reading's greatest natural asset, however, despite its relatively central location it is largely severed from the day-to-day life of the town. Railway lines divide it from the main centre of population to the south, and relatively few crossing points limit opportunities for people to interact with the River. Although it is arguably an underused resource, in some ways this has been to the town's advantage, leading to a surprisingly unspoiled stretch of river frontage despite its urban location. It is fortunate the significant harm that would have been brought about by the proposal to construct a dual carriageway along its length in the 1980s was avoided, and it is important to learn from mistakes of the past. With the proposal for buses as the only form of motorised transport, this is a more appropriate scheme that the Panel believe can be resolved in a way that will be acceptable for this sensitive site. However, at approximately 14m in width and 1km in length, it cannot be ignored that this is a very significant structure, and if handled in the wrong way, could cause significant harm. As forming an embankment on the eastern side of the River Kennet is deemed inappropriate due to flooding concerns, the creation of a significant area of undercroft seems unavoidable. Minimising the way the structure meets the ground can limit its impact to only a limited degree, and a strategy for the undercroft and how it relates to the Thames Path should be an integral part of the proposal, creating a more people focused approach.

We suggest that planning policy which promotes leisure and tourism along the river should be brought into more focus here, and opportunities to activate and improve the river frontage should be further explored. Flood risks constrain potential permanent uses, but there are a variety of ways this space could be occupied, particularly relating to river usage. Opportunities might include setting up or creating partnerships with existing river activities such as rowing clubs. If there is demand for residential moorings in this location this could be a successful way to help create more passive observation and activity in this area, with the potential for the undercroft to provide facilities for these inhabitants. Examples of programmes from comparable undercroft spaces include the creation of play facilities, hosting temporary events such as markets and film screenings, and providing affordable workshop space for artists. This raises issues such as access and the effect on the rural character of the site. However, we suggest that there are multiple ways inhabitation of the undercroft can be achieved to a greater or lesser extent, and more research into how this has been achieved elsewhere could be beneficial.

The way the MRT connects into the surrounding street network at either end will be of particular significance, and we suggest further exploration of the context around these points is required, expanding the plan area that is currently being described. These are areas of interchange that must create successful places for people as well as accommodating transport infrastructure. Key issues include the location of bus stops and how this will influence the quality of the environment for people waiting. At the Park and Ride end, the route cyclists will take to the Thames Path should be further described. At the Tesco end, a strategy for how cyclists can safely continue to Reading Station should be included.

Landscape strategy

Some thoughtful ideas have been proposed in the current landscape strategy, however, we feel this brief is too limited, and it is more concerned with mitigating the impact of the proposed MRT rather than creating an ambitious, concept led proposal. There is an opportunity in this project to help make this stretch of the river a more accessible and desirable place to be, and this should be addressed. Despite the remarkable views from the Thames Path, at present it is a fairly mean stretch of narrow asphalt with room for significant upgrading. Improving the quality of this path, and creating more opportunities for people to dwell in the area rather than passing straight through could be highly beneficial. Proposed benches may help contribute to this, but this should be further explored. The landscape proposal should be intrinsically linked to the aims and objectives of the structure itself, and this strategy should be more integrated with proposals for how the undercroft space will be managed. Screening this structure with planting could have limited benefits, but we suggest that this should not be the main focus of the landscape strategy, and that if a more ambitious approach were taken there would be less need to attempt to cover it up.

Cycle strategy

Buses will use the MRT in a more singular way, with the principle route to connect the Park and Ride site to Reading Station. Cyclists however, will want to use this infrastructure in a far less constrained way, with connections such as those into the city centre also of significance. Proposed cycle routes should aim to integrate into the existing network as fully as possible if this scheme is to achieve its aim of making alternative forms of transport more desirable. This requires more analysis into the wider connections around the site, outlining issues such as how the cycle path along the River Kennet can connect and what will happen to cyclists when they come on and off the MRT at either end.

Understanding more about these issues may unlock a clearer strategy for cyclists, but based on the presentation the Panel suggest that creating access from the eastern side of the MRT to the River Kennet could significantly improve links into the town centre. We suggest that investigating an option to decouple the bus and cycle route into separate structures could help reduce the impact on the site and create the opportunity to design a more flexible and responsive cycling route. Although a significant structure is required to support the bus route, a cycle route could be a far more lightweight structure, and as such the surface of the foot/cycle route could be well below that of the busway within the same overall bridge profile making an intermediate foot/cycle ramp in this location more achievable. This access must be resolved in regard to flooding issues and the approach to the undercroft, but the Panel feel this is an issue worth perusing despite potential complexities.

Structure and bridge design

The Panel feel a clear concept for what the viaduct and bridge design aims to achieve is missing. The current proposal outlines constraints, requirements and engineering issues; however, we feel further exploration of potential options and design development is required. The justifications for the selection of one bridge design over the 5 or 6 presented was wholly unconvincing. At present, the proposal is too utilitarian in appearance, and does not successfully achieve the aim of creating a minimal elegant structure. We feel further exploration will be required to decide upon this strategy, relating closely to any landscape and inhabitation strategies. Bridges recently designed for the Olympic Park in Stratford could be a useful source of inspiration in this exercise.

The Panel supported the idea expressed in the material issued for the deck to read as a sinuous element that gently curves in plan and section reflecting the fluid nature of the river and railway line adjacent. This ambition is not currently being supported by the detail of bridge design. A key decision should be whether the raised platform and bridge are read as a continuation of one another, or clearly separated elements. Potential design approaches could include the creation of a continuous minimal 'blade' structure where the platform and bridge would read as a single element with continuous materials used. Structural elements should be minimised wherever possible in this approach, with a predominately steel structure likely to be appropriate to this aesthetic than concrete. Another option could be to create a clearer separation between the raised viaduct and the bridge.

The significance of the listed structure and its curtilage were not fully explored/explained. The Panel were unconvinced that setting the bridge height at 6.7m was preferable to it either being higher (so as not to be visible through the bridge portal to the south) or lower (which would make intermediate connections up/down to the riverside path easier). If part of the significance of the structure is its appearance as a complete 'piece' then a judgement or justification for a particular height, and indeed the bridge's plan position, needs to be made and with reference to agreed key views. The Panel also felt that the possibility of removing the existing 'accommodation bridge', with its function transferred to the new bridge and the narrative history being recorded/presented through interpretation material on the site, had not been explored. Engaging with the fabric of the listed structure in this way might be a means to enhance an appreciation of its significance, and therefore be an opportunity rather than being a risk to the project, as in any case the project will be interacting with the listed structure due to its proximity.

The confluence of the River Thames and the River Kennet is significant to the town, but despite listed bridge structures in this location, this moment is not currently celebrated. A design competition for the new bridge/landscape could be held, with a brief to highlight the significance of this site and explore its full potential. Themes such as the creation of a hub of boat activities at this point or connecting more to the wooded areas either side of these bridges could be incorporated. This should demonstrate how this area could be utilised in the future as a place, considering desire lines, views, landscape and potential use of the existing arches of the adjacent listed bridge.

The Panel were critical of the generic design of the column and bearing structures of the bridge/viaduct. These are critical to the look and feel of the undercroft space and are visible along the riverside walk. Alternatives should be explored that achieve the openness and permeability needed for flood reasons but that also relate to the landscape setting (and potential use, or not) of the undercroft, including their sculptural/spatial qualities.

Materials

Engineering requirements may limit materials suitable for this structure, but we encourage approaches that minimise the carbon impact of the significant amounts of concrete likely to be used. For example, bridge structures for the proposed HS2 line are exploring options to use volcanic ash. The surface material for the carriageway should also be considered. Alternatives to asphalt could help reduce the embodied energy of the scheme and improve the quality of the experience for people traveling on this route. The Panel suggests that sustainability benchmarks be explored such as those provided by the BREEAM Infrastructure scheme.

This review was commissioned by Peter Brett Associates with the knowledge of Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Since the scheme was not the subject of a planning application when it came to the Panel, this report is offered in confidence to the addressee and those listed as being sent copies. There is no objection to the report being shared within respective practices/organisations. DSE reserves the right to make the guidance known should the views contained in this report be made public in whole or in part (either accurately or inaccurately). Unless previously agreed to remain confidential, this report will be publicly available if the scheme becomes the subject of a planning application and to any public inquiry concerning the scheme. DSE also reserves the right to make guidance available to another design review panel should the scheme go before them. If you do not require this report to be kept confidential, please let us know.

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