

Park and Ride in Chester

The recent Local Plan submission to HMG's Inspector re-affirmed the Council's long term commitment to Park & Ride and the 'ambition' to establish a fifth P&R for Chester at Mannings Lane.

FoNCGB have no fundamental objections to P&R – in fact we would support such schemes as long as we could be sure that they fulfilled the objectives usually claimed for such schemes.

These are:-

- Reduce congestion
- Reduce pollution
- Increase social inclusion
- Improve accessibility
- Improve safety
- Improve road utilisation
- Improve cost efficiency
- Win public acceptance

The fact of the matter is that the current Chester scheme is NOT working satisfactorily, and to consider extending it at this time is economic madness. We acknowledge that a new contract is due to be negotiated to be effective from April 2016. It is to be hoped that it can be improved over the current one.....

Economics:-

The cost of the subsidy to the bus companies by the Council has seen year on year increases and is now very nearly £ 1.5 mn/yr¹.

Gross subsidy	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Total	£1,159,883	£1,244,151	£1,368,063	£1,401,490	£1,447,289

This level of subsidy has a direct impact on the Council tax payers in the Borough. For every for every £ 2 spent on a return bus ticket, the Council Tax payer has to chip in a subsidy of £ 2.30, a level of subsidy which has also steadily risen over the past 5 years at least.²

Subsidy/ ticket	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Total	£1.38	£1.52	£1.75	£2.18	£2.30

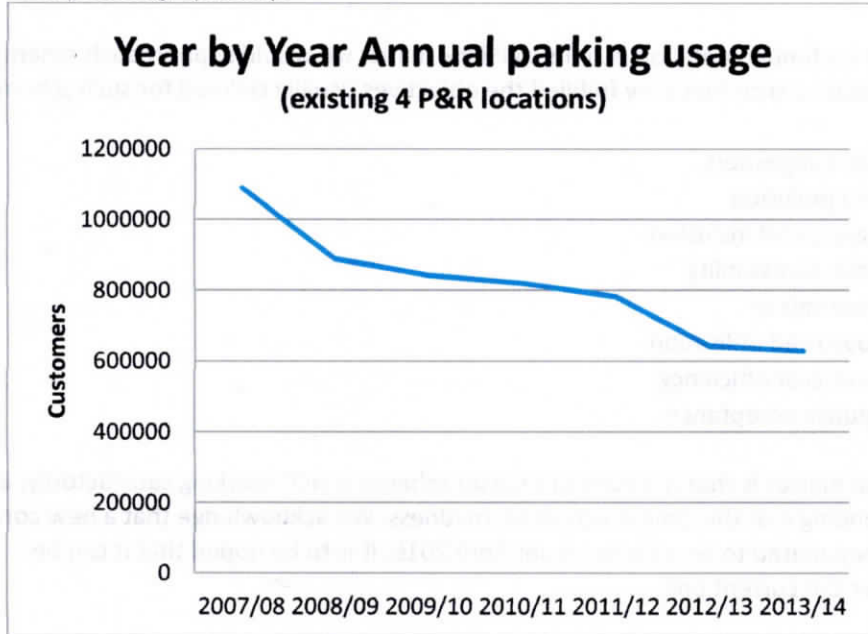
Popularity & Usage

Whilst it is frequently stated that P&R is popular, the usage figures tell a different tale:- As acknowledged in the Chester Transport Strategy³, the existing facilities are far from operating at capacity. The Council also acknowledge that their patronage has been in decline over the last five years and longer:-

- In the year
2007/8 it carried 1.1mn⁴ passengers
2008/9 990k⁵
2009/10 843k⁶
2010/11 820k⁷
2011/12 782k⁸
2012/13 642k⁹

This is significantly fewer than the 1999 figure of 685k¹¹.

To express it graphically:-



One of the undoubted reasons for this lack of enthusiasm for P&R is the “*large amount of parking space in Chester*”¹² and “*at its busiest period on Saturday afternoon, car parks were only 75% occupied and that there is consequently significant spare capacity in available parking stock around the city. This indicates that levels of supply are adequate in Chester*”¹³

Efficiency and Road Utilisation

The last survey of users seems to have been in October 2010¹⁴. Using that data, which showed a 28% occupancy in 2010 and updating it for the current level of usage, this gives us an average level of occupancy of about 21%. It has not been possible to verify this figure by means of the on-line ‘free space update’ as it has not been working in June/July 2014 for Boughton Heath (the only P&R with such a system).

Similarly, the average occupancy of the buses used can be calculated at about 8% - less than 25%¹⁵.

The above shows that there is ample capacity within the City’s existing P&R facilities for current demand and any foreseeable growth.

It cannot be denied that there is a need to make better use of what already exists and that there are ‘easy win’ ways of doing so. Currently, there are no signs to P&R on the M53 or A55 southbound. The sign on the short stretch of A56 between the M53 and Hoole Hall is too small and easy to miss because of the traffic. What is needed is digital signing on the M53 and the A55 giving live updates on the spaces available, and another such sign at Hoole Hall roundabout indicating both Upton and Boughton Heath P&Rs with their respective vacancies. Other major cities such as Oxford signpost their P&R schemes well in advance on city approach roads.

A new 5th Park & Ride?

Given the above, it is clear that the proposal for a 5th P&R whether at Mannings Lane or elsewhere can only be a financial albatross and will not meet 'sustainability' criteria on many fronts.

It is suggested in the Chester Transport Plan that an 1800 space Park and Ride facility should be built at Mannings Lane. A developer (Mannings Lane Developments Ltd – MLDL) has made an alternative submission that this should be reduced to 650 spaces with the other $\frac{2}{3}$ rds of the site being given over to 350 luxury houses¹⁶, but even they admit that "it is clear that existing (P&R) facilities are not operating at capacity and information received from the Council suggests that their patronage has been in decline over the last five years"¹⁷

MLDL (with David Wilson Homes) is proposing the removal of 17.3 hectares of valuable Grade 3A agricultural land in order to build 350 luxury houses. Of those 17.3 hectares, they propose releasing 4 hectares to the Council for a Park & Ride site for 650 cars. (Very different from the 1800 suggested in the Chester Transport Plan and the 1200 which was envisaged in the original CDTS proposal).

It is unclear from the Council's documentation as to what size of P&R they are attaching the suggested capital costs of £ 10.2 mn (including a 44% 'optimism' bias – which seems to be a contingency because of an inability to cost a car park properly)¹⁸. It is also unclear whether this includes the associated infrastructure changes deemed essential, such as bus lane construction and priority traffic light installation down Hoole Road. None of this was clarified at the recent Local Development Plan examination despite the questions being asked.

- With reference to a bus lane down Hoole Road, it is interesting to note the change of stance from when the Council rejected this proposal on the grounds that the road was too narrow and "would produce a negative net present value, and an ongoing revenue deficit which would have to be made up by the Council taxpayers"¹⁹. It should be noted that this observation was made in the context of an expected traffic of 509k passengers – almost as many currently served by all 4 existing P&R locations²⁰.
- No mention made of the costs of the undoubted associated need to widen the Millennium Greenway to cope with extra pedestrian and cycle traffic.

In essence, the 'gift' of a Park & Ride facility to CWaCC by MLDL would be a poisoned chalice with long term on-going financial consequences for the Council Tax payer. It is driven by the developer need to provide a reason for delisting Greenbelt land in order to allow house building rather than any structured approach to improving access to the City.

The alleged need for a fifth P&R was re-iterated in the One City Plan, but there is no evidence of calculations behind it – rather, it seems to have been based on an aerial view of the city's map and a 'feeling' that the circle should be completed.

Should a P&R be constructed, then we know that it will compound the effects which arise in all piecemeal P&R developments:-

All previous studies show that UNLESS simultaneous action is taken to restrict (either physically or by cost) city centre parking, then all that will happen is an overall increase in traffic, as any cars removed from the road by the P&R are soon replaced by new traffic.²¹

Given that, it is not going to make the journey to town any easier – certainly not before something is done about the bottleneck at Hoole Bridge

This view prominently featured in a previous Chester enquiry:- *“Consequently it is expecting too much of the reader to know or understand that the Council’s intention is in fact to reduce the capacity of roads relieved by the project so that it is not taken up immediately by ‘substitute’ car trips. Such measuresand other traffic and parking management proposals, need to be spelt out in principle in direct relationship with the new scheme. A commitment needs to be given in the plan to their implementation at the same time as, the P&R. Without such explicit additions the proposal could not be endorsed”.*²²

It should be noted that the Council has **NOT** proposed any such restrictions. This administration is on the record as saying that the new Northgate proposal can only succeed with adequate parking. They have also announced their intention to continue the ‘Free after 3’ scheme. There are some hints in the recommendations of charging for on street parking in the AECOM report²³ but no indication that the Council is thinking yet of adopting them.

General issues with P&R

There are many other unresolved issues with this ill thought through proposal:-

- Proposed intermediate stops at the Hospital, University and elsewhere. Case law suggests that these cannot be assured because of the issue of subsidised Council services competing against commercial services.
- Abstraction from existing public transport (and other P&Rs) is typically 35%²⁴ and thus affects the viability of existing services
- Affect on rural & local commercial services – particularly if rural services are forced to interchange at a P&R
- Less viable rural public services will disproportionately impact on the disadvantaged as they have less access to private cars
- They create additional and alternative journeys to P&R, rather than Public Transport all the way
- Shops/ retail outlets proposed – not an appropriate reason for release of Green Belt and might become a ‘destination’ in its own right – damaging existing businesses in local centres such as Hoole and also the city centre
- Effect on local residents of bus priority signalling – inability to get out of side roads.
- Mention is made of extended hours in order to capture the evening traffic (for the theatre etc) but without any analysis of who might use it when they are able to park in the Centre or of how much it might cost.
- Damage to Hoole B&Bs. Anecdotally, they rely significantly on passing car traffic.
- Will not attract those who can get concessionary fares on normal buses

This is an answer in search of a problem to solve rather than the other way round

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- ¹ CWaCC response to FOI request at https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/cost_of_park_and_ride_subsidy#incoming-530972
- ² Derived from division of subsidy by passenger numbers in answer to FOI request https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/cost_of_park_and_ride_subsidy#incoming-530972
- ³ Chester Transport Strategy and Vision – Baseline Report at <http://tinyurl.com/CTS-Baseline-report> page 33
- ⁴ Figures for 2007/8 & 2008/9 taken from Figure 5.11 in Chester Transport Strategy and Vision – Baseline Report.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Figures for 2009/10 and later taken from CWaCC response to FOI request at https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/cost_of_park_and_ride_subsidy#incoming-530972
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Based on Council claim in 1999 that the '4 existing P&R's saved 1mn car journeys pa.@1.46ppc - i.e. equiv to 590k people (figures from Chester Guided Busway Order Public Enquiry Document CCC96, pp6)
- ¹² Chester Transport Strategy and Vision – Baseline Report at <http://tinyurl.com/CTS-Baseline-report> page 33
- ¹³ Chester Transport Strategy and Vision – Baseline Report at <http://tinyurl.com/CTS-Baseline-report> page 33
- ¹⁴ CWaCC response to FOI request at https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/cost_of_park_and_ride_subsidy#incoming-530972
- ¹⁵ From published timetables, there are between 251 and 285 return trips/ day from all 4 parks (actual number depends on whether 10 or 15 minute interval used for those times not specified). Say 270. Assume only a 6 day week as frequency reduced at weekends. 84,240 trips pa. average paying passengers/ bus = 7.5. Allowing previous ratio of 1.1 to allow for accompanied children travelling free (source as footnote 3), then passengers/ bus is 8%.
- ¹⁶ Turley Associates letter to the Local Transport Strategy 13 Oct 2013
- ¹⁷ Turley Associates letter to the Local Transport Strategy 13 Oct 2013
- ¹⁸ Chester Transport Strategy & Vision Recommendations at <https://tinyurl.com/TransportVisionRecs>
- ¹⁹ Discussion paper considered by Environment Advisory Committee at its meeting on 11 September 2002 – dated 24 October 2002, p37 pp3.4.
- ²⁰ Discussion paper considered by Environment Advisory Committee at its meeting on 11 September 2002 – dated 24 October 2002, p41 pp10.
- ²¹ e.g. Parkhurst, G, "Park and Ride: could it lead to an increase in car traffic?", Transport Policy, Vol 2 No 1, pp15-23, 1995
- ²² Cheshire 2011 Replacement Structure Plan Panel Report. Examination in Public of October 1997. Issue 5 Major Transport Schemes
- ²³ <http://tinyurl.com/CTS-Baseline-report> page 33
- ²⁴ Parkhurst, G, "Park and Ride: could it lead to an increase in car traffic?", Transport Policy, Vol 2 No 1, pp15-23, 1995