a Sustainable Integrated Transport Strategy for Milton Keynes

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Introduction

A transport strategy can never be an end in itself, it is but a means to an end. The end that we seek is for our community to be more sustainable than it currently is.

The Government’s recently published White Paper on the Future of Transport - ‘A New Deal For Transport: Better for Everyone’ - has an excellent two-part message. We can not go on as we are and we must secure sustainable mobility. Explicitly, the White Paper looks to public transport to assist. Our Sustainable Integrated Transport Strategy (SITS) concurs exactly with the intent of the White Paper.

By common assent, Milton Keynes is a wonderful place in which to live. Again, by common assent, there is a problem. We possess a city ‘designed for the car,’ but less well designed for people in terms of accessibility! It is the case that the thirty year old Master Plan goal of ‘ease of movement’ still remains to be achieved.

The Council’s new SITS is all about at last beginning to deliver on this promise. This strategy initiates the shift away from car dependency to public transport dependency. This is morally required of us if we are to support the concepts of sustainability and social equity, and politically necessary too, if we are to adhere to Government policy.

Freedom of movement ranks equally with freedom of thought. Shifting mode will ‘open up’ Milton Keynes to all its citizens, young as well as old, poor as well as rich. The transport strategy that we currently possess in effect significantly ‘closes down’ Milton Keynes to the many. This is wrong.

This Authority, duty bound to pursue the interest of all, will now begin to deliver on the long promised ‘ease of movement’ goal. More than content to pursue this, we will thus promote a much fairer and inclusive society that the Government now seeks.

All this will require cool heads, political courage, political leadership and most important, public support. We have consulted widely. You the public have told us what you want, what you need. The strategy reflects this perspective. In Milton Keynes, not only do we need a new deal for transport - we need a new deal for you. Your Council is determined to seek the best for all its citizens and at the same time contribute to the greater sustainability project at national and global levels. Now read on!

Mike O’Sullivan, Dip. Arch, Dip.TP, MRTPI
Chair of Transport Committee, November 1998
1

Context

GLOBAL
1.1 Since the Rio Earth summit of 1992, sustainability has become an increasingly important world wide objective. Sustainability is defined as, “Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

1.2 Vehicles currently account for about 21% of global emissions of noxious gases. The potential for future world-wide traffic growth is huge - so cutting down on vehicle use will be a critical factor in reducing pollution, environmental damage and the use of non renewable finite resources.

NATIONAL
1.3 In the UK, several key reports and guidance notes have highlighted the problems we face and have identified the actions we need to take. They include the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution’s 18th Report, ‘Transport and the Environment’, 1994, and the Government’s guidance note ‘Planning Policy Guidance: Transport’, PPG13, 1994.

1.4 Recent legislation includes the Road Traffic Reduction Act, 1997, which places a statutory requirement on Highway Authorities to set target(s) to reduce traffic on local roads in their areas. Statutory reports should be submitted in July 2000. It is expected, however, that non-statutory ‘interim’ road traffic reduction reports will be submitted in July 1999.

1.5 The Government also released guidance on a ‘National Air Quality Strategy’(NAQS), 1997, suggesting measures to improve air quality adversely affected by transport. The objectives of the NAQS and the Sustainable Integrated Transport Strategy (SITS) will be
consistent. Both aim to deal with air pollution at the local and regional level and, by doing so, simultaneously help to reduce global emissions of pollutants.

1.6 These developments, together with growing public concern, point to the need for Government action. The recent White Paper contains proposals to improve the economy, health and the environment, pollution and social exclusion, and deliver an integrated transport policy by providing choice for transport users, integration of transport services, accountability to users and the Nation, and a revised institutional framework. The Government’s objective of a much fairer and inclusive society fits comfortably with our vision of ‘opening up’ Milton Keynes.

LOCAL

1.7 More than any other city in the UK, Milton Keynes was designed around the car - but even our wide and well designed roads, so often envied by other towns and cities, are beginning to show signs of congestion. Traffic forecasts suggest that in 20 years time, traffic in the UK will be between 22% and 46% higher than it is now, unless we change our travel habits. For Milton Keynes, traffic forecasts are between 47% and 73% higher than now.

1.8 We now face the unenviable prospect of our City being choked by the very arteries that were designed to give the City life. The problems are not just confined to the City. Our rural communities are being disrupted by commuting traffic, with no alternatives available. A victim of its own success, Milton Keynes runs the risk of being strangled by its own car dependency!

1.9 Congestion gives rise to pollution, contributes to global warming and climate change. Through excessive car dependency, Milton Keynes is making its contribution to a national and global problem.

1.10 Congestion is bad for the economy. The local economy will be adversely affected if accessibility levels diminish. The Council has had two consultants’ reports warning of city centre traffic ‘log-jam’ in the not too distant future. We will not allow this to happen.

1.11 Car dependency is bad for social and economic equity. The 1970 ‘Plan for Milton Keynes’ promised ‘ease of movement’: this does not exist. The car has failed to deliver on this promise.

1.12 However, it is not all bad news. There is a general lack of traffic congestion overall that comes about from basically low density levels of development. Many facilities, such as schools, serve local pupils within adjacent Grid Squares thus reducing the need for car travel. We have the space to adapt to new needs and new technologies. We have the Redways, an extensive pedestrian and cycle network. In terms of regional linkages, Milton Keynes is potentially at the ‘railway cross roads’ of England. North/south, it is located on the West Coast main line with direct links possible to mainland Europe via the Channel Tunnel. It is also located on the proposed East West Rail link.

1.13 We have also taken notice of the suggestions in the document ‘Milton Keynes First Local Agenda 21.’ which has been produced in partnership with local people as a basis for discussion of what sustainable actions need to be taken.
CITY MASTER PLAN

1.14 The original ‘Plan for Milton Keynes’ was prepared in 1970. It set out six goals to act as guiding principles for developing the City:

- Opportunity and freedom of choice.
- Easy movement and access.
- Balance and variety.
- The creation of an attractive City.
- Public awareness and participation.
- Efficient and imaginative use of resources.

In 1990, Milton Keynes Borough Council developed these principles into a ‘Strategy for Milton Keynes’, adding two new goals, ‘health and security’ and ‘civic pride’ to the original six.

PARTNERSHIP

1.15 Soon after becoming an Unitary Authority in 1997, we asked people how we should provide Council services. We incorporated the views expressed during this ‘20:20 Vision’ consultation into the five strategic aims that now guide our operations. These are as follows:

- Working in partnership;
- Being open, accessible and consultative;
- Tackling disadvantage and promoting equality;
- Promoting a healthy and sustainable environment; and,
- Ensuring service excellence, efficiency and effectiveness.

1.16 We will not be able to ‘open up’ Milton Keynes or attain these aims for all its citizens if we continue encouraging car-dependency. Building our City to serve car users will penalise the old, young and less well off, who can not or do not have cars. People will find they have less freedom of choice, reduced access to their City and that movement is more difficult. We would not be promoting a healthy and sustainable environment, nor tackling disadvantage and promoting equality.

1.17 Not to do this would conflict with long standing Milton Keynes principles and aims, with our vision in this Strategy and with the Government’s objectives, a strong economy, a sustainable environment and a much fairer and inclusive society.

CENTRAL MILTON KEYNES

1.18 A review of CMK was published in 1995 by a Steering Group representing the major public, private and voluntary organisations with an interest in Central Milton Keynes (CMK). There was broad consensus on the key issues, and the way forward. It recognised that a new integrated land use and transport strategy was required, based on the principle of ‘managing demand.’

1.19 SITS will be that strategy. It will promote CMK in maintaining its economic advantage while participating in the overall Milton Keynes drive for greater sustainability.
CMK will need to gradually evolve towards accessibility based on public transport, not on the car. This is the direction in which city centres world-wide are now beginning to move.

THE MILTON KEYNES LOCAL PLAN
1.20 Our existing Local Plan covers the period 1991 to 2001. We are now reviewing and updating it to cover development up to 2011. One of the key themes of the Local Plan Review will be achieving more ‘sustainable development’, including reducing our need to use the car and making public transport more viable. The new Local Plan will be consistent with SITS and will help us to achieve our Strategy when making planning decisions.

THE LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN
1.21 One consequence of the recent White Paper is that we will have to develop a five year Local Transport Plan covering all forms of transport. It will have to include local targets for improving air quality, road safety, public transport and road traffic reduction. We will have to consult with citizens, businesses and transport operators. It will include bids for Government capital funding for transport for five years based on an overall transport strategy and replace the one year bid through the Transport Policies and Programme. SITS, therefore, arrives at an opportune time and it will be the context in which our future bids are made.
2

Why a New Strategy?

2.1 Milton Keynes needs a new transport strategy because the present inherited one is not working and shows no promise of ever doing so.

2.2 In a low density suburban-type city, the car is the only ‘obvious’ way to get around. In consequence, Milton Keynes’ present transport strategy can roughly be summed up as ‘cars for all’. The resultant car-dependency makes it impossible to offer a realistic public transport service for those who are too young, too old or too poor to have their own vehicle. Many cars in households are only available to the main driver who has ‘first call’.

2.3 The non-possession or availability of cars disadvantages, socially and economically, a significant proportion of Milton Keynes citizens. This gives rise to what can be described as an ‘accessibility deficit’. It applies equally to those living in an urban or a rural setting. The most constant complaints about Milton Keynes, survey after survey, is how unsatisfactory the public transport system is and how difficult it is to ‘get about’.

2.4 This is not the fault of the various bus companies that have operated within the area over the past decades. Bus deregulation of the local bus market has not reversed the spiral of decline in local bus use. Essentially, the fault is due to the low density of development mentioned above and its consequence, car-dependency.
2.5 It is not impossible to ‘get about’ Milton Keynes without a car but it is more difficult than it ought to be and in no way reflects the ‘ease of movement’ goal set out in the original Master Plan. That citizens of Milton Keynes should find it difficult to travel about their city, reflects poorly on the current transport strategy. This consequent lack of social equity is unacceptable to this Council. This defect is not the mark of a civilised city.

2.6 As predicted, car-dependency will lead to ‘log-jam’ in the city. This will be bad for the economic success story that is Milton Keynes. The Council sees it as a priority to ensure that the city has no barriers put in its way that might constrain its continued dynamism.

2.7 On environmental grounds, further car-dependency can not continue. Accumulated scientific data indicates that there is indeed a global climate warming phenomenon at work that is outside the range of historical experience. Links between global warming and the emission of noxious gasses - principally, carbon dioxide (CO₂) - are now proven beyond all reasonable doubt.

2.8 Finally, there is the political dimension. Since the Rio Earth Summit of 1992, the Government has been pursuing an agenda of greater sustainability. The present Government through its recent White Paper on Transport, is aiming to extend the reach of sustainability even further. Local authorities are expected to support the new sustainability agenda. Not to do so would put at risk their claims for Government funding.

2.9 On social, economic, environmental and political grounds, Milton Keynes Council will, therefore, be most supportive of the Government’s new sustainability agenda.

2.10 To redress the imbalances generated by excessive car-dependency, we need to put in place a new, more sustainable transport strategy. This strategy will strike a better balance between the free use of the car and the need to secure higher levels of accessibility for all.
Our Vision

3.1 The following statement sets out our aspirations for the people of Milton Keynes. It is a vision that takes into account future economic activity, the environment, social opportunities and the quality of life. This vision will guide us in developing our Sustainable Integrated Transport Strategy:

3.2 “We aim to open up Milton Keynes by making it a place where everyone can afford to move around conveniently, where economic, social and cultural life can flourish, whilst damage to our environment is minimised.”

3.3 Due to its present level of car-dependency, Milton Keynes is substantially ‘closed-down’ to many of its citizens. In consequence, we suffer from an ‘accessibility deficit’. The resulting social and economic exclusion is the opposite to what was originally intended or promised. ‘Ease of Movement’ was one of six goals set out in the original master plan for the city. It remains to be achieved. A central purpose of the new strategy will be to deliver this goal.
4

Our Strategy

4.1  Our new strategy needs to satisfy the social, economic, environmental and political critique set out in Section 3. We need a people-friendly way of helping Milton Keynes’ citizens to get about their city.

4.2  

Our strategy is to bring about a significant shift from the car to other ways of travelling, such as walking, cycling and public transport.

4.3  By doing this, by ‘opening up’ Milton Keynes, we will improve the quality of life for people who live, work and visit the area. Successfully implementing this strategy will lead to:

- greater social equity;
- a more satisfactory economic future for Milton Keynes;
- more efficient transport for both people and freight;
- less use of scarce finite resources;
- less pollution caused by transport;
- better air quality; and,
- less noise.
4.4 We will be guided by our vision and the following objectives:

- all people should be able to move around conveniently and safely, regardless of their circumstances, with those able to pay doing so;
- that, in developing our planning policies with our partners, we will actively seek to reduce the number, length and need to make journeys;
- to encourage walking, cycling, and quality public transport, whilst reducing journeys by car and promoting a healthier lifestyle; and,
- to ensure that Milton Keynes’ economic prosperity is enhanced by our new transport policies by helping people to travel when and where they want, but in more environmentally friendly ways.

4.5 The process of securing greater sustainability for Milton Keynes starts at the city centre, where instead of the current reliance on the car as the means of getting people to work, progressively, public transport, linked to ‘Park & Ride’ where appropriate, will be deployed to undertake this task.

4.6 Achieving an initial modal shift at the city centre will allow the process of sustainability to ‘ripple-out’, impact favourably on the rest of the city, including the rural hinterland, and make Milton Keynes a more socially inclusive and, therefore, fairer and more civilised, place.

4.7 A key policy in implementing our strategy will be to work within our region, with the Government and with the European Union to pursue similar transport objectives. To achieve our local objectives in Milton Keynes, we will need changes in the wider framework that the proposals in the White Paper should enact, but we will not shirk our responsibilities to the people of Milton Keynes.

4.8 We know it will not be easy. For our strategy to succeed, we will have to work with the people of Milton Keynes and our partners to make fundamental changes to the way most of us travel. Changing our current transport behaviour may be difficult. Some people will find it painful in the short term but in the long run, we will all benefit.
5

The Strategy Illustrated

5.1 The following are some examples of how we anticipate the strategy will impact to the benefit of the community.

5.2 To change public attitudes to movement, we will:

- work to permanently change social attitudes and driver behaviour, so as to reduce travel demand, particularly by car and particularly in the peak periods;
- promote greater public awareness of sustainable transport issues, especially amongst the staff of Milton Keynes Council and other major employers;
- promote the introduction of Green Commuter Plans;
- encourage drivers to walk, cycle or use public transport for as many journeys as possible as an alternative to the car; and,
- work with all public and private bodies at regional, national and European levels to effect change.
5.3 Because we believe in equality of access for all, we will:

- relax parking restrictions for car users with a disability and provide adequate parking places for them;
- ensure that ease of access for the mobility impaired i.e. those with a disability, the elderly, people accompanying young people or with heavy shopping, is incorporated into the design of the transport network; and,
- ensure that access to public transport including taxis meets the needs of the mobility impaired.

5.4 We will support our vision through the Local Plan and the planning process by:

- integrating land use and transport planning;
- being rigorous in assessing planning applications against the Strategy;
- locating development so as to avoid the need for some car and freight journeys, reduce the length of others and encourage the use of more energy efficient means of transport; and,
- responding to economic and social needs by encouraging appropriate sustainable development.

5.5 We will encourage people to walk by:

- developing a safe ‘Strategic Pedestrian Network’, ensuring that pedestrians are given priority with more space allocated to them and that suitable routes are available for all;
- ensuring that pedestrian safety and directness of routing are improved; and,
- promoting walking as a safe, healthy and sustainable way of travelling.

5.6 We will encourage people to cycle by:

- developing a safe ‘Strategic Cycling Network’ with more space allocated to cycling;
- ensuring that cycles can be used safely and easily throughout the Council area; and,
- promoting cycling as a safe, healthy and sustainable way of travelling.

5.7 To achieve a shift to public transport, we will:

- work to secure a more efficient and attractive public transport system including the taxi service and increase investment in public transport;
- improve access, interchange and integration between public transport and all other methods of travelling;
- develop quality partnerships with operators to provide high quality, responsive services that meet demand, maintain the local economy and are widely publicised;
• support public investment within an accountable system of regulation; and,
• assess the viability of alternative public transport systems such as tracked bus, trams, light railways, etc.

5.8 To ensure vehicle and road users’ safety, we will:

• maintain a safe ‘Strategic Highway Network’; and,
• construct highway improvement schemes only if there are environmental and safety benefits.

5.9 To manage the demand for car parking and thereby contributing to bringing about a significant shift to more sustainable forms of travel, we will:

• generally restrain car parking, in line with our strategy objectives, without undermining the economic life of our towns and CMK;
• provide adequate short stay car parking to support shops, commercial and leisure activities, thereby promoting the vitality of our towns and CMK;
• subject to the necessary legislation being in place, develop a pilot scheme to levy a new car parking charge on workplace parking; and,
• introduce Park & Ride.

5.10 We aim to shift freight movement from road to rail and other modes but recognise the importance of freight distribution to the prosperity of Milton Keynes. We will:

• seek to reduce the impact of HGV’s on the environment by promoting quality partnerships for freight;
• encourage the maximum use of rail for carrying freight;
• encourage the maximum use of the Grand Union Canal for carrying freight whilst recognising its limited potential; and,
• recognise the importance of HGV’s to the local economy and the practical limitations of alternatives.

5.11 To improve safety for all pedestrian, cycling and highway users, we will:

• introduce reduced speed limits, where they can be adequately enforced, in order to increase road safety as well as improving fuel economy;
• provide better education, training and publicity for all road users, to increase their awareness of road safety issues;
• investigate the causes of traffic injury accidents and introduce measures to reduce their frequency and severity;
• introduce measures to help vulnerable road users; and,
• carry out safety audits on all new improvement schemes to ensure that they meet the needs of all road users.
6 Targets

GENERAL

6.1 We will only know whether we are meeting our SITS objectives by monitoring changes in transport use over time and comparing the results with our targets. Setting targets is a complex task but we are guided by the following principles that they should be measurable, relevant, time limited and realistic.

6.2 We will review our initial targets in future editions of the SITS as we may need to revise them, or set new targets, from time to time. Initially, we have set targets for the journey to work and for road safety. Additionally, we will, monitor the targets that the Government intends to set in the future and endorse the White Paper view that ‘National targets can usefully act as benchmarks and encourage improvement but they do not recognise local variations or draw on local knowledge of what is achievable.’

6.3 Our long-term targets cover the period to 2011, the life of the Structure Plan and our new Local Plan, but we have also adopted ‘interim’ targets for 2001 and for 2006. It is unlikely, especially in the short term, that we will be able to move towards all our targets at the same rate.

JOURNEY TO WORK

6.4 The 1991 Census showed that almost 80% of journeys to work within Milton Keynes were by car - much higher than the regional average of 60%.
6.5 Traffic congestion is worst during the peak periods and is mainly caused by commuter traffic. Since most employment is, and will continue to be, within the City, particularly the City centre, congestion and pollution problems will continue to be concentrated on this area.

6.6 Our journey to work targets for the SITS are as follows:

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6.7 The figures with an asterisk, such as 55%*, are based on targets proposed in the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution’s Eighteenth Report. The 1997 column with an # assumes the same modal split as observed in 1991.

6.8 Only 1% of people travel to work by motorcycle; we do not expect this figure to alter by 2011. We do, however, intend to improve parking facilities for motorcyclists.

6.9 Past trends have been for the proportion of journeys to work made by car to increase and for the proportion made on foot, by cycle, and by public transport to fall. Our Strategy must ultimately reverse this trend, if it is to be successful.

6.10 We believe our targets are realistic. If we achieve them, the number of journeys to work by car in 2011 will be less than now. This would be a considerable achievement when set against the long term trends and current commuting behaviour in Milton Keynes. We will review our journey to work targets, from time to time. They are not maxima and we will try to improve on them.

ROAD SAFETY

6.11 Road safety is one area where all Highway Authorities already have a target. The Government requires us to reduce annual road accident casualty rates in Milton Keynes to:


6.12 Our own road safety targets match the national targets and we want to do better. We will adopt the existing national Accident 2000 target for the immediate future but we will introduce a new target(s), based on the updated national target(s) for 2011, in a future review of this Strategy.
6.13 We expect the Government to set new targets which split road accident casualties into fatal, serious and slight categories. Until these new national targets are available, we will include the following additional target in our Strategy:

• a 70% reduction in fatal and severe casualties from the 1981-85 average level by 2011.

LOCALISED TARGETS

6.14 Our targets are for the whole of the Council area but we recognise that peoples’ transport behaviour and their travel opportunities vary, according to where they live. Different parts of Milton Keynes have very different characteristics - e.g., the City, the older settlements and the rural areas. We will, therefore, consider whether we could set more localised targets and timescales.

6.15 The measures we have proposed in our Strategy will apply throughout Milton Keynes - but they could be applied at a different rate, or with a different emphasis, to reflect local conditions. Our targets and the Strategy itself will be consistent, but we will adapt them to local circumstances.

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

6.16 The targets we have set in our Strategy will not, on their own, ensure that we meet our objectives. We need to set them within a framework of wider, national targets as soon as they are introduced. We will introduce additional targets into future editions of the Strategy, so we can monitor progress towards meeting our objectives in more areas.

6.17 We have particularly noted the recommendations in the RCEP’s 18th Report, 1994, which has targets for cutting carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions in 2020 to 80% of 1990 levels and on traffic-generated air pollution. We, therefore, intend to monitor traffic levels, nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) emissions, air pollution, and traffic noise. These indicators will reveal improving or deteriorating trends.

6.18 The RCEP’s 20th Report ‘Transport and the Environment - Developments since 1994’, 1997, calls for tighter emission limits and controls on fuel consumption. We will investigate whether it would be feasible to include such additional targets in a future edition of the Strategy.

6.19 Other targets for changing movement patterns within Milton Keynes could include:

• reducing the number of children travelling to school by car;
• reducing the number travelling alone in cars; and,
• reducing car-use for leisure and other journey purposes.

6.20 Unfortunately, we have little current information on the existing situation in Milton Keynes, so it is difficult to set targets for improvements in these areas. We have, however, co-funded with the Commission for the New Towns, a major survey of household travel patterns. The results will give us some of the information we need.