Motor Vehicle Strategy Document

The following notes refer primarily to the Motor Vehicle Strategy Document, as published at:
https://ask.warwickshire.gov.uk/insights-service/local-transport-plan/supporting_documents/04%20Motor%20Vehicle%20Strategy%201.pdf

General comments

Positives

- The acknowledgement that improving sustainable travel options will benefit driving by reducing congestion.

- The statement on page four (*Network Management*) about moving away from car dependency and the car as the automatic first choice for transport, the over-reliance on cars and trucks which has resulted in numerous negative consequences, and acknowledging that these aspects can be improved by serving fewer vehicles, is extremely positive to see.

Could be improved

- Similar to the comments made in the Core Document, it is good to see a repeat of the acknowledgement of, and chart showing, the unsustainable growth in motor transport and its negative impacts, as shown on page five (*Road travel in Warwickshire*). It could be beneficial to also highlight the increase in light commercial vehicle traffic which, while significantly lower than car vehicle traffic, has still grown notably in the last decade.

  As per earlier comments, it would also be good to see data on the vehicle kilometres for local journeys (commercial and otherwise), where these have a significant traffic impact and are perhaps most easily replaced by other transport options such as walking, wheeling, and cycling.

Negatives

- The cover image (repeated on page three) shows an urban environment, what appears to be a fairly busy road, outside of a school building. Yet, the road space is utterly dominated by motor transport. It shows no clearly defined footpath and no cycle infrastructure. There is no pedestrian crossing to access the school.

  This image must be altered to remove the dominance of motor traffic, incorporating the other modes of transport that are especially important in this environment. While this strategy document obviously focuses on motor vehicles, including clear walking and cycling infrastructure in graphics such as this provides a subtle reinforcement that road access must be equitable for all users, not dominated by motor transport.

- The overview talks about the road network providing *"vital connections to the county's […] cycle networks"*. This significantly overstates the existence of proper cycle networks in the county which are few and are of poor quality.

- Including a description of Warwickshire's road network in the Motor Vehicle Strategy, and with the wording that is used, is highly car-centric. This section should be removed, perhaps placed into either the Managing Space Strategy or the Core Document, and re-written to provide balance with non-car uses.

  For example, it talks about roads *"providing a vital connection for those less able to use forms of transport other than cars"*. This seems to ignore two facts:

  o **a significant proportion of the population cannot use cars**, be it due to age, disability, finance etc., and rely on other means of transport to get about. As a result, there is an air of ableism about the statement.

  o Walking, wheeling, cycling, and public transport all make use of the road network which belongs to everyone and must not be considered the domain of drivers. Everybody has the common law right to walk, wheel, and cycle on the road network and this must be recognised and facilitated.

- Still on page three, it talks about *"the car is currently [the] most convenient form of transport"* for many people. Whilst that is undoubtedly true, it must be acknowledged that this is down to historic domination of motor transport in planning alongside failures to properly accommodate for other modes of transport. Over the decades, driving has been made more convenient than walking, wheeling, cycling, and public transport – and cheaper than public transport. Just because that convenience exists today, that does not make it right, and it does not mean that the new LTP should continue to accommodate driving on that basis. **Driving must not be so convenient moving forward**.

- Missing from the Local Transport Plan is a reference private vehicle storage in the public realm. On average vehicles are parked for ninety-two percent of the time. The notes on the Managing Space Strategy make more detailed reference to this, but the negative impact of too many vehicles all requiring parking space must be acknowledged here too.

Focus on: Motor Vehicles Policies

- The numbered Motor Vehicles policies suggest these may be in a particular order of preference or priority e.g., that MV1 is more important than MV4. It should be clarified whether this is or is not the case.

- The policies section (*page six*) starts by listing the objectives for road interventions that, *"support economic growth, reduce environmental impact, connect people with services and promote use of other travel options"*. Whilst all of these are important, the ordering here is wrong.

  Environmental matters must come first, above all other considerations. This must be followed by promoting other travel options, then connecting people with services, with economic growth last.

It is essential to always put environmental concerns at the top of any such list, to ensure that it is given proper and due consideration above all other matters – there is no point in supporting economic growth if we harm or destroy our environment in the process. Promoting other travel options supports the travel hierarchy – with active travel considered first, followed by public transport, and lastly motor vehicles. Connecting people with services i.e., making it easy for people to move around feeds into supporting economic growth by allowing people to travel to jobs, to provide services, and move goods.

- The opening statement moves on to say *"we will seek to improve the attractiveness of key routes, moving traffic away from town and village centres…"*. Similar to earlier comments, the use of the word "seek" waters down this objectiveness to near meaningless. It must be removed.

  Also, this statement only speaks about "moving traffic away". It must also focus on general traffic reduction to bring down the number of vehicle miles. While moving traffic outside of town/village centres provides local air quality benefits, pollutants don't just disappear when traffic is out of sight.

- **MV1 –** This policy says very little. It could include reference to the Safe Systems approach adopted by the Warwickshire Road Safety Partnership; it could include a commitment to lowering speed limits in urban areas to improve road safety around non-driving road users. It doesn't define what "fit for purpose" means, where there is an opportunity to commit to building a road network that is equitable for all road users. Non-car transport modes are still described in a manner that puts them in second place to motor traffic, contrary to the transport hierarchy.

  For the final sentence, this could be re-worded, for example, as follows: *"We will work closely with planning departments and developers to identify pressures and provide evidence-led solutions. Sustainable travel options including active travel and public transport will be prioritised, along with car share and car clubs to reduce car dependency, whilst still including options for those who need to drive their own vehicles"*.

- **MV3 –** Again, the "alternative transport options" appear to take second place to motor vehicles at the start of this statement, contrary to the transport hierarchy. The use of the word "seek" again reduces the strength of this policy.

  It should be reframed and rewritten to ensure active travel and public transport are prioritised ahead of driving. For example, *"WCC will maximise developer contributions, where appropriate, to fund, firstly, alternative transport options to car use; and secondly, sustainable improvements to the network itself, in order to deal with the impact of developments"*.

  Also, the use of the phrase, "our aim will be" is non-committal and should be strengthen by re-wording to, *"growth must complement and improve our existing environment…"*

- **MV4 –** It is good to see acknowledged the detrimental impact that the overuse of cars has on towns and villages. Again though, the commitment is softened by the phrase, "we will seek…". Remove the word "seek" to make this a true commitment.

  While the policy states that, *"new infrastructure will consider the needs of all road users"*, this does not provide the strength of commitment to actually provide for the needs of all road users ("consider" is not the same as actually providing it). It also doesn't properly reflect the transport hierarchy given the statement places equal weight on all road users.

  This should be written along the lines of, *"New infrastructure will prioritise the needs of active travel and public transport, whilst also continuing to cater for motor vehicles. This will provide safe, attractive, direct, and convenient alternatives to car use while ensuring continued connectivity between places for those who need to drive. We will learn and adopt best practices from other regions and countries, with benefits to the environment and people's wellbeing as a result"*.

- **MV4 –** this policy position also states the Warwickshire will consider capacity increases for motor vehicles in certain circumstances. **This must be removed**; it is unacceptable and contradictory to other parts of the Local Transport Plan. Given the state of current motor vehicle use, the negative local impacts of the same, and the impact on the climate crisis (to which the County Council declared an emergency in 2019), it is **entirely inappropriate** to talk about providing capacity increases for motor vehicles.

  The plan has already acknowledged on more than one occasion that the increase in private vehicle usage and vehicle miles is unsustainable. It has also noted that a reason for that growth is the continued provision of increased capacity for driving – you get what you build for. Induced demand is a known and established principle – it is not possible to solve traffic volume issues (congestion) in the long term by providing additional capacity.