

<b>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>	9 <sup>th</sup> December 2020
<b>Agenda item name:</b>	A52 Clifton Bridge
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### **Purpose**

To outline the response taken by the City Council following the partial closure of Clifton Bridge in February 2020, including the ongoing liaison with Highways England to resolve the matter.

### **Background**

The A52 Clifton Bridge is the busiest road in Nottingham, normally carrying over 80,000 vehicles a day in both directions. The A52, along with the A453 is a Trunk road and falls under the responsibility of Highways England.

Clifton Bridge is one of only three major road crossings of the River Trent within the city boundary, the others being Trent Bridge and Lady Bay Bridge, which under a cross boundary agreement are the joint responsibility of the City and County Council's.

On 6<sup>th</sup> February 2020, without any notice being given Highways England closed all four southbound (or eastbound) lanes of Clifton Bridge for safety reasons after a routine inspection found badly corroded steelwork in the structure. The impact of this on the city's highway and transport network was immediate, resulting in major gridlock and congestion, as at its peak, up to 15,000 extra vehicles a day diverted through the city using Trent Bridge and Lady Bay Bridge as alternative routes south and east.

On 12<sup>th</sup> February 2020 Highways England re-opened one lane southbound, which eased congestion slightly but major congestion and delays within the city remained, in particular to bus and tram operations where journey times were severely affected due to critical junctions and routes being blocked.

On 15<sup>th</sup> March 2020 a second southbound lane was temporarily re-opened but unfortunately this had to be quickly removed due to renewed structural concerns and the layout reverted back to a single southbound lane.

From 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the Government began introducing restrictions in response to Covid-19 leading to the first national lockdown, which actively discouraged the use of public transport and all forms of non-essential travel. This led to a significant reduction in traffic levels across the city and an easing of the congestion created by Clifton Bridge, at least in the short term.

With the relaxing of the lockdown restrictions, traffic levels started to pick up again over the summer and increased further in September after the schools and universities re-opened. By

the end of September flows had returned to near normal levels causing a further build-up of congestion around the city due to the ongoing lane closures at Clifton Bridge.

In mid-October, following the introduction of local restrictions to tackle Covid-19, culminating in a second national lockdown on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2020, traffic levels again reduced but not as sharply as in the first lockdown. It did however result in congestion around the city easing although once the lockdown restrictions are lifted traffic flows are expected to increase once again.

On 8<sup>th</sup> November 2020 a second southbound lane on Clifton Bridge was finally opened by Highways England but as of yet there are no confirmed dates for when the remaining lanes or the Queens Drive on-slip will re-open.

The original timeline stated publically by Highways England was to have all lanes re-opened by the end of 2020 with all repairs being completed by February 2021. However, due to an increase in the scope of work required to repair the bridge, the latest timeline given by Highways England will mean that work is likely to continue on the bridge into autumn 2021.

### **Our Response**

The Council's immediate response following the partial closure of Clifton Bridge was to instigate a range of measures to minimise the impact on Nottingham and its citizens, including:

- Monitoring the roads and traffic signals from our Traffic Control Centre and making adjustments to signal timings to help traffic flow
- Working with Nottinghamshire Police on the ground to keep traffic flowing at key junctions, particularly tram and bus corridors
- Introducing selective traffic restrictions to discourage vehicles from diverting into neighbourhoods and prioritise key public transport corridors
- Encouraging people to think about using public transport including park & ride for journeys where they can
- Suspending all but emergency roadworks for an initial period and then allowing works back in on a case-by-case basis.

In consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Local Transport, on 6<sup>th</sup> March, a formal request was made to the Department for Transport and Highways England seeking support for a comprehensive package of further measures aimed at encouraging greater use of sustainable transport to help ease congestion around the city including:

- Temporary park & ride options
- Portable Variable Message Signs and use of Smart Motorway signs on the M1 and major approach routes advising drivers to take an alternative route or use public transport
- Special offers to promote public transport
- Travel planning support for major employers and for events
- Ongoing support for police presence to keep key junctions clear
- Yellow box markings at key junctions on bus and tram routes

In addition, the matter was escalated to Members of Parliament, the Department for Transport and senior levels within Highways England where progress of the works was

discussed and assurances sought that every effort was being made to reopen the bridge as soon as it was safe to do so.

Following the Government's subsequent Covid-19 advice to limit the use of public transport, consideration by Highways England of the further package of measures to encourage use of public transport was paused due to the conflict with Government travel guidance and assurances were sought that this matter be kept under review.

However a number of further measures were supported by Highways England, including:

- Up to six portable Variable Message Signs located at key points around the Nottingham area displaying messages to warn motorists of the delays at Clifton Bridge and give them opportunity to find an alternative route or allow more time for their journey
- Use of M1 gantry signs to warn of delays at Clifton Bridge and encourage A52 eastbound traffic to use J24 to avoid adding to the congestion
- Support for Police uniformed presence to keep junctions clear when required
- Introduction of yellow box markings at a number of key junctions around the city to help keep traffic moving
- Support for the Council's Workplace Travel Scheme to encourage businesses to take up green travel measures

Highways England were also encouraged to keep local residents and businesses informed during the period of the works. One way this has been achieved is through the circulation of regular Clifton Bridge repair scheme newsletters in which residents and businesses have been updated on progress.

Officers will continue to undertake regular monitoring of traffic levels across the city, including the impact caused by the ongoing works at Clifton Bridge, and once flows start to build up again will continue to take proactive measures to manage congestion and delays.

### **Liaison with Highways England**

Since the beginning of February 2020 when the partial closure of Clifton Bridge first occurred, officers have been maintaining regular contact with Highways England to monitor progress, seek assurances on their work programme and agree further measures to minimise the impact on Nottingham's road and transport networks.

Working in collaboration, liaison has been maintained through joint weekly / fortnightly stakeholder meetings, where in addition to the City Council, a number of other key stakeholders are involved including the emergency services, NHS, the County Council and local district councils.

Further dialogue and discussion has also taken place with Highways England involving the Portfolio Holder for Local Transport and local Members of Parliament. In addition, officers have also maintained regular communication over the phone and in further ad-hoc meetings when required.

## **Next Steps**

The priority is for Highways England to re-open all remaining lanes on Clifton Bridge and complete the repair work as soon and as safely as possible.

Officers will maintain regular liaison with Highways England as the repair works continue to seek ongoing assurances on progress through to expected completion in autumn 2021.

This engagement will seek to keep under review the need for additional mitigation measures as Covid-19 restrictions are eased and traffic volumes start to return to normal.

In the meantime, officers will continue to undertake regular monitoring of traffic levels across the city and take appropriate measures to manage congestion and delays.

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