



Subject:	Car Parking Strategy - Presentation to Committee
Date:	10 th February 2016
Reporting Officer:	Donal Durkan, Director of Development
Contact Officer:	Anne Doherty, Planning & Transport Officer

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy identified car parking as a major issue for Belfast city centre and recommended that the Council work with the Department for Regional Development to develop and implement a strategy for car parking for Belfast. The Council commissioned consultants (Aecom) in October 2015 to develop a Car Parking Strategy and a project steering group consisting of Council officers and representatives from DRD has been set up to assist Aecom with the development of the Strategy.
1.2	The development of the Car Parking Strategy is under way and is due to be completed by Spring 2016. Representatives from Aecom will make a presentation on the progress of the strategy in particular, the baseline research, emerging issues and the outcomes from the consultation process with key stakeholders.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	It is recommended that Elected Members consider the findings presented to Committee on the emerging Car Parking Strategy commissioned by the Council and if appropriate provide feedback.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<u>Key Issues</u> The development of the Car Parking Strategy comprises the following key stages: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stage 1 – Baseline Review• Stage 2 – Current Issues, Challenges and Trends• Stage 3 – Assessment of Options

3.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage 4 – Formulation of Strategy and Action Plan <p>An overview of the emerging findings is outlined in Appendix 1. Elected members will have an opportunity to provide feedback on the development of the strategy following the presentation and through specific meetings if requested at a later date.</p>
4.0	Appendix 1 – Summary of findings – Belfast Car Parking Strategy and Action Plan

Appendix 1

Belfast Car Parking Strategy and Action Plan Summary For 10/02 Special Committee



1. Background

As a result of Local Government Reform in April 2015 the Council became responsible for the operation of the 30 car parks previously operated by the Department for Regional Development. The recent Belfast City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy also identified car parking as a major issue for the city centre and recommended that the Council work with DRD to develop and implement a strategy for car parking.

The current parking strategy was set out in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan which was developed to address transportation issues to 2015.

The Council wish to provide a strong civic leadership role for the promotion of a modern, safe, accessible and integrated transportation system for the City of Belfast and the wider region, and now is the opportune time to review and update the car parking strategy for the city. Belfast City Council has therefore appointed consultants AECOM to develop an integrated parking strategy and action plan for the city.

1.1 Objectives

The steering group has developed a set of objectives which the strategy should seek to address:

- Ensuring appropriate provision and location of car parking to support the economic vitality of the City Centre.
- Ensuring parking provision does not encourage less sustainable commuter travel, especially for journeys into the City Centre and supports access by public transport, cycling and walking.
- Identifying opportunities to provide secure bicycle and coach parking in appropriate city centre locations.
- Minimising the potentially negative impacts of parking on residential communities in the city particularly in inner city areas.
- Supporting reductions in congestion and pollution and supporting improvement in road safety through more effective management of traffic flow and modal integration.
- Review of city centre car parking signage and information for drivers to identify the potential for improvements and co-ordination.

2. Baseline Review

A significant amount of work has been carried out to date to come to an informed view of the baseline within the city. This has included consideration of parking data, parking sites, current policies and proposals, best practice, and management and operational issues.

2.1 Review of Current Situation

The total number of parking spaces in the city centre is just under 40,000, split roughly as 32% on-street, 41% off street (publicly available) and 27% off-street (privately available). These latter private spaces total over 10,000 within the city centre and are associated with buildings (e.g. underground car parking) and contract parking. The council-owned spaces total under 6% of this 40,000 total.

There are around 60 publicly available car parks within the city centre itself, although provision is fragmented geographically.

A review of usage of publicly available spaces has shown that typically around 50-60% of off-street spaces are used at any one time. On-street spaces show typically higher occupancies at between 70-80%. According to biennial surveys that have taken place over the last decade, this level of parking has remained relatively constant.

A review of each of the individual car parks has also been carried out. This has shown significant differences in terms of quality; for example only one in five car parks have provision for parents and children, with less than half providing dedicated spaces for disabled users. Blue Badge holders are able to park for free on-street and there is evidence to suggest that this is a popular practice in the city centre. In certain areas of the city centre there are high instances of vehicle crime and this inevitably has an impact on parking behaviour.

In light of these considerations, there appears to be ample parking within the city centre however there is reason to believe that some users are adding to traffic congestion by circulating to look for a space. The issue therefore appears to be more one of a lack of information on where people can park tied with a generally low quality parking experience for many users.

The review has found that parking tariffs are generally dependent on car park location. In core areas of Belfast, council owned car parks are cheaper to use than private car parks on an hourly basis, but in terms of daily charges some of the privately operated car parks are cheaper than the council ones. In general, tariffs in Belfast are comparable with cities such as Newcastle and Nottingham, but generally cheaper than cities such as Manchester, Dublin and Cardiff.

Commuter parking in residential areas is a known issue and individual Residents Parking Schemes have been developed by DRD for areas of the city centre and in other areas such as Stranmillis and Lower Malone. However, to date none of these schemes have been implemented, with low community and local political support seen as being the main reasons why they have not proceeded.

The city council is responsible for 16 car parks outside of the city centre. Only two of these have a charging regime, and surveys at the remaining sites show that there is both a high degree of occupancy and all day parking, probably due to the lack of any restrictions. This results in low turnover which limits parking availability for those who would wish to shop or do business in these areas.

DRD operates a number of large strategic park and ride sites on key routes to/from the city centre. These include sites at Sprucefield, Dundonald and Cairnshill. Translink has also introduced increased parking provision at a large number of rail stations within Belfast. These sites have largely been very successful over the past few years and perform a strategic function in getting car users to switch to public transport for the final few miles of their journey into the city centre.

Given the recent rising popularity of cycling, there is a need for increased levels of cycle parking. Similarly, parking for coaches is important given the recent rise in tourists visiting the city.

It should be noted that congestion at certain times of the day is an ongoing issue within the city centre and it should be noted that there are a number of Air Quality Management Areas, primarily designated as a result of traffic pollution.

2.2 Policy and Best Practice

It is important to note that existing local policies in relation to parking are typical of those used throughout the UK and Ireland. Key policy documents previously published over the last 10-15 years include the Regional Transportation Strategy and the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan. All of the policies are generally in accord with one another in that they identify the need to carefully manage or restrain parking supply and demand within the city in order to achieve wider transportation objectives.

The outworking of these policies means that they include proposing to control the amount of publicly and privately available parking; only providing new parking spaces if they replace other ones or facilitate new development; and introducing residents parking schemes and new strategic park and ride sites.

It is also important to highlight that the recent City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy identified inconsistent pricing, poor signage and fragmented provision of parking in the city centre. It suggested that there could be a rationalisation of the spaces towards the inner ring within multi-storey car parks as well as improved signage, development of a city 'app' and more cycle parking.

There are also a number of large schemes potentially coming forward within the city. These include large transport schemes such as York Street Interchange and Belfast Transport Hub, as well as regeneration frameworks and masterplans such as Ulster University's Belfast campus, Linen Quarter and Northside. These schemes will impact on parking and need to be considered in the development of the strategy.

The study has also identified best practice in parking. In terms of how parking influences town centre attractiveness, studies note that location is the number one factor for customers, whereas parking costs come much lower down the list of priorities and below the need for safe and attractive parking facilities.

Modern day parking systems offer cashless payment, the pre-booking of spaces and electric vehicle charging. Technology is being utilised via active variable message signage and parking apps are being developed which direct users to individual spaces. This has benefits in terms of better turnover of high demand spaces and reductions in enforcement requirements. The best car parks can achieve the 'Park Mark' award which reflects the high standard of service that they offer in terms of security, design and accessibility.

The City of Nottingham has introduced a Workplace Parking Levy which asks businesses to pay an annual fee for providing workplace parking spaces. The levy is an incentive to employers to reduce the amount of parking they provide and the revenue is used to pay for public transport improvements.

Cycle parking 'hubs' have also been provided in some cities which offer a large number of secure, covered bike racks for cyclists. Best practice for coach parking is to provide dedicated and secure off-street facilities in a good location which can be pre-booked by tour operators.

3. Consultation

Acknowledgement and discussion of parking issues within the city through engagement with key stakeholders is vital for the success of the car parking strategy. Many of the issues require a comprehensive and detailed strategy to address them going forward, with potentially contentious decisions to be made.

The consultation process to date has comprised two elements; one-to-one discussion with a small number of stakeholders followed by a workshop with a larger group of stakeholders. One-to-one discussions were held throughout November and December 2015 with local commercial agents, car park operators, businesses, DRD, Translink and Transport NI.

Some of the key messages arising from these discussions is that parking is not the number one issue for investors looking to locate in the city centre, or possibly for people who work there. Some stakeholders noted instances of operational difficulties in the run up to Christmas due to traffic congestion and it was considered that this could be alleviated through improved signage and information.

Individual measures such as increased cycle/coach parking and new park and ride sites could all have a collective impact. Some stakeholders were open to idea of varying tariffs and there was also interest in locating parking predominantly to areas around the inner ring. Several of the stakeholders suggested that the strategy could be benchmarked against other UK/Ireland cities.

Following this initial consultation process with selected stakeholders, a workshop was undertaken and held in City Hall on 14th January. Prior to the workshop, a contact list of potential stakeholders was developed and each contacted was individually invited. The key stakeholders who had already taken part in the one to one discussions were again invited to attend as well as those from other organisations including, but not limited to, Belfast Chamber of Trade, Belfast Healthy Cities, Sustrans, Disability Action, NI Independent Retail Association, Belfast City Centre Management and Queens and Ulster Universities.

Of the 81 invites sent to stakeholders, 41 attended the workshop on the day. For those who were unable to attend in person, the presentation was sent via email along with a request for feedback.

The workshop format firstly comprised AECOM presenting the key information from the baseline review followed by a breakout group session to discuss the draft objectives and existing issues. A second presentation was then given which set out current policy, best practice and potential solutions. Delegates were again invited to discuss these issues in a breakout session.