



‘IMPROVEMENTS’ PLANNED FOR FLEET STATION

‘Hampshire County Council (HCC) is developing plans for the improvement of rail facilities in Fleet.’ said a FACE-IT spokesman. The Hampshire Local Transport Plan (Long-Term Strategy (2011-2031), accessible via the HCC website, recognises Fleet as having travel patterns dominated by the private car, with car ownership and usage significantly above the national average but with public transport provision limited to key routes and peak time services. There are some capacity problems at primary road junctions, especially during peak travel times. Measures being considered for Fleet include:

- Improving capacity at congestion bottlenecks
- Reducing the need to travel at peak times in Fleet
- Improvements to Fleet railway station
- Mitigation of the travel impacts arising from new development
- Investment in developing walking and cycling routes

At first sight, these measures might encourage us to believe that the junction by Fleet Station will be improved, the parking issues will be resolved and a significantly improved bus service will be provided on routes to the station, especially at peak periods. The Fleet Station Travel Plan, also available through the HCC website, provides more detail of the planned objectives for Fleet and other towns, which include:

- Reduced peak time congestion from fewer car trips per household.
- Improved health and general wellbeing through walking or cycling to work or the station.

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**Fleet and Crookham
Environment is Threatened**

- Working with bus operators to improve bus services and reduce the need to use cars.
- Working with rail operators for including improved parking and access facilities at railway stations.
- Improving transport interfaces at the station.

According to FACE-IT, however, the Fleet Station Travel Plan takes no account of the recent Hart District Council's Core Strategy Transport Assessment (currently being revised) nor does it seem to recognise the significant increase in demand which will come from all the development in the station's catchment area. It does identify that some 2,500 people arrive at the station every day and that 1,450 arrive in the peak period between 7a.m. and 9a.m.. A little more than half the people (1,325) arrive by car. Some 700 cars are parked at or near the station by those who drive themselves or are car sharers and a further 525 cars are used to drop people off at the station. The vehicles being used to deliver people to the station often make two round trips per day (1,050 journeys), adding to the congestion. With only 347 car parking places, the car park fills quickly and by 8a.m. competition for spaces is fierce and stress levels increase because of the current shortfall of more than 300 spaces. Sadly, the Fleet Station Travel Plan fails to highlight the extent of the current parking issues or to estimate the shortfall increase that will come from the existing and planned development.

By providing 200 to 300 more parking spaces, FACE-IT believe that daily car journeys for those currently being dropped off at the station could probably be reduced by 400 to 600, thus delivering a significant contribution to the first of the objectives in the plan. Sadly the plan fails to address parking other than mentioning it as a possible long term option for South West Trains, for which considerable funding would be required and would probably not be available.

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Instead of addressing the car parking problem to reduce congestion, the report sets out various schemes to encourage walking and cycling. These are good proposals and could indeed improve health and wellbeing. The report estimates that a 2% (26) of solo car journeys per day could be reduced by these means, hardly a significant quantity.

With no more parking and only a slight increase in walking and cycling, FACE-IT concluded that the report writer must have found a solution in improved bus services, perhaps even using a park and ride facility to increase parking facilities away from the station or to reduce car journeys by providing enhanced services on potentially high volume routes. With high daily parking fees of £7, such arrangements could surely be attractive and affordable. Despite the objective stated in the plan of improving the use of busses, the only highlighted action would be the potential increase of frequency on one route to the station. ‘This is extremely disappointing,’ said the FACE-IT spokesman, ‘and is hardly likely to raise the bus usage above the current 6% of people using the station.’

Once at the station, however, travellers can look forward to an improved forecourt, improved station buildings and a new crossing with a lift, similar to that now to be seen at Farnborough.

The Fleet Station Travel Plan is written about a series of worthy objectives but has failed to engage in the real needs of Fleet’s growing population of commuters and offers very little in the way of reducing congestion and improving the journey to and from the station. ‘It seems to be a standard model of a consultant’s report, probably quickly modified to suit each station in Hampshire, quoting the same worthy objectives, and costing a great deal in consultancy fees for no real benefit.’, said the FACE-IT spokesman.

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