

**Decision Maker:** Renewal and Recreation Portfolio Holder

**For Pre-decision Scrutiny by the Renewal and Recreation  
PDS Committee on**

**Date:** 13<sup>th</sup> December 2011

**Decision Type:** Non-Urgent Executive Non-Key

**Title:** **BROMLEY TOWN CENTRE VARIABLE MESSAGE SYSTEM**

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**Chief Officer:** Marc Hume, Director Renewal & Recreation

**Ward:** Bromley Town Centre

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## 1. REASON FOR THE REPORT

1.1 A report detailing the specification for the Variable Message System (VMS) and seeking funding approval was considered by the Environment PDS on 29th November 2010 (Report ES10152). The decision taken by the Environment Portfolio Holder on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2011 was:

**That the funds for the system be released in principle, but the matter be referred on to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal & Recreation for his consideration and assessment as to whether such technology provides value for money and will contribute positively to Bromley Town Centre's economy.**

1.2 The adopted Bromley Area Action Plan (AAP) and supporting information identifies a programme of transport improvements that were necessary to support both the future planned development growth in the town centre and the town's ongoing success as a thriving Metropolitan Centre. The VMS system is seen as the best way of providing the information drivers need (in real time) as it will efficiently redistribute parking demand to car parks with spare capacity. It is considered, therefore, to be an essential requirement to support the successful implementation of Phase 1 of the Area Action Plan. This requirement was also tested and supported at an Examination in Public before a Planning Inspector as part of the AAP adoption and represents value for money and should be supported.

## **2. RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 2.1 That the Portfolio Holder for Renewal and Recreation agrees to implement the VMS scheme as part of the delivery of the Area Action Plan, as the Portfolio Holder is satisfied that the proposed scheme provides value for money and will contribute positively to Bromley Town Centre's economy.

### Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing policy. Bromley Town Centre Action Plan
  2. BBB Priority: Vibrant Thriving Town Centres.
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### Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Estimated cost £200k
  2. Ongoing costs: Recurring cost. Electricity costs
  3. Budget head/performance centre: TfL Capital funding & Highways Divisional Budget.
  4. Total current budget for this head: £247k and £1,235k
  5. Source of funding: TfL Formula funding for 2011/12 and 2012/13, as well as the existing revenue budget for 2011/12 and future years
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### Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 5
  2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: 170
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### Legal

1. Legal Requirement: No statutory requirement or Government guidance.
  2. Call-in: Call-in is applicable
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### Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): Up to 4440 motorists who seek a parking space in Bromley on a daily basis.
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### Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Yes.
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: Positive comments from Town Centre Members' Working Party

## 2. COMMENTARY

- 3.1 The adopted Bromley Town Centre AAP and supporting documents were prepared to provide a planning framework to promote sustainable development in the town and improve the quality and range of facilities and services to residents and businesses. The AAP is clear that development proposals likely to come forward within Phase 1 of the plan (2010 -2015) can be accommodated without the requirement for major new transport infrastructure, such as significant junction improvements.
- 3.2 However, during the first five years of the AAP (Phase 1), two car parks are due to be developed – Westmoreland Road (581 space capacity) and South Street (68 spaces at weekends only). In addition, due to structural issues at The Hill car park, an additional 81 spaces cannot be used. Although Site G will provide additional parking stock to existing levels, this is likely to be one of the final sites to be developed (currently scheduled for Phase 3). Therefore, a Parking Migration Strategy has been developed to determine the impact of the loss of spaces and consider possible mitigation measures. A draft of this has been produced and has been reported to the Town Centres Member Working Party for their consideration.
- 3.3 In Phase 1 of the AAP, Site K Westmoreland Road has the most significant transport impact because of the temporary closure of the car park during the construction period and the resultant loss of parking spaces. Analysis of parking data in the development of the Parking Migration Strategy suggests that the likely impact will be felt by more than one car park as drivers seek to find the most attractive alternative for them, whilst dealing with likely capacity issues at The Mall car park, which is the closest in terms of distance to Westmoreland Road.
- 3.4 Providing information to drivers will, therefore, be very important otherwise there is likely to be a negative impact on the economy of the town centre. Whilst written information is likely to obtain a reasonable level of awareness of the issues, drivers will require better information on alternative car parks and where there may be spaces available to avoid wasted journeys to a full car park. A permanent VMS system would be the most effective method of doing this.
- 3.5 A permanent VMS system would clearly have other benefits, in addition to reductions in overall congestion, including improvements in air quality, more reliable journeys for customers and higher satisfaction ratings for the motorists, especially shoppers. The longer term legacy of the VMS system would be enjoyed by future shoppers and town users as development sites are completed. In this way Bromley is responding positively to the challenge set by Croydon, Sutton and Kingston town centres who all currently have VMS systems in operation.
- 3.6 The system is also supported by businesses within the town. Howard Oldstein, General Manager of the Glades Shopping centre has written “As a large retail business in the centre of town, it is important to us that customer's who choose to visit Bromley have an enjoyable experience which in turn will ensure they return. The experience begins once they leave home, therefore their journey to town is as important as their need to visit. From experience and surveys conducted, we know that trying to park cars can be frustrating for some, especially if they have just been caught in traffic hold ups. When asked many customers feel that waiting in queues only to be told that no spaces are available, is a waste of their time and in some cases puts them off from coming back again. One of our sister centre's council's recently changed from fixed statements to VMS systems, and has seen a major difference to traffic flows and consumer spending. Their surveys conducted after the installation provided evidence that customers appreciated the indicators to other parts of the town, as this provided them with opportunities to minimise the delay in getting

parked, get their shopping done and return to their car for a quick getaway. It was also noted in the survey, that placement of the VMS boards is key to the success. Customers also liked the idea that the boards could also highlight messages other than car park information, such as town events/poor weather conditions etc. They felt this gave them a choice, as they could structure their day more efficiently”

- 3.7 The proposed VMS system has been designed to be easily extended and flexible to allow future developments. Officers from the Town Centre Renewal team formed part of the project team that developed the specifications and are satisfied that it is fit for purpose. In relation to Value for Money considerations, Appendix 6 of the Transport Strategy sets out the Implementation Programme of Transport Improvements with Estimated Budget costs, which were prepared by Transport Consultants Peter Brett Associates in 2007. This programme estimated a budget cost of £450k for developing and implementing a VMS system. This budget estimate was produced before the recent innovations in IT based technology, which has improved and matured in recent years. This allied to the development of a robust specification and competitive tendering arrangements have further driven the budget estimate down to £200k, which is considered good value for money.

### 3. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There is a clear need for the introduction of the VMS system, as it has been identified in the AAP as a transport improvement that is needed to allow critical development to take place in the Phase1. This requirement has also been tested and supported at an Examination in Public before a Planning Inspector as part of the AAP adoption

### 4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The estimated cost of the VMS system is £200k. The following sources of funding have been identified for the VMS project:

| Source                      | Amount | Comment   |
|-----------------------------|--------|---|
| LIP Formula funding 2011/12 | £87k   | Discussions are under way with TfL to allow this sum to be carried forward to 2012/13, otherwise it will have to be committed in 2011/12. |
| LIP Formula funding 2012/13 | £60k   | From re-profiling of current budgets.   |
| LIP Formula funding 2012/13 | £100k  | From unneeded allocation for contribution of 6% to costs of Chislehurst Bridge.   |
| Total                       | £247k  |   |

- 5.2 It is intended to capitalise the maintenance of the system for either 5 or 10 years as part of the tender. This will help to reduce the running costs of the scheme and mean that the maintenance of the equipment will have no impact on revenue budgets for the duration of the contract.
- 5.3 There is a small additional cost for the electricity the system uses. This will be absorbed by the existing street lighting budget within Transport and Highways’ Division budget and which totals £1,235k.

### 5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 LBB will need to enter a contract with the selected supplier to implement and maintain the system. The Legal Team has helped with the production of the tender documents.

## 6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The system will be under the day to day management of the Council's Parking Services team.

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| <b>Non-Applicable Sections:</b>                       |   |
| Background Documents:<br>(Access via Contact Officer) | Area Action Plan Transport Strategy<br><br>Environment PDS Report Bromley Town Centre Variable Message Sign System for Car Parking + Minute |