BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

PUBLIC REPORT

Report to: CABINET

Report of: Assistant Director (Development Strategy)

Date of Meeting: 27 June 2005

Relevant Forward Plan Ref: Non-Key Decision

Subject: Emergency Services Priority 'Blue' Routes

Relevant Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Len Gregory Relevant O&S Chair(s): Cllr Alistair Dow

Wards affected: ALL

1. Purpose of report:

This report seeks approval for the proposal to introduce a network of Emergency Service Priority 'Blue' Routes, which will formalise the City Council's approach to ensuring the needs of the emergency services, are taken account of in decisions made on the City's highway network.

2. Decision(s) recommended:

That approval is given to amend the City Council's existing policy on road hierarchies to incorporate the designated emergency service priority routes as set out in paragraph 5.5.

Contact Officer: Chris Haynes, Policy Manager

Telephone no/e-mail address: 0121 303 7421

chris.haynes@birmingham.gov.uk

3. Brief Summary of Report:

- 3.1 The City is responsible for a network of some 2,550 kilometres of highway. The network is divided up into a hierarchy of routes, which reflect the function of each road.
- 3.2 The Emergency Services Priority 'Blue' Routes initiative seeks to formalise the City Council's approach to taking into account the needs of the emergency services on the different types of roads in the hierarchies.
- 3.3 The initiative seeks to assist a reduction in response times for emergency services by ensuring that they are not affected by unnecessary traffic calming or other measures.

4. Compliance Issues:

4.1 Are Decisions consistent with relevant Council Policies, Plans or Strategies:

The Emergency Services 'Blue' Routes policy will support the City Council's strategic themes and priorities as set out in the Council Plan 2005, Objective 7.1. It will contribute to improved journey time reliability and reduction in congestion which are important themes within the Local Transport Plan.

4.2 Relevant Officers/Members/ others consulted on this matter:

Consultation was carried out with officers from Development Strategy and representatives from the Fire, Police and Ambulance services to check on consistency and appropriateness.

4.3 Relevant legal powers, including Financial, Personnel, Equalities and other resource implications (if any):

Legal Powers

Powers to designate hierarchies of roads are contained within the Highways Act 1980. The Road Traffic Act (1991) obligates the City Council to prepare and carry out a programme of measures designed to promote road safety. The Traffic Calming Act (1992), Highways Act (1980) and the Highways (Traffic Calming) Regulations (1999) make provision for Local Authorities to carry out highway works affecting the movement of vehicular and other traffic for the purposes of promoting safety and of preserving or improving the environment, and for connected purposes.

Financial Powers

£100,000 has been included within the Transportation and Street Services Portfolio's Capital Budget for 2005/06 to ensure that the aims of this initiative can be progressed. There are no direct revenue implications as a consequence of this report. Detailed capital scheme implementation reports to the Cabinet Member will incorporate 'Blue Routes' issues (as appropriate) and the revenue implications arising will be identified within the financial appraisal included in these separate reports

4.4 Main Risk Management and Equality Impact Assessment Issues (if any):

The review of the priority routes and the appropriateness of measures will assist in ensuring communities can continue to receive quick responses to emergency situations. The failure to address the needs of the services could lead to problems in this area.

5. Relevant background/chronology of key events:

- 5.1 The City is responsible for a network of around 2,550 kilometres of highway. The network is divided up into a hierarchy of primary routes (usually A roads), district distributors (usually B roads) and other (unclassified) local distributor roads. The position in the hierarchy reflects the function of the route. In addition, the city also has a separate road hierarchy for Traffic Sensitive Routes (for road openings) and a hierarchy of users for consideration of measures set out in the Visions Transport Strategy.
- 5.2 The introduction of the emergency services priority route hierarchy is a formalisation of the City Council's existing approach, detailed in the traffic calming policy, to ensure the needs of the emergency services are taken into account when decisions are made on the City's highway network. In the past discussions have always taken place with the emergency services regarding any traffic calming or traffic regulation order proposals. The Emergency Services 'Blue' Routes plan formally identifies the routes, which are most important to the emergency services.
- 5.3 Traffic calming in its widest sense is the introduction of measures that will result in drivers modifying their driving behaviour to ensure that they maintain appropriate speeds for the environment through which they pass.
- There are a wide range of traffic management techniques. Traffic calming may be introduced to address a specific safety problem or to address an environmental issue. It can also be used as part of a new road or highway or in response to requests from local residents or community groups. Traffic regulation orders control the use of the highway for access and parking.
- The routes are categorized into three groups:

 The highest group are strategic (and generally include all the City's primary routes) on which there will be a presumption against vertical traffic calming unless there are exceptional circumstances (e.g. where speeding or an accident problem cannot be dealt with by horizontal calming or use of speed cameras). The second category covers other routes where the emergency services will play a key role in helping to identify appropriate measures through consultation. For the remaining category (which has the highest route mileage), a range of traffic calming measures would be appropriate if the problems justify action in accordance with our existing policies on traffic calming.
- 5.6 The introduction of the Emergency Services Priority 'Blue' Routes seeks to contribute to improve people's health and safety by reducing impediments to swift response times by the emergency services.
- 5.7 The City Council's current traffic calming policy attempts to minimise the use of measures involving vertical deflections, such as speed cushions and road humps in order to minimise adverse effects on emergency services, bus operators and other road users. In circumstances where vertical deflection is required preference is given to speed cushions as opposed to road humps as these allow for larger vehicles such as ambulances and fire engines to pass over unaffected whilst still requiring smaller vehicles to check their speed.
- 5.8 Research undertaken by the Transport Research Laboratory suggest that where

- vertical calming measures are required on bus and ambulance routes, speed cushions rather than standard road humps should be used.
- 5.9 Under the City Council's Network Management Duties it is obliged to manage the road network with a view to achieving, as far as may be practicable the fast movement of traffic on the City's road network, and facilitating the fast movement of traffic on neighbouring traffic authorities' road networks. The City Council may also undertake any duty that contributes to the more efficient use of the road network and the avoidance of disruption to the movement of traffic on their or a neighbouring authorities road network.
- 5.10 There are very few examples of vertical calming measures on the strategic (blue) routes. There will be a presumption against any new vertical calming on these routes and existing calming will be reviewed. Before any changes take place each case will be considered on its merits after detailed investigation and consultation.
- 5.11 Excessive traffic speeds on some routes could, in some cases, be controlled by alternative measures. Speed cameras, horizontal calming, traffic regulation orders may be appropriate as an alternative to vertical calming in some locations.
- 5.12 'Visions A Transport Strategy for Birmingham' states that traffic calming measures to address safety problems and/or environmental problems will be supported. Vulnerable road users in general and child pedestrian and child cyclists in particular are the main beneficiaries of schemes in Birmingham.
- 5.13 A plan of the Emergency Services Blue Routes network is attached for information.

6. Evaluation of alternative option(s)

The alternative would be to do nothing. The initiative will ensure that any future proposals for traffic calming or other measures can be checked for consistency and appropriateness.

7. Reasons for Decision(s):

The introduction of the Emergency Services Priority 'Blue' Routes seeks to contribute to improve people's health and safety by reducing impediments to swift response times by the emergency services

Signatures (or Cabinet Member(s) approval to adopt recommendations):	
Chief Officer(s):	
Cabinet Member(s):	

List of background documents:

Traffic Management Act - 2004
Visions – Birmingham's 20 Year Transport Strategy - 2000
Birmingham City Council Corporate Plan
Impact of road humps on vehicles and their occupants – TRL - 2004