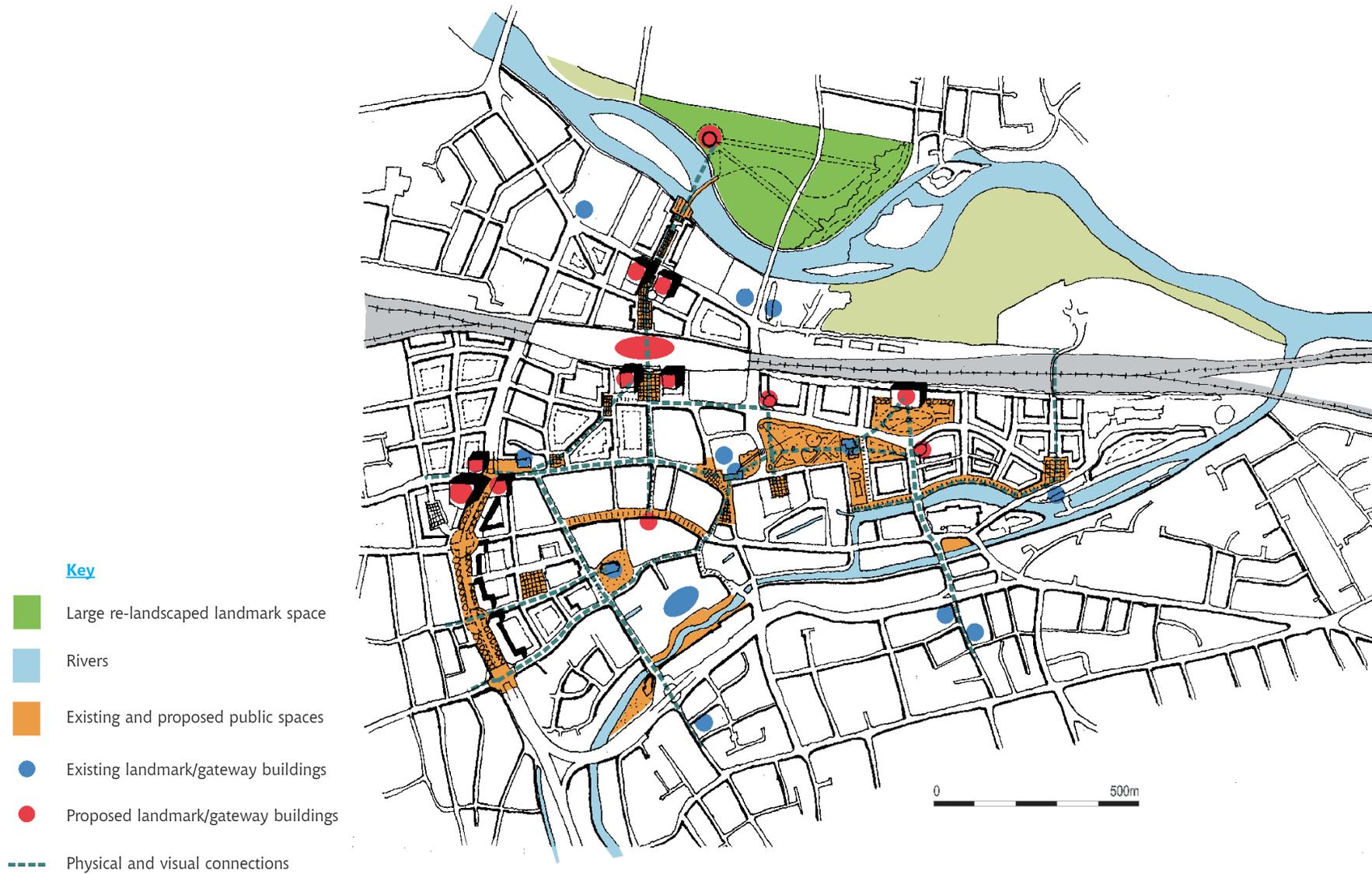


Figure 7 Buildings, routes and spaces



2.4 Buildings, routes and spaces

The network of landmark buildings and spaces (Figure 7), existing in the core, and proposed in the new project areas, has an important function in increasing legibility and permeability of the city centre as a whole.

Successful places provide visual links and steps, in buildings, spaces, public art and so on that lead and attract you from one place to another. This does not occur consistently across the centre of Reading and new measures are required to create a really successful joined up place. An examination of the centre from this perspective produced the structured proposals outlined in this section. There are several key routes that are known to locals but which are very undefined for visitors to the city centre, for example :

- the station to the Minster
- the Butter Market to the Oracle and Kennet Riverside
- The Town Hall and the Forbury from the west and vice versa
- The use of riverside walkways.

Broad Street and St Mary's Butts are key, recognisable routes east-west and north-south respectively but are not currently operating in an integrated network of routes that complement each other and provide a choice of movement for pedestrians. This network needs to be supported by visual signposts in the form of buildings (see 2.3 above), and a "language" of landscaping and environmental treatment of the public realm. The types of measures required are set out in the guidance on the Core and interfaces and the Project Areas.

In terms of the overall network, the street-based network is expanded to form squares and spaces at intersections and at other appropriate points of emphasis. Existing and proposed spaces have been mapped and, with their complementary existing and proposed built form landmarks discussed in the previous section, generate main focus points.

In the case of the project areas, the following possible new public spaces have been identified. They are located at important 'hinge' points in the urban fabric:-

- **East side**
 - an extension of the open space of the Forbury gardens eastwards, connecting with a new urban park as a local focus for residents
 - an 'intimate' local square relating to the Blake's Lock, accommodating local community and leisure activities and providing a gateway to the route northwards to cross the railway line.
 - a generous riverside promenade on the north side of the Kennet linking the Abbey to Blake's Lock.

The remaining spaces shown on the plan are existing and, with the improvements suggested in the Core and interfaces guidance, combine with the new spaces to provide a choice of public space qualities in terms of:

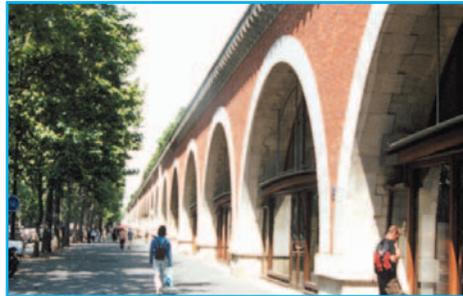
- scale
- texture (hard urban to soft parkland)
- form (formal square or linear promenade)



The Rocks, Sydney

- West side

- a linear park or shared use 'urban avenue' along the bridged section of the IDR
- a new public space at the heart of the new development that will be a destination in itself
- a civic square in the heart of the existing market area (Hosier Street) relating to the more traditional market activities



Viaduc des Arts, Paris



Brindleyplace, Birmingham



Brindleyplace, Birmingham

■ Station / River

- a station 'plaza' on the south side of the proposed station building
- a public square north of the station, with a focus on cultural activities associated with a generous pedestrian route northwards towards the river
- The redefined urban landscaped park in the flood plain on the north side of the Thames



Médiatèque, Nîmes



Parc de Bercy, Paris



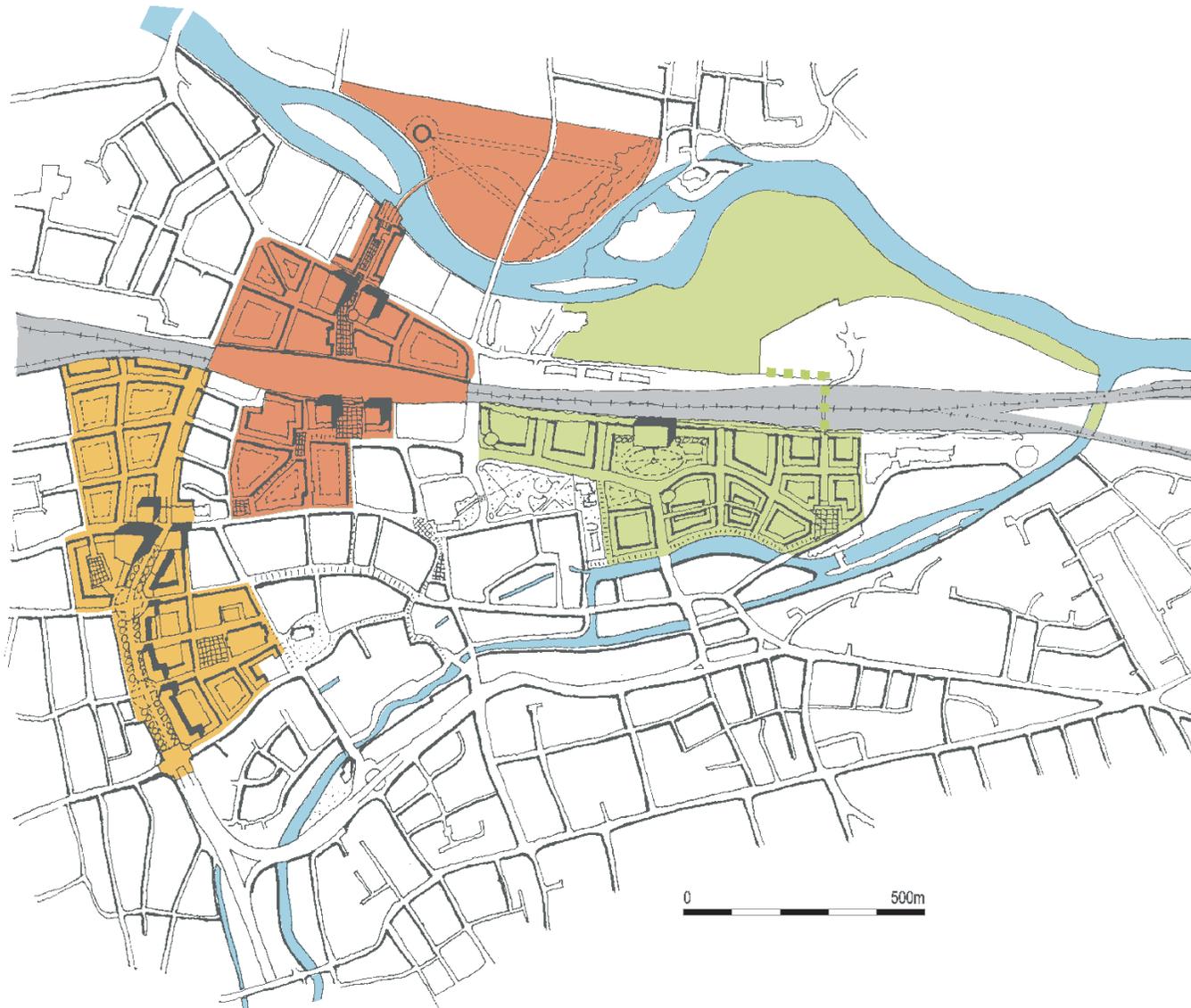
Parc de Bercy, Paris

Figure 8 Uses

Station / River Project Area

Transport interchange and related uses. Hotels, conference facilities, commercial, retail and residential mixed in throughout. Culture and leisure “set-piece” buildings leading to the river.

West Side Project Area
Residential, commercial



East Side Project Area

Commercial, residential, community/local leisure, public open space and riverside walk

2.5 Uses

The new project areas should accommodate a mixture of uses that are well integrated and connected with existing uses in the core and interfaces. There may be genuine mixed use developments, though with differing proportions according to the nature of development.

Some of the perceived benefits of mixed development are:-

- More convenient access to facilities
- Travel-to-work congestion may be reduced
- Reduced car ownership and shared use of car parking
- Greater opportunities for social interaction
- Socially diverse communities
- Visual stimulation and delight of different buildings within close proximity
- A greater feeling of safety, with 'eyes on streets'
- Greater energy efficiency and more efficient use of space and buildings
- More consumer choice of lifestyle, location and building type

- Urban vitality and street life
- Increased viability of urban facilities and support for small business.
- A potentially exciting and 'buzzy' place to live or work in or to visit.

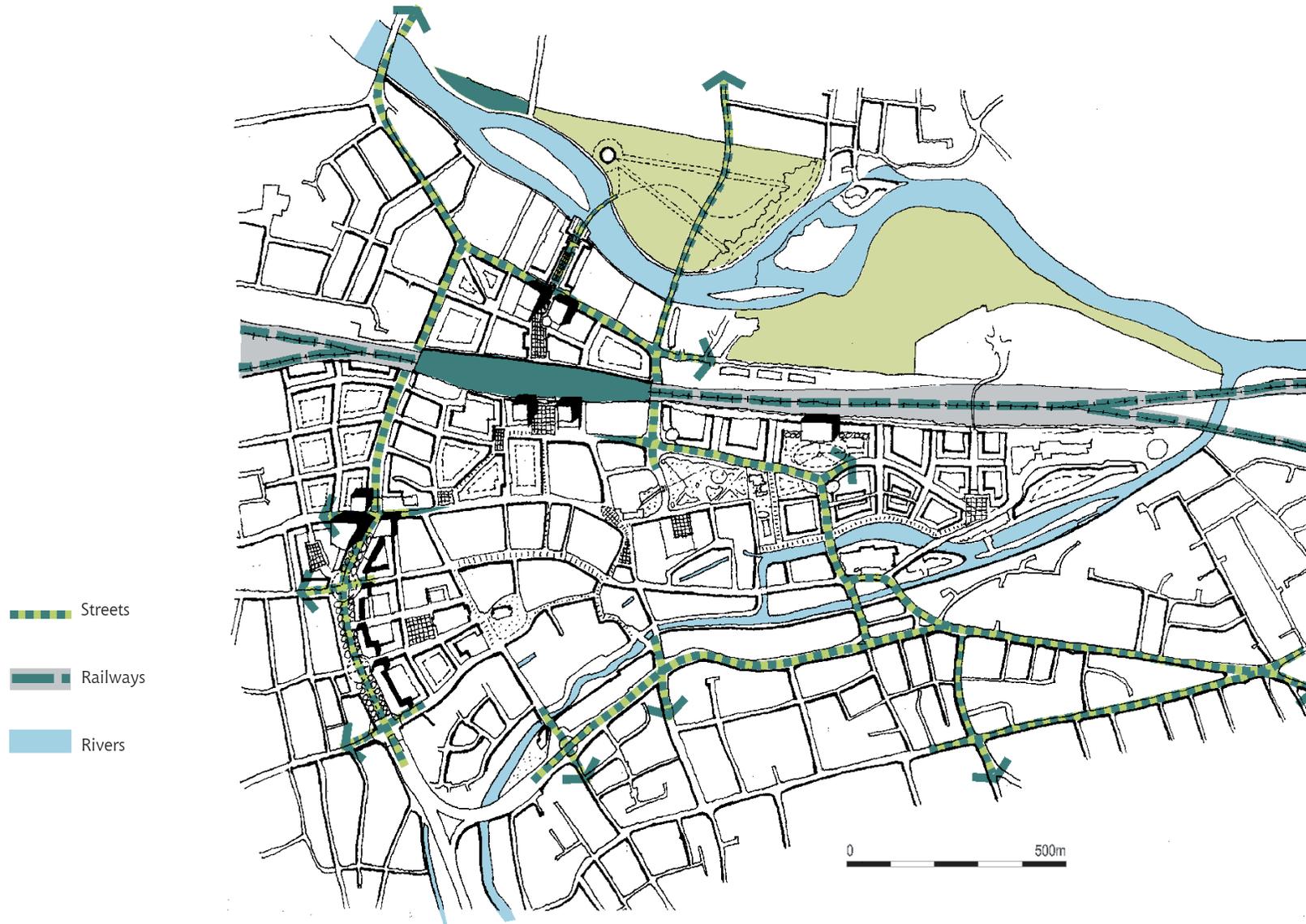
“Whether we are talking about mixing uses in the same neighbourhood, a mix within a street or urban block, a mix within a street or urban block, or the mixing of uses vertically within a building, good urban design should encourage more people to live near to those services which they require on a regular basis.” Urban Task Force Report

A wide variety of uses can be accommodated within a single building. Shops and public facilities rely on visual prominence and direct level access from the street. Offices and residential properties do so to a lesser degree and can benefit from being on a higher level to improve privacy. Vertical stacking of uses should be encouraged, particularly in central locations.

As residential projects and strategies for housing in the city centre are developed, it is important that the issues of mixed residential tenure and mixing residential with other uses are addressed. The sustainability of such residential communities will be enhanced by linking them to existing ones. Whatever the combination of uses, the ground floor use should be active, particularly where the building frames or fronts onto a public space.

Figure 8 broadly illustrates the anticipated main uses identified for each project area. The indicated uses are not exclusive as no area should be single use, and the uses that end up in each location will largely be driven by market demand. Whatever the focus, the predominating element should be that of a mixed use environment.

Figure 9 Urban avenues



2.6 Urban avenues

Urban avenues provide a qualitative sense of arrival. There are already examples of this in Reading, for example along the London Road. An avenue used by pedestrians and cyclists as well as vehicles is humane and welcoming. The approach can and should be extended. Thus one of the overall structuring devices of the Framework is to treat the various dominant linear elements of the city centre (the rivers, railway, and IDR) as "Urban Avenues". These can help to provide an identity for the city, rather than simply being a series of barriers, severances or people-unfriendly environments (Figure 9).

The most useful shift in thinking is to reconceive the IDR as an attractive space for many uses, a landscaped boulevard that is not dominated by cars, but is also well-used by pedestrians. The character of this important route and space will change depending on the relationships of built form to space. However it should form a continuous landmark space that encourages links across it, and development along it.

The IDR, as an urban avenue, will also have the potential to provide a basic framework for a green network, connecting existing green routes and spaces within the Core to the Project Areas and beyond. This green network can combine with the other opportunities, especially for an 'avenue' treatment along the railway and the rivers, to forge new links for people and for ecology.

2.7 Urban design and transport interactions

The transformation and expansion of the centre of Reading, "from town to city", will involve urban design and transport solutions that go hand in hand. Transport will need to be developed in order to serve the greater intensity of activity, while more space and priority will need to be given to this activity in the design and configuration of new buildings and places. There will be many instances where the right balance must be struck between convenience of access and environmental quality.

The aim here is not to be prescriptive, but to suggest key issues for the future direction of change. Individual schemes and studies should address these parameters so that different elements form part of a consistent approach, and so that opportunities are not lost due to piecemeal or uncoordinated action.

There are four key themes:

- Access and environment: getting the balance right
- Station location location: transport change, development change
- Protecting public transport - in and to the centre
- Lowering the barriers: reducing severance, rethinking streets' roles

2.7.1 Access and environment

The first theme is to balance access by and penetration of public transport and other vehicles within the city centre, with the provision of a safe and attractive environment for people on foot.

The parameters are:

- Maintaining penetration by local public transport as far as possible to provide **convenient access to shops**, especially for people with limited mobility
- Improving the environment and safety of the city centre by **reducing the intrusion of public transport vehicles**, especially those that are noisy and polluting. Expansion and intensification of city centre activity will require more space and a higher quality environment. This means that the number of vehicles will need to be limited as far as possible. To the extent that this is not possible, measures could be taken to reduce the intrusiveness of the vehicles themselves. At certain places and times already, even the current number of buses within core shopping areas is seen as a significant problem. Unless **routes are diverted** away from the main places of pedestrian activity, this intrusion will at some point become unacceptable as service frequencies increase to meet the growing demand.

- **The introduction of trams or LRT** could reduce the number of separate vehicles, and the noise and fumes, but there would still be numerous bus services operating on routes not served by trams/LRT.
- Possibilities could be explored for **reducing public transport intrusiveness**, including less polluting vehicles, finding an underground route/station for LRT within the core, and cutting dwell-times at stops (ticket and fare innovations etc.) Furthermore, vehicle speeds can be limited in sensitive streets to 10 mph as has applied successfully for more than 15 years in Exeter, for example.
- If public transport routes are to be located outside the core area, possibilities can be explored for **overcoming the longer walk distances** between bus stops and shops. This is unlikely to be necessary for the majority of public transport users - it is known that much larger pedestrian zones operate in continental cities without internal public transport services - including Reading's twin city of Dusseldorf. However, for a proportion of users some trips in some circumstances can be greatly aided by the provision of services close to the shops and

other destinations. For example a dedicated environmentally-friendly electric shuttle service could be introduced, linking pedestrian areas to the station and bus/LRT stops, as in Avignon. A prototype vehicle with a modern image is under test in Malmo. This is not seen as a core public transport requirement, but an added assistance for those with limited mobility, or who are simply tired or weighed down with shopping.

- Continued evolution of the **parking approach**: A comprehensive parking strategy will need to be developed that allows step-by-step improvements in line with the growth and intensification of the central area.
- Arrangements for parking have a significant bearing on urban design and the quality of the local environment. For example, the greater the proportion of parking provided in "structured" parking facilities (i.e. off-street, probably multi-storey), the greater is the potential for planning access routes that do not undermine priorities for public transport and pedestrians.

- Consideration can be given to progressive reductions in on-street parking activity, and to control and charging regimes that are consistent with access convenience, public transport fares, journey purpose priorities, and so on. These matters will need to be pursued in the context of an access strategy for central Reading.
- Continued restriction of car traffic is necessary, with a presumption against through traffic. Service vehicles will need to be managed to minimise conflict with the pedestrian environment, for example with time and circulation regulations.

2.7.2 "Station location location"

The second theme is concerned with responding to the exciting prospect of the transformation of Reading railway station into Reading multi-modal interchange and transport development area (TDA).

Government guidance, notably PPG13 and the forthcoming companion guide on "Planning and Sustainable Access", emphasise the importance of intensifying development at locations that are highly accessible by public transport. A study commissioned by the RICS (with DETR) has also focused attention on development opportunities at major nodes in the transport system (Transport Development Areas). There are relatively few stations outside London with sufficient density of services to be attractive to large-scale development, but Reading has this potential.

The transformation of the station area is possible by the happy conjunction of two major opportunities:

- the potential for major upgrading and expansion of rail and other public transport services as part of both regional and local public transport growth;

- the potential for major northward extension of the city centre associated with major new north-south pedestrian links.

A major upgrade of the rail services at Reading could generate development value in the vicinity while, conversely, major development will generate custom for the rail undertakings. To the extent that such development reduces the pressure for building out of town, the result would be of benefit to everyone.

The railways, together with the floodplain of the Thames, have historically limited development northwards from the centre of Reading, and the uses and building intensity are still "backyard" rather than "showcase" in character in many cases. The aim should be to reduce the barrier effect of the railway.

The following parameters should be addressed in any studies or proposals at the station and within the walking catchment (say 600 metres) to ensure realisation of the full potential. These are not intended to be prescriptive, but to provide a picture of opportunities that could be exploited, and which demand attention to achieve the best for Reading.

- Convenient **interchange** between inter-city, regional, and city rail services, and all other modes serving the city including buses, tram/LRT, taxis, cars, cycles and of course pedestrians. Within the overall public transport network, this would be the most important interchange.
- The potential integration of national and regional railway services, local services, and station and other development opportunities should be continued as a matter of urgency. A visionary approach should be taken. The objective is the creation of a **station fit for its role as a major node** in the national system, and as the principal development location and interchange in Reading.

- Intensive mixed-use development within the vicinity of the station portals, maximising access by public transport, but also creating a **strong identity for the station location**, serving as a facility centre and reference point for the whole city. Station locations as focal points for their respective towns and cities are common in continental Europe.

- The provision of **high quality pedestrian links between areas north and south of the railway**. This could be achieved in various ways. The most difficult but best would be a broad link at ground level with rail tracks above. The new Lisbon Expo interchange station provides an example where there are intercity tracks at the upper level, regional metro and LRT below ground, with the pedestrian area and facilities in between at ground level. Such an approach involves major engineering and could only be justified by a combination of step change enlargement of railway services as part of a national and regional upgrade, together with major development around the station.

- Create other key **legible pathways either side of the railway** and towards and across the River Thames. A single pedestrian route will have limited impact, and the creation of a new grid connecting areas north and south of the railway will maximise potential. As part of this approach, the route to Caversham can be much more strongly linked (physically and psychologically) with the station area and the city centre.

2.7.3 Protecting public transport

This third theme focuses on making sure that public transport can do the job that central Reading needs it to do. There is the potential for Reading station to change from being a stop on the national network, to a major interchange and focus of development activity for the whole sub-region. Similarly, it can be assumed that in time public transport serving the City of Reading itself will undergo a step change in terms of route coverage, service frequency and service quality.

The expansion and increased intensity of activity in central Reading can only happen with an even greater reliance on public transport. Such reliance can only be placed on a first class system capable of attracting car owners as well as "captive" users.

Following this logic, a satisfactory balance within the city centre between environment and access must be accompanied by good public transport services between the city centre and the suburban areas and beyond. Routes must therefore be created that are protected from the delays and irregularities caused by traffic congestion on the road network.

Elimination of congestion was traditionally seen as the principal means of helping road-based public transport, but this is now seen to be unrealistic. Instead, measures must be taken to protect public transport services from congestion, and to remove impediments to regular operation.

Large cities often rely on fully segregated rail systems to provide the necessary capacity and degree of reliability. The aim in Reading should be to achieve as much segregation as possible, but there will continue to be heavy reliance on street-based systems, requiring traffic management measures to ensure "whole route" protection from delays. This should build on the approaches already pioneered in Reading (e.g. contra-flow bus lanes, diversion of traffic away from bus routes, bus-only streets).

The parameters are:

- Identification of **protected routes for radial public transport to the city centre**, e.g. fully segregated or shared with local and access traffic only;
- **Effective network operation** by ensuring that such protection extends to suburban and orbital routes that interconnect with the city centre services.
- Identification of **routes for other traffic**; complementary measures on both networks to ensure that public transport is not impeded, and provides access to key attractors and generators of passengers. In general, constant journey times will be more important than trying to speed up running speeds.

2.7.4 Lowering the barriers

This fourth theme is about how the roads and streets can be turned from boundaries and barriers into living parts of the town. It involves redesigning the main traffic routes so that they pose less of a barrier to pedestrian and local movement, and so that they are better integrated into the urban scene. And it means providing new pedestrian/cycle routes across other barriers, including the railway and the Rivers.

The basic parameters are:

- **Reduce the severance effect of the IDR**, and redesign the route as an integrated part of the city fabric, not as a rigidly segregated traffic artery.

Examples include:

- decking over western section cutting
- reducing the width of carriageways
- dividing carriageways
- replacing roundabouts and gyratory elements with signal junctions
- providing more pedestrian crossings
- providing wide pedestrian crossings at key locations
- reducing traffic speeds
- reducing traffic flows
- creating new squares/public spaces
- integrated "traffic" design including hard and soft landscaping, removing railings and clutter etc.

- Retaining any through movement role of sections of the IDR (e.g. for cross Thames traffic), but altering speed and flow relationships so that such traffic does not dominate the environment or local access movements within the city centre. The present situation where (at off-peak times) the IDR allows high-speed movement north south does not help in the aim of creating a high-quality city centre.

- Reconsider traffic and access routing for each category of road user, with the aim of maintaining access without constraining the outward development of the city centre, and also providing preference to the "**city-friendly**" *modes of travel*.

- This could lead to a circulation pattern that **eventually discontinues the IDR as a ring route** for general motor traffic, for example by restricting through movement via the present north eastern section of the IDR.

- Produce networks for each mode both within the centre connected to wider city networks and routes. Parking for cars and cycles, and servicing facilities also need to be included. This could be addressed by the production of a "**city centre access strategy**". This would complement and integrate the "corridor strategies" currently being pursued.

- Plan new development and public spaces to create strong urban grid with **active frontages along the IDR** and other routes open to traffic. Avoid developments which turn their backs on the key public streets and spaces.

A big moment

The confluence of three major strands of change - the development of the **railway** services and station, the **expansion** of Reading centre, and the prospect of a new **LRT or tram** system for Reading - makes this a seminal moment in the development of Reading. We cannot overstate the importance of fully understanding the issues, and resolving them through multi-disciplinary working. The urban design framework for the centre of Reading and its expansion will acknowledge the catalytic power of the key public transport developments in general, and the station area in particular. By the same token, the planning of the transport investments must take account of the parameters outlined here and relate them to a bold vision of central Reading. Although the vision will unfold over the long term, a number of key elements need to be tackled in the short term. The shape of the future transport system will need to be addressed in particular.