

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD

9 March 2009

Report of the Director of Planning Transport and Leisure

Part 1- Public

Matters For Information

1 COLTS HILL BYPASS

Summary

To report on the deliberations of a Reference Group recently formed to consider improvements to the A228 at Colts Hill.

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The Board will be well aware that it has been a long held aspiration to carry out a strategic road improvement on the A228 in the form of a bypass to bring significant safety and environmental improvements to the Colts Hill area.
- 1.1.2 There have been various design approaches to achieving this end, including an off-line dual carriageway scheme adopted in 1991. The most recent scheme adopted in October 1997 comprised a single carriageway scheme to the north west of the current alignment of the A228.
- 1.1.3 The A228 is part of the strategic highway network linking the Medway Towns and Maidstone with Tunbridge Wells, with onward links to the south coast. There have been considerable improvements to the route including the Snodland Bypass, Hale Street Bypass, Pembury Northern Bypass and most recently of course, the Leybourne and improved West Malling Bypass. The consequence of this is that the unimproved section of the A228 through Colts Hill remains a significant missing link in the strategic route.
- 1.1.4 The significance of this missing link is emphasised by a number of factors, not least that the A228 between Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone/Medway is a key link between designated regional hubs where it is regional policy that accessibility improvements will be given priority. In practical terms the A228 also forms a major access to the new hospital near Pembury and is an important bus route as well as providing general traffic relief to the alternative A26 route, nearby villages and Tonbridge Town Centre.
- 1.1.5 Locally the stretch of the A228 through Colts Hill has been recognised as having a poor safety record. There is also a high degree of environmental impact on the community living along and near to the current road.

1.1.6 The current volume of traffic which includes a considerable proportion of heavy goods vehicles, can give rise to congestion simply as a consequence of negotiating the current alignment of the existing highway.

1.2 Priority – The Regional Transport Board

1.2.1 The Colts Hill bypass scheme has been promoted a number of times by the County Council but under the current prioritisation method adopted by the Regional Transport Board (RTB), it is considered unlikely to obtain sufficient priority to achieve funding. It is estimated that the current scheme is likely to cost in the region of £20-25M which means that the scheme falls into the category of “major scheme funding”, competing with other major schemes (in excess of £5M) across the Region.

1.2.2 The assessment criteria used to prioritise schemes at the regional level is currently under review by the RTB but at this stage the County Council are not optimistic that this will significantly alter the priority and prospects for advancing the Colts Hill bypass project.

1.3 The Colts Hill/A228 Reference Group

1.3.1 Following some success in influencing the programming of the improvements to the A21, a Reference Group chaired by Greg Clark MP has been formed to consider the A228 at Colts Hill. The Group has met just once so far and its next meeting is planned for the 13 March. The membership of the Group includes local Member of Parliament, the County Council, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Councils, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust, Capel Parish Council, Paddock Wood Town Council and representatives of local residents.

1.3.2 At the first meeting the Group reviewed many of the issues outlined in the first part of this report and as a result has set itself a number of tasks for further consideration. These include:

- A review of the regional prioritisation methodology and consideration of how the scoring for the Colts Hill scheme might be increased by promoting all of its virtues, with particular regard to accessibility to the new hospital.
- How the missing ‘spoke’ between Maidstone/Medway Towns and Tunbridge Wells can be promoted and be included in the South East Regional Plan.
- Can a range of short term measures be identified and implemented on the current A228 through Colts Hill to improve road safety conditions.

1.3.3 These are all matters that will be reviewed by the Group at the forthcoming meeting. In respect of the last point, Kent Highway Services (KHS) are to provide figures on traffic flows and to table a proposal for the establishment of a working

group to look at short term road safety measures. In this respect the Reference Group will be faced with somewhat of a dilemma. Based on local experience there does seem to be the basis of a case for implementing some local improvements to improve highway safety and traffic flow through this stretch of the A228. However, the Group did recognise that if such a scheme were to be realised it would itself have the effect of possibly diminishing the need for a more strategic approach. However, there is clearly an attraction in achieving some shorter term improvements. Based upon the evidence that KHS will bring to the next and future meetings, this will be a matter for the Reference Group to consider and ultimately for the County Council in consultation with others to consider as part of future improvement programmes.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 None at present.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 Not applicable at this stage.

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 The principal risk to be considered is the impact of ongoing deficiency in the strategic network from an environmental, highway safety and transport efficiency point of view.

1.7 Conclusion

1.7.1 The Board may wish to lend support to the current initiative of the Reference Group and be kept informed of the deliberations and recommendations that it might make.

Background papers:

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Nil

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