

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PUBLIC TRANSPORT PANEL

Tuesday, 31st March, 2009

Present: Cllr M A C Balfour (Chairman), Cllr M R Rhodes (Vice-Chairman), Cllr C Brown, Cllr Mrs C A F Grant, Cllr Miss J L Sergison, Cllr Mrs E A Simpson, Cllr D Thornewell and Cllr M S Worrall.

Councillors Mrs Anderson, Baldock, Court and Heslop were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No. 15.21.

Mr R Howkins (Network Rail); Mr I Paterson (Medway Valley Community Rail Partnership); Mr J Bottomley and Mr S Aitken (Arriva Services); Mr D Washington (Kent County Council) and Mr L Shields (Tonbridge Commuters).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dalton, Lancaster, D Smith, Mr M Gibson (South Eastern) and Mr M Spalding (Arriva).

PART 1 - PUBLIC

**PT
09/001 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

**PT
09/002 MINUTES**

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Public Transport Panel held on 18 March 2008 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**PT
09/003 CURRENT PROGRESS ON ROUTE UTILISATION STRATEGY**

Mr R Howkins of Network Rail provided a presentation on the current progress on the Route Utilisation Strategy giving an overview of timescales starting with publication on 28 April 2009, followed by wider stakeholder briefing and consultation. The publication of the final Strategy document was anticipated in Spring 2010.

Mr Howkins reported that high level gaps had been identified in certain areas including peak capacity to and from London; accessibility of railway stations and rail services during evenings, weekends and Bank Holidays. It was indicated that there was no realistic way of increasing peak capacity via London Bridge, although peak trains would be lengthened.

Members expressed their frustration and disappointment at South Eastern's proposal to reduce services to Cannon Street and London Bridge from Maidstone East as this would cause severe inconvenience to commuters.

The Consultation draft recommended extending peak high speed services into Kent by either increasing frequency into Ashford or Maidstone West. Other options being explored were outlined but their business cases required further development. Members were assured of Network Rail's intention to undertake a structured exercise in assessing line speed and frequency of services, along with other viable ways of increasing capacity being explored.

The Panel expressed disappointment at the lack of progress especially as business cases for some options had not been worked out fully. Members also felt that a business case for connecting Redhill to Tonbridge and Medway Valley services could exist and again expressed their disappointment at the lack of a Redhill link and connections to Gatwick, urging that this option be seriously considered.

In response to a question from the Panel relating to London Bridge services during the Thameslink construction period Members were advised that the construction strategy was in the process of being developed. However, it was likely there would be a reduction in services with some trains not stopping at London Bridge.

Refurbishment of Tonbridge station, under the National Stations Improvement Programme, was not expected until 2010. Members asked that Network Rail give serious consideration to the flow through and access of commuters and urged them to consult with Tonbridge Commuters.

The Chairman thanked Mr Howkins for his presentation advising that the Borough Council was happy to co-operate and assist Network Rail in providing information on business cases and the Redhill line.

Copies of the presentation would be circulated with the Minutes at the request of the Chairman.

**PT
09/004**

HIGH SPEED DOMESTIC SERVICES

Members were advised that due to unforeseen circumstances Mr Gibson, the Public Affairs Manager at South Eastern, was unable to attend the meeting. A stakeholder newsletter and a summary of a revised service specification for the two main lines serving Tonbridge and Malling were circulated for information.

Mr Shields of Tonbridge Commuters explained that they were seeking further information on the revised timetable suggested by South Eastern, especially relating to the distribution of trains over peak periods.

**PT
09/005**

MEDWAY VALLEY LINE CURRENT DEVELOPMENT AND INITIATIVES

Mr I Paterson, the Community Rail Project Officer, provided an update on activity and projects undertaken during the last 12 months. These included a range of initiatives for improving information; special events organised to raise the profile of the Medway Valley Line and improvements to stations' facilities and their environment. Recent railway investment had led to the installation of a permit to travel machine at Aylesford, improvements and expansion of the East Farleigh station car park and CCTV installation on the northern end of the line at Aylesford, New Hythe and Snodland.

The importance of Section 106 funding was recognised and would be used to continue improvements for New Hythe and Snodland stations.

Members thanked Mr Paterson for his excellent presentation and the hard work undertaken to improve and maintain the Medway Valley Line.

Network Rail acknowledged that the frequent non collection of fares on this line could reflect as missed demand in the business plan and would explore further.

Copies of the presentation would be circulated at the request of the Chairman.

**PT
09/006**

ARRIVA SERVICES – GENERAL UPDATE

In the absence of Mr M Spalding, who was unable to attend the meeting, the Arriva general update was provided by Mr J Bottomley of Arriva Maidstone and Mr S Aitken of Arriva Tunbridge Wells.

Hard copies of the information provided would be circulated with the Minutes but it outlined bus service updates since June 2008. These included the introduction of Kent Freedom Passes for schools in the Maidstone area; the introduction of a new service 704 between Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge, Sevenoaks and Bluewater and amendments to services 70 and 71.

The Panel was advised that a new Arriva website was launched at the end of January 2009, along with the introduction of internet sales for discounted tickets. A new electronic system of purchasing tickets was in the final stages of development.

Following a question raised, Members were advised that bus lanes along the A20 had proved beneficial, although ongoing problems with sensors had resulted in some of these lanes not being operational. These problems were being dealt with it and it was anticipated that the bus lanes would be functioning normally shortly.

Members were assured that the rerouting of Service 71 to serve the

London Road Park and Ride had not impacted significantly on journey times, subject to passenger loading, although this was reflected in the revised timetable.

Questions raised on concessionary fares and whether passenger numbers had increased; whether Government changes in effect from 1 April would have any impact on the operation of the scheme and whether Arriva intended to follow the example of Stagecoach in seeking reimbursement would be passed to Mr Spalding in his capacity as Commercial Manager to provide answers outside the meeting.

**PT
09/007**

NU VENTURE – GENERAL UPDATE

In the absence of Mr Kemp there was no general update at this meeting.

**PT
09/008**

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL - GENERAL UPDATE

Mr Daniel Washington of the Public Transport Unit at Kent County Council provided a brief update. He indicated that a decision to extend the age range for Freedom Passes would be considered by the County Cabinet shortly.

Works on infrastructure development were ongoing and included improving route 7 services, new bus stops, maps and route corridor improvements.

A Kick Start bid for routes 6 and 7 was being discussed with Arriva in an effort to improve service levels and infrastructure. It was emphasised to Members that this was still at the discussion stage but satisfactory progress was being made. An integrated transport plan for 2010-2012 was being explored to improve the whole route 6 and 7 corridor.

The Panel was advised of a new bus service from Borough Green to Swanley via West Kingsdown.

Other initiatives outlined included the introduction of Smart Cards on buses; the creation of a Roadside Infrastructure Unit to deal with upgrading bus stops and improvements to West Malling Railway Station.

Members asked that consideration be given to adequate advertising of all connections along the new route to Swanley and that improvements to West Malling Railway Station were compatible with current development work.

The Panel also urged that consideration be given to providing bus services to the new hospital at Pembury and, if possible, extend the route along the A20 corridor. Mr Washington advised that there was potential for this to be included in the Kick Start bid.

Concern was expressed about the length of the number 71 service and

its development into a long and extended journey, with the Panel highlighting that if this service was quicker it might be more commercially viable.

Members welcomed the good news relating to improving and replacing bus stops and time tables as it was an important issue for commuters. The Chairman suggested that liaison with parish councils was important to prevent problems associated with bus stops disappearing or replacing bus shelters that did not belong to the County Council.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION IN PRIVATE

**PT
09/009**

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

No items were considered in private.

The meeting ended at 2130 hours