

Tonbridge and Malling Joint Transportation Board***Response to bulletin of 28 June from the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste announcing cuts from £274K to leave only £28k in the 2010/11 Integrated Transport Programme. £6 million external funding risked by £50,000 investment reduction***

We understand that in the very challenging financial climate we are now experiencing, and this includes in-year cuts in national transport budgets, there are bound to be impacts on Kent County Council's Integrated Transport Programme for 2010/11.

Inevitably there would have to be some cuts and it is entirely rational that projects that have passed the 'point of no return' contractually, and would end up costing more to withdraw from, should be preserved in the remnants of the programme. However, we would have expected such drastic alterations in the programme to have been taken through the current cycle of meetings of Joint Transportation Boards to secure broad understanding of the task.

Beyond the category of protected cuts, the rationale applied to the remaining schemes in the review is not clear. More to the point, the effects on an already impoverished programme for Tonbridge and Malling are very concerning. It is difficult to discern any justification for cutting an almost insignificant scheme within the programme, the £5k Speed Limit Reduction project in Winterfield Lane, East Malling, when there has been considerable local support and expectation for this work for several years. It seems extraordinary that such a minor initiative that is designed, amongst other benefits, to provide safe walking access to a large secondary school, cannot remain in the programme.

More critical in overall strategic terms is the cutting of the design work on the A20 Bus Priority Measures. This saves a whole £50k yet has the potential to jeopardise over six million pounds of private investment in the public transport in the Medway Gap area. Planned developments in the Medway Valley area include obligations of over £2.00 million for physical measures to improve road conditions for public transport, a further £4.25 million in specific planning obligations for bus service improvements and other obligations on developers to negotiate a range of additional services.

The timing and coordination of this investment is extremely complex and depends on a range of different 'trigger points' on a range of developments and periods during which the funds need to be spent. Some are a long way off but others are approaching the stage of being urgent, if the funds secured through the planning process are not to be lost.

The fundamental challenge is to plan and co-ordinate the obligations arising from development at a large number of sites. An essential part of this is to move up from the concepts at the planning stage to firm and specific scheme proposals. The £50k provision in this year's programme was designed to do just this by making a start on this urgent work. It has been cut from the budget, putting over £6 million of developer funding at risk. It is difficult to understand how such action can be justified, even for the short term budget relief that it might achieve.

The whole budget for Integrated Transport in Tonbridge and Malling was only about £274K and has been cut back to leave only £28k in the programme, a deeply concerning result that shows a complete lack of equity in transport investment in Tonbridge and Malling compared to other parts of Kent.

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