

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD

13 June 2011

### Report of the Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure

#### Part 1- Public

#### Matters For Information

#### 1 BOROUGH TRANSPORTATION

##### Summary

An overview of transportation matters currently featuring on the Borough Council's broader agenda.

#### 1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 At the last meeting in early March the Board considered a paper that examined the complete range of transportation issues currently on its agenda. It is worth revisiting that report to provide a general update and, more particularly, to make the new Members of the Borough Council aware of these issues. Many of the matters discussed within the report involve the County Council in one way or another and it seems appropriate to bring this report to the attention of the Joint Transportation Board (JTB), in view of the obvious 'cross-walks' between the two Councils. In parallel, I will be presenting a similar report to the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board (PTAB) on the night following the JTB.
- 1.1.2 The important contextual point over-shadowing all aspects of transportation at the present time is the current difficult economic climate. Among other things, this has serious adverse implications for the County Council's investment aspirations for highways and transportation as set out in its recently issued Local Transport Plan for Kent 2011 to 2016. It has set back the implementation of the A21 Tonbridge to Pembury dualling project by the Department for Transport (DfT) and it is continuing to drive steep increases in the cost of rail fares.

#### 1.2 Highways and Transportation

- 1.2.1 The historical context for the partnership working through the JTB goes back many years. For a long period the Borough Council had an instrumental role in traffic management and highway maintenance and improvement. The work was carried out through an agency agreement between the County and Borough Councils. The Borough Council operational role came to an end in 2005 and a number of officers in the Borough Council's Highway Management Unit

transferred across to the County Council which since then has carried out local highway and traffic management directly itself.

1.2.2 Nevertheless, the Borough Council continues to work in conjunction with the County Council by advocating highway and transportation improvements that are important to this Borough and providing local expertise and knowledge to help steer the highway maintenance and improvement programmes. A significant asset in helping to do this is this Board. In parallel, there is also considerable influence through the development planning process as can be seen in the earlier report to this meeting where an extensive range of development related initiatives are set out.

1.2.3 The Borough Council has also worked with the County Council to help shape the development of the two key documents that provide the framework for future highways and transportation investment in Kent. These are “**Growth without Gridlock**” and the “**Local Transport Plan for Kent 2011-16**”

### 1.3 **Growth without Gridlock**

1.3.1 Growth without Gridlock sets out the County Council’s vision for the next twenty years and it is pleasing to see that it recognises many of the key transport issues and challenges that this Borough Council has been advocating solutions for over many years.

- Dealing with the transport implications of the range of developments in the Borough, particularly in the Medway Valley and in central Tonbridge.
- Improving air quality in a number of declared Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) arising from traffic related factors, including a long stretch of the A20 and Tonbridge town centre.
- Enhancing station facilities and rail connections to the City of London on the West Malling/Maidstone East Line and tackling overcrowding on the Tonbridge line.
- Improving transport interchange at Tonbridge and West Malling stations.
- Reinstating direct rail services between the Borough and Gatwick Airport on the Tonbridge/Redhill Line.
- Minimising the adverse impacts of HGV traffic, including overnight parking.
- Mitigating the impacts of traffic on the A25 corridor through Platt, Borough Green and Ightham.

1.3.2 Growth without Gridlock lists a series of proposals aimed at dealing with the challenges outlined in the previous paragraph. It specifically mentions the following:

- Coordinated implementation of transport requirements arising from developments in the Medway Valley, including new bus services supported by bus priority measures – focussed on the A20 corridor.
- Construction of a bypass at Borough Green.
- Construction of the London Road Hadlow Road link in Tonbridge.
- Urban Traffic Management and Control system for Tonbridge.
- Implement Action Plan to deal with AQMAs.
- Work with Network Rail and the Train Operating Companies in the area to enhance opportunities for transport interchange at stations and improve services, particularly to the City of London, with particular focus on the service specification for the next Integrated Kent Franchise period beyond 2014.
- A228 Corridor Improvements – including at Kent Street, Snodland bypass and at Colts Hill in neighbouring Tunbridge Wells Borough to relieve the A26 corridor.
- A21 Tonbridge to Pembury dualling to improve access to the new Pembury Hospital and the North Farm Retail Park.

1.3.3 Many of these initiatives feature in the schemes list that the Board considered at the last meeting. This list was subsequently revised to take on board the comments from the PTAB and the JTB. It sets out the Borough Council's priorities for future highways investment and it is reproduced for reference at **Annex 1**.

1.3.4 Growth without Gridlock is now adopted policy as far as the County Council is concerned. Nevertheless, the Borough Council is taking an opportunity to write to the County Council to reinforce support for elements of the strategy such as the inclusion of the London Road to Hadlow Road Link Road. Subject to any alterations requested by the PTAB the night after the JTB, I will be sending the text reproduced at **Annex 2** to the County Council together with the schedule at annex 1 to reaffirm the broader wishes and aspirations of the Borough Council for highway and transportation improvements.

1.3.5 It is inevitable that a document with a timeframe of 20 to 30 years will be aspirational in tone and this is certainly the case for Growth without Gridlock. The translation of this broad long term strategic document into short term planning is provided by the Local Transport Plan for Kent (LTP). This contains the County Council's prioritised programme for the five year period 2011 to 2016.

## 1.4 Local Transport Plan for Kent

- 1.4.1 The consultation draft of the LTP was deeply disappointing as far as the Borough was concerned and the consultation response represented a robust challenge to the prioritisation system suggested in the consultation draft. Ultimately, the Borough Council's representations were unsuccessful and the adopted prioritisation methodology for transportation investment over the next five years is balanced towards the Growth Areas and East Kent. Nevertheless, there are plus points such as the reinforced importance of the Member Highway Fund. Each county member has an annual budget of £25,000 available for highway improvements in their county division. Over the plan period this will be one of the most significant funding streams and the Borough Council should take the opportunity of working through this Board and other avenues to assist its County Council Members in ways to make the most effective use of their funding.
- 1.4.2 It is also pleasing to see that the A21 Tonbridge to Pembury dualling project features as an important priority within the LTP. The County Council believes it can promote and build this scheme for considerably less than the Highways Agency's current estimate and it is carrying out a detailed assessment to identify what that target cost might be.
- 1.4.3 This focus by the County Council on the scheme makes it all the more essential that the postponed Public Inquiry for the highway orders is resumed so that there is no scope for procedural delay if an early start on construction becomes a practical proposition. Both Councils have joined the A21 Reference Group, the West Kent Partnership and our MP, The Rt Hon Sir John Stanley, to record with the DfT a strong desire that the Inquiry should take place as soon as possible. In recent days the Borough Council Leader has received a response to earlier representations on this important matter and it is reproduced at **Annex 2**. It has also been circulated to the Reference Group and our local MPs. In summary further progress depends fundamentally on the work currently being developed by the County Council and we wait with anticipation on the results of the County Council's assessment and what this might mean for scheme development and implementation.
- 1.4.4 I have placed for reference purposes copies of "Growth without Gridlock" and the "Local Transport Plan for Kent 2011-16" in the Member Library. These can also be accessed on the County Council's website on the following links:
- [http://www.kent.gov.uk/roads\\_and\\_transport/highway\\_improvements/our\\_transport\\_vision/local\\_transport\\_plan.aspx](http://www.kent.gov.uk/roads_and_transport/highway_improvements/our_transport_vision/local_transport_plan.aspx)
  - [http://www.kent.gov.uk/your\\_council/priorities,\\_policies\\_and\\_plans/priorities\\_and\\_plans/growth\\_without\\_gridlock.aspx](http://www.kent.gov.uk/your_council/priorities,_policies_and_plans/priorities_and_plans/growth_without_gridlock.aspx)

## 1.5 Rail

- 1.5.1 We have a significant list of key concerns about rail services through the Borough. The removal of city services on the West Malling line as a result of major changes in the timetable over two years ago continues to have repercussions for mid-Kent. It has impacted adversely on the travel patterns of local residents commuting to London. Both the Borough and County Council have continued to press for restoration of these services. It may well be that there will be some mitigation of the impacts by the introduction of peak time services on Thameslink through Blackfriars.
- 1.5.2 There are also major concerns about fares and the RPI+3% mechanism that has operated throughout the south east franchise since it was granted in 2006. Unfortunately, this is now set to continue for the remaining two years of the extended franchise. Service issues are also important with overcrowding on peak services being a considerable inconvenience for many passengers on the mid and west Kent lines who find that they regularly have to stand for their journeys to and from the capital.
- 1.5.3 It is pleasing to see that these and many other critical rail related issues, such as the need to restore the direct line from Kent to Gatwick airport, have been included by the County Council in the final version of the 'Rail Action Plan for Kent'. The Borough Council responded to the consultation on the draft version of this document and many of the points raised have been reflected in the final version of the document.
- 1.5.4 Again, a copy has been deposited in the Member Library and it can also be referred to on the KCC website on the following link:
- [http://www.kent.gov.uk/your\\_council/have\\_your\\_say/rail\\_summit/rail\\_action\\_plan.aspx](http://www.kent.gov.uk/your_council/have_your_say/rail_summit/rail_action_plan.aspx)
- 1.5.5 In recent days, a new highspeed peak service to St Pancras has been introduced on a six month trial from Maidstone West station via the Medway valley line. Unfortunately, there is no stop at any of the stations within this Borough, not even one that the Borough Council would have been keen to support at Snodland station. Given the trial nature of this service, it is disappointing that an additional stop could not have been built into the service specification, especially as it would not have added significantly to the overall journey time to St Pancras.
- 1.5.6 It was mentioned above that the franchise period had been extended for a further two years. This was a contractual entitlement for Southeastern Railway subject to it successfully complying with certain performance parameters. Apparently, it did manage to achieve this so the extension became a formality.
- 1.5.7 The focus therefore shifts to what happens beyond the end of the current franchise. A wide spectrum of organisations in Kent is disappointed about the service specification for the current franchise and the way that this has impacted

on services in the county. There appears to be a general sentiment that the details of the next franchise should have a far greater degree of scrutiny and challenge the next time round. The Rail Action Plan for Kent is an excellent way for harnessing this collective effort. The Borough Council will be working with the County Council to promote local aspirations for the future of rail services through the Kent Rail Forum.

- 1.5.8 It is not yet known what the DfT has in mind for the next franchise specification. Whatever it might be, the DfT will have start letting Kent residents and businesses know some time soon because the process of procuring a new train operating company is long and complex. When this information has been issued, I will be reporting to the Board accordingly.

## **1.6 Legal Implications**

- 1.6.1 None applicable.

## **1.7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 1.7.1 As set out in the LTP.

## **1.8 Risk Assessment**

- 1.8.1 Not applicable.

Background papers:

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Nil

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