

Comments on “Growth without Gridlock – a Transport Delivery Plan for Kent”

Thank you for your recent letter and attached copy of the new transport delivery plan for Kent. I have shared this with my Members and I would like to make the following observations and comments by way of reinforcing those elements of the plan directly relevant to this Borough.

Overall, the document is to be welcomed. It neatly captures the themes and challenges that this Council would wish to see addressed over the timescale of the Plan. It is particularly pleasing to note the strong emphasis accorded to the A21 Tonbridge to Pembury Dualling Project and the County Council’s aspirations for bringing this to fruition itself at a very much reduced cost. We would of course be keen on being kept informed about any progress you are able to make on this.

It is also pleasing to see the recognition given to the importance of improved accessibility in and around Tonbridge town centre and support for its economic vitality through the continued commitment to the construction of the London Road-Hadlow Road link.

The proposal for a Lower Thames Crossing to the east of Gravesend features heavily in the Plan. This of course has huge regional strategic implications but it also has potential impacts at a more local scale. The traffic generation will not all be M2 and M20 related as there is bound to be some ‘outer orbital’ effects of bringing a considerable number of vehicles to this part of north Kent. In other words, the implications of this major proposal on the A228 need to be firmly on the agenda. In fact, even without such a major proposal, the need for improvements along the A228 corridor is paramount and it is good to see that these are specifically listed in the Plan for the Snodland Bypass, Colts Hill bypass and through Kent Street near Mereworth.

I am just a little perturbed by what I read as a significant change to the aspiration that has long featured in the previous versions of the Local Transport Plan, the provision of an all way working junction of M25/M26/ A21. It is a critical addition required to the Strategic Road Network, to maximise the use of main routes and to provide relief for the A 25. However, on page 38 the proposal is described as ‘east facing slips on the M25M26 to enable traffic approaching from the south to travel east on the M26 and M25’. This should also provide for flows in the opposite direction. That is, for traffic travelling west on the M26 to turn off and go south on the A21. The potential for confusion could have been very easily eliminated by the simple addition of the words ‘and vice versa’ on page 38.

The importance of rail in the transportation mix is well brought out in the plan document and, together with the Rail Action Plan for Kent, provides a strong platform for the work that we will be keen to carry out jointly with you to ensure the next franchise for the south east is built around the needs of rail passengers rather than the DfT and the train operating companies. In

particular the sign up to direct connections to Gatwick from the heart of Kent is welcomed.

Overall the Plan provides a good framework for transport investment over the next two decades. It is a pity therefore that the more immediate manifestation of the document, the Local Transport Plan, should reflect so little the broad aspirations of this longer term plan. The LTP pays no heed to the concentration of well planned development in this Borough in the next few years. The fact that the pace of development in the immediate outlook period exceeds most other parts of Kent is simply ignored despite strong representations made in response to the consultation on the draft LTP. The only conclusion possible is that the longer term aspirations of 'Growth without Gridlock' can be readily sacrificed for reasons of short term expediency in drafting the current and subsequent LTP documents. That this is so is a pity because Growth without Gridlock is a good plan that this Council broadly supports.