

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD

28 November 2011

Report of the Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure

Part 1- Public

Matters For Information

1 BOROUGH TRANSPORTATION MATTERS

Summary

This report provides an update on a number of transportation matters that the Borough Council has recently been focusing on. It parallels a report to the recent meeting of the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board and is timely because one of the principal focuses of concern is the imminent Southeastern Railway fare increases.

1.1 Context

1.1.1 In parallel with similar reports to the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board (PTAB), this Board has been receiving regular reports on a range of transportation matters currently high on the Borough Council's agenda. This paper provides an update on a number of these.

1.2 Rail

1.2.1 The Borough Council has pressed long and hard for improved rail services in this area. Disappointingly, these have had little impact on seemingly immutable contractual specifications set many years ago. The list of aspirations includes the following:

- Restoration of city services on the Maidstone East/West Malling line. We advocated this strongly at the draft stage of the County Council's Rail Action Plan for Kent and it is now enshrined as an important priority in the adopted document.
- Reinstatement of the direct service between Tonbridge and Gatwick that was abandoned in 2008.

1.2.2 Earlier this year there had been some hope of at least a partial reinstatement of non-Victoria services on the West Malling line. The Department for Transport (DfT) and the train operating company were in discussions about peak Thameslink services through Blackfriars. However, the cost of introducing such services would have been apparently unsustainable in the present difficult

financial period and it has dropped out of any further consideration during the rest of the current franchise that will last till April 2014.

1.2.3 No matter how frustrating the results of consistent advocacy might have been in recent times, it is important to keep this effort going over the next two years when there is real opportunity to influence the specification for the next franchise. The general scope and direction of the service specification should become known after the Olympics next year and the DfT must conduct public consultation on this. We can then ensure that the Borough and County Councils' aspirations are fully aired at that stage including:

- restoration of City services on the West Malling line,
- reinstatement of the direct service from Tonbridge to Gatwick and further development of the line into mid and north Kent,
- protection against any reduction in service numbers of trains between Tonbridge and Cannon Street,
- providing a stop at Snodland station on the recently introduced High Speed Service between Maidstone West and St Pancras,
- A fundamental rebalancing of the fare setting formula for the franchise that has been so damaging and inequitable to rail passengers in this Borough.

1.2.4 This last point is not only one for the longer term. It is very topical at the moment because increases in fares are expected to be introduced from the start of the New Year, and, based on the current fare setting formula these will be substantial and a matter of grave concern for passengers and for the Borough and County Council.

1.2.5 This concern prompted the Borough Council to hold a special Rail Forum meeting a few weeks ago to ensure that the train operating company was fully aware of the depth of worry these imminent fare increases were creating. A detailed information sheet presented to the Forum by Southeastern Railway, copied at **Annex 1**, failed to mitigate the concerns of those who attended the session and also from the rail user group representatives present. In response to the sentiments they expressed, the Leader and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation wrote jointly to the Minister of State responsible for the rail industry and to the Managing Director of Southeastern Railway. It was essential that we submitted these letters, reproduced at **Annex 2**, as soon as possible after the Rail Forum, if there were to be any opportunity of positively influencing the fare setting exercise currently underway at Southeastern Railway. The PTAB endorsed these letters when it met on 16 November. Annex 2 also contains the reply received from Southeastern Railway.

1.2.6 The Rail Forum also revealed some interesting information from Network Rail on the imminent enhancement works at Tonbridge station and the railway industry's

preparations for service continuity during the winter months. The presentation from the Forum is reproduced at **Annex 3**.

1.3 A21 Tonbridge to Pembury Dualling Scheme

- 1.3.1 The Minister of Transport earlier this year requested the Highways Agency to work with Kent County Council to examine the scope for reducing the cost of carrying out the proposed A21 dualling scheme. This they have done and it has resulted in a new estimated cost for the work in the region of £80M, down from the £117M the HA was working to. My understanding is that this exercise has been conducted using similar design specification and standards and that the reduction emanates from matters related to allocation of project risk and reassessment of contingencies. The County Council believes that further reduction could be derived from a modification of design standards and consideration of the burden of VAT.
- 1.3.2 This still leaves a considerable amount to be sourced to provide a budget for the scheme before there is any possibility of it going ahead. There are a number of possibilities. The government, as part of its budget processes towards the end of this calendar year, will be reviewing the package of unprogrammed schemes for the period beyond 2015. These include the A21 Tonbridge to Pembury scheme. The County Council is, in parallel, researching the potential for funding support from the Local Enterprise Partnership and from other sources. We should maintain a watching brief over the next few months to see whether a combination of these potential funding sources comes together in a way that would allow a reduced cost, County Council led scheme to be implemented.

1.4 Access to Pembury Hospital

- 1.4.1 The mismatch between the programme for opening the new hospital and the planning to ensure proper provision for bus access has been disappointing. My understanding is that the currently emerging plan from the Health Trust, in conjunction with the County Council, is that there will be a service based on four buses each hour from central Tonbridge to the new hospital. The 217 will have an additional hourly service and these will be phased with the hourly services on the 208 and 209.
- 1.4.2 In the meantime, the Trust will not be providing the services required within the original planning consent issued by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. It is seeking to have the planning obligation altered so that it is not directly responsible for providing the services and it wishes instead to be allowed to provide a sum to the County Council to arrange an altered series of services. If the submission to amend is accepted it would have implications for access to the hospital from a considerable part of Tonbridge and Malling because the services that were required in the original planning consent from Borough Green, Mereworth and West Malling would not be provided.

- 1.4.3 This is based on the Trust's assessment of likely patronage which it asserts will be low from these locations and would not provide proper value for money within a constrained budget. The funding in the first five years when the planning obligation requires the service to be supported is limited and it is questionable whether it would be possible to explore the opportunities for services that would be viable after that time. It is therefore pioneering an alternative approach that might provide more certainty in the longer term. This would be based on enhanced transportation provision from the voluntary sector using cars and min-buses to carry patients and visitors from those locations.
- 1.4.4 If there were to be a reasonable guarantee that such an approach would work well in practice and that the provision would be robust, the result could be a more beneficial service to communities in more rural parts of the Borough. It all depends on the detailed management and operation and we wait with interest to see what the Trust is able to arrange.

1.5 South East of England Councils

- 1.5.1 Interestingly, in recent weeks we have become aware that the South East of England Councils (SEEC) has been considering what role it might be able to play in promoting strategic transportation ambitions for the region. Whatever this might involve, given that there is no dedicated technical administrative support, it has to be fairly limited. Nevertheless, if there is an appetite for some broad coordination of strategic ambitions and aspirations, we should recognise this as a further opportunity to register and advocate the strategic matters that are locally important.
- 1.5.2 With this in mind, we have sent an informal submission to the regional representative for transportation matters at SEEC to ensure that Borough Council aspirations are reflected in any overall list of future priorities for the region. This is reproduced at **Annex 4**.

1.6 Legal Implications

- 1.6.1 Nil

1.7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.7.1 None directly for the Borough Council.

1.8 Risk Assessment

- 1.8.1 Not required

1.9 Policy Considerations

- 1.9.1 Community

Background papers:

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Nil

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