

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD

11 June 2012

**Report of the Director of Kent Highways and Transportation
and the Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure**

Part 1- Public

Matters For Decision

1 TONBRIDGE TOWN CENTRE – TRANSPORT STRATEGY

Summary

The aim of this report is to inform the Board of the emerging outcomes of the work to review and update the Transport Strategy for Tonbridge town centre. It informs the Board on the overall approach being taken in reassessing traffic movement and air quality implications of the strategy. Proposed measures to meet the objectives of the Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan (TCAAP) are being reviewed and updated including a realistic approach to the London Road to Hadlow Road link (LR/HRL).

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The Transport Strategy for the town centre is contained in the Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan (TCAAP) adopted in April 2008 as part of the Borough Council's Local Development Framework. The Transport Strategy seeks ways to improve traffic flows and pedestrian movement in the town centre and specifically to ease congestion and reduce traffic levels in the High Street in order to improve general environmental conditions and address issues such as poor air quality.
- 1.1.2 KCC, as the Highway Authority, recently engaged Jacobs to undertake a traffic assessment of the road network in and around the town centre and prepare some outline designs with costings for a range of realistic options to assist in reducing traffic levels and ease congestion in the High Street to reflect the objectives of the TCAAP. These assessments have been undertaken with close regard to the poor air quality, at the southern end of the High Street, with the aim of producing an improvement in general environmental condition whilst acknowledging the potential for onward impacts of poor air quality following redesignation of traffic flows.
- 1.1.3 Consideration has also been given to the initiative to pedestrianise part of the High Street put forward by the group PATHS (Pedestrian Action for Tonbridge High Street).

- 1.1.4 Jacobs have now completed the traffic assessment commissioned by KCC and have produced in Table 1 (Annex A) a list of potential measures resulting from a comprehensive re-appraisal of the transport position within the central area. It also includes an analysis of other measures that have not, to date, formed part of any strategy, but nevertheless have been raised through other channels and mentioned in reports to the Board in the past. This table should be read in conjunction with the layout plans contained in Annex B.
- 1.1.5 The situation with regards to air quality is finely balanced and options for radical improvement might be constrained. The assessment work carried out so far indicates that a significant reduction in traffic flows in the High Street would be needed to achieve national air quality objectives combined with measures to avoid standing traffic. Shifting the traffic to the Bordyke may result in unacceptable increases in nitrogen dioxide levels at the junction with the High Street, due to increased volumes of standing or slow moving traffic. This has recently been identified as an area requiring further investigation, following the most recent Borough wide Updating and Screen Assessment, which has independently looked at factors that may contribute to poor air quality, including areas in which traffic flows have increased.
- 1.1.6 The PATHS proposal for pedestrianisation of the High Street from Bradford Street to the High Street junction with Vale Road has been assessed for impact on the road network. PATHS propose that the section of the High Street between Bradford Street and Medway Wharf Road is made access only with traffic being diverted via Medway Wharf Road/ Sovereign Way/Avenue Du Puy/Vale Road. The traffic assessment demonstrates that the consequential reassigned traffic will result in highway capacity being exceeded on the Avenue Du Puy and Medway Wharf Road and junction capacity being exceeded at the B2260 High Street/Medway Wharf Road junction. It is also likely that traffic would be diverted onto other routes which would increase the pressure and congestion on Vale Road, Bordyke and the junction of Hadlow Road/Cannon Lane. It is clear that the alternative routes (junctions and links) do not have the capacity to accommodate the diverted traffic at all times of day and this would be likely to lead to unmanageable congestion in the wider area at peak times. This vision for pedestrianisation is clearly impractical as a permanent solution and it is not recommended that this be taken forward for further development and costing. That would not prevent the occasional closure of the High Street for particular events and initiatives.

1.2 The Next Steps

- 1.2.1 It is clear from the traffic analysis undertaken by Jacobs that the London Road/Hadlow Road Link, although desirable, is not essential to the implementation of development in the TCAAP. This is reassuring because this long standing proposal (currently costed at £10 million) has been unable to be realised, even during more optimistic economic times. There seems no prospect for the scheme being financed and the ongoing effect of the existence of the

proposal is in essence simply to blight property and land from beneficial use. Consequently its long term inclusion in the transport strategy for the town centre seems of little value.

- 1.2.2 Abandoning a costly and therefore undeliverable proposal would mean that the transport strategy is focused on other more deliverable measures. Some of the capital receipts from the abandonment of this scheme will help to stimulate the delivery of the measures identified in Annex A. A further source of funding could be through contributions from future development. Additionally, the Integrated Transport Programme funding is also a potential funding source if safe, effective measures can be identified.
- 1.2.3 Since commissioning the Jacobs study the Department for Transport has announced that the widening of the A21 has been prioritised for construction in the next Comprehensive Spending Review period. The revised transport strategy will acknowledge the greater level of certainty in the delivery of the A21 widening. The potential for additional grammar school provision in Sevenoaks which may lead to a change in some travel patterns in Tonbridge will also be acknowledged.
- 1.2.4 The analysis so far has been undertaken using a spreadsheet assessment which works well where the impact of change in traffic patterns is predictable. If funding is available, consideration could now be given to the value of using the KCC and Tunbridge Wells VISUM model which covers the urban areas of Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge, Southborough, Paddock Wood and Hildenborough. This if required will give a better idea of the interaction between transport modes and transport choices.

1.3 Further Considerations

- 1.3.1 A significant portion of peak traffic movements (and the shoulder peak) in the study area result from education related trips. The many secondary and further education establishments result in high demand in the 16-18 age groups where origin and destination are often at opposite ends of the town. Traffic reduction could be achieved through modal change incentivised by a public transport discount scheme for this age group. The existing Freedom Pass scheme demonstrates success in the case of Tonbridge, where the opportunity for tackling congestion is very limited. The County Council's proposals for a scheme aimed at the 16 -18 age group, in the County, would go some way to mitigate the impact of education. This matter will be acknowledged in the transport strategy.
- 1.3.2 If funding is available, there could be some further air quality study to evaluate the impacts of our most recent Updating and Screening Assessment alongside the proposed improvements to traffic flows around the town centre, on some measures that are emerging as part of the strategy review would be desirable.

1.4 Conclusions at this stage

- 1.4.1 The work so far has been useful in defining the extent to which the transport strategy can be reviewed and the inevitable physical and financial constraints that apply.
- 1.4.2 Nevertheless, there are opportunities to implement some changes that could assist in managing traffic flows more carefully and help improve the efficiency of the network and to some degree environmental quality.
- 1.4.3 It is apparent that the Hadlow Road/London Road Link has no prospect of delivery in any foreseeable circumstances and its demise will assist financially to achieve some other smaller scale improvements and bring dormant property back into use.
- 1.4.4 Further consideration will be given to the range and priority of measures and improvements identified through the work so far and this should be the subject of the next phase of work. Local County and Borough Council Members who have a keen interest in the shaping of any future projects will be engaged in this process prior to a further detailed report being made to the Board.

1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 The County Council as Highway Authority is responsible for the operation of the network and in doing so has a clear role in advising the Borough Council as Planning Authority on future strategy in Local Planning terms.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 None at this stage.

1.7 Risk Assessment

- 1.7.1 The conclusion has been reached after much consideration that the London Road to Hadlow Road Link will not be realised. Consequently, the most practical way forward is to consider matters in the context of a review of the transport strategy for the town centre and to identify some measures that can more realistically be brought forward for implementation.

1.8 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.8.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

1.9 Recommendations

- 1.9.1 That the Cabinet be recommended to **ENDORSE** the overall approach set out in the report.

1.9.2 That the Board recommend to the County Council Cabinet Member for Environment Highways & Waste that the London Road to Hadlow Road link approved scheme **BE ABANDONED**.

1.9.3 A further report **BE MADE** to the Board, following engagement with local County and Borough Council Members, with a proposed prioritised programme of works and an indication on how the measures will be funded, including the use of some of the capital receipts arising from the abandonment of the Link Road.

Background papers:

Tonbridge Transport Strategy – Traffic Study Report
April 2012

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| Screening for equality impacts: | | |
|---|---------------|-------------------------------|
| Question | Answer | Explanation of impacts |
| a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? | N/A | |
| b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? | N/A | |
| c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above? | | N/A |

In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.