

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD

24 September 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: This report marks a proposed shift in the transport strategy for Tonbridge Town Centre following discussion at the last meeting and an informal member session during the summer. The change in context is summarised along with a package of measures designed to improve transport management in the town centre.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 At the last meeting of the Joint Board, members gave some initial consideration to a review of the Transport Strategy for Tonbridge Town Centre. This led to some further Member discussion at an informal session held in August which in turn gave rise to some constructive direction and pointers to shaping a refreshed future approach.
- 1.1.2 A subtle but important shift that has emerged during these discussions was to question some of the principles that had previously been held. The current adopted strategy includes an aspiration to redistribute some traffic away from the High Street onto the alternative road network. Measures put forward at the last meeting of the Joint Board were designed to achieve this. However, what has become apparent is that the limited capacity on the alternative network, coupled with the significantly restricted range of options available (which are in turn set by the physical nature of the town centre) make the practical options difficult to achieve this aim. In addition some concerns were expressed about the basic wisdom and ability of seeking to divert traffic onto alternative routes. The discussions also exposed the possibility of actually worsening both traffic congestion and air quality standards at key points as a result of pursuing such an approach.
- 1.1.3 What has emerged is a different set of concerns and objectives that are more to do with better management of the current road network, through improved signalling, signing, servicing regimes and relatively modest engineering interventions that could assist in the easing the flow of traffic in and around the

town centre. In parallel some key junctions offer some opportunity for improvement and that these should be considered in more detail.

- 1.1.4 The functioning and environment of the High Street itself has been considered over many years. It is clear now that there is no practical opportunity for permanent pedestrianisation and actually the diversion of any significant traffic levels is also unachievable without serious congestion at other points. This sensitivity in managing the traffic flows has to be kept firmly in mind in designing a way forward. Securing the free flow of traffic, especially at peak times, is important to how people travel in the town centre and how the town works economically. It is therefore critical to support this functioning whilst also looking at how pedestrian movement can be helped. Such an approach is in the economic interests of the High Street and town centre as well as the more immediate traffic imperative.
- 1.1.5 Consequently, what follows is a reflection of this shift to pursue a more pragmatic approach to traffic management in the town centre through a range of potential interventions. Those members who were able to attend the session in August should recognise the changed approach in the following measures. They range from relatively minor changes that could be achieved in the short term to other possibilities that will take some more detailed work to bring them to a point that we can be comfortable of their practicality. Some are a matter of easy change whilst others (such as alterations to servicing arrangements for the High Street) will require intensive consultation.
- 1.1.6 The intention is that the potential measures that are outlined below can form the practical elements of the refreshed approach to managing movement in the town. These will need to run alongside other initiatives to do with bus strategy and cycling provision.
- 1.1.7 Part of the context for the refreshed approach is the abandonment of the Hadlow Road to London Road link. The realisation of this project has been in significant doubt for many years and there is no prospect of its implementation in the foreseeable future. However, the County Council has agreed that some funds from land sales that will occur can be made available to directly assist in bringing forward the proposed new measures.

1.2 Preparing the New Town Centre Transport Strategy

- 1.2.1 Table 1 below captures the objectives flowing from recent Member discussions that are to be met through a refreshed Transport Strategy for the town centre and indicates the work that is needed to devise and implement the relevant schemes. In some cases, these initiatives require straightforward reviews and relatively low-cost adjustments to be undertaken. In others, investigations and detailed design will lead to consultation. In at least one case, detailed highway design work will have to be undertaken, probably leading to a scheme that would be more costly to implement and consequently may take longer to realise depending on the availability of funding from all sources.

1.2.2 The table is arranged in an order with a view to deliverability, having regard for 'quick wins' and longer term projects. Importantly, the list of measures covers a range of initiatives that together form a package that can help ease movement and achieve transport improvement. These improvements are focussed less on intervention through engineering and concentrate more on management and efficiency of the current system and road network. That reflects the general conclusions reached and it is hoped that the Board can sign up to this approach. The timescales quoted refer to lead time required for completion of studies/reviews, design of schemes and cost estimates. The final prioritisation against available funding will be an outcome of the ongoing reporting process when there is more design and cost information.

Table 1: Objectives and Approaches for new Transport Strategy

OBJECTIVE	APPROACH(ES)
Improve air quality in the High Street and Quarry Hill Road.	Assess all aspects of the Transport Strategy for their impact on air quality, rejecting any measures that may impact adversely on known hot spots or have the potential to create new ones. Commit to ongoing monitoring of the outcomes of measures that are agreed for implementation. <i>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: Officer time and any necessary additional monitoring equipment.</i> <i>Timescale - ongoing.</i>
Ensure that longer distance/through traffic is directed to the most appropriate routes, avoiding the High Street.	Review direction signs at all relevant junctions, including A21, A26, Quarry Hill Road, Pembury Road and High Street. <i>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: Officer time and new signs, if such are needed. Completion by Autumn 2013.</i>
Reduce interruptions to the flow of vehicular traffic passing through the town centre.	1. Review traffic signal coordination and junction timings at all relevant locations, particularly in the approaches to and through the High Street. <i>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: Commissioning of specialist advice and implementation of agreed outcomes. Completion by March 2013, subject to ongoing monitoring.</i> 2. Prepare a Servicing Strategy for the High Street (specifically between the Big Bridge and Vale Road, over which length opportunities for rear access appear to exist). <i>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: Officer time,</i>

	<p><i>stakeholder consultation and any agreed traffic regulation orders, with enforcement. Completion by Summer 2014.</i></p> <p>3. Review vehicular movements at the Medway Wharf Road/High Street junction (initially a physical restriction to right turning traffic from Medway Wharf Road and from High Street). <i>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: Officer time, stakeholder consultation, detailed design (physical measures) and any agreed traffic regulation orders. Completion by March 2014.</i></p>
Improve the flow of pedestrian movement and general ease for people at various locations in the town centre	<p>Prepare a Pedestrian Movement Plan for the High Street and Quarry Hill Road, including the de-cluttering of street furniture and signs, and the removal of unnecessary road markings. This can include improving conditions by the alteration of some kerb lines and by some minor treatment of some small areas in appropriate materials without any reduction in carriageway capacity. <i>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: Officer time and/or commissioning of specialist advice, stakeholder consultation, and detailed design. Phased construction to Summer 2014, depending on funding.</i></p>
Improve the performance of the High Street/Vale Road/Avebury Avenue/Barden Road junction.	<p>In connection with the above, review kerb lines, pedestrian crossing facilities and the carriageway layout to improve the flow and interaction of traffic modes without reducing overall capacity. <i>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: Officer time and/or commissioning specialist advice, stakeholder consultation, and detailed design. Completion by Summer 2014.</i></p>
Reduce peak period queuing at the Hadlow Road, Bordyke and Cannon Lane junction.	<p>Optimise signal timings, and upgrade equipment if necessary. Review position of stop line on Bordyke approach. <i>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: Commissioning of specialist advice and detailed design. Completion by Autumn 2013.</i></p>
Improve the performance of the Vale Road/Vale Rise junction.	<p>Currently related to the potential for redevelopment of adjoining land, but if there is delay it may be appropriate to generate options for assessment.</p>

	Traffic signals not currently the preferred solution. <i>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: None in the short term, apart from the development management process. Review position in Summer 2013.</i>
Relieve the High Street north of the river.	Continue to negotiate for the development-related delivery of the Lansdowne Road Link. Assess and improve signal timings at the Bordyke junction. <i>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: Officer time and commissioning specialist advice. Timescale - ongoing.</i>
Improve the efficiency of vehicle, cycle, pedestrian and public transport interaction in the vicinity of Tonbridge Station and Quarry Hill Parade.	Review highway layout, crossing facilities, bus stops and taxi stands, and quality of the environment outside the station and the shops. <i>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: Officer time and/or commissioning of specialist advice. However, the timescale will need to be related to any likelihood of development proposals coming forward in the vicinity</i>
Achieve the optimum layout of the Five Ways junction (Shipbourne Road/London Road) to reduce queuing at peak times and ensure that school-related pedestrian and cycle traffic is not compromised in terms of safety and flow.	Review junction layout, having regard for schemes previously considered. <i>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: Commissioning of specialist advice, and detailed design if necessary. Report on options by Autumn 2013.</i>
Consider the impact on town centre traffic of A227, B245, A26 and A2014 junctions beyond the main town centre strategy area.	Review performance of each junction. <i>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: Commissioning of specialist advice. Report on performance and any recommendations by Autumn 2014.</i>

1.3 Legal Implications

- 1.3.1 As the Highway Authority, the County Council has power to implement changes and alterations to the road network in accordance with the appropriate Legislation and Regulations.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.4.1 It will be important for cost estimates of the various measures described above to be brought forward for the Boards consideration as elements of the package are designed. This will be assessed against available funding at the time. The County Council have committed to make available £250,000 towards the implementation of the strategy from the sale of assets following the abandonment of the London Road to Hadlow Road link.
- 1.4.2 We are optimistic that some further funds will become available from emerging development projects in the town centre towards some of these package elements. Additionally we are hopeful that a contribution can be made from the Local Transport Plan funding block when it is allocated by the County Council and through future Member Highway Budgets if appropriate.
- 1.4.3 The resource implications for each of the package elements have been broadly indicated in the table above along with an estimate of potential timetabling and implementation.

1.5 Risk Assessment

- 1.5.1 It is appropriate for a review of the transport strategy to be refreshed from time to time in order to take account of changing patterns and context. Not to do so would be to risk inappropriate action and miss opportunities to take a pragmatic approach to current transport issues, which this report seeks to do.

1.6 Equality Impact Assessment

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

1.7 Recommendations

The Board endorse the revised objectives and approaches to the Tonbridge Transport Strategy as outlined in table 1 and further reports be brought forward dealing with implementation.

Background papers:

Nil

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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?	No	The measures outlined in this report will be designed to take account of the needs of different groups in the community in accordance with current guidance.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	No	See above
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		

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.