

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD**

**23 February 2010**

**Report of the Director of Planning Transport and Leisure**

**Part 1- Public**

**Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)**

**1 STRATEGIC TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENTS**

**Summary**

**The report outlines a number of current strategic transport matters of importance to the Borough.**

**1.1 Introduction**

1.1.1 Over recent months, there have been a number of developments in the strategic transport field that have implications for the future of travel in this Borough. Some, such as the timetable changes on the West Malling/Maidstone East railway line, have already been introduced and have been distinctly unwelcome. Others, such as the work on the County Council's 'Integrated Transport Strategy for Kent' look forward over the next two decades. They are being brought together in this report so that the Board has an overview of the broad range of strategic transportation initiatives that are currently live issues. They are as follows:

- The Kent Integrated Transport Strategy
- Delivering a Sustainable Transport System – London to Dover/Cross Channel Ports
- A21 Dualling
- A228 Colts Hill
- The Kent Route Utilisation Strategy (Network Rail)
- The new Southeastern Railway Timetable
- The West Kent Investment Strategy and Action Plan 2010-15

## 1.2 The Kent Integrated Transport Strategy

- 1.2.1 Kent County Council is carrying out a consultation exercise on its draft Integrated Transport Strategy. It is not really clear where this latest document fits into the spectrum of already existing plans and strategies such as the South East Plan and the Regional Transportation Strategy. Nevertheless, it seeks to provide a context for future Local Transport Plans and to inform the Local Development Framework process by providing a vision for an integrated transport network for Kent over the next twenty years.
- 1.2.2 The closing date for response was 12 February and I have offered some observations on the draft strategy before that date. A summary of the points made is attached at **Annex 1**. County Council and Borough Council officers have also met to discuss the document just before the response deadline and this provided an opportunity to amplify the earlier submission. I advised the County Council that the response deadline preceded the meeting of this Board by a little over a week and that the comments so far were at officer level. Therefore I sought an understanding that there would be an opportunity to follow up with any further observations the Board might wish to add.
- 1.2.3 The document makes a laudable attempt to provide a longer term context for Local Transport Plans that, until now, have had a life-span of five years. However it also aims to be a key influence on Local Development Frameworks, without recognising that a number of Local Planning Authorities, such as Tonbridge and Malling already have their current LDF at a mature stage of adoption. It prompts a question of what weight would or could be given to this document when the process of adoption is significantly different from the statutory framework for the LDF.
- 1.2.4 The document recognises a number of key transport issues for the Borough but does not transform these into proposals.
- There is considerable development in the Medway valley and also in Tonbridge; the transportation implications of these have already been mapped out through planning consents and in the Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan.
  - Air Quality Management Zones are acknowledged but there is no indication of a positive means of resolving them.
  - There need to be specific measures to deal with deficiencies in rail services on the West Malling line and on the corridor out to Redhill and Gatwick.
  - The project to install further Urban Traffic Management Centres only mentions one for Tunbridge Wells when it should include both centres because Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells are indicated as a joint hub in the South East Plan.

- There is no mention of dualling for the single lane stretch of the Snodland bypass.
- There should be specific reference to improved station parking, especially at West Malling and Hildenborough.
- It is interesting to note that there is no sign of any early adoption of congestion charging or parking levies but there is mention of 'variable parking charges'. Given that the stock of off-street parking is almost entirely within the control of the districts and any attempt to reduce demand would have an adverse financial impact on them, there will need to be some more detailed explanation as to how the County Council will be able to use this particular demand management mechanism and how it would meet the drop in income of this Borough Council, for example.
- The text on a Lower Thames Crossing is referenced by an arrow on the associated map in the document indicating a landing place on the south of the River Thames to the east of Gravesend. The strategy should be overt in recognising that such a location would result in traffic impacts well to the south and east and particularly along the A228 corridor and adjoining roads.
- There is the briefest of mentions of enforcement of work place travel plans at new developments that opens up a number of questions about how it would be done, what would the sanctions be, and who would do it and under what powers?
- There is a welcome reference to the County Council, in its role as Highway Authority, going beyond a narrow focus on functional highway matters and contributing towards 'place-making'. This implies a commitment to quality design and layout and creating roads that are attractive as well as being functional. Past experience suggests that this will be a difficult aim to achieve since it inevitably implies greater capital and revenue costs to build and maintain such projects. Nevertheless, it is an aim that we should support if we are to achieve improvement to the appearance and attractiveness of the public realm in this Borough through financial means other than what we can secure from our own Capital Plan or through the planning process.

1.2.5 These, together with the comments already forwarded to the County Council transportation team set out in Annex 1, are just a few of the observations prompted by a wide ranging strategic document. The Board may have further thoughts and these can be collated at the meeting. I will then send them to the County Council and confirm the aggregate submission as the formal views of this Council.

1.2.6 Irrespective of what weight the final strategy eventually has or whether it has any impact on the LDF process, it presents an opportunity to air and advocate a range of transportation matters that are important to the residents and businesses in the Borough, both present and future.

1.2.7 Several copies of the document have been left in the Members' library for reference. It can also be viewed on-line at the KCC website under <http://www.kent.gov.uk/static/transport/integrated-transport-strategy.pdf>

### **1.3 Delivering a Sustainable Transport System (DaSTS)– London to Dover/Cross Channel Ports**

1.3.1 Future transport investment will inevitably be significantly influenced by the finance available to pay for it and this is likely to be constrained as a result of the long term pressures on public finance. Whatever the extent and content of future transport investment programmes, there will need to be some means of determining relative priorities between competing proposals for the available budgets. The Government has recently adopted a new process for doing so and has set it out in recent guidance under the title of "Delivering a Sustainable Transport System" (DaSTS). This is focused on transport investment beyond 2014 and it reflects the work of both the Eddington and Stern Reviews.

1.3.2 Each region is currently working on a series of corridor and thematic studies to guide future funding and programmes. The Regional Transport Board for the South East has requested the County Council to progress one such study entitled "London to Dover/Cross Channel Ports". The County Council has, in turn, commissioned its term consultant, Jacobs, to carry out the work.

1.3.3 The objectives of the study are stated to be as follows: within the context of the current distribution of international/national/regional movements across the study area, to:

- consider the implications for the national road and rail networks arising from the need to deliver planned levels of regional growth; in so doing consider the extent to which solutions associated with the delivery of planned growth might reduce the need for travel on the national networks;
- consider the implications of the need to accommodate international/national movements for delivery of regional growth;
- review the precise locations of growth and consider how variations in either phasing/distribution may reduce the negative impacts of additional transport demand;
- To consider the extent to which future investment scenarios might be sensitive to significant changes in the distribution of international/national/regional movements

1.3.4 As one of the Local Planning Authorities within the corridor of the study, we have been invited to review and comment on some initial scoping documents that, I have to say, were disappointing. The detail particular to this Borough was based on out-of-date spatial planning material that has been superseded by more recently adopted plans that form part of our Local Development Framework. I have pointed the County Council towards the relevant material on our website and also questioned why the work so far should be concentrating on minor developments rather than on the significant concentration of planned activity in the Medway Gap which has direct implications for transport on the London to Channel Ports corridor. In particular, I have made a number of specific points on matters that are directly relevant to any consideration of traffic impact on the corridor as it passes through this Borough:

- 1) The County Council has been alerted to the fact that the adopted spatial planning documents are only part of the story as far as this Borough is concerned. This is because Development Plans are no longer able to take account of windfall development. This can add substantially to housing supply and our Annual Monitoring Report has been sent to illustrate this point. It provides a more accurate reflection on the impact of development on the network and it shows the Housing Trajectory identifying the scale and phasing of development on our larger sites up to 2021. Although Tonbridge and Malling is not even mentioned in the DfT Brief for this DaSTS exercise, the figures show that over the past few years more houses have been built in this Borough than in either the Growth Area of Ashford or the Growth Point of Maidstone. Most of these are concentrated at the northern end of the Borough where planning permission exists for nearly 4,000 houses to be built, all of which will access the most overloaded section of the M20 at junction 4.
- 2) Any study on this corridor between London and the Channel Ports must acknowledge the presence and effects of one of the largest Business Parks in Europe at Kings Hill with a considerable impact on Junction 4. Some fairly significant improvements have already been made to Junction 4 and further improvements are proposed in association with the Peters Pit development (widening the eastern overbridge).
- 3) However it cannot operate effectively without the widening of the motorway itself. There have been at least two widening schemes for the Junction 3-5 section which have been designed but all have been shelved. This is now the main bottleneck on the route to the channel ports and it is a key constraint that the DaSTS must address.
- 4) The M20 is clearly critical in terms of serving both local development and international traffic, but this should not be considered in isolation from the rest of the road and rail network. The study is too narrowly focussed on the M2/M20 corridor. Throughout the Medway Gap the M20 is paralleled by the A20 where developer and other funding exist to improve bus priority.

Likewise, developer funding exists to contribute towards improvements to West Malling Station including a new bus interchange. A proposal for a new car park has permission and has already been laid out to formation level so that completion by a third party is reasonable straightforward and achievable. If development-related traffic in this area can be converted into bus or rail passengers, the locally generated traffic on the M20 could be reduced. However, it depends upon there being a good quality and attractive public transport service and that is not the case at present, particularly on the railway. Again, this should be a key consideration for this study.

- 5) The study does appear to be too narrowly focussed on the M2/M20 corridor and on car traffic. There is no mention, for example, of the important regional spoke which is the Redhill-Ashford rail line which parallels the M25/M20. The Borough Council has long argued the case for a fast service from Ashford International to Gatwick via Redhill stopping at Tonbridge. In the case of the Regional Hub of Tonbridge, as reference to our Area Action Plan will confirm, there is substantial housing Tonbridge Station and other local road improvements. A good quality rail interchange with better east-west options has the potential to relieve the A228 and M20 of some locally generated traffic.
- 6) Given the long term scope of the study as a framework for investment stretching out well beyond 2014, consideration needs to be given to the prospects of a Lower Thames Crossing. If this is eventually provided to the east of Gravesend linking with the M2, the desire-line to Dover and particularly the Channel Tunnel would indicate that much traffic would use the A229 or the A249 to link with the M20 thus relieving the overloaded Junction 3-5 section of the M20 of traffic originating from north of the river.

1.3.5 The project brief is attached at **Annex 2** and it shows that a first stage interim report is to be presented to the Regional Transport Board by 26 February. I will be seeking updates from the County Council on the submission to see how the feedback we have already provided has been reflected in the consultant's report and I will report on this to future meetings of the Board as appropriate.

## **1.4 A21 Dualling**

1.4.1 A Draft Compulsory Purchase Order and Highways Act Orders for the A21 Tonbridge to Pembury Dualling were published Friday 11 December 2009. This formal statutory stage is generally an opportunity for those who wish to object to a scheme to do so. However, it may be appropriate in this instance for the Borough Council to register its support for the scheme to ensure that any contrary views are properly balanced. Certainly, the A21 Reference Group consisting of a number of the local MPs and Members of Councils along the route of the A21 has recognised that the pressure to carry out this work should be maintained.

- 1.4.2 With this in mind, I recommend that a representation from the Chairman on behalf of the Council in favour of carrying out this project be registered with the Highways Agency. Copies should also be provided to the Regional Transport Board and to the A21 Reference Group for its awareness.
- 1.4.3 The closing date for submission of views is Friday 5 March 2010. If, after this period of public consultation, there are objections to the draft orders there will be a Public Inquiry starting in summer 2010. The Secretary of State will then consider the report of the Public Inquiry and make a decision late in 2010 or early 2011. If the scheme is approved, construction is anticipated to start at the beginning of 2012, and be completed by the end of 2013.
- 1.4.4 Members should also be aware that my staff are in discussion with a small number of local residents and the Environment Agency concerning matters of detailed design which should not in themselves delay the process.

## **1.5 A228 Colts Hill**

- 1.5.1 Improving the A228 past Colts Hill is an essential pre-requisite to any declassification of the A26 primary route from Alders Roundabout through Hadlow to the A21 and Southborough. Unfortunately, the scheme fared poorly in a regional review of the highways programme several years ago when it secured a low priority relative to other schemes in the south east. There is consequently no firm proposal to build a bypass and instead the County Council has been considering improvements of the existing road through Colts Hill.
- 1.5.2 The improvements envisaged although no doubt welcomed locally are rather minor in nature and do not address the significant deficiencies of this part of the primary route network and an important access to the new Pembury Hospital. They consist of a raised rib white centre line on a half metre wide red strip through the bends at the southern end of the road and some local widening and verge bollarding at the northern end of the site to the south of the Badsell Road junction together with a closure of Crittenden Road to remove the crossing conflicts at this junction.
- 1.5.3 This latter proposal created a considerable amount of local concern at a public exhibition of the scheme towards the end of January and the County Council is no longer considering this as an option. It is looking at other ways of resolving the poor crash record of this staggered junction with the A228 Colts Hill.
- 1.5.4 Whatever the outcome, the outlook is far from satisfactory because this stretch of the A228 will remain a major constraint to traffic on a corridor much of which has been gradually improved over many years. Until there is a radical upgrading of the line through Colts Hill, there will be a continued block on desired improvements within this Borough.

## **1.6 The Kent Route Utilisation Strategy**

- 1.6.1 Last July, the Board endorsed a response to Network Rail's consultation on its Draft Kent Route Utilisation Strategy and to its Sussex Route Utilisation Strategy. Network Rail has now published final versions of both strategies.
- 1.6.2 The key document for our purposes is the Kent document and I have to say that the response to the representations that this Council made to the consultation draft has been disappointing.
- 1.6.3 The RUS acknowledges the full range of planning frameworks for the next decade or so in Kent but it then ignores the planned scale of development in this Borough in particular and mid-Kent in general. This is illustrated by the fact that West Malling is still not mentioned as a candidate to be included in the National Station Improvement Programme despite the commitment of £250,000 of development related contribution arising from the Leybourne Grange scheme.
- 1.6.4 There is some move towards restoring the services removed in the December timetable changes by introducing a two trains an hour service on the West Malling line to the Thameslink route; ie through Blackfriars. However this is not until beyond 2015.
- 1.6.5 There is mention of faster services on the West Malling line but no specifics about what this means and when. Nevertheless, given the current slow speeds on the line, a faster service to London should be welcomed but with one very important caveat; careful attention will need to be paid to ensure that this is not through a reduction in the level of service from intermediate stations along the line.
- 1.6.6 In the Council's response to the RUS consultation, we advocated strongly a step change in the services from the Medway Towns, along the Medway Valley line, through Maidstone West, to Paddock Wood, Tonbridge and through to Gatwick. This was also to include links from Ashford (HS1 and Eurotunnel) and East Kent through to Redhill and beyond to the west. In other words, a proper attempt to produce a truly orbital rail structure around the south east of London. Unfortunately, the RUS provides no hopes for such an aspirational plan over the next three decades and it is difficult to see what can be done to reverse this when the Strategy is set so firmly against it.
- 1.6.7 Pleasingly, access to Ebbsfleet and St Pancras through the Medway Valley Line remains a possibility, though it is a secondary consideration relative to additional services to Ashford International. This latter option appears to have more favour because it has potential to mitigate one of the key gaps identified in the RUS; over-crowding on the West Kent line from Tonbridge.
- 1.6.8 This remains one of the bleakest out-comes from the RUS because it has not managed to identify any effective way over the next ten years of dealing with it or to address the long term forecast over the next thirty years that there will be a doubling of rail use. It is all the more perverse, therefore, that there is no attempt

in the RUS or by the DfT to deal with the obvious current problem of rail-heading away from the West Malling/Maidstone East line to the West Kent line. Staplehurst and Headcorn are frequently mentioned in this context but the evidence is there for the rail industry to see around Hildenbrough station where the parking conditions in the rural lanes out to some distance from the station are concerning and appear to be irresolvable without some fundamental action by the DfT and Network Rail.

- 1.6.9 In this regard, there are no specific proposals in the RUS about additional parking at particular stations. If HS1 is eventually extended to the Medway Valley Line this is a matter that needs to be addressed as well as at most other stations within the Borough on the other lines to London.
- 1.6.10 Perhaps the most significant element of the RUS is what it is not able to say about the considerable disruption that will occur between 2012 and 2015 as London Bridge is almost entirely rebuilt. This is a truly major scheme that will have enormous benefits to the rail network when it is fully completed. While the work is going on, it will be different matter and the RUS describes well the constraints and difficulties facing those who will have to carry out the construction works and those who will still need to operate a rail service through a very straitened corridor. Over the next year or so, we will have to monitor the information coming from Network Rail to assess what impact this is going to have for services on the West Kent line.
- 1.6.11 The Sussex RUS has very little impact on this Borough beyond the Tonbridge to Redhill line. We took the opportunity to make the case for restoring the direct Gatwick link in our response to the consultation draft but the answer in the final document reflects exactly what was said in the Kent RUS. There is little further we can do at the moment to rectify this blinkered decision but we should use other opportunities to advocate improvements in service on this line such as the Kent Integrated Transport Strategy mentioned earlier in this paper.
- 1.6.12 Copies of both Strategies are available for reference in the Members' Library.

## **1.7 The new Southeastern Railway Timetable**

- 1.7.1 When I reported on rail matters to the last meeting of the Board in November, we were waiting for a response from the Minister to the strong case put to him last summer by the local MPs in coordination with local Councils and rail user groups. All of us sought to preserve services on the West Malling/Maidstone East line. Sadly, in the days before the new timetable for the Kent Integrated Franchise became live on 13 December, we received news through The Rt Hon Sir John Stanley MP that the timetable announced in the summer and, indeed, some six years ago was to be implemented without any concession to cater for the needs of city-bound rail passengers living in this Borough.
- 1.7.2 The Minister considered the submission for many weeks and it appeared some deep consideration was being given to the case that we had all made. The

service changes that this Council has been advocating against for the past half dozen years were introduced without any alteration whatsoever. The Minister's letter was deeply disappointing as was the letter that relayed the decision. It paid scant regard to any of the points made, it evaded the questions posed and based the decision on principles that directly contradict other aspects of Government policy, particularly those promoting sustainable transport and living.

- 1.7.3 I responded to the Minister **Annex 3** and also wrote to The Rt Hon Sir John Stanley MP who was able to include some of the information in the debate he managed to secure in Parliament on 6 January. An extract of the debate is included at **Annex 4** together with the reply I received on behalf of the Minister from the DfT **Annex 5**. I have subsequently replied to the DfT because I am astounded by its apparent disregard for the integrity of the planning process in mid and west Kent and also by comments appearing to suggest that rail-heading is acceptable travel behaviour. **Annex 6**.
- 1.7.4 From the series of comments by the Minister and his officials, apparently, proper planning for the twenty-first century within this Borough and elsewhere in mid-Kent is hostage to the whims and intransigence of a few land owners in the Maidstone area right at the start of the railway age. According to the Minister, the West Malling/Maidstone East Line is a historical anomaly that is impossible to rectify nearly two hundred years later.
- 1.7.5 My fundamental concern is that proper planning of this area is hostage to the short term interests of the franchise operation. What is more, the total financial impact of continued city services on the West Malling line is, we are told, some £637,000. What this refers to, what permutations of service delivery or scope for contributions to abate the cost there might be, we are not allowed to know about or challenge. It is commercially sensitive; there is no point in asking so the debate is closed. In my reply, I have suggested that the Board would be concerned by such a position and would certainly wish to revisit this matter as part of the Ministers' promised review of the timetable in early 2010.
- 1.7.6 The frustrating aspect of this exchange is that it reveals the DfT to be fundamentally inconsistent with Network Rail and its RUS that we considered earlier. The RUS described genuine difficulties in the medium and long term in being able to find any solution to over-crowding on the West Kent line. Some of this occurs because of commuters rail-heading from places nearer stations on the West Malling /Maidstone East line. Instead of condoning this rail-heading, the DfT should be actively encouraging people to use the mid-Kent line by improving the speed of services and the choice of destinations.
- 1.7.7 In the longer term, the Thameslink services on the West Malling line will restore to some extent the problem of lack of access to the city destinations. However, it does mean several years of poor service unless the promised review reinstates what has been recently lost.

## **1.8 The West Kent Investment Strategy and Action Plan 2010-15**

1.8.1 A final element in the emerging strategy framework for the Borough is the Investment Strategy and Action Plan being developed by the West Kent Partnership. Members will already have seen an earlier draft of this at the last meeting of the Community Development Advisory Board in November. **Annex 7** is an extract of the relevant transportation section. I understand an updated document will be considered at the next meeting of the CDAB before going to the WK Partnership Group for endorsement. If the Board has comments to make on this section of the Action Plan, I will convey these to the Group for consideration.

## **1.9 Legal Implications**

1.9.1 None applicable.

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

1.10.1 None applicable.

## **1.11 Risk Assessment**

1.11.1 The longer term risks for the proper spatial planning in the Borough are set out in the annexed letters to the Minister.

## **1.12 Policy Considerations**

1.12.1 The matters raised in this report have impact on the Community Strategy and the Local Development Framework.

## **1.13 Recommendations**

- 1) That, subject to any further comments by the Board, the observations in Annex 1 and in the report **BE ENDORSED** as the formal response to the consultation on the Kent Integrated Transport Strategy document.
- 2) Subject to any further comments by the Board, the range of issues outlined in the report **BE APPROVED** as representing the Council's views about what needs to be included in the Regional Transport Board's consideration of the London to Dover/Cross Channel Ports DaSTS Study.
- 3) That the Chairman and Director **BE REQUESTED** to write to the Highways Agency to register this Council's support for the A21 Dualling Scheme during the current notice period for the Highway Orders.
- 4) That the various annexed responses advocating the continuation of city services on the West Malling Maidstone East Line **BE ENDORSED**.

The Director Planning Transport and Leisure confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Michael McCulloch

Nil

Steve Humphrey  
Director of Planning Transport and Leisure