

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

14 June 2011

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 BOROUGH TRANSPORTATION MATTERS

Summary

The paper provides an update on a range of transportation issues currently on the Borough Council's agenda.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 At the last meeting in February the Board considered a paper that examined the complete range of transportation issues currently on the Council's agenda. It is worth revisiting that report to provide a general update but, more particularly, to make new Members aware of these issues.

1.1.2 The important contextual point over-shadowing all aspects of transportation at the present time is the current difficult economic climate. Among other things, this has serious adverse implications for the County Council's investment aspirations for highways and transportation as set out in its recently issued Local Transport Plan for Kent 2011 to 2016. It has set back the implementation of the A21 Tonbridge to Pembury dualling project by the Department for Transport (DfT) and it is continuing to drive steep increases in the cost of rail fares.

1.2 Highways and Transportation

1.2.1 For many years the Borough Council had an instrumental role in traffic management and highway maintenance and improvement. We carried out this work through an agency agreement with the local highway authority, Kent County Council. However, this role came to an end in 2005 and since then the County Council has carried out its highway authority responsibilities directly itself.

1.2.2 Nevertheless, the Borough Council continues to advocate highway and transportation improvements that are important to this Borough and to provide its expertise and local knowledge to help steer the highway authority's programmes. A significant asset in helping to do this is the Joint Transportation Board and there is also considerable influence through the development planning process. The Borough Council has also, through consultation responses, contributed to the

development of the two key documents that provide the framework for future highways and transportation investment in Kent. These are “**Growth without Gridlock**” and the “**Local Transport Plan for Kent 2011-16**”

1.3 Growth without Gridlock

1.3.1 Growth without Gridlock sets out the County Council’s vision for the next twenty years and it is pleasing to see that it recognises many of the key transport issues and challenges that this Borough Council has been advocating solutions for over many years.

- Dealing with the transport implications of the range of developments in the Borough, particularly in the Medway Valley and in central Tonbridge.
- Improving air quality in a number of declared Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) arising from traffic related factors, including a long stretch of the A20 and Tonbridge town centre.
- Enhancing station facilities and rail connections to the City of London on the West Malling/Maidstone East Line and tackling overcrowding on the Tonbridge line.
- Improving transport interchange at Tonbridge and West Malling stations.
- Reinstating direct rail services between the Borough and Gatwick Airport on the Tonbridge/Redhill Line.
- Minimising the adverse impacts of HGV traffic, including overnight parking.
- Mitigating the impacts of traffic on the A25 corridor through Platt, Borough Green and Ightham.

1.3.2 Growth without Gridlock lists a series of proposals aimed at dealing with the challenges outlined in the previous paragraph. It specifically mentions the following:

- Coordinated implementation of transport requirements arising from developments in the Medway Valley, including new bus services supported by bus priority measures – focussed on the A20 corridor.
- Construction of a bypass at Borough Green.
- Construction of the London Road Hadlow Road link in Tonbridge.
- Urban Traffic Management and Control system for Tonbridge.
- Implement Action Plan to deal with AQMAs.

- Work with Network Rail and the Train Operating Companies in the area to enhance opportunities for transport interchange at stations and improve services, particularly to the City of London, with particular focus on the service specification for the next Integrated Kent Franchise period beyond 2014.
- A228 Corridor Improvements – including at Kent Street, Snodland bypass and at Colts Hill in neighbouring Tunbridge Wells Borough to relieve the A26 corridor.
- A21 Tonbridge to Pembury dualling to improve access to the new Pembury Hospital and the North Farm Retail Park.

1.3.3 Many of these initiatives feature in the schemes list that the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board endorsed at the last meeting. It was subsequently noted by the JTB and it sets out the Borough Council's priorities for future highways investment. A revised version incorporating Members comments from both of these meetings is reproduced for reference at **Annex 1**.

1.3.4 Growth without Gridlock is now adopted policy as far as the County Council is concerned. Nevertheless, there is merit in writing to the County Council to reinforce support for elements of the strategy such as the inclusion of the London Road to Hadlow Road Link Road. This could usefully be accompanied by the schedule at annex 1 to reaffirm the broader wishes and aspirations of this Council for highway and transportation improvements. The text at **Annex 2** is recommended as a draft response.

1.3.5 It is inevitable that a document with a timeframe of 20 to 30 years will be aspirational in tone and this is certainly the case for Growth without Gridlock. The translation of this broad long term strategic document into short term planning is provided by the Local Transport Plan for Kent (LTP). This contains the County Council's prioritised programme for the five year period 2011 to 2016.

1.4 Local Transport Plan for Kent

1.4.1 The consultation draft of the LTP was deeply disappointing as far as this Borough was concerned and our response represented a robust challenge to the prioritisation system. Ultimately, the Borough Council's representations were unsuccessful and the adopted prioritisation methodology for transportation investment over the next five years is balanced towards the Growth Areas and East Kent. Nevertheless, there are plus points such as the reinforced importance of the Member Highway Fund. Each county member has an annual budget of £25,000 available for highway improvements in their county division. Over the plan period this will be one of the most significant funding streams and the Borough Council should take the opportunity of working through the JTB and other avenues to assist and influence the County Councillors to use their funding as effectively as possible.

- 1.4.2 It is also pleasing to see that the A21 Tonbridge to Pembury dualling project features as an important priority within the LTP. The County Council believes it can promote and build this scheme for considerably less than the Highways Agency's current estimate and it is carrying out a detailed assessment to identify what that target cost might be.
- 1.4.3 This focus by the County Council on the scheme makes it all the more essential that the postponed Public Inquiry for the highway orders is resumed so that there is no scope for procedural delay if an early start on construction becomes a practical proposition. The Borough Council has joined the A21 Reference Group, the West Kent Partnership and our MP, The Rt Hon Sir John Stanley, to record with the DfT a strong desire that the Inquiry should take place as soon as possible. In recent days the Leader has received a response to earlier representations on this important matter and it is reproduced at **Annex 3**. It has also been circulated to the Reference Group and our local MPs. In summary further progress depends fundamentally on the work currently being developed by the County Council and we wait with anticipation on the results of the County Council's assessment and what this might mean for scheme development and implementation.
- 1.4.4 I have placed for reference purposes copies of "Growth without Gridlock" and the "Local Transport Plan for Kent 2011-16" in the Member Library. These can also be accessed on the County Council's website on the following links:

http://www.kent.gov.uk/roads_and_transport/highway_improvements/our_transport_vision/local_transport_plan.aspx

http://www.kent.gov.uk/your_council/priorities,_policies_and_plans/priorities_and_plans/growth_without_gridlock.aspx

1.5 Rail

- 1.5.1 We have a significant list of key concerns about rail services through the Borough. The removal of city services on the West Malling line as a result of major changes in the timetable over two years ago continues to have repercussions for mid-Kent. It has impacted adversely on the travel patterns of local residents commuting to London. The Borough Council has continued to press for restoration of these services. It may well be that there will be some mitigation of the impacts by the introduction of peak time services on Thameslink through Blackfriars.
- 1.5.2 There are also major concerns about fares and the RPI+3% mechanism that has operated throughout the south east franchise since it was granted in 2006. Unfortunately, this is now set to continue for the remaining two years of the extended franchise. Service issues are also important with overcrowding on peak services being a considerable inconvenience for many passengers on the mid and west Kent lines who find that they regularly have to stand for their journeys to and from the capital.

- 1.5.3 It is pleasing to see that these and many other critical rail related issues, such as the need to restore the direct line from Kent to Gatwick airport, have been included by the County Council in the final version of the 'Rail Action Plan for Kent'. This Council responded to the consultation on the draft version of this document and many of the points raised have been reflected in the final version of the document.
- 1.5.4 Again, a copy has been deposited in the Member Library and it can also be referred to on the KCC website on the following link:
- http://www.kent.gov.uk/your_council/have_your_say/rail_summit/rail_action_plan.aspx
- 1.5.5 In recent days, a new highspeed peak service to St Pancras has been introduced on a six month trial from Maidstone West station via the Medway valley line. Unfortunately, there is no stop at any of the stations within this Borough, not even one that the Borough Council would have been keen to support at Snodland station. Given the trial nature of this service, it is disappointing that an additional stop could not have been built into the service specification, especially as it would not have added significantly to the overall journey time to St Pancras.
- 1.5.6 It was mentioned above that the franchise period had been extended for a further two years. This was a contractual entitlement for Southeastern Railway subject to it successfully complying with certain performance parameters. Apparently, it did manage to achieve this so the extension became a formality.
- 1.5.7 The focus therefore shifts to what happens beyond the end of the current franchise. A wide spectrum of organisations in Kent is disappointed about the service specification for the current franchise and the way that this has impacted on services in the county. There appears to be a general sentiment that the details of the next franchise should have a far greater degree of scrutiny and challenge the next time round. The Rail Action Plan for Kent is an excellent way for harnessing this collective effort. We will also be taking the opportunity to promote the Borough Council's aspirations for the future of rail services through such arrangements as the Kent Rail Forum where we have had Member and officer representation at recent meetings.
- 1.5.8 We do not know what the DfT has in mind for the next franchise specification. Whatever it might be, the DfT will have start letting Kent residents and businesses know some time soon because the process of procuring a new train operating company is long and complex. Once, details have been issued, I will be reporting to the Board accordingly.

1.6 Legal Implications

- 1.6.1 Nil for the Borough Council.

1.7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.7.1 None directly for the Borough Council.

1.8 Risk Assessment

1.8.1 As a way of reducing the risk of a less than acceptable service specification in the next south east train franchise, the paper proposes collective action with the County Council in the context of the Rail Action Plan for Kent.

1.9 Equality Impact Assessment

1.9.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

1.10 Policy Considerations

1.10.1 Community

1.11 Recommendation

1.11.1 That the Cabinet be recommended to endorse the observations on the County Council's document 'Growth without Gridlock' contained in [Annex 2].

The Director of 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

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 decision relates to actions by the County Council and not by this authority directly.

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
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.