

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD**

**27 July 2011**

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

**Part 1- Public**

**Matters for Information**

**1 BOROUGH TRANSPORTATION MATTERS**

**Summary**

**An update on a range of current transportation issues affecting the Borough**

**1.1 Introduction**

1.1.1 At its last two meetings, the Board considered extensive reports on transportation issues currently affecting the Borough. This paper provides an update on some of matters previously discussed and introduces some new ones related to bus service provision.

**1.2 Rail Services**

1.2.1 The February report contained information that the Department for Transport (DfT) was considering the possibility of introducing two peak hour Thameslink services on the Maidstone East line to Blackfriars as part of timetable changes in May 2012. The Board formally resolved that this be welcomed and supported.

1.2.2 In recent weeks, The Rt Hon Sir John Stanley MP kindly copied me into the latest exchange he had been having on this subject with the Minister of State at the DfT, The Rt Hon Theresa Villiers. Copies of the letter and Sir John's Press Statement are attached at **Annex 1** and these reveal that the peak hour Thameslink service to Blackfriars has been ruled out during the remainder of the current rail franchise on grounds of cost.

1.2.3 The only additional service coming out of the DfT recent assessment is the new high speed service between Maidstone West and St Pancras that, unfortunately, has no direct positive benefit for Borough residents and businesses since it does not provide a stop on any of the stations along the Medway Valley line.

1.2.4 The disappointing news on rail related matters is continued with the continuation of the fare setting formula which provides for annual increases based on RPI+3%. Uniquely, the Kent franchise had been subjected to RPI+3% during the first five years of the current franchise and it was set to revert to RPI+1% from 2012 until the end of the franchise period in 2014.

- 1.2.5 The government changed this in the Comprehensive Spending Review to make the fare setting formula RPI+3% across all franchises. Given that the relevant month for determining the index figure is July and that this is predicted to be not far short of 5%, it means that after years of significant increases, local residents will be finding at the start of next year that yet again they will be facing a considerable increase in the price of regulated fares, averaging just under 8%.
- 1.2.6 The dissatisfaction with the quality of rail services in west Kent under the current franchise makes it all the more important that the service specification for the next franchise is scrutinised robustly when the DfT issues it for public consultation in the near future. The Board's steer will be sought throughout this process when it eventually begins so that we can exercise the maximum influence on the future services beyond 2014 when the new franchise begins.

### **1.3 A21 Tonbridge to Pembury Dualling Project**

- 1.3.1 The Borough Council and other West Kent authorities have been pressing the DfT to accelerate the timetable for the Public Inquiry for the A21 Tonbridge to Pembury Dualling scheme. Again, Sir John has kindly copied the Leader into the latest information that he has received on this matter from the Secretary of State.
- 1.3.2 In essence and on procedural grounds, the Public Inquiry cannot take place until there is certainty about the scheme funding and the timing of implementation. Neither funding nor timing have been firmly tied down, so unfortunately this first element of the project will have to stay in abeyance until these have been confirmed.
- 1.3.3 In the meantime, this throws even more focus and importance on the work currently being progressed by the County Council. It is working with the Highways Agency to produce a mutually agreeable scheme at a reduced cost to that previously estimated by the Highways Agency. The Minister of State requires this work to be completed by the end of October to inform decisions about pre-construction procedures on a range of planned but as yet unprogrammed schemes such as this one between Tonbridge and Pembury.

### **1.4 Local Sustainable Transport Fund**

- 1.4.1 In the report to the Board in February, I described a new funding stream that the government had just introduced, the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF). This is a mix of capital and revenue funding and access to it is through a competitive bidding process between local highway authorities.
- 1.4.2 At that time, we had no indication of what the County Council might be submitting but it did seem prudent to make a pre-emptive suggestion to the County Council of a local priority that it could include in its submission to the DfT. The Board considered that the proposals for remodelling the forecourt area at West Malling station to improve access for public transport and pedestrians were well aligned with the sustainability objectives of the fund and an ideal candidate for inclusion in

a cross-Kent bid. This was endorsed by the Board and information to support it was forwarded to the County Council shortly thereafter.

- 1.4.3 In the event, the County Council did not include the West Malling bid within the submission it made to the DfT and we contacted the County Council at officer level to express deep disappointment at this omission. This was all the harder to take because the LSTF bid was founded upon the prioritisation system enshrined in the Local Transport Plan that we had robustly objected to earlier this year because it was demonstrably flawed on well evidenced grounds. The contacts with the County Council included the following passage that summarises the reasons why we felt it was wrong in not including the West Malling Station proposals in the package bid.

*"You also say in another email 'the shortlisted bid will come as a disappointment to some'. This is a prescient comment because the document as it stands is deeply disappointing to us here at T&M. This is not because we believe that there should be some even share out of bids across the county but because we consider that local circumstances provide a strong justification to support transportation investment in this Borough and for a degree of enhanced priority to reflect this.*

*We set out the case for this in our response to the LTP consultation which I am happy to share with you if you haven't already seen it. The prioritisation methodology eventually adopted by KCC in the LTP is grossly unreasonable as far we are concerned and this latest bid preparation for the LSTF simply perpetuates this.*

*We have a proposed scheme at West Malling station that manifestly 'ticks all the boxes' as far as the LSTF is concerned and it is inexplicable that it doesn't simply appear within the list of stations on page three of the 'Key Components' document.*

*These are :-*

- *strengthening partnership arrangements with Network Rail, Southeastern Railway, KCC and T&MBC that will almost certainly expand to include private sector involvement.*
- *funding from S106 from committed developments*
- *planned growth in passenger numbers to come from the major series of developments in the Medway gap*
- *Kent's biggest business park on the doorstep of the station*
- *currently grossly inadequate provision for bus/rail interchange as well as foot/cycle access at the station and this risks prejudicing sustainable transportation ambitions as the new planned developments are implemented.*

- 1.4.4 In recent days, the Minister of State has announced the results of the current funding round and Kent County Council has been successful to the tune of £2.273M for its 'Growth without Gridlock' theme. This represents just under half of

what the County Council bid for in its submission and we do not yet know what is included in this partial award.

## **1.5 Bus Services - Number 70**

- 1.5.1 The public transport team at the County Council has written to inform me about its bus service review that will result in the withdrawal of a number of services that it supports across Kent. These changes will take place from the start of the next calendar year.
- 1.5.2 The one service that will be affected in this Borough is the Saturday shift of the number 70 that operates between Borough Green, Offham, West Malling and Tesco's at Leybourne. The weekday service is unaffected.
- 1.5.3 While any diminution in service will impact adversely on those who depend on it, the fact is that the County Council has little room for manoeuvre as far as the Saturday service on the number 70 route is concerned given the serious budget pressures that it has to deal with.
- 1.5.4 Realistically, a service where the patronage is low and that requires the level of subsidy per passenger journey that this one needs, £12.89, would inevitably come under close scrutiny as part of any cost saving exercise. There is therefore a financial rationale for its inclusion in the list of services being withdrawn although it does leave those residents in Offham village that are completely dependent on buses with no means of transport on a Saturday a situation that I am sure the Board will seriously deprecate. Notice of the proposed changes will have been on display on affected services from the middle of July.

## **1.6 Bus Services – Pembury Hospital**

- 1.6.1 The Council has been consulted on an application submitted to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and it is seeking our views on this. The applicant seeks to vary the condition relating to bus services applied to the planning permission for the redevelopment of Pembury Hospital. The condition required new bus services to the hospital to be provided before occupation of phase 1B and it was to run for at least 5 years. The Trust now considers it is not best placed to provide the infrastructure or manage the routes.
- 1.6.2 Consequently the application seeks to remove the condition subject to the completion of a section 106 agreement that secures a contribution towards bus services - apparently this application follows discussions between Tunbridge Wells BC and Kent County Council.
- 1.6.3 The Trust has carried out surveys of in-patients and out-patients for the 2010/2011 years and it concludes that a level of bus service to the new Hospital is justified but in respect of services for the Hadlow, West Malling and Borough Green areas – it does not consider that enough people from these areas visit the hospital to support a bus service.

- 1.6.4 The submitted application is based on sufficient funds being provided to KCC over a five year period to ensure that adequate bus routes to and from the Hospital in areas of greatest need can be implemented and improved. Critically, this does not include Hadlow, West Malling, and Borough Green and generally the proposal is imprecise about what would be covered by the S106 agreement.
- 1.6.5 If permitted, this application would have seriously adverse impacts on bus access to the new hospital for the local communities in Hadlow, West Malling and Borough Green and, as such, this Council's position has had to be one of fundamental and strong objection to it. This was the position registered with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council by its deadline for responses on 13 July.

## **1.7 Legal Implications**

- 1.7.1 None for the Borough Council.

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

- 1.8.1 Not applicable.

## **1.9 Risk Assessment**

- 1.9.1 Not applicable

## **1.10 Policy Considerations**

- 1.10.1 Community

Background papers:

contact: Mike McCulloch

Nil

Steve Humphrey

Director of Planning, Transport & Leisure