

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

16 November 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

This report provides an update on a number of transportation matters that the Borough Council has recently been focusing on. It seeks retrospective endorsement of letters sent to the Minister for Transport with responsibility for rail and to the Managing Director of Southeastern Railway. These letters expressed deep concern about the impact that imminent rail fare increases will have on residents of this Borough who travel regularly by train and urged restraint in the scale of the proposed increases.

1.1 Context

1.1.1 The Board has been receiving regular reports on a range of transportation matters currently high on the Borough Council's agenda. This paper provides an update on a number of these.

1.2 Rail

1.2.1 The Council has pressed long and hard for improved rail services in this Borough. Disappointingly, these have had little impact on seemingly immutable contractual specifications set many years ago. The list of aspirations includes the following:

- Restoration of city services on the Maidstone East/West Malling line. We advocated this strongly at the draft stage of the County Council's Rail Action Plan for Kent and it is now enshrined as an important priority in the adopted document.
- Reinstatement of the direct service between Tonbridge and Gatwick that was abandoned in 2008.

1.2.2 Earlier this year there had been some hope of at least a partial reinstatement of non-Victoria services on the West Malling line. The Department for Transport (DfT) and the train operating company were in discussions about peak Thameslink services through Blackfriars. However, the cost of introducing such

services would have been apparently unsustainable in the present difficult financial period and it has dropped out of any further consideration during the rest of the current franchise that will last till April 2014.

1.2.3 No matter how frustrating the results of consistent advocacy might have been in recent times, it is important to keep this effort going over the next two years when there is real opportunity to influence the specification for the next franchise. The general scope and direction of the service specification should become known after the Olympics next year and the DfT must conduct public consultation on this. We can then ensure that the Council's aspirations are fully aired at that stage including:

- restoration of City services on the West Malling line,
- reinstatement of the direct service from Tonbridge to Gatwick and further development of the line into mid and north Kent,
- protection against any reduction in service numbers of trains between Tonbridge and Cannon Street,
- providing a stop at Snodland station on the recently introduced High Speed Service between Maidstone West and St Pancras,
- A fundamental rebalancing of the fare setting formula for the franchise that has been so damaging and inequitable to rail passengers in this Borough.

1.2.4 This last point is not only one for the longer term. It is very topical at the moment because increases in fares are expected to be introduced from the start of the New Year, and, based on the current fare setting formula these will be substantial and a matter of grave concern for passengers and for the Borough Council.

1.2.5 This concern prompted the Council to hold a special Rail Forum meeting to ensure that the train operating company was fully aware of the depth of worry these imminent fare increases were creating. A detailed information sheet presented to the Forum by Southeastern Railway, copied at **Annex1**, failed to mitigate the concerns of those who attended the Forum and also from the rail user group representatives present. In response to the sentiments they expressed, the Leader and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation wrote jointly to the Minister of State responsible for the rail industry and to the Managing Director of Southeastern Railway. It was essential that we submitted these letters, reproduced at **Annex 2**, as soon as possible after the Rail Forum, if there were to be any opportunity of positively influencing the fare setting exercise currently underway at Southeastern Railway. The Board is invited to endorse these letters. I will also be reporting on these to the next meeting of the Joint Transportation Board with a similar invitation to lend weight to the submission. Annex 2 also contains the reply received from Southeastern Railway.

- 1.2.6 The Rail Forum also revealed some interesting information from Network Rail on the imminent enhancement works at Tonbridge station and the railway industry's preparations for service continuity during the winter months. The presentation from the Forum is reproduced at **Annex 3**.

1.3 A21 Tonbridge to Pembury Dualling Scheme

- 1.3.1 The Minister of Transport earlier this year requested the Highways Agency to work with Kent County Council to examine the scope for reducing the cost of carrying out the proposed A21 dualling scheme. This they have done and it has resulted in a new estimated cost for the work in the region of £80M, down from the £117M the HA was working to. My understanding is that this exercise has been conducted using similar design specification and standards and that the reduction emanates from matters related to allocation of project risk and reassessment of contingencies. The County Council believes that further reduction could be derived from a modification of design standards and consideration of the burden of VAT.
- 1.3.2 This still leaves a considerable amount to be sourced to provide a budget for the scheme before there is any possibility of it going ahead. There are a number of possibilities. The government, as part of its budget processes towards the end of this calendar year, will be reviewing the package of unprogrammed schemes for the period beyond 2015. These include the A21 Tonbridge to Pembury scheme. The County Council is, in parallel, researching the potential for funding support from the Local Enterprise Partnership and from other sources. We should maintain a watching brief over the next few months to see whether a combination of these potential funding sources comes together in a way that would allow a reduced cost, County Council led scheme to be implemented.

1.4 West Malling Station

- 1.4.1 The current layout of the station forecourt and approach road has become increasingly unsuitable for the volume and type of traffic using it. It was clear many years ago that this situation would arise as a result of the development planned for the Medway Valley area and Kings Hill. It led to us adopting a station master plan some eight years ago that aimed to remodel the station forecourt area to improve access for buses, taxis, pedestrians and drivers going to the car parks. Unfortunately, circumstances conspired against any progress being made on this initiative, not the least of which was a lack of any budget beyond a contribution of £250,000 (Index-linked) to come from the Leybourne Grange development.
- 1.4.2 Nevertheless, over the past year and a half, we have been working at officer level with representatives from KCC, Southeastern Railway, Network Rail and local bus companies to try and progress this project. The group recently agreed a brief for design work and this should be commissioned by the end of 2011. This will involve transforming the broad outline concepts of the earlier master-plan into

firmer detail and, crucially, identifying a firm budget estimate for the project. Securing funding for the scheme in the current period of financial constraint will be a major challenge. However, there is considerable potential funding in a range of developer obligations in this area that could contribute towards a budget sufficiently large enough to allow the scheme to be implemented. This will require further investigation and negotiation over coming months.

- 1.4.3 The recent opening of the additional car parking at the station through a third-party initiative has been helpful in providing some additional capacity to meet the increasing local demand. However, it has further highlighted the access deficiencies. These have been compounded by a traffic regulation order that prohibits all but bus and taxi traffic through the bottom of the station approach road to the A228 West Malling Bypass. This has been the subject of continuing consideration by this Council as the Local Planning Authority and the applicants, Kent County Council and the car park operator.
- 1.4.4 From a planning point of view, dealing with this 'bus gate' is a matter separate from the forecourt remodelling scheme. Nevertheless, practical and operational considerations relating to the potential forecourt scheme, mean that they are pretty closely entwined and really do need to be progressed in tandem.

1.5 Access to Pembury Hospital

- 1.5.1 The mismatch between the programme for opening the new hospital and the planning to ensure proper provision for bus access has been disappointing. My understanding is that the currently emerging plan from the Health Trust, in conjunction with the County Council, is that there will be a service based on four buses each hour from central Tonbridge to the new hospital. The 217 will have an additional hourly service and these will be phased with the hourly services on the 208 and 209.
- 1.5.2 In the meantime, the Trust will not be providing the services required within the original planning consent issued by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. It is seeking to have the planning obligation altered so that it is not directly responsible for providing the services and it wishes instead to be allowed to provide a sum to the County Council to arrange an altered series of services. If the submission to amend is accepted it would have implications for access to the hospital from a considerable part of Tonbridge and Malling because the services that were required in the original planning consent from Borough Green, Mereworth and West Malling would not be provided.
- 1.5.3 This is based on the Trust's assessment of likely patronage which it asserts will be low from these locations and would not provide proper value for money within a constrained budget. The funding in the first five years when the planning obligation requires the service to be supported is limited and it is questionable whether it would be possible to set up services that would be viable after that time. It is therefore pioneering an alternative approach that might provide more certainty

in the longer term. This would be based on enhanced transportation provision from the voluntary sector using cars and min-buses to carry patients and visitors from those locations.

- 1.5.4 If there were to be a reasonable guarantee that such an approach would work well in practice and that the provision would be robust, the result could be a more beneficial service to communities in more rural parts of the Borough. It all depends on the detailed management and operation and we wait with interest to see what the Trust is able to arrange. At this stage the Borough Council has indicated its informal support for such an approach and I recommend that this be endorsed.

1.6 South East of England Councils

- 1.6.1 Interestingly, in recent weeks we have become aware that the South East of England Councils (SEEC) has been considering what role it might be able to play in promoting strategic transportation ambitions for the region. Whatever this might involve, given that there is no dedicated technical administrative support, it has to be fairly limited. Nevertheless, if there is an appetite for some broad coordination of strategic ambitions and aspirations, we should recognise this as a further opportunity to register and advocate the strategic matters that are locally important.

- 1.6.2 With this in mind, we have sent an informal submission to the regional representative for transportation matters at SEEC to ensure that our aspirations are reflected in any overall list of future priorities for the region. This is reproduced at **Annex 4**, and subject to any further views that the Board might wish to add, I would recommend that this be endorsed as a reflection of our broad strategic transportation ambitions in a regional context.

1.7 Medway Valley Sustainable Transportation Strategy

- 1.7.1 The Borough Council and the County Council many years ago adopted the Medway Valley Transportation Strategy. This provided a context for the concentration of major planning applications in the Medway gap in the early years of the last decade. Time has moved on and much of the development then envisaged has either taken place or is currently being implemented. There are some notable exceptions to this that have been caught up in delay as a result of the financial slow-down of recent years. Nevertheless, with changing circumstances, policy contexts and the need for operational coordination and 'ring-mastering' of a wide range of development obligations, it has become clear from officer level discussions with the County Council that a refresh of the earlier strategy is warranted. I have impressed upon the County Council that the revised strategy should adopt a rounded view to the A20 corridor and include some smarter approaches to enhanced bus services that, in themselves, do not constrain the general use of the road or have negative impacts on congestion and air quality.

1.7.2 I am therefore expecting that the next meeting of the JTB at the end of November will be considering a draft version of a revised strategy from the County Council and that this will include details of consultation arrangements so that local Members have an opportunity to have their views fully reflect in the fresh strategy when it is adopted.

1.8 Legal Implications

1.8.1 Nil

1.9 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.9.1 None directly for the Borough Council.

1.10 Risk Assessment

1.10.1 Not required

1.11 Equality Impact Assessment

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

1.12 Policy Considerations

1.12.1 Community

1.13 Recommendations

1.13.1 That the Cabinet be recommended **TO ENDORSE** the following;

- 1) the letters at Annex 2 from the Leader and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation to the Minister at the DfT and to the Managing Director of Southeastern Railway;
- 2) the principle of joint consideration of the forecourt remodelling at West Malling Station and the planning obligations associated with the bus gate;
- 3) support for the proposals by the local Health Trust to set up responsive transport arrangements using the voluntary sector for community access to the new hospital at Pembury from the rural parts of the Borough;
- 4) the submission to SEEC set out in Annex 4.

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: Mike 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 recommendations do not involve direct action by the Borough Council. Instead they relate to an advocacy role pressing for actions by other parties.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	n/a	See previous answer
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.