

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

19 November 2013

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 UPDATE ON TRANSPORT ISSUES

Summary

This report provides 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 some information relating to the rail franchises and the work of the Airport Commission.

1.2 A21 Public Inquiry

- 1.2.1 A Public Inquiry for the scheme was held between 14 May and 9 July 2013. The Public Inquiry Inspector's report and recommendations and the Secretary of State's decision on whether or not the scheme will go ahead are expected in late 2013 or early 2014. Cllr Nicolas Heslop was invited to join a debate on the BBC South East Politics Show about the A21 scheme and the impact on the adjacent Ancient Woodland. The programme was aired on 29 September.

Rail Issues

1.3 Direct Award to Southeastern Trains

- 1.3.1 Southeastern's current franchise ends in Oct 2014. The whole re-franchising process for all current train operators has been delayed following the mistakes made last year with the west coast re-tendering exercise. The Department for Transport (DfT) has decided that the next tendered franchise for the south east won't start until June 2018 - after the construction works at London Bridge are complete.
- 1.3.2 Rather than simply extend the current franchise the DfT will be negotiating a new Direct Award contract with Southeastern (a single action tender). The negotiations will include looking to achieve some key improvements in a number of areas including:

- improved focus on passenger experience;
- innovation to solve capacity issues;
- better partnership;
- continuing focus on industry efficiency and cost;
- key challenges of major fleet introductions and infrastructure change;
- smartcard implementation; and
- reduced carbon footprint/enhanced sustainability

1.4 Thameslink, Southern, Great Northern and First Capital Connect Rail Franchise

1.4.1 Govia, a partnership between UK transport operator The Go-Ahead Group and the international transport provider Keolis, is a pre-qualified bidder for the new Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern rail franchise. The new franchise, due to commence next September, will encompass the following services:

- all of the current First Capital Connect services from September 2014
- all services currently operated by Southern, including Gatwick Express, from July 2015
- some Southeastern services (serving Thameslink) including the HS1 line from Ashford from 2014 and 2018

1.4.2 This Council (through our Rail Manifesto) and Kent County Council continue to lobby for the reinstatement of the Gatwick line through Tonbridge. Although we are told that at times as few as four passengers use this route I consider there is an untapped market in Kent which could be utilised subject to some targeted promotion.

1.5 Lower Thames Crossing

1.5.1 It is expected that a response by Government following the consultation on strategic options will be announced around Christmas and we will update Members accordingly.

1.6 Airport Commission

1.6.1 The Airports Commission, chaired by Sir Howard Davies, has been established by Government to report on steps needed to maintain the UK's status as a global aviation hub. This includes examining whether there is a long term need for

additional airport capacity focusing on South East England and, if so, to make recommendations on options to meet any identified shortfall.

- 1.6.2 The Commission have, to date, been gathering evidence on relevant factors. This includes examining the relationship between airports and economic activity, the role of a hub airport, the noise implications of aviation, the impacts on climate change and some work on improving short term capacity of existing airport infrastructure.
- 1.6.3 The Commission are due to publish their interim report in December 2013. Recently, Sir Howard has made it clear that although the improved capacity management at some airports might provide increased resilience, there was unlikely to be any significant increase in capacity achieved through such an approach. Some capacity exists at Stansted, but accessibility would need significant investment and improvement to fully exploit that potential.
- 1.6.4 The report, to be published in December, seems likely to conclude that further new runway capacity is needed to support the Commission's provisional view that there is more demand than can be accommodated in London and the South East. In reaching that provisional view the Commission have considered whether larger aircraft could meet future demand; have come to the view that constraining demand does not assist climate change issues because air traffic simply moves elsewhere; and that there is no realistic prospect of successfully redistributing traffic to airports in other regions of England.
- 1.6.5 Over 50 different solutions to address future demand have been considered initially by the Commission. These have been described as being in three main categories:
 - Additional runway at Heathrow
 - Additional runway(s) at Gatwick/Stansted
 - A completely new airport (mainly Thames Estuary but also includes an option for a hub airport at Stansted)
- 1.6.6 It is expected that the report in December will close down the alternatives and include a list of 'plausible options' for further consideration. A final report with recommendations will be made to Government in summer 2015.
- 1.6.7 A number of key points have generally emerged which are worthy of mention:
 - A new hub airport to the east of London could only be a realistic option if Heathrow closes.
 - The effect on the west of London economy and local employment of a Heathrow closure would be catastrophic.

- Equally, the business and housing development needs to support a new hub airport to the east of London would be extremely difficult to accommodate and the prospect of business moving elsewhere in Europe is a concern.
- There is a view that costs of infrastructure to an estuary airport would be prohibitive and that funding would be more efficiently deployed increasing surface access to existing airports, especially Heathrow and Stansted.
- Surface access generally is a topic gaining concern with the Commission through their initial work.
- The prospects for a fast Heathrow-Gatwick link to enable Gatwick to function as a part of the Heathrow hub would be very challenging to deliver. In any event, there are practical problems (such as the rail link needing to be completely 'airside'). Neither promoters of expansion at Gatwick or Heathrow see this as an advantage.
- There remains some disagreement at the technical approach to noise assessment and calls have been made for the Commission to have a further independent audit and advice.

1.6.8 Understandably, there appears to be significant attention being given to the role of Heathrow as a hub airport but also as a key factor in the SE economy. Many commentators believe that this role should not be constrained and that to effectively replace Heathrow would have national consequences as well as huge local impacts. It is in that challenging context that the realism, practicality and sense of any proposals for a new airport will be judged.

1.6.9 Additional capacity at Stansted (and the take up of some existing capacity) seems to rely on very significant surface access improvement and considerable faith in the ability of promoters to increase its attractiveness to business.

1.6.10 A second runway at Gatwick would clearly risk exacerbating the issues around flight path noise that have been felt locally in south west Kent. It is also not clear what role Gatwick could play regionally/nationally in relationship to Heathrow in terms of a focus for business and a driver of the regional and local economy. For part of Tonbridge and Malling the issues of noise are potentially harmful and the Borough Council will need to take care in examining the likely impact of increased air traffic from new runway capacity.

1.6.11 Equally the Borough Council will wish to consider carefully any advantages that investment in Gatwick would bring for business development and economic activity in the Borough as well as increased options for air services for local residents. In that context the railway access improvements allied to any proposals for Gatwick will be important in securing any benefit to the area and Kent as a whole.

1.6.12 The Borough Council also need to continue to be mindful of the possibilities that an estuary airport could still gain support. Such a proposal could generate significant impact in terms of environmental, traffic, development and other pressures, at least on the northern part of the Borough. Until such time as we can readily assess these variables, alternatives to an estuary airport must remain for consideration.

1.6.13 A further report to the Board will be made following the Commission's interim report in December.

1.7 Pinch Point Bids

1.7.1 Members will recall from earlier reports to this Board that the County Council's bid to the DfT's Pinch Point Fund for widening the eastern overbridge at Junction 4 of the M20 was not successful.

1.7.2 KCC still consider that this scheme fits the criteria and they were recently advised that they have another chance to bid from a further tranche of funding. A second bid has now been submitted and my letter of support for this scheme is included in [Annex 1.

1.8 Cycling Strategy

1.8.1 The County Council intends to present an updated Cycling Strategy to the Joint Transportation Board next month for adoption.

1.9 Legal Implications

1.9.1 None

1.10 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.10.1 None directly for the Borough Council.

1.11 Risk Assessment

1.11.1 Not required.

Background papers:

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Nil

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