

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

12 January 2016

Report of the Director of Housing, Planning and Environmental Health Services

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 TRANSPORTATION UPDATE

This report provides Members with an update on various transportation matters including current and future consultations for alleviating the impacts of Operation Stack and proposals for a new Lower Thames Crossing. Progress in respect of planned or desired strategic highway improvements is also covered, including Tonbridge High Street, A21 dualling, M20 Junction 4 and M25 Junction 5 east facing slip roads. It also provides a brief update on future airport capacity following the Airport's Commission recommendations.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Transportation updates are regularly reported to this Board, the last occasion being in June 2015. There have been a number of significant developments since the last update and this report provides a brief summary of progress and next steps for information.

1.2 Current and Future Consultations

1.2.1 Operation Stack – Proposals for a new Lorry Parking Area

1.2.2 Highways England launched a public consultation to seek views on two new proposed lorry parking areas north of the M20 in the vicinity of Junction 11 in December. The proposal is in response to the extended Operation Stack in the summer of 2015 that caused significant disruption for users of the M20 and also local businesses and residents over a prolonged period of time. The suggested lorry parking area will provide better services for lorry drivers and allow the M20 to remain open for longer in the event of a closure of the Channel crossings. Comments are invited up to 25th January 2016.

1.2.3 Operation Stack was first introduced in the 1980s and had until 2015 been used fairly infrequently, approximately once a year between 2010-14. In 2015 it was deployed on 32 days (to the end of November) due to industrial action and migrant activities that caused disruption to crossings. Although this could be

considered to have been an exceptional year, freight traffic using the Channel crossings is growing and this has led to increasing calls for a more permanent solution.

- 1.2.4 The Government has agreed with the site owners that Manston Airport can be used temporarily as part of Operation Stack, but it is not ideally located (it cannot be used to serve lorries using Eurotunnel, for example) and can only be considered as a short term interim relief measure. In the Autumn Statement, the Government agreed to commit up to £250m to providing a major new permanent lorry park and to carry out consultations.
- 1.2.5 Views are sought on two alternative locations, both capable of accommodating up to 3,600 lorries, one to the west and one to the east of Junction 11 of the M20 in the vicinity of Stanford. There are also four alternatives for the way in which the lorry park would be used ranging from simply an alternative to Operation Stack on the M20, with basic facilities and no charge, to something more like a fully functioning truck-stop with enhanced services and open 24 hours a day 365 days a year with charging for overnight parking. Further consultations on a more detailed proposal are anticipated in the spring.
- 1.2.6 Although the options are located outside of the Borough and Operation Stack does not have a direct impact on users of the M20 further west than Junction 8 in Maidstone Borough, there are clear wider benefits to the Kent economy as a whole and other users of the Channel Crossings. This inevitably includes many businesses and residents of Tonbridge and Malling who we know to have been disrupted to varying degrees by the implementation of Operation Stack as it currently functions. Therefore, I intend to send an initial expression of general support for a permanent solution based in the vicinity of Junction 11 as proposed.
- 1.2.7 Lower Thames Crossing
- 1.2.8 Members will recall that Highways England on behalf of the Department for Transport is in the process of preparing options for a new road crossing of the River Thames.
- 1.2.9 A major public consultation exercise is due to take place starting in January for a period of 10 weeks. Highways England through their consultants Halcrow Hydra have been meeting with Local Planning Authorities to discuss consultation arrangements and contacts to ensure that local communities, residents and businesses have the opportunity to engage with the process. It is anticipated that a fuller report and draft response will be brought back to the next Board meeting in March.

1.3 Highway Improvements

1.3.1 Tonbridge High Street

1.3.2 Phase one of the Tonbridge Town Centre Regeneration scheme began in the summer of 2015, paused to allow businesses to trade for the Christmas period, recommencing on the 4th January. Some delays have been experienced by Kent Highways and their contractors Amey due to technical difficulties associated with utilities and other services being discovered close to the surface requiring relaying and lowering that has meant that progress has been slower than anticipated. There have also been concerns expressed by businesses affected and other town centre users that information has been limited and communication could have been improved.

1.3.3 These issues have been flagged up with Kent Highways and from January more resources will be employed on both the works themselves and also communications. Works will be taking place on both sides of the High Street, staggered so as to allow the traffic to flow, but effectively doubling the rate of progress and a new communication plan has also been prepared and meetings with the traders established to improve the sharing of information.

1.3.4 The works in the High Street are expected to be completed by the end of April.

1.3.5 Although not forming part of the High Street improvements, consultants DHA have been commissioned to prepare some design work associated with improvements to River Walk and the forecourt and the area around the Tonbridge Station forecourt. In the event that there is any underspend from the High Street works post 2016/17 or that further funds can be secured officers have been working closely with Kent County Council and South Eastern so that a project to improve the access and egress from the station can be accelerated and implemented using this time limited funding to best effect. Further updates on this project will be provided in future reports.

1.3.6 A21 Dualling

1.3.7 The construction of the on-line scheme to dual carriage the 2.5 mile stretch between the Vauxhall and North Farm junctions on the A21 is well under way and still anticipated to be completed in the spring of 2017 as previously reported.

1.3.8 M20 Junction 4

1.3.9 The scheme, which will provide extra carriageway space on the junction gyratory system, is due to start during 2016. It will be funded by contributions from developers and from Local Growth Funding. The scheme includes the widening of the eastern bridge over the M20 to provide an extra traffic lane (from 2 to 3) and minor changes to the top of the east facing slip roads to accommodate the widened bridge.

1.3.10 M25 East Facing Slips

Kent County Council, KALC and TMBC jointly appointed consultants SYSTRA in November to carry out the M25/M26 Connectivity Study, which has been reported previously. This will establish whether a robust economic case can be made for new east facing slips at an appropriate location in the vicinity of Junction 5 of the M25/M26. The study is expected to be completed by the end of March.

1.4 **Future Airport Capacity**

1.4.1 The Government has postponed making a decision on future airport capacity until at least next summer pending further environmental impact reports in respect of the Airport's Commission recommendation for a third runway at Heathrow.

1.5 **Legal Implications**

1.5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

1.6 **Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

1.6.1 There are no direct financial or value for money considerations arising from this report although there may be wider benefits for local residents and businesses as a result of some of the improvements being implemented or proposed in this report.

Background papers:

Nil

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