

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

28 July 2020

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 TRANSPORTATION UPDATE

1.1 Summary: This report reviews the outcomes of the TMBC Cycling Strategy, considers options for an updated strategy framework for Cycling and Walking, and provides an update on the South Eastern rail franchise and Lower Thames Crossing.

1.2 Transport Strategy - Cycling and Walking

1.2.1 The adopted Cycling Strategy 2014-2019 was prepared by Sustrans on behalf of KCC and TMBC, the document can be found online - https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/7866/Tonbridge-malling-cycling-strategy.pdf. Whilst Kent County Council has responsibility for highways and public rights of way networks, the adopted Strategy was jointly supported by both authorities, recognising the need for local buy in and the role of the borough council as Local Planning Authority. The strategy sets out principles and proposals to improve cycle routes across the borough. These are summarised as follows;

- **Principle 1:** A network of high quality routes will be completed in the urban areas of Tonbridge and the Medway Gap providing convenient and safe access throughout those areas.
- **Principle 2:** Wherever possible measures will be provided which give cyclists priority over motorised traffic in terms of accessibility and journey time.
- **Principle 3:** Cycle parking will be provided in all employment and residential developments (both new build and change of use).
- **Principle 4:** KCC will work with partners to ensure the regular maintenance of all cycle tracks within the borough.
- **Principle 5:** The provision of cycle training for young people and adults.

- **Principle 6:** Ensure cycle routes are fully advertised and signposted, and that cycle maps are available for all routes.
- **Principle 7:** Automatic counters will be installed throughout the cycle network to enable a detailed analysis of usage.

- 1.2.2 It was intended that together these measures would encourage more people to choose cycling for local journeys, especially in urban areas. In response to Principle 1, some route improvements have been delivered during the timeframe of the strategy. Tonbridge town centre has seen significant public realm improvements in recent years, which also include River Walk which leads from the High Street, this is a shared use route that links to River Lawn Road. These improvements have been of benefit to pedestrians and cyclists.
- 1.2.3 Elsewhere the non-motorised user's route has been delivered alongside the A21 dualling between North Farm and Vauxhall junctions, and cycle lane improvements have also been implemented on the Shipbourne Road. It is however recognised that many of the route proposals in the strategy remain unimplemented, and that the cycle route network remains inconsistent and incomplete.
- 1.2.4 In practice delivering cycle route improvements is very challenging due to the availability of funding, and competing design considerations which often have to be taken into account, especially where seeking to retrofit existing streets and upgrade existing public rights of way. It is therefore not always possible to provide dedicated cycling infrastructure within our constrained highway network, the details of which are often only clarified at a detailed design stage for specific schemes.
- 1.2.5 In response to Principle 3, a new cycle hub is shortly to be opened at Tonbridge Station. Accessed from Barden Road, this will be a substantial enhancement to facilities within the town - <https://turvec.com/turvec-news/southeastern-cycle-hubs-secured/>.
- 1.2.6 KCC through their Explore Kent website, also maintain up to date information regarding cycling and walking routes across the county. Responding to Principle 6, the route map for Tonbridge has been recently updated, and can be found online - <https://explorekent.org/activities/explore-tonbridge-walking-cycling-routes/>. Other prominent routes are also promoted, including the River Medway towpath cycle route at Aylesford.
- 1.2.7 The Cycling Strategy has supported the current development and has been helpful in confirming shared priorities, in supporting negotiations on individual planning applications and funding bids as opportunities have allowed. The strategy now needs to be updated to reflect the policies and allocations in the submitted Local Plan. As a recognised approach it is considered that the development of a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) will further assist TMBC and its partners in achieving these outcomes.

1.2.8 The practice of preparing a Cycling Strategy was not previously prescribed by government, this has however progressed. In 2017 the DfT published guidance for local authorities who wished to prepare LCWIPs - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-cycling-and-walking-infrastructure-plans-technical-guidance-and-tools>. This was in recognition of the national ambition for sustained investment in walking and cycling, to support an increase in these transport modes, with the aim to double the rate of cycling nationally by 2025. This practice is now embedded in the 2019 NPPF which states that;

“Planning policies should:

...provide for high quality walking and cycling networks and support facilities such as cycle parking (drawing on Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans)” (para 104, d).

1.2.9 In the context of the emerging Local Plan with its strategic site allocations, officers have commenced the preparation of an infrastructure plan, which will be utilised to inform future strategies. This provides an opportunity to review and update the principles and cycle route proposals in the adopted cycling strategy, as well as consider opportunities to improve facilities for pedestrians. It is often the case that cycling schemes are most successful where they also include measures for pedestrians too.

1.2.10 Utilising funding from KCC, Consultants DHA Transport have been appointed to provide advice regarding future cycling and walking networks in the borough, including assessment of routes and the provision of recommendations for improvement. This corresponds to stages 3 and 4 of the technical guidance. Due to the coronavirus lockdown, the progression of this work has been delayed but is expected to continue over the summer months. These assessments should assist in the preparation of more robust and deliverable route proposals.

1.2.11 It is anticipated that a draft infrastructure plan will be finalised for public consultation following the conclusion of the Local Plan examination hearings, to ensure that route proposals remain relevant to the delivery of strategic and other development allocations, as well as to support existing communities. The draft strategy will be submitted to PTAB and subsequently the Tonbridge & Malling JTB for consideration, and to confirm support to progress the document for a period of public consultation.

1.2.12 Local Authorities are taking differing approaches in embedding LCWIPs alongside their other policies and frameworks, in response to the specifics of their local circumstances. LCWIPs can sit alongside and support the implementation of other corporate plans, climate change strategies, infrastructure plans and transport strategies for example. The latter can set out on a more detailed basis, agreed corporate aspirations for sustainable transport matters including bus and rail, which are not otherwise included in the Kent Local Transport Plan -

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/transport-and-highways-policies/local-transport-plan>.

1.2.13 At present Tonbridge & Malling does not have a transport strategy, which like the LCWIP this is not a statutory requirement. Members are asked to informally consider if they would support the preparation of a transport strategy. There is no nationally prescribed approach, however any transport strategy would require the support of KCC and where possible other transport partners, so that it could be an effective policy tool.

1.3 South Eastern Rail Franchise – Update

1.3.1 On 23 May the government suspended the normal financial mechanisms of rail franchise agreements, transferring all revenue and cost risk to the government. Operators continue to run day-to-day services for a small, pre-determined management fee. Companies entering into these agreements will see a temporary suspension of their existing franchise agreement's financial mechanisms for an initial period of 6 months, with options for further extension or earlier cancellation as agreed. Further information can be found in the press release - <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/rail-emergency-measures-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>.

1.3.2 The South Eastern Franchise itself has been further extended by direct award. The new contract commenced on 1 April 2020 and will run until 16 October 2021, with the option to extend at the DfT's discretion until 31 March 2022 - <https://newsroom.southeasternrailway.co.uk/news/southeastern-direct-award-contract>. There is currently no further information regarding the overdue review of the franchise and related improvements including smart and flexible ticketing.

1.4 Lower Thames Crossing Consultation

1.4.1 Highways England have published a design refinement consultation for the Lower Thames Crossing, this runs from 14 July to 12 August. Following earlier stages of consultation, Highways England are proposing a number of changes to the design of the project following feedback received, discussions with local stakeholders, ongoing design development and new technical data. These include;

- minor changes to elements of the highways design;
- updated paths for walkers, cyclists and horse riders;
- proposals for redirecting and upgrading utilities;
- more detailed landscaping proposals;
- further developed ecological mitigation measures.

- 1.4.2 The feedback from this consultation will help Highways England develop its application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) planned for submission later this year.
- 1.4.3 Whilst further consideration of the detailed design is welcomed, none of the proposed revisions will have any direct implications for Tonbridge & Malling. The borough council has responded to the previous consultations expressing support for the Lower Thames Crossing, recognising the operational issues at the Dartford Crossing and economic benefits that the infrastructure could bring.
- 1.4.4 The borough council remains concerned about the impacts of the project on other parts of the strategic and local road networks. In responding to the consultation support for the Lower Thames Crossing will be reiterated, in addition to our request that investment in the project should be complemented by a phased programme of other investments, that help to build in the resilience required to ensure that the LTC doesn't solve one problem, but create others elsewhere.

Background papers:

Nil

contact: Bartholomew Wren
Principal Planning Officer (Policy)

Eleanor Hoyle
Director of Planning Housing and Environmental Health