

Joint Transportation Board

Minutes of a Meeting of the Joint Transportation Board held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **7th December 2010**.

Present:

Mr M A Wickham (Chairman);
Cllr Burgess (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Cloughton, Cowley, Feacey, Heyes, Woodford.
Mr M J Angell, Mrs E Tweed.
Mr T Reed – KALC Ashford Area Committee

Apologies:

Cllr Clarkson, Mr R E King, Mr S J G Koowaree, Mr J N Wedgbury.

Also Present:

John Farmer (Major Projects Manager - KHS), Andrew Burton (Project Manager – KHS), Jamie Watson (Project Manager – KHS), Carol Valentine (Community Delivery Manager – KHS), Andy Phillips (Head of Transport – Ashford's Future), Paul Jackson (Head of Environmental Services – ABC), Ray Wilkinson (Engineering Services Manager – ABC), Danny Sheppard (Senior Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer – ABC).

276 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Cloughton	Code of Conduct – Personal but not Prejudicial – Regarding Shopmobility as Chairman of the Ashford Access Group.	279
Feacey	Code of Conduct – Personal but not Prejudicial – Trustee of the Ashford Volunteer Bureau.	279
Heyes	Code of Conduct – Personal but not Prejudicial – Member of Ashford Town Centre Partnership Management Board.	279
Mrs Tweed	Code of Conduct – Personal but not Prejudicial - Member of Ashford Town Centre Partnership Management Board.	279

277 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Board held on the 14th September 2010 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

278 Transport Forum

The Board received the report of the Chairman of the Transport Forum for the Meeting held on the 26th November 2010 which had been tabled. The Forum had considered updates on: - Kent Highway Services from KCC Cabinet Member Nick Chard; Southern Railways; Southeastern Railways; Bus Services; and Taxis. The Chairman (of the Forum) said it had been an extremely interesting meeting and Nick Chard's input had been particularly informative and appreciated.

A Member who was also Chairman of the Ashford Access Group explained that the Group was an External Representative on the Forum and he was disappointed to note that their appointed transport representative, Stephen Bourner of Ashford's Future, had not attended the meeting. He apologised to the Chairman and endeavoured to speak to Mr Bourner about the importance of attending future meetings.

Resolved:

That the report of the Chairman of the Transport Forum for the Meeting held on the 26th November 2010 be received and noted.

279 Tracker Report

The Chairman drew Members attention to the Tracker of Decisions.

A Member referred to the Ashford Cycle Strategy which had been approved, but mentioned that a complete joining up of the network had currently been delayed due to a lack of funding. She explained that some of the County Members had got together to discuss using their own Highways budget to get this done if possible and discussions were underway with Officers. It may not turn out to be quite to the standard originally envisaged, but it would be nice to get this completed.

In response to a question about the Disabled Parking Bays Panel, Mr Wilkinson explained that the Panel's first meeting had been held on the 10th November and had approved three bays and declined three others. The three approved bays had already been installed. The affect of the bay in Repton Manor Road would be monitored to see how it affected other parking in the road.

In response to other questions about parking, Mr Jackson explained that all Borough Council car parks would be free for each Sunday in December in the run-up to Christmas. The NCP car parks would not be following suit. The Local Authorities had no control on the maximum amount the NCP car parks could charge but minimum

amounts were controlled by planning conditions (i.e. they could not charge less than the Council). The Board agreed to record their disappointment that NCP would not be following the Council's lead in offering free car parking on Sundays in the lead up to Christmas. They also thought NCP should be asked to consider contributing some of their profits from parking over the Christmas period towards Shopmobility which could in turn lead to increased usage of their car parks.

Resolved:

- That (i) the Tracker be received and noted.**
- (ii) the Chairman write to NCP to express the Board's disappointment that they would not be following the Council's lead in offering free car parking on Sundays in the lead up to Christmas, and to ask them to consider contributing some of their profits from parking towards Shopmobility.**

280 Victoria Way Improvement Scheme

Mr Watson introduced the report which informed Members of the progress of the Victoria Way scheme. He circulated copies of a new public leaflet on the scheme, which would shortly be distributed to businesses and residents, and showed some photographs of progress as a slideshow.

He explained that the main difficulty to date had been over utilities, particularly at the middle section between Leacon Road and Victoria Road as many underground services had had to be diverted. A key objective of the scheme was to divert existing services into the road corridor as well as upgrading and providing new services to serve and 'future proof' the adjacent development sites. This had largely been resolved, although construction remained difficult in that services needed to be installed sequentially in parallel with the build up of the earthworks before the road works could be started, and this put pressure on the programme.

With regard to John Wallis Square, further design alterations had been necessary to bring the cost of the Square within the allocated budget. This had included the removal of the pavilion base and part of the architectural screening along the Learning Link edge with the school, although this element may be brought back in at the end of the scheme if funding allowed. Mr Watson agreed to circulate a further briefing note to Members on John Wallis Square after the meeting.

Mr Watson explained that in March 2010 the Board had approved Traffic Orders that allowed the introduction of residents permit parking in Victoria Crescent and limited waiting in Jemmett Road and Bowens Field, and this was now operational. It would now be necessary to develop proposals that would control traffic movements and parking along the main route of the new Victoria Way and into adjacent roads. There would be a need to: - include several minor alterations to the original parking controls agreed by the Board in March 2010; introduce a 20mph zone around the Square and outside Victoria Road Primary School; maintain a clear area outside the school during school times via the use of keep clear markings and a Traffic Order; implement a 'no left turn' restriction exiting Victoria Crescent into Victoria Road; and

implement a restricted parking zone within the 20mph zone. If there were objections to the restricted parking zone these would be brought to the March 2011 meeting of this Board.

In conclusion Mr Watson said that there was considerable focus on meeting the deadline of 31st March 2011 although this would be tight and some of the associated elements of the scheme may take a little longer to complete. The project was also within the existing budget. Mr Farmer explained that the Homes & Communities Agency had agreed the principle to some reallocation of funding to cover the residual expenditure that may be incurred beyond the formal funding end date of 31st March 2010. The scheme had encountered a difficult start, as reported at the June 2010 meeting of this Board, particularly due to having to accommodate and secure advance works to the many utilities involved. However, Mr Farmer said that these matters were largely resolved and he was pleased to say that the whole scheme was now in a much more promising position.

The Chairman opened the item up to Members for questions/comments and the following responses were given: -

- A no right turn into Matalan from Brookfield Road had been in place in the past to alleviate tailbacks and Officers were looking at the possibility of implementing this again. The traffic signals would be removed over the Christmas shutdown period.
- There had been discussions with the Ashford Access Group about ensuring John Wallis Square would be a practical area for the disabled. As far as Officers were aware there were no hazards in the area and there would be no steps and only minor ramps.
- It was recognised that parking would be a problem, particularly outside the school and discussions had been held with the school. Two or three spaces were initially going to be provided, but the decision had been taken that 'fighting' for these few spaces may cause more problems. Therefore all parking outside the school had been removed in favour of concentrating on the two hour restrictions in Bowens Field and encouraging dropping off there. At present there were no parking restrictions in Bowens Field and the area did attract all day parking by commuters.
- The majority of zigzag yellow lines outside schools were enforced by the Police but were only enforceable with the correct signage at either end of the area in question. It would be a longer term issue for KCC to ensure the correct signage was in place at schools across the Borough.
- The initial idea had been to extend the screening from the Square to include the school boundary with the Learning Link footpath but this had been removed from the scheme at the present time because of funding. Whilst obviously not 100% ideal, it could be added back in at the end of the scheme if funding permitted.

- The work necessitating the temporary traffic lights in Brookfield Road should be complete by February 2011. Permanent traffic signals would be going in at a later date so a decision would be taken in February 2011 about what to do in the meantime.
- The snow the previous week had caused the contractors to shut down for four days for health and safety reasons. This would obviously have an impact on the programme, but it was unknown at this stage exactly how much.
- Officers were aware of the problems with the road surfaces in Victoria Road and Victoria Crescent. There had obviously been a lot more movements of construction vehicles recently and this had caused potholes etc. Repairs would be made to any that caused an immediate hazard and longer term solutions would be examined.
- They had been looking to alter and upgrade the Loudon Way junction to assist Victoria Way but this had also been taken out of the programme due to funding. It may be added back in if Victoria Way came in on budget.

Resolved:

That the progress of the scheme be noted.

281 Highway Improvements at M20 Junction 9 and Drovers Roundabout

Mr Farmer introduced the report which informed Members of the progress of highway improvement works to M20 Junction 9 and Drovers Roundabout and set out the diversion routes to be used during a weekend closure of the M20 between Junctions 9 and 10 in spring 2011. He said he knew there had been concerns about traffic management on the scheme and wanted to make it clear that the project team did not ignore the public and their needs. However, there did need to be fixed traffic management plans in place so everybody knew where they stood day to day. He understood that the traditional rush hour of 5pm now started a lot earlier (3pm with the 'school run'), but in his view, to finish work in time to re-open everything by 3pm would not leave a sufficient construction window and it was a difficult balance. Mr Farmer invited the local Ward Members to come and visit the site and discuss this issue with the construction team.

The Members in question said they would be happy to accept such an offer. They considered that the late removal of the lane closures was a major problem and perhaps one that had been underestimated by the project team. After believing that agreement had been made to open all lanes up by 3.15pm, there had been occasions where this was not happening until 4.30pm. A core construction period of 9am to 3pm was six hours which should be enough. Quite often it took up to 15 minutes to negotiate the Drovers Roundabout and whilst sitting in stationary traffic often no work appeared to be taking place which was extremely frustrating. It was accepted that enough time needed to be allowed to get the job done and there was a duty to finish the work on time, however it was felt that the views of the public were

being totally disregarded and the apparent indifference of Kent Highway Services and the project team was unacceptable and not in the interests of good public relations.

In response to a question about planning applications in the vicinity, Mr Phillips explained that work was underway with developers and planning applications were likely to be submitted shortly for new housing off Maidstone Road (opposite Repton Park) and a Care Home and offices off Simone Weil Avenue. Members asked to be kept up to date with these developments.

With regard to the feature bridge over the M20, Mr Farmer explained that the preferred option was to erect the bridge in one go which would necessitate a 33 hour closure of the M20 to all non-emergency traffic between 2000 hours on a Saturday until 0500 the following Monday. At the last meeting of the Board, Members had been understandably concerned about the impact on Ashford of what would include a wide ranging traffic diversion strategy for that weekend and this would have to be agreed with both Kent Highway Services and the Highways Agency. In essence, London bound traffic on the M20 would be diverted around the south of Ashford, whilst coastbound traffic would use a diversion route to the north of the town. It was now likely that this would take place over the weekend of the 7th May 2011 following the school holidays, Easter and the extended May Bank Holiday. In response to a question Mr Burton said that the South East Ambulance Trust, Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover had all been involved in discussions. Blue light vehicles would be allowed through the closure so ambulances on emergency calls would be unaffected. The transport operators would be given details of the actual date when finalised, and they would contact their customers who would be affected.

In terms of the landscaping arrangements for the re-instated Drovers Roundabout, Mr Farmer explained that the comments of the Borough Council's Strategic Sites & Design Manager were currently being incorporated into the plans and these would be submitted back to the Council for final approval. He assured Members that all efforts would be made to maximise planting and he endeavoured to circulate the current plans to Board Members.

Resolved:

- That (i) the progress on site of highway improvement works to M20 Junction 9 and Drovers Roundabout be noted.**
- (ii) the diversion routes to be used during a weekend closure of the M20 between Junctions 9 and 10 in spring 2011 be noted.**

282 M20 Junction 10A and Smartlink – Implications from Recent Government Announcements on Funding

Mr Phillips introduced his report which outlined the implications from recent Government funding announcements and the actions being taken to try and ensure that the M20 Junction 10A and Smartlink projects, which were both vital to support and enable Ashford's growth, were delivered as soon as possible. The Chairman

directed Members' attention to the tabled papers which included the comments of the Borough Council Portfolio Holder on the report.

In short, Mr Phillips explained that the recent announcement meant that the two projects would not happen now until at least 2015. The Leader of the Borough Council had already written to the Secretary of State for Transport seeking an urgent meeting to discuss the Junction 10A scheme and the best way in which funding and certainty of programme could be secured going forward. Discussions also continued with the Highways Agency, the Homes and Communities Agency and developers reliant on the scheme to ensure that private investment in the scheme could be maximised, the costs of the scheme to the public purse could be reduced and that lobbying of Ministers and senior Department for Transport officials was co-ordinated to a plan agreed by all parties. There was likely to be a further review of all schemes that did not make it into the 2011-2015 funding period within the next 12 months, so the case had to be prepared. With regard to Smartlink Mr Phillips explained there now needed to be an assessment, chiefly undertaken through the Quality Bus Partnership Steering Group, to see what could be done to enhance existing bus services, including a reduced cost 'Smartlink Lite' scheme with reduced capital costs and a phased strategy based on implementing a series of 'Smart-Routes' supporting major development sites as they came forward.

A Member said that in his view Ashford's expansion plans were evaporating and many of the targets now seemed 'pie in the sky'. If Cheeseman's Green and Chilmington Green were not coming on stream to the extent previously planned, would Junction 10A be needed and why was the Leader insisting it should go ahead? Mr Phillips explained that planning permission had been granted for Cheeseman's Green for 1100 dwellings and additional businesses, but only 700 of those could be implemented without a Junction 10A or further improvements to the existing Junction 10. Another Member said that whilst he had no problem with the diminution of growth in Ashford he also thought it was important to keep all options open. If Junction 10A did not come forward because of funding cuts, he considered that was fine and plans would have to be adjusted accordingly, but it was also appropriate to push for it if it was at all possible. The Vice-Chairman asked if the Junction 10A project had been examined in the same way as the A21 at Pembury, where a 'stripped back' scheme had seen the costs reduced by two thirds. Could this be an option for Ashford? Mr Phillips explained that Junction 10A was being reviewed by a consultant to see if costs could be managed down in a similar way, including involving the private sector to keep public sector costs down.

A Member said he supported the overall growth plans and there were a lot of good things going on, but he had always questioned the need for Smartlink and continued to do so. A Park & Ride system for Ashford had been talked about for more than 20 years but there had never been any significant progress. Rather than continuing to press for this would it not be better to say that Park & Ride should be put on hold for the immediate and indefinite future. The 'on and off' nature of such projects made it hard to explain to residents what was going on and often caused unnecessary and unfounded concerns. Mr Phillips explained that the case for Park & Ride was built on development coming forward in the town centre. Clearly that had not happened perhaps as quickly as everybody would have liked, but new shops, offices and jobs would inevitably come forward in the future, and at that point there would be a need

for additional parking and transport systems such as Park & Ride. Another Member said he had always supported the idea of Park & Ride and having worked in the industry knew how well such a system could operate in offering an alternative to the car and gridlock on town centre roads. Once the town centre started growing the only other alternative would be a string of multi storey car parks in the town centre, so he hoped the idea of Park & Ride would not be abandoned.

Resolved:

That the report and the further actions being considered to take the schemes forward be noted.

283 Local Winter Service Plans

Mrs Valentine introduced the report which gave details of the Local Winter Service Plans for the Ashford area for 2010/11. She explained the Plan was a technical document, and a more public friendly version of the plan was available on the Winter Preparedness section of the KCC website, including a list of locations of salt bins/bags etc. Following the consultation exercise it had been clear that District Councils were keen to be involved in winter service, particularly in relation to snow clearance in town centre areas. Arrangements had therefore been put in place to use labour from District Councils in snowy periods and KHS would supply a small quantity of sand/salt mixture to Districts to use on the highway network. She believed that had worked quite well in the snowfall of the previous week, which had been an earlier than normal test of the County's plan.

The following responses were given to questions/comments: -

- The contracts with farmers had been re-done this year and there were now more than 180 across the County. All farmers had to complete the requisite paperwork including legal aspects and issues of insurance.
- All salt bins had been placed for this winter. Requests for ones in Godinton Road would be looked at for next year. All schools should be included in the Plan and if any had been missed off this list this was purely an administrative error.
- Roads leading to schools would be prioritised where possible. There were obviously limited resources but the priorities were outlined clearly within the Plan and it was an evolving piece of work.

Members generally said they were extremely impressed with the document and praised the work of Kent Highway Services during the snow of the previous week. There were numerous good news stories of how people had been able to carry on as normal last week and the improvements on last year were noticeable. People driving from East Sussex into Kent had also said how much better the Kent roads were. It was hoped that some of this positive news would be reflected in the local press, particularly when compared to some of the problems experienced on the railways and the coverage that had generated. Mrs Valentine explained that the KCC Press

Office was putting a story together for the press and Members were encouraged to share any good news stories with them.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

284 Highway Works Programme 2010/11

The report updated Members on the identified schemes approved for construction in 2010/11. The Chairman directed Members' attention to the tabled papers which included a request from Mr Koowaree for clarification over the status of the requested crossing between two cycle paths at Norman Road. Mrs Valentine said she would investigate and get back to Mr Koowaree.

A Member said that the lining that had taken place in Chart Road had been done quite badly and needed re-doing as a matter of urgency. There had been a number of complaints from residents and it would not be difficult to put right.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

DS