

Transportation, Highways and Engineering Advisory Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Transportation, Highways and Engineering Advisory Committee held in Committee Room No.2 (Bad Münstereifel Room), Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **5th July 2013**

Present:

Cllr. Heyes (Chairman);
Cllr. Feacey (Vice-Chairman);
Cllrs. Burgess, Michael, Robey, Wedgbury.

Also Present:

Dutch Docherty – Stagecoach in East Kent, Sue Whybrow – Ashford Independent Taxi Drivers Association, Sarah Paul – Ashford Borough Council, William Train – Ashford Borough Council, Danny Sheppard – Ashford Borough Council.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Cloughton, Yeo, Stephen Gasche – Kent County Council, Mike Gibson – Southeastern, Yvonne Leslie – Southern.

65 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Feacey	Announced an 'Other Interest' as Chairman of Energyshift Ltd who worked with members of the taxi trade.	67

66 Terms of Reference and Forward Work Programme

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed all those present. He said that this was the first meeting of the Transportation, Highways and Engineering Advisory Committee and accordingly he thought it would be useful for Members to have sight of the Terms of Reference and the proposed forward programme of work.

In terms of additional potential items for future meetings, Members made the following suggestions: - M20 Junctions 10 and 10A; the second Thames Crossing; Lydd and Manston airports and a potential new airport hub on the Hoo Peninsula; and arrangements for buses and taxis at Ashford International Station.

The Chairman advised that although the Committee had been set up to advise the Cabinet, it would liaise closely with the Joint Transportation Board on the majority of the issues and use that as a link with Kent County Council.

Resolved:

That subject to the comments above the Terms of Reference and Forward Work Programme for the Transportation, Highways and Engineering Advisory Committee be received and noted.

67 Industry Updates and Discussion

The Chairman said that unfortunately both of the major train operators had sent their apologies for the meeting. Both Southern and Southeastern had provided brief updates which were tabled for Members' attention. The Chairman said it was particularly regrettable that they had both missed the first meeting of the new Advisory Committee as it would be an important connection for them. There were a number of items of interest to discuss and with the new franchises looming it was in their interests to attend.

Stagecoach

Dutch Docherty explained that plans were in place for an improved C-Line Service to begin in September. There had been problems with the timetable and it was hoped that the new service would improve punctuality and allow more run-in time for drivers who had to deal with increased traffic congestion in and around the Town Centre. From the 29th July, Stagecoach would be providing new 2 and 2A Services from Rolvenden/Tenterden to Ashford to replace the existing Nu-Venture 295 Service. This would be an improved half hourly (rather than the current hourly) service and was in response to public demand. The 2 Service would be via High Halden and the 2A via Shadoxhurst. Stagecoach was also aware of phase 2 of the National Grid's overhead power line refurbishment between Sellindge and Canterbury. Part of Plain Road would be closed for four weeks from 20th July and diversions would be in place for the 10 Service.

In response to questions about the phasing of traffic lights in the town centre, Mr Docherty said that Stagecoach had experienced some problems a few months ago, particularly at Elwick Road and around the Station, but this had been looked at and it seemed to be better now. Road markings had also been an issue and there had been a number of collisions and near misses when exiting the station. The biggest area of concern though remained the lane markings at Drovers Roundabout. There had been a number of minor accidents, many involving buses and in his view there would be a serious accident there soon. Vehicles simply kept getting in the wrong lanes due to poor directional markings and were changing lanes at the last minute, quite often swooping in front of buses and one incident had seen a passenger on one of the buses break their nose and have to be taken to hospital after the driver had had to break excessively. The point had been made a number of times but he could not see how it could be overcome. There was also currently a problem of a temporary lane closure to facilitate the John Lewis work. Even minor incidents at this roundabout resulted in the town grinding to a halt. The Chairman said that a review of the whole junction was currently underway by KCC's contractors Amey and that this information would be useful when looking at the outcome of that review.

The expansion of the 517 bus service to include Repton Park was ready to commence but Stagecoach were waiting for the completion and opening of the link road. The Vice-Chairman said he would put Stagecoach in contact with the

contractor. Mr Docherty also agreed to talk to the responsible officer regarding out of date E-Line timetables at the Waitrose and Carlton Road bus stops.

A Member said there were a number of parking problems in Hurst Road which were only likely to get worse when the new primary school opened in September. There were plans for yellow lines and moving the bus stop and he asked if Stagecoach had been consulted. Mrs Paul advised that there had been initial discussions and double yellow lines at pinch points in Hurst Road had been proposed. Mr Docherty said he had not been involved yet, but he knew that there would be problems if the bus stop was not moved. They did already have problems getting the buses through Reed Crescent, Kingsnorth at school changeover times and had stopped trying to do so as a result. He said that double yellow lines and parents dropping children off at school did not mix. They were simply ignored which led to buses getting stuck and in his view there needed to be more pro-active enforcement. A Member said it would be worth speaking to the KCC Member for the area (Hurst Road) as he did have a small pot of money which could be used for mitigating some of the problems.

Taxis

Sue Whybrow said that the taxi trade had been relieved at the recent revocation of a licence of a dishonest driver. There had however been disappointment at the way the story had been covered in the local press which had been misleading and cast the trade in a bad light. They had written to the newspaper to complain but this had been completely ignored. There had also been a negative letter in the newspaper about taxis using the Godinton Road Bus Gate. She asked if the Council could be more pro-active in promoting the taxi trade and disputing misleading and biased reporting as it did influence public opinion and the trade was often misunderstood. In other matters she said that the Beaver Road Bus Gate was currently working well which was pleasing, however there were still problems in and around the Station. Inconsiderate parking by private cars was bottlenecking the area for all users, particularly taxis and buses, and it was causing lengthy delays. Signage definitely needed to be improved. These comments were supported by Mr Docherty. Mrs Whybrow said she was also concerned about Government changes to the CRB check requirements for private hire drivers.

In terms of the CRB check the Vice-Chairman advised that the new system would simply allow applicants a chance to review the results of the CRB check before it was sent to the Council. He saw this as advantageous for applicants.

With regard to recent reporting in the local newspaper the Committee advised Mrs Whybrow to write to the Editor if she felt her complaints were being ignored.

The Committee said they agreed with the comments about the Station and were concerned that the problem would only get worse with the potential additional train services. This was why they had added it to their forward work programme.

68 Dates of Next Meetings

The Chairman advised that the next Meeting of the Committee would be an evening meeting in October 2013 to discuss strategic issues. The date would be confirmed shortly. The next Meeting of the Committee in this form (Industry Updates and Discussion) would be Friday 17th January 2014 at 9.30am. He asked all representatives to note the date in their diaries.

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