

Transportation, Highways and Engineering Advisory Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Transportation, Highways and Engineering Advisory Committee held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the 11th July 2014.

Present:

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

Also Present:

Pierre Delalande – Eurostar, Mike Gibson – Southeastern, Yvonne Leslie – Southern, Dutch Docherty – Stagecoach in East Kent, Derek Goodwin – Ashford Driving Instructors Association, Ray Wilkinson – Ashford Borough Council, Andrew Osborne – Ashford Borough Council, Jo Fox – Ashford Borough Council, Danny Sheppard – Ashford Borough Council.

Apologies:

Cllr. Yeo.

Philip Norwell – Stagecoach in East Kent.

80 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Feacey	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as Managing Director of Energyshift Ltd who worked with members of the taxi trade and as a Member of the Management Committee for UK LPG.	83, 85

81 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Industry Updates and Discussion Meeting of this Committee held on the 17th January 2014 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

82 Eurostar

The Chairman welcomed Pierre Delalande, Head of Public Affairs, Eurostar, who gave an update on the business of Eurostar and future plans that may affect Ashford and the Ashford International Station. He said that Eurostar had experienced a good 2013 however 2014 had been a little more challenging so far with increased competition from budget airlines as well as the current economic climate. In terms of

Ashford specifics, he wanted to re-iterate Eurostar's commitment to Ashford International Station and the desire to increase services and add new destinations. May 2015 would see the launch of a new direct service from London to Lyon/Avignon/Marseille which would stop at Ashford. This would provide new links from the UK direct to the South of France. More specific details on that service would follow in the coming months. There would be some immigration issues on the return portion of the journey as customers would have to disembark briefly at Lille to be processed. This was far from ideal and they would continue to look at alternative options, but current immigration laws had to be respected.

In terms of the future of Ashford International Station, Mr Delalande explained that the new Eurostar rolling stock, and all future international trains, would not be compatible with the existing signalling systems at the Station and it would therefore be essential to provide a signalling solution to ensure that the International trains continued to be able to stop at Ashford. He knew work was underway with KCC, ABC, Network Rail and High Speed 1 on the 'Ashford Spurs' project and funding was already in place for the fact finding project.

He said he was aware of the demand for more stopping services to Brussels but Eurostar was not in a position to be able to commit to that at this stage. The situation would be kept under constant review though, and discussions would continue.

The Chairman then opened discussion up to the Committee and the following points were made:

- The direct service to the south of France was welcomed. It was considered that any competition for the airlines was a good thing. It would be important to get the price point right though. It was accepted that baseline costs and journey times would be higher by rail, but rail did have the advantage in terms of convenience.
- There was demand for more stopping services at Ashford to Lille/Brussels, but also to Paris.
- Journey times on the E320 trains to Amsterdam would be constrained somewhat by infrastructure on part of the track in Northern France. The estimated time from London to Amsterdam was 4 hours, but the timetables were still being devised and he would be able to report more details in the future.
- Members considered Ashford was a much better and more convenient location for Kent's international rail passengers than Ebbsfleet and that any new or expanded services should be focussing on Ashford International rather than Ebbsfleet International. Mr Delalande said he was aware of the viewpoints around this and re-iterated that Eurostar was committed to both stations. Their research indicated that Ebbsfleet generated more business use and Ashford more leisure use. It also demonstrated that there were not large numbers of commuters in Kent travelling 'the wrong way' to Ebbsfleet to connect with European bound services. Eurostar was a commercial company and if there were markets to exploit, they would certainly be interested.

- There were some ticketing offers such as £89/£99 per person return and children for £1, but perhaps these could be advertised better. The trains to both Paris and Brussels operated at a high seat occupancy level and the newer trains would provide for an additional 220 seats per journey.
- Eurostar did keep up to date with developments in the various locations and the commercial team was aware of emerging issues such as the Commercial Quarter and extension of the Designer Village in Ashford. These considerations would ensure that thinking around services was not static.

The Committee thanked Mr Delalande for attending the meeting and giving such a useful update. His time was greatly appreciated and both sides agreed to stay in contact.

83 Road Junctions in and around Ashford

Derek Goodwin of the Ashford Driving Instructors Association advised that he had raised some concerns about two particular road junctions – Canterbury Road/Simone Weil Avenue, and Brookfield Road/Leacon Road as well as a number of worn out road markings. The issues were similar in that they both involved right turns which he considered were dangerous and/or confusing for motorists. KCC Officers had been unable to attend the meeting but had submitted a response in writing that had been included within the Agenda.

Mr Goodwin said that for many years he had been confused by the responses of KCC Highways. The Association had highlighted many issues over the years, which had initially been rebuffed by KCC, but then attended to at a later date, or left and still caused confusion. The generally accepted view seemed to be that a road situation was safe if there were no reported incidents, but this of course did not take into account near misses or incidents that were not reported. He said it also did not take into account the knock on effect of other junctions and driver stress, which in his view was just as important. Mr Goodwin considered the most troubling part of KCC's response had been the comment that "any confusion with signal operation at this junction can only be attributed to driver behaviour." He found this statement insulting and it appeared to be an avoidance of corporate responsibility similar to asking homeowners to cut back their hedges due to visibility problems, when there were hundreds of junctions and roundabouts in Ashford with restricted views as a result of public hedges and grasses not being regularly cut by KCC. He was also confused by the response from KCC regarding worn out road markings and could not understand why they would not be repainted until somebody had reported them via KCC's website. Surely their staff were using the same roads as everybody else and could notice the worn out lines themselves.

With the aid of photographs, Mr Goodwin gave a short presentation explaining the issues at the two junctions in question as he saw them. At Canterbury Road/Simone Weil Avenue a sensor had been removed from the centre of the road beyond the stop line for the lights. Therefore if you were waiting in this area to turn right (i.e. beyond the stop line) and the lights turned red, it was still possible for vehicles coming from the town to filter into Simone Weil Avenue (they were seeing a green filter light) and into the path of vehicles now turning right. KCC did not accept that this could happen, but he assured that it was possible and was putting vehicles into conflict. With regard to Brookfield Road/Leacon Road, the road markings here were

very confusing and did not actually help the situation. When turning right, were motorists supposed to stay in the left hand lane until the last minute, or use the hatching? Quite often two vehicles arrived at the junction, both wishing to turn right but each choosing a different one of the two options. There was also potential conflict with traffic on the other side of the road turning left. In his view a right hand filter lane could quite easily be provided at this junction. He was unsure what to advise his pupils about this junction and he had spoken about this matter with Driving Examiners who were also unclear. He therefore did not now use that junction at all. KCC's response had again been similar in that they did not accept any fault with this junction. There was also confusion about the camera on this junction as it was supposed to detect right turning vehicles but now appeared to be facing the other way.

The Committee advised that they shared Mr Goodwin's concerns over the ambiguity and agreed to write a letter to KCC making these points and calling for site inspections to take place.

A Member mentioned another junction – New Street in to Somerset Road, and asked if the left hand turn here could be a permanent green as it did not appear to conflict with other traffic. Mr Wilkinson said that as he understood it, this was because of the pedestrian crossing and the exit from Edinburgh Road. Members agreed to ask if it would be possible to allow drivers to at least proceed to the next set of lights here though.

Resolved:

That the Chairman write to KCC expressing the Committee's concerns about the Canterbury Road/Simone Weil Avenue, Brookfield Road/Leacon Road and New Street/Somerset Road junctions.

84 Lorry Parking Update

Cllr Burgess, Chairman of the Truck Stop Pilot Task Group, said he did not have too much to add to his update to the Joint Transportation Board (JTB) on 10th June. He understood there may be some developments in terms of bringing the Task Group under the wing of either the JTB or this Committee in the future, but he did not have full details at this stage. The whole issue of lorry parks was now really in KCC's hands in terms of identifying potential sites. Mrs Fox said that from the Borough Council's point of view, they were being pro-active and working well with KCC to find solutions on the whole issue of inappropriate lorry parking. They were helping to devise a parking enforcement framework for HGVs that could be rolled out across all parking enforcement authorities across Kent. However, the issues were not always around illegal parking but anti-social behaviour too. There was a lot going on behind the scenes, including joint work with the police, and any future initiatives would take the form of pilots so they could examine the effect of any changes made.

With regard to the anti-social behaviour issues, a Member said that HGVs should be fitted with on board toilet facilities in the same way as touring caravans. He considered a campaign to change the law in this area would make a substantial improvement to the situation. This was perhaps an issue to raise with Government.

85 Industry Updates and Discussion

Stagecoach

Dutch Docherty said he was pleased to report that bus usage in the Ashford Borough had increased by 3.9% in 2013/14 compared to the previous year, reaching a total of nearly 3.4 million passengers, compared to just 1.9 million in 2004/05. In the quarter to 30th June 2014 passenger numbers had continue to rise - 3.8% up on the previous quarter.

There had been a successful start to the new H and K Lines which had been launched in partnership with East Kent Hospitals Trust. It always took time to build up new routes and change people's travel habits, but it was gaining momentum and customer satisfaction appeared to be high. They were expecting a gradual increase over the four years of their agreement with the Trust so that the routes would become self-supporting in that time.

Mr Docherty said that they were looking forward to the long awaited extension of buses in to both Park Farm East and Godinton/Repton Parks. The continued delays in terms of planning obligations were disappointing and he was unsure how much closer they were to being in a position to commence. It was frustrating as Stagecoach was ready to go and wanted to get in to these areas as quickly as possible. A Member said that as he understood it the main reason for the delays was to do with issues surrounding the Bus Gates. At Park Farm East a new Bus Gate was proposed and for safety reasons it would be very important to get that piece of infrastructure right from day one and he asked if Stagecoach could join the Borough Council in putting pressure on KCC for proper camera enforcement of Bus Gates. Mr Docherty said he agreed that the Bus Gates would need monitoring and enforcement and the existing systems in Ashford were the most misused he had come across. Perhaps there was a need for Stagecoach to become more involved at the planning stage of these developments. Jeremy Cooper of Stagecoach had already agreed to send a letter to KCC on this issue.

Stagecoach were undertaking two ticket promotions for the summer – offering a bundle of five day tickets for the price of four on smartcards, and off-peak return tickets at buy one get one half price when two were purchased together. Their Family Day Explorer ticket for the Ashford area had also been very popular since its launch in 2012. East Kent would be hosting a Stagecoach pilot scheme in which vehicle location information was sent from the ticket machines to provide real time information which would assist both customers using smartphones etc. and the drivers and control centres. This would build on the work already underway using Twitter which had been successful.

Towers School would be bringing its finishing time forward from September which would allow Stagecoach to use some buses for both Towers and the town centre schools. This would in turn release other buses to operate extra journeys to Kennington and Park Farm between 1530 and 1630 where there were currently some gaps in the timetable on school days and which customers had often asked them to address.

Mr Docherty referred to the changes made to the Freedom Pass by KCC. It would now be known as the Kent Young Persons Travel Pass and the cost would increase

to £100 for six months or £200 for a year. He understood this had not been popular, along with the decision to limit use to before 7pm. Stagecoach were currently finalising detailed arrangements with KCC, but they were going to offer children with the pass the option of buying a 'plus' ticket for an extra £50 per annum (including August), or £25 for six months, which would enable them to travel in the evenings and at weekends. Holders of the free statutory scholar passes could continue to pay £100 for travel during the evenings, weekends and school holidays, just as they currently did through the Freedom scheme.

In conclusion he said that traffic congestion in Ashford continued to be of grave concern. Mr Docherty had been working in Ashford for three and half years now and continued to hear the same comments about congestion and if anything it seemed to be getting worse and he simply could not run buses on time in parts of Ashford. The situation was so bad that they were withdrawing the E-Line from John Lewis on journeys towards Ashford, because of the time penalty comparative to the number of users. They had previously added additional running time to the E-Line timetable last autumn to combat this, but it was already seriously delayed again. It was very disappointing that the planned bus priorities around the Drovers roundabout were never implemented and as a result they were unable to provide reliable journey times and buses remained a poor option for commuters in Eureka Park, further exacerbating the traffic congestion problem. This was not considered acceptable for Stagecoach or its customers. Looking ahead to the Chilmington Green development, it looked likely that similar mistakes were being made at the planning stage where priority measures as part of a Smartlink system had been dropped, which he considered would leave bus provision in Chilmington Green as a "dead duck".

A Member asked if Stagecoach still had any plans to run the occasional C-Line service via the Highfield Estate. Mr Docherty said he would go back to the commercial team and try to find an answer.

In response to questions about traffic congestion and areas where Stagecoach may like to see additional double yellow lines etc, Mr Wilkinson explained that through the Quality Bus Partnership meetings a package of 'quick wins' had been agreed in terms of parking restrictions that could be implemented and Stagecoach had identified areas as part of that list. It was on the list of parking controls to be implemented and it was hoped that this would move up the priority list in the coming year.

The issue of the lane markings at the Drovers Roundabout was again mentioned. There were still a number of near misses involving buses on the roundabout, with traffic getting in to the wrong lane and swerving across lanes at the last moment. Mr Goodwin considered one solution could be to make the island of the roundabout smaller which would in turn allow the lanes to be widened and wondered if this had been suggested.

Southern

Yvonne Leslie advised that the main development since the last meeting had been the successful bid from Southern's parent company Govia to win the Thameslink Southern Great Northern (TSGN) franchise. The mobilisation team had been preparing to take on the Thameslink services from First Capital Connect in September, and the current Southern Services would be incorporated in July 2015.

Therefore, it would be business as usual for the Ashford routes for the next year with a lot of focus on the Thameslink project and the rebuilding programme at London Bridge. Network Rail would be undertaking major engineering work around London Bridge in late August as part of this, and the amended timetable information had been included with the Agenda papers and there was a lot of pro-active communication work going on to promote this.

The Chairman asked if there was yet any possibility of extending the two car Ashford to Brighton diesel units to four car units as it remained such a well-used service and they were often full from Hastings/St Leonards onwards. Mrs Leslie advised that there was still no additional diesel rolling stock available and no more was being made. Electrification proposals elsewhere in the country may mean a cascading down in the future but it appeared that this was already earmarked for other areas.

Southeastern

Mike Gibson advised that Southeastern's new timetable from January 2015 was now available to view on their website. The HS1 service from Ashford had been maintained with some enhancements. As with any timetable it was impossible to please everyone, but it had been worked up following a long period of consultation and working within Government affordability constraints while still offering the best possible service to passengers. He explained that there had been an erroneous report in the Kentish Express stating that there would be a fast service from Ashford International to Cannon Street and he was afraid that would not be the case. He was unsure where that information had come from, but that had been set straight with that particular newspaper.

The National Rail Passenger survey results had been extremely poor for Southeastern with overall satisfaction rates dropping from 84% to 72% in a six month period. Mr Gibson explained that there had been a number of infrastructure problems during the spring when the survey had been undertaken so the results were understandable to some extent. Network Rail did recognise the scale of the problem caused by issues such as maintenance, tree felling, overrunning engineering works, landslips, faulty signalling etc. but Southeastern had felt it necessary to refer Network Rail to the Office of Rail Regulation. The Chairman said that the survey results were disappointing and actually placed Southeastern as the lowest satisfaction rating in the country, whilst having the most expensive tickets. He said he still did not understand why ticket prices were so high. Another Member said that despite paying a premium price he often had to stand on HS1 Services at peak times and wondered if there were opportunities to increase the number of carriages. Mr Gibson said that the fares were set by Government and were based on their desire to pass on the increases in rail infrastructure costs from the tax payer (by way of subsidy) to the customer (by way of ticket prices). Additionally, anticipated private sector funding for the railways had not come to fruition. In terms of HS1 he said he would have a look at the customer numbers at peak times.

In terms of ticketing, Mr Gibson advised that Southeastern were running a number of '2 For 1' entry deals to Kent's attractions over the summer when travelling by train, as well as the usual 'weekender' and 'kids for a quid' deals. The Chairman asked if there could be more offers for passengers travelling to London rather than the other way. Mr Gibson advised they would like to increase offers however their peak market was already at capacity so there was only room for growth on the off-peak services.

They had put forward a number of ideas to the Department for Transport (DfT) for more flexible ticketing (smartcards, off-peak season tickets, part time worker season tickets etc.) and they were looking at the whole principle of what they charged off-peak. In terms of tourist destinations, they were being pushed by the Kent attractions to bring people in to Kent and Sussex from London.

In response to a question about Wi-Fi, Mr Gibson advised that there was a national programme to put Wi-Fi on trains which would be funded by fines levied on Network Rail for poor performance. The date for this was 'to be confirmed' but would be set by the DfT.

A Member said that he had travelled to London by train since 1975 and the journey time on the standard line had increased from just over one hour then, to nearly an hour and a half now. He understood that this was a result of penalties being introduced for trains arriving 5 minutes or more late, and the train companies extending timetables to give themselves more flexibility. He wondered if there could be a re-examining of this and if faster trains to London could again run on the normal line. Mr Gibson said there were a number of factors to take into account. Customer numbers had risen by 50% in the last 10-15 years and to meet demand since Southeastern had taken over the franchise they had put on approximately 200 more services (as had colleague operators like Southern). The down side was that infrastructure had not expanded at the same rate and as a result trains had to travel slightly slower than previously thus increasing journey times. Also, population growth meant that there was far more pressure to stop at the smaller rural stations. There were always objections from local people to any proposals to take out stops at smaller stations and people in Kent and East Sussex had historically fought hard to maintain their rail services going back to the 1960s and the Beeching Report. The targets that had been introduced by Government in the early 1990s had been a good incentive to operators and provided certainty to passengers, but it was true to say that they had resulted in an element of 'timetable padding'.

Ray Wilkinson asked if there had been any progress on reducing the parking charges at Pluckley Station. The level of commuter parking on the nearby residential roads was still high and people were not using station car park. A 24/7 Controlled Parking Zone had already been introduced in the immediate area around the station, but this had simply pushed the problems further down the road. Mr Gibson said he would look into this and if the car park was underused they could perhaps look at reducing charges.

86 Dates of Next Meetings

Monday 27th October 2014, 7.00pm (Evening Meeting on Strategic Issues)
Friday 16th January 2015, 9.30am (Industry Updates and Discussion)

DS

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact Danny Sheppard:
Telephone: 01233 330349 Email: danny.sheppard@ashford.gov.uk
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21st July 2014

Dear Steve

Transportation Highways & Engineering Advisory Committee (THEAC) – Junctions in and around Ashford.

As you know at our meeting on 11th July 2014, the THEAC considered an item from Derek Goodwin of the Ashford Driving Instructors Association on road junctions in and around Ashford. Firstly, thank you for providing a written response to his initial concerns. However, I must admit after listening to Derek at the Meeting, I do share some of the concerns he continues to have.

I know you have been made aware of the two main issues of concern: - the Canterbury Road/Simone Weil Avenue and Brookfield Road/Leacon Road junctions; so I will not repeat these in any great detail, but I have included an extract from the Minutes below and some photographs which Derek displayed at the Meeting. There does appear to be a degree of ambiguity at these two sites and the possibility of vehicles being put in to conflict. I would suggest that perhaps a site inspection and report back on the issues raised should take place.

Derek Goodwin of the Ashford Driving Instructors Association advised that he had raised some concerns about two particular road junctions – Canterbury Road/Simone Weil Avenue, and Brookfield Road/Leacon Road as well as a number of worn out road markings. The issues were similar in that they both involved right turns which he considered were dangerous and/or confusing for motorists. KCC Officers had been unable to attend the meeting but had submitted a response in writing that had been included within the Agenda.

Mr Goodwin said that for many years he had been confused by the responses of KCC Highways. The Association had highlighted many issues over the years, which had initially been rebuffed by KCC, but then attended to at a later date, or left and still caused confusion. The generally accepted view seemed to be that a road situation was safe if there were no reported incidents, but this of course did not take into account near misses or incidents that



were not reported. He said it also did not take into account the knock on effect of other junctions and driver stress, which in his view was just as important. Mr Goodwin considered the most troubling part of KCC's response had been the comment that "any confusion with signal operation at this junction can only be attributed to driver behaviour." He found this statement insulting and it appeared to be an avoidance of corporate responsibility similar to asking homeowners to cut back their hedges due to visibility problems, when there were hundreds of junctions and roundabouts in Ashford with restricted views as a result of public hedges and grasses not being regularly cut by KCC. He was also confused by the response from KCC regarding worn out road markings and could not understand why they would not be repainted until somebody had reported them via KCC's website. Surely their staff were using the same roads as everybody else and could notice the worn out lines themselves.

With the aid of photographs, Mr Goodwin gave a short presentation explaining the issues at the two junctions in question as he saw them. At Canterbury Road/Simone Weil Avenue a sensor had been removed from the centre of the road beyond the stop line for the lights. Therefore if you were waiting in this area to turn right (i.e. beyond the stop line) and the lights turned red, it was still possible for vehicles coming from the town to filter into Simone Weil Avenue (they were seeing a green filter light) and into the path of vehicles now turning right. KCC did not accept that this could happen, but he assured that it was possible and was putting vehicles into conflict. With regard to Brookfield Road/Leacon Road, the road markings here were very confusing and did not actually help the situation. When turning right, were motorists supposed to stay in the left hand lane until the last minute, or use the hatching? Quite often two vehicles arrived at the junction, both wishing to turn right but each choosing a different one of the two options. There was also potential conflict with traffic on the other side of the road turning left. In his view a right hand filter lane could quite easily be provided at this junction. He was unsure what to advise his pupils about this junction and he had spoken about this matter with Driving Examiners who were also unclear. He therefore did not now use that junction at all. KCC's response had again been similar in that they did not accept any fault with this junction. There was also confusion about the camera on this junction as it was supposed to detect right turning vehicles but now appeared to be facing the other way.

The Committee advised that they shared Mr Goodwin's concerns over the ambiguity and agreed to write a letter to KCC making these points and calling for site inspections to take place.

Another Member raised the issue of New Street/Somerset Road Junction (extract below) and I would ask if you could perhaps have a look at this junction as well.

A Member mentioned another junction – New Street in to Somerset Road, and asked if the left hand turn here could be a permanent green as it did not appear to conflict with other traffic. Mr Wilkinson said that as he understood it, this was because of the pedestrian crossing and the exit from Edinburgh Road. Members agreed to ask if it would be possible to allow drivers to at least proceed to the next set of lights here though.

As Chairman of the Committee and ABC Cabinet Member please keep me informed with any developments. If you would like to discuss this matter further please do not hesitate to contact me. I would be happy to organise a meeting between yourself and Mr Goodwin if you think this would help.



Yours sincerely

Councillor Bernard Heyes
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