

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 **27th October 2014**.

Present:

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

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (iii) Councillor Sims attended as Substitute Member for Councillor Wedgbury.

Apology:

Cllr. Wedgbury.

Also Present:

Engineering Services Manager, Assistant Health, Parking and Community Safety Manager, Senior Member Services and Scrutiny Support Officer.

Benjamin Ward – Southeastern Trains.

212 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the last Strategic Issues Meeting of the Transportation, Highways & Engineering Advisory Committee, held on the 28th April 2014, be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

213 Toilet Facilities on Southeastern Services

The Chairman advised that he had instigated this topic as he was concerned about the frequency of on-board toilet facilities being out of order on Southeastern services. He had invited Benjamin Ward, Press Office and Public Affairs Executive from Southeastern to attend the meeting to discuss the issue in more detail.

Mr Ward thanked the Committee for the opportunity to come and address them and apologised for anyone affected by the lack of toilets on some services. He said they were always working with engineers to improve the facilities on their trains. One of the reasons for closing train toilets was that when they were full the train had to be taken to a depot for the tanks to be emptied. This could only be done at certain stations which had replenishing facilities. The trains were checked at the start of the working day to ensure the toilets were in working order and typically the tanks took three days to fill up, but this could happen quicker at weekends or school holidays. The only real way to make improvements in this area would be through timetable planning and changing the 'diagram' of train services, alternating units between

daytime and evening journeys and perhaps being able to get trains in to the replenishing depots sooner than every three days. Southeastern were already looking to make such changes in the new timetable commencing January 2015.

The second and more common cause of having to put the toilets out of use was misuse or vandalism. The High Speed trains, for example, normally had very good toilet facilities and a good record for being in service, but they were abused and some passengers did not read the warning signs and still flushed items that they should not. When this happened the toilets had to be closed and trains put in to maintenance, which could take up to six days. The toilets were robust and did meet all industry standards, but they would continue to look at ways to make them more robust. However, even if they did install completely new toilets, at great expense, it would still not prevent customers flushing inappropriate items. Trains were fitted with CCTV, but for obvious reasons this did not extend to the toilets so misuse was difficult to monitor.

Discussion was opened up to the Committee and the following points were raised: -

- The local replenishing facilities were at Ramsgate and Faversham Stations and there were none at Ashford or St Pancras. The Committee considered that if trains were to continue using the same type of toilet system, then there was a need for more replenishing facilities, especially at the London end of the line.
- In terms of comparing Southeastern's record on toilet facilities with companies like Virgin, this was problematic as Virgin had a lot fewer trains and did more long distance journeys. As a commuter service it was much more difficult for Southeastern to get their trains in to the maintenance facilities as often, thus it was an unfair comparison. The Chairman said he accepted this point however it was particularly galling as passengers already paid a premium to use the High Speed Services.
- Some sort of mobile tank, like a Portaloo, was suggested as this could allow for a different emptying/collection regime which could happen in more or less any location. Mr Ward said that this sounded like a good suggestion but, whilst he was not an expert, he thought there was probably some technical reason why this was not being done already. He endeavoured to investigate and report back.
- In terms of questions over whether a train was 'fit to run' if it only had one working toilet, Mr Ward said that the only alternative would be to take that whole train out of service and in terms of service and capacity questions, they would always rather provide some service than none at all. As soon as such defects were reported the aim was to get that train in for maintenance at the next available opportunity to rectify the problems. The six day turn around was a maximum and most defects were rectified within three days.
- Perhaps more detailed warning signs should be put up which were more explicit on the types of items that should not be flushed and the consequences of doing so. If passengers knew that this could take the train out of service for up to six days they may think twice. Mr Ward said that the

current posters did mention items but not the consequences and this was perhaps something worth trying.

In conclusion the Committee suggested that there were three possible areas for improvement that could be taken away from this Meeting: - options for alternative and more frequent emptying regimes/mechanisms; new posters communicating the consequences of misuse; and options for making the toilets themselves more robust. Mr Ward said he would take these comments back and would endeavour to present an update to the next Industry Meeting of this Committee in January 2015.

Resolved:

That the update be received and noted.

214 Thameslink Programme

Mr Ward said he would give a brief overview of the Thameslink Programme and its impact on the Ashford Borough. A more detailed briefing could be provided at a later date if required. He explained that as part of the Government's £6.5 billion Thameslink programme, a state of the art new station was being provided at London Bridge. This would for the first time provide step free access to all platforms, more space, better facilities and eliminate the notorious London Bridge 'bottleneck' improving train performance and journey opportunities. From January 2015 work would begin on Southeastern's part of London Bridge Station and was expected to continue to August 2016. This would reduce the seven lines serving that part of the station down to four and cut platform capacity by nearly 40% meaning that not all trains could stop at London Bridge and others would have to be diverted to Charing Cross, Cannon Street and Blackfriars. He outlined some of the specific service changes and explained that these would start from the 20th December 2014 in preparation for January 2015. The Department for Transport, Transport for London and the train operators were working together to agree more flexible or subsidised ticketing arrangements for the longer term closures. Discussions were ongoing and they hoped to have a positive announcement on that soon.

Mr Ward said that perhaps the most important aspect of all of this would be communication to passengers. This was something Southeastern were placing a lot more emphasis on generally, but particularly with regard to the situation at London Bridge. A comprehensive passenger communications plan had been put in place including: - meet the manager sessions at all main stations; writing to all season ticket holders; a dedicated Thameslink website; posters at stations; information on screens and announcements at stations and on trains; and briefings to local stakeholders such as this one.

The Committee said that the work would undoubtedly cause disruption but it was accepted that it was vital. Mr Ward said that there would be an impact but they were confident disruption would be minimal and day to day services would still run as normal. A Member asked about potential overcrowding on Cannon Street services, with people trying to avoid the Charing Cross services and whether there was any opportunity to increase services to Cannon Street. Mr Ward advised this had been looked at, but they were already at their peak in terms of services in to Cannon Street. They would however be increasing the number of carriages on all peak Cannon Street services to the maximum of 12.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

215 Lorry Parking/Truck Stops

The Assistant Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager advised that this update covered two issues, firstly the matter of KCC's continued pursuit of sites for lorry parks across Kent, as well as the issue of enforcement against illegal/nuisance lorry parking in Ashford. On the first matter, unfortunately an Officer from KCC had been unavailable to attend this meeting, however the report to, and minutes of their Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee of 17th September 2014 had been appended to the papers for this meeting. It presented the latest position on the project.

With regard to enforcement, the Assistant Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager advised that there had been a 6% increase in the number of lorries coming in to the UK this year so the problem was increasing and more lorries were parking in retail parks, commercial sites, and even residential areas. They were working with KCC on more enforcement, but they also had to be aware of where those displaced lorries may go next and it would obviously be important to ensure they had somewhere else to go and they were not unintentionally pushed to an even more inappropriate location. There was also a particular problem on Saturdays and Sundays as lorries were not permitted to drive in France on Sundays and so tended to gather on this side of the Channel. She said it was important to point out that there were facilities available and they did always check the capacity of the existing truck stop when they did enforcement, but there was a £28 admission price and for many it was worth taking the risk of a £35 fine. Such drivers would always park for free if they could. Therefore there was a need for more education, but it was also clear that the sanctions needed to be stricter and they were looking at options for clamping. She said she was also aware of concerns about anti-social behaviour and environmental protection issues (noise) surrounding lorry parking, but it was necessary to catch offenders in the act. She said she hoped that the approach Officers were now taking would start to see more results in the coming months.

The Chairman said that he had concerns over the time aspects in the KCC report as it was going to take at least two years just to provide the first lorry park at Westenhanger. He and other Members also thought there were options to increase the number of spaces there from the proposed 300 to at least 500.

A Member said he had a few concerns about KCC's report. He felt there was a need for the load to be spread more equally between the M20 and M2 corridors as Ashford and the surrounding areas were already taking more than their fair share of lorries. He was also concerned about the impact the proposed expansion of the Ashford Truck Stop may have on the M20 Junction 10 and proposed Junction 10A and whether this increased capacity been taken into account in any modelling work undertaken.

Resolved:

That the update be received and noted.

216 M20 Retexturing and Relationship with the Highways Agency

The Chairman said he had raised this issue as the current M20 Retexturing works (20th – 31st October 2014) and resultant road closure did not appear to have been fully consulted upon with Ashford Borough Council. He said this raised significant questions about the liaison and consultation process between the two authorities going forward. Particularly as there was an ongoing issue of concern regarding the environmental impact of the noise generated by the road surface between Junctions 9 and 8 of the M20 and future options for that resurfacing.

The Engineering Services Manager said that on further investigation the Council may have been informed about these particular works by way of an email to its Customer Care account, which had been down at the time, resulting in it not being received. However this would have been a notification that the works were happening rather than a consultation. He understood that the works had begun and were ongoing and there had been no complaints as a result of the works themselves. With regard to the wider noise questions, he understood that noise surveys had been carried out prior to the retexturing and would be repeated once they were complete to see if they had had any impact. The work was however chiefly about improving the skid resistance rather than any noise issues. As he understood it, full resurfacing would take place when it was needed but this was not a cheap option and was certainly not imminent.

A Member said that regardless of whether emails were sent or not, communication on this matter could have been better. He had received complaints about the diversion routes via the A251 which residents had not been made fully aware of.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

217 Date of Next Meetings

The next Meeting of the Committee (Industry Updates and Discussion) would be Friday 16th January 2015 at 9.30am.

The next Strategic Issues Meeting of the Committee would be Monday 27th April 2015 at 7.00pm.

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Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact Danny Sheppard:
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