

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 16th January 2015.

Present:

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

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (iii) Councillor Mrs Dyer attended as Substitute Member for Councillor Burgess.

Also Present:

Cllr. Sims

Dutch Docherty – Stagecoach in East Kent, Derek Goodwin – Ashford Driving Instructors Association, Ben Ward – Southeastern, James Hann – Ashford Borough Council, William Train – Ashford Borough Council, Danny Sheppard – Ashford Borough Council.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Burgess, Yeo.

Stephen Gasche – KCC, Yvonne Leslie – Southern.

320 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Industry Updates and Discussion Meeting of this Committee held on the 11th July 2014 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

321 Industry Updates and Discussion

Stagecoach

Dutch Docherty said this coming Sunday (18th January), would see the launch of the revised E-Line and new G-Line services. The existing 517 service would become redundant. There had been some concerns raised about the effect of these changes from residents of Little Burton Farm, particularly around services to and from Sainsbury's and the New Hayesbank Surgery. At present, as a temporary solution, customers were being advised to go in to town and change to C-Line services, but the situation was being looked at with KCC. Changes would also be introduced to the 1 and 2 services, whereby the 1 service from Canterbury to Ashford would be advanced by 10 minutes in order to give the connecting 2 service from Ashford to

Tenterden a fair chance of keeping to timetable. He was pleased to report that the rest of operations in the Ashford area were going to plan.

Mr Docherty said that they were continuing to look at the issue of buses standing with their engines running in Bank Street. Drivers had been advised to keep their engines off due to previous complaints, but passengers were now complaining that they were cold whilst waiting to depart. They would keep this under review.

A Member referred to the letter that had appeared in the local paper from Jeremy Cooper, Commercial Director of Stagecoach East Kent, criticising the Joint Transportation Board's decision to reject the implementation of parking restrictions in Bluebell Road, Park Farm and to ask for alternative bus routes to be examined in this area. He considered it was regrettable that the letter had criticised a decision taken as part of the democratic process. He said that buses were welcome in Park Farm, but just not on that particular road and he considered that Mr Cooper should apologise for the content of that letter.

The effect of the new G-Line services on the elderly residents of Loudon Court was mentioned. There were 56 residents in the sheltered accommodation and they did use the bus services regularly and they had concerns about the proposed changes. The bus stops had been re-positioned slightly further away from the building which meant that residents would now have to walk further and cross a road to catch the bus. One suggestion was that every other bus (i.e. one an hour) could alter its route and go right past the home. Mr Goodwin said he had some concerns about the siting of the new bus stops affecting visibility at the Loudon Way/Springwood Drive junction. Mr Docherty explained that it was a difficult balance. Previous plans to position the bus stops nearby had been objected to by residents because they would be outside their homes. The current location had been chosen because it was in an open area with no houses. He had personally raised a concern about sight lines here but had been assured that the proposed location was acceptable. Mr Train said he would endeavour to find out more detail on KCC's consultation process for the location of these bus stops and report back. A comment was also made about there perhaps needing to be more synergy between the E-Line and G-Line timetables. It was agreed that these issues should be discussed further at the next Quality Bus Partnership (QBP) meeting.

With regard to the comments about Little Burton Farm, a Member asked if any thought had been given to re-directing the H-Line to accommodate one stop in Little Burton Farm. Mr Docherty said that he would take that suggestion back, along with a potential diversion of the 1 service also. This was perhaps another topic for discussion at the next QBP meeting.

A Member asked about the age of some of the buses on the Ashford fleet which were relatively old considering the overall investment in the Ashford network. Mr Docherty responded that Stagecoach were well aware of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) rules which meant that all buses would have to be fully DDA compliant by 2017. Therefore, there was an ongoing process of renewal, with some 25 newer buses already about to come in to the East Kent and East Sussex fleet with more to follow. Some of those would be allocated to Ashford. All non DDA compliant vehicles would be redundant by 2017.

Southern

Yvonne Leslie had e-mailed to advise that she was planning to attend the meeting but was now required in the office given the ongoing issues with London Bridge work and Southern's service and communications around that. Her e-mail advised that the key item she wanted to highlight was a reminder about Southern's current consultation on proposals for amendments to the December 2015 off-peak timetable. The details were on Southern's website – www.southernrailway.com and the consultation document could also be emailed to any interested parties. The deadline for responses was Friday 30th January 2015. She also advised that she would be happy to take any questions on any aspects on Southern's service and report back.

Southeastern

Ben Ward advised that, as with Southern, Southeastern had implemented a new timetable to reflect the Thameslink work and the rebuild at London Bridge. It was early days but Southeastern's own timetable appeared to be holding up pretty well in terms of performance and had so far proved robust. This was clearly going to be an ongoing issue and the first set of passenger loading data would be received later that day and would be analysed for any adjustments that may be necessary. A Member said there was concern about the knock-on effect the London Bridge work was having on services to Cannon Street with many choosing to use those trains and causing overcrowding there. He asked if a 'workers ticket' had been considered as a temporary solution to combat general overcrowding on peak services, whereby tickets could be reduced in price as an incentive to use earlier services and get in to London before 7.30am. Mr Ward said that it was inevitable that Cannon Street services would be busier during the period of the works and services arriving between 8am and 9am had been strengthened. They would be looking at the first set of passenger data when received to see what else could be done. With regard to the 'workers ticket' he knew there was an 'early-bird' ticket for passengers from Gravesend where there was a cheaper rate pre 7.30am, but this was not widely used. He did not know why this had not been rolled out to other areas but suspected it was to do with Southeastern's franchise being based on set fares and revenues which would need to be born in mind if there were any proposals to reduce ticket prices.

Mr Ward reported that the High Speed Services continued to see an increase in usage. Three new stations had been added to the HS1 routes (Snodland, Walmer and Martin Mill) and as the number of passengers continued to rise, Southeastern would be looking to strengthen their peak services wherever possible. The removal of splitting and joining services at Ashford and Faversham had helped in this regard and other opportunities across the network would be examined. A Member mentioned that he often had to stand on HS1 services which was particularly galling when you had paid a premium for the ticket and wondered if there was enough rolling stock for the High Speed trains. Mr Ward responded that there was a limited amount of High Speed carriages and they were currently running at an absolute maximum. Southeastern were making a bid to the Department for Transport to lease some additional stock from First Capital Connect, although this would not be High Speed rolling stock and there would be strong competition for these from other areas.

Mr Ward further advised that Southeastern would shortly be going out to consultation on its May 2016 timetable and would like feedback from all passengers and stakeholders. They were planning two stakeholder events during March (one in London and one somewhere in Kent) and more details of those would be provided when confirmed.

There had been an increase in fares across the network of 2.2% this January. Super off-peak fares had been frozen this year and Southeastern continued to try and promote off-peak travel. Another important point to make was that Southeastern would this year be pressing ahead to deliver on its obligations and commitments from its direct award contract. That included employing 100 additional members of staff, a deep clean of all stations to be completed by September 2015 and a deep clean of all trains to be completed by June 2015. The Chairman said he had welcomed the super off-peak saver tickets, but had been a bit disappointed that the pre-Christmas on-line 20% discount on these tickets had not been valid with rail cards. Mr Ward said he would feed that back.

With regard to the discussion about the toilet facilities on Southeastern trains at the last meeting, Mr Ward advised that there had been an increase in the frequency of bringing the units in for emptying and hoped passengers would have noticed the improvement. The Chairman said that he had certainly seen an improvement in the last few months in the availability of toilet facilities on trains and, coupled with increased passengers, this was a good achievement.

A Member said that public perception seemed to be that they were paying more but getting a worse rail service. He considered that any further increase in fares next year would have to be carefully justified. Mr Ward advised that the increase in the regulated (peak) fares was set by Government so they did not have a lot of say on that. They had attempted to make concessions where they could as evidenced by the freeze on super off-peak fares.

Ashford Driving Instructors Association

Mr Goodwin referred to the previous Industry Updates and Discussion meeting of this Committee, where he had raised 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. He considered that the response from KCC had been quite muted and dismissive, but they had re-phased the lights slightly at Canterbury Road so whilst the issue still existed, the likelihood of it occurring had been significantly reduced so that was at least some progress. There was still some disagreement about whether there had ever been a sensor in the road at this location, but he, along with Driving Examiners and Officers at ABC were sure that there had been.

With regard to the Brookfield Road/Leacon Road issue, there had been no change and there was again still some disagreement about what the camera on this junction was there to do. He considered it had been installed to detect right turning vehicles but KCC denied this.

On the wider issue of road markings around the town, Mr Goodwin considered this was getting worse and some were now almost transparent. When it was wet they were very difficult to see and many were at important junctions and roundabouts.

The roundabout at Magazine Road was given as an example. He said that if road markings were supposed to be there and were not then this was a safety issue and they should be re-painted as a matter of urgency. KCC had previously said that if they were not reported they would not be re-painted, but he did not think this was a satisfactory response. Surely their Officers were using the same roads as everybody else and could notice the worn out lines themselves, or would it be necessary to report 'the whole of Ashford' as needing attention?

322 Date of Next Meeting

Monday 27th April 2015, 7.00pm (Evening Meeting on Strategic Issues)

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Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact Danny Sheppard:
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