

7th Annual rail summit at Kent County Council, Council Chamber, Maidstone.

On Monday 18th May, the 7th Annual rail summit was held at KCC, County Hall, in Maidstone. The meeting was chaired by Mathew Balfour, KCC cabinet member for Environment and Transport.

Two items were of particular relevance to Ashford;

Clare Waller and Lisa Goodman (Lead strategic planners for Network rail), spoke on the "Kent route study" beginning July 2015. The draft report will be available Spring 2016.

They are considering passenger aspirations, route aspirations and the required infrastructure change. For Ashford initially this means electrification of 30 miles of track via a third rail from Ashford into the marsh.

A "Marsh link" to Ashford will mean Ashford to Doleham will go from 60 mph to 90 mph and from Doleham to Ore 40 to 60mph. 9 road crossings and 37 user / passenger crossing will need upgrading. The line itself will need infrastructure change at Ashford West Jct., changes at Appledore and extension of the Rye loop. This will enable the Marsh link to get into Ashford much faster and prospectively join the HS1 traffic.

All the information gathered will inform their business case.

(Note; Tracey spoke to them after the meeting and they are willing to come to JTB to explain the project)

Fayyaz Qadir, Principal Transport Planner delivery, KCC, spoke about rail accessibility for East Kent and the prospective new Thanet Parkway station. The first stage are line speed and operational improvements between Ashford and Canterbury West and then Canterbury West and Ramsgate (delivery 2018 / 19).

Second stage is Thanet Parkway station on the Ashford - Ramsgate line. The consultation for this was open 2 Feb – 27 March 2015. The consultation report is due end June 2015 and the completed outline design for the station Oct 2015.

Third stage is signalling improvements due 2020.

Initially, Thanet Parkway will be unmanned (automated).

The entrance is proposed to be from A256 Richborough Way and exit to A299 Hengist Way (but the speed of this road may mean this is not possible).

The investment criteria considered for this business case indicated that a £1 investment would reap a £3 reward for business in Kent (this case excluded Manston airport being in operation so any development of this site will bring added income to the business case scenario).

It is anticipated that this line will carry 10,000 passengers by 2021.