

Public Transport Liaison Task Group

Minutes of a Meeting of the Public Transport Liaison Task Group held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **8th April 2016**.

Present:

Cllr. Heyes (Chairman);
Cllr. Feacey (Vice-Chairman);
Cllr. Farrell.

Also Present:

Dutch Docherty – Stagecoach in East Kent, Derek Goodwin – Ashford Driving Instructors Association, Inspector Andrew Judd – Kent Police (Ashford), Yvonne Leslie – Southern, Ben Ward – Southeastern, Jo Fox – Ashford Borough Council, Chris Miller – Ashford Borough Council, Will Train – Ashford Borough Council, Danny Sheppard – Ashford Borough Council.

Apology:

Cllr. Pickering.

1. Minutes

- 1.1 Derek Goodwin advised that under Paragraph 2.2, the mini roundabout between the International Station and the Hitachi Depot was still being ignored by many drivers and this was therefore extremely dangerous. Jo Fox advised that this was all part of the area owned by Network Rail and it was intended to be included within the public realm works. She said she would though pass on the comments about the roundabout.
- 1.2 At paragraph 4.4 of the Minutes, Task Group members had been asked to forward on details of specific problems areas with regard to traffic lights and road markings. Derek Goodwin advised that he had done this and expressed concern over a number of traffic light sequences and roundabouts in Ashford and his points had basically been dismissed by KCC Highways. However a few weeks' later, changes that he had suggested (one example being Station Road/Wellesley Road) had been made as they had proved to be correct. He said he found the whole attitude of KCC Highways somewhat dismissive and arrogant and felt they should take more notice of organisations such as the Ashford Driving Instructors Association who were out using these roads every day. Officers seemed to fall back on the 'Killed and Seriously Injured' statistics to justify their point of view, but in his opinion this was dangerous and simply left the onus on insurance companies to pick up the bill.

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting of this Task Group held on 9th October 2015 be approved.

2. Update on Current ABC Parking and Highways Projects

2.1 Will Train introduced the report which updated on some of the main parking and highways projects that Ashford Borough Council was currently working on.

2.2 The Chairman opened up the item for discussion and the following points were raised:

- The Chairman said that the review of parking on Council housing land was long overdue. Parking areas on housing developments were often abused by non-residents and the facilities were often not available for the people they were designed for. He considered there was a need to extend existing controls and he would be watching this review with great interest.
- With regard to on-street parking schemes, Traffic Regulation Orders and HGV parking, the Chairman said he was concerned about implementing too many restrictions which could simply cause displaced parking in potentially even less suitable locations. It was particularly important to protect residential areas. Jo Fox advised that until a decision was taken on the Operation Stack lorry park, they were at a bit of a stalemate on lorry parking. They would continue to clamp offenders and encourage drivers to use the available lorry parking facilities, and the commercial operators of the current lorry parks may be open to expansion, but they wanted to be sure of the outcomes of the Operation Stack lorry park first. With regard to the locations of HGV parking in the Borough, it was often a case of finding the 'least worst place'. There was an 8% increase of HGV's coming into Kent year on year so the problem was not going to go away and sometimes parking in industrial areas was seen as preferable if there was nowhere else to go, rather than forcing them to residential areas or the hard shoulder of motorways. Weight restrictions in residential areas were a possibility but KCC would not sign off on these until there was enough lorry parking provision across the whole of Kent.
- The Chairman referred to the taxi rank review and proposals to move taxis to the international side of the station. He said he had some concerns about people having to walk quite a distance to the domestic ticket office. Will Train advised that this was more about onward journeys and people leaving the station. There would still be an option to drop people off on the domestic side. Ben Ward advised that at peak times station officers could have ticket machines on them so tickets could be purchased in other areas of the station.
- Will Train endeavoured to update the Vice-Chairman on the current plans for taxi ranks in the Commercial Quarter and Stour Centre.

- Derek Goodwin asked why there was so much variation in speed limits on the A28, particularly around Great Chart. Inspector Judd advised that both KCC and the Police were examining speed limits on the A28 as a whole (from Chilham to Newenden) and this had been confirmed as a priority due to the high number of collisions and casualties on this road. It was expected that there would be changes on this road in the future.
- School safety was a big issue and Civil Enforcement Officers had been involved in a project that aimed to reduced accidents and disputes between road users outside schools. Task Group members considered there did seem to be a desire for parents to park as close as possible to schools regardless of safety. Staff entering and exiting the schools were also often a contributing factor.
- The phasing of the traffic lights at the M20 Junction 10 from the William Harvey Hospital seemed to have changed recently, with some lights only staying on green for a matter of seconds, and this was causing long tailbacks at peak times. This had delayed buses and was a safety concern bearing in mind access and egress from the hospital. Will Train said he would pass this on to Highways England.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

3. Industry Updates and Discussion

Southern

- 3.1 Yvonne Leslie directed the Task Group's attention to the Stakeholder newsletter that had been provided with the agenda papers and contained a lot of information about Southern and the entire Govia Thameslink franchise. She advised that there had been an improving picture on punctuality and reliability since the traditional winter/Christmas dip, but performance continued to be affected by both general infrastructure issues and individual incidents.
- 3.2 Key developments since the last meeting included the arrival of the new Thameslink Class 700 trains which were currently undergoing testing and driver training, the introduction of new trains for the Gatwick Express and a focus on driver training with 88 new drivers for Southern since the beginning of last year and 200 across the franchise. Whilst there would be some timetable changes coming in to effect in May, the next substantial changes would be in 2018 following the completion of the London Bridge work and the full Thameslink programme. Consultation on this would begin this summer and there would be opportunities for colleagues to comment.
- 3.3 Yvonne Leslie agreed to report back on the current position with regard to speed restrictions at Polegate.

- 3.4 It was noted that customer satisfaction in the survey of autumn 2015 had been low. Yvonne Leslie said that whilst the results had been disappointing, they were not entirely unexpected with punctuality and reliability being affected by the works at London Bridge. This had given them less lee-way with their timetable and was in part reflected in the survey results. At the beginning of 2017 they would have access to more track and the full benefits of the work would be seen on completion in 2018 so they were hoping to see improvements in survey results, but until then they were running on restricted infrastructure. There was quite a lot of work going on behind the scenes including the joint performance improvement plan and ongoing discussions between their senior management team and local MPs.

Southeastern

- 3.5 Ben Ward advised of a similar position at Southeastern to Southern with performance taking a slight downturn since October 2015 due to infrastructure issues and general weather related issues. One major issue that had affected performance was the closure of the line between Dover Priory and Folkestone Central following severe damage to the sea wall on Christmas Eve. There had also been two landslides in South East London in January which had caused major disruption. Performance had begun to improve since the turn of the year and Southeastern were continuing to work with Network Rail to resolve infrastructure issues. The Chairman asked if any thought had been given to utilising the Minster loop whilst the line was closed between Dover and Folkestone. Ben Ward said the issue here was availability of rolling stock and they would have to take carriages away from other services. The line was expected to be re-opened by December 2016.
- 3.6 In an attempt to improve performance Southeastern had: - re-introduced stand-by drivers to allow for some more resilience and flexibility; launched a rapid response team at the Grove Park Depot so they could get to affected trains more quickly; would be recruiting eight more drivers, ten more conductors and six more on-board managers to bolster staffing levels; and had already begun to plan ahead by looking at arrangements for winter weather disruption ahead of next year.
- 3.7 With regard to issues previously raised by this Task Group, Ben Ward advised that with regard to crowding on HS1 services there was little more he could say other than there was a finite number of rolling stock and they were continuing to work with Network Rail and the Department for Transport in an attempt to get more. Significant timetable changes would be implemented in August, mainly due to the works at London Bridge. The most noteworthy was that Cannon Street services would no longer stop at London Bridge. Consultation on this timetable was now complete and they were trying to accommodate as many requests as possible. It would be released in June and he encouraged colleagues to keep a look out for it. Jo Fox advised that ABC would be happy to publicise the timetable changes through its own communication channels if that was deemed helpful.

- 3.8 On the subject of Southeastern's offers not being as attractive as they appeared and in comparison to other companies, Ben Ward confirmed that railcards and discounted offers were not eligible to be used together. Offers were tailored around particular times of the year, whilst passengers could benefit from using a railcard all year round.
- 3.9 The Chairman also raised the issue of queues at the Ashford International Station Ticket Office at off-peak times. On one occasion only one person had been on duty and he had had to wait 14 minutes and missed his train. There did appear to be other staff on site and he wondered why nobody else had stepped in to assist. Ben Ward said he knew there had been some staffing issues but he would check the current situation with the Station Manager.

Stagecoach

- 3.10 Dutch Docherty reported that improvements had been made to the A, B, C, E, F and G-Line Services and well as the 666 Service. They had been re-timing routes and the feeling was that they had now got things just about right. The number of complaints received had dropped significantly and they had actually been receiving compliments with regard to the C-Line. With regard to school services, Stagecoach carried out an analysis of these each year and some changes had been implemented from January. They had seen a drop in passenger numbers for the Towers School so had cut out one service (the 514) and revised the 515, 516 and 519 Services and things were now working well. There was some concern about the return to school after the Easter break the following week, combined with roadworks in the Town Centre and at Kennington, and the possibility that a lot of the hard work could be un-done. Lots of school buses used these routes and they were very concerned about the possibility of children arriving at school late because of congestion. Dutch Docherty said he had considered re-routing some services via Magazine Road, but he would keep a watching brief for the early stages of the work before deciding whether any changes were necessary. As with the M20 Junction 10, he considered appropriate phasing of the traffic lights would be crucial.
- 3.11 In terms of future plans, he advised that all vehicles would have to be Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant by December 2016 and they would no longer be able to supply step access buses. That coming weekend they would be removing the remaining 'Olympian' vehicles from the fleet and bringing newer buses from other depots. They were aiming to be fully DDA compliant by the end of May, 7 months ahead of schedule.
- 3.12 Dutch Docherty advised that in the last two weeks three bus windows and some destination boards had been destroyed by young people using catapults in the Stanhope area. These incidents had all been reported to the Police but this was an extremely dangerous and alarming situation for drivers and passengers alike. Inspector Judd advised there was an ongoing issue with catapults in the Ashford area that the Police were aware of. He encouraged Stagecoach to continue to report incidents, even if they did not see the offenders.

- 3.13 The Chairman referred to the current proposals to withdraw the last two buses from Tenterden in the evening which meant that the last bus would be 20.40 rather than 22.30. He considered this regrettable and advised that he would like to respond to the consultation on behalf of the Council.

4. Date of Next Meeting

- 4.1 Friday 14th October at 9.30 a.m.
- 4.2 The Chairman reminded colleagues that if there were any specific subjects they would like the Task Group to discuss at future meetings to please make them known.

Councillor Heyes
Chairman of the Public Transport Liaison Task Group