

Public and Voluntary Transport Liaison Task Group

Minutes of a Meeting of the Public and Voluntary Transport Liaison Task Group held in Committee Room No. 1, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **14th October 2016**.

Present:

Cllr. Bradford (Chairman);
Cllr. Farrell.

Also Present:

Dimitri Bridgland – Stagecoach in East Kent, Dutch Docherty – Stagecoach in East Kent, Derek Goodwin – Ashford Driving Instructors Association, Graham Sivyer – Wealden Wheels, Ben Ward – Southeastern, Chris Miller – Ashford Borough Council, Kieron Leader – Ashford Borough Council, Danny Sheppard – Ashford Borough Council.

Apologies:

Louis Ferguson – Stagecoach in East Kent, Yvonne Leslie – Southern, Sheila Davison – Ashford Borough Council, Jo Fox – Ashford Borough Council.

1. Revised Terms of Reference

- 1.1 The Chairman welcomed everyone present and advised that as this was his first meeting in the Chair, and the first meeting of the slightly revised Task Group, it would be useful to review the agreed Terms of Reference of the Group. He advised that as the Group evolved it may want to make alterations or amendments to the Terms of Reference but they were a good starting point. Members and invitees present all supported the contents.

2. Minutes – 8th April 2016

- 2.1 There was one action for Southern whereby Yvonne Leslie had been asked to report back on speed restrictions at Polegate. It was confirmed that Members had received an update shortly after the meeting and it related to a temporary emergency. The restriction had been lifted by the 24th June.
- 2.2 Derek Goodwin advised that the previously discussed issue of the mini roundabout between the International Station and the Hitachi Depot was still an issue. The limited marking that had been there had now all but disappeared and the roundabout was continuing to be ignored by many drivers so was therefore extremely dangerous. The driving examiners were also unhappy with the situation as this was part of the driving test route and was causing confusion. Chris Miller advised that as the road was privately owned by Network Rail it did present some difficulties, especially in terms of enforcement. He suggested the mini roundabout and markings could be re-painted to re-instate its prominence. He endeavoured to speak to Nina Peake at Southeastern as well as the Council's lining crews with a view to getting this work done.

Resolved:

That subject to noting the apologies of Mr Claughton of the Ashford Access Group, the Minutes of the meeting of this Task Group held on 8th April 2016 be approved.

3. Industry Updates and Discussion

Southern

- 3.1 Yvonne Leslie had given her apologies for the meeting but had supplied an update brief on key themes. She had advised that if there were any particular questions for Southern she would be happy to receive them and respond outside of the meeting. The update was tabled and contained information on the RMT industrial action, a revised temporary timetable and the 2018 timetable changes.
- 3.2 Dimitri Bridgland asked about Southern's 2018 timetable and the proposals for the Ashford International to Brighton line. The website referred to a 'sample timetable' but it was not available to view on-line. Ben Ward advised he would pass this issue on. There was however some uncertainty at present as Southern had to undertake a public consultation on these timetable changes for when the works at London Bridge were complete, but they did not know if they would be running these services after 2018.

Southeastern

- 3.3 Ben Ward advised that Southeastern's new timetable had commenced in August and had taken a little while to bed in, combined with a major infrastructure issue between Lewisham and London in August. However, since then performance had been a lot better and currently sat at 90.7% - ahead of target. HS1 services had performed consistently strongly and had not been affected by the infrastructure issues.
- 3.4 Crowding was still an issue, particularly on HS1 services, but this was common across the network. Southeastern continued to work with the Department for Transport to try and bring in additional rolling stock but there was only a finite number available and it was extremely unlikely that this situation would change in the 18 months left on the current franchise. Although certain services were very crowded, in terms of their overcrowding figures Southeastern didn't feature in the top 10 nationally which is why they had not been viewed as a priority for additional rolling stock. For HS1, they had looked at some redundant Eurostar stock, but the work/maintenance required to bring them in to service would come at a substantial cost and would not be viable for a company with only 18 months left on their franchise. This may be something for the next franchise to consider. They would continue to do what they could to mitigate the situation with clever maintenance and timetabling, but in many ways they were a victim of their own success with demand high and passenger numbers continuing to increase.

- 3.5 With regard to the issue of queues at the Ashford International Station Ticket Office at off-peak times, he was aware that there was an issue at weekends with people sometimes having to queue for 15/20 minutes which he accepted was too long. There had been an increase in footfall at the station mainly due to high speed services as well as increased population/development in Ashford. There were only three windows to sell tickets at the station and these were often all open but ultimately they may need additional windows. In the meantime, staff rotas had been altered to ensure maximum coverage at all times and there was an additional ticket office on the international side of the station for which they were looking to recruit a new member of staff so that this could also be staffed. They were also continuing with their commitment to introduce more ticket machines across the network, with 63 installed so far in the current franchise. Ben Ward agreed to feed back on the issue of similar problems with long queues at Canterbury West station.
- 3.6 Ben Ward asked about the new college that would be opening in Ashford in September 2017 and whether there were any plans for additional signage and pedestrian routes, as they anticipated that a lot of the students would use the train which would generate many new travellers arriving at the station. The Chairman said that they anticipated students turning left out of the station, using the subway underpass and crossing at Elwick Road. Pedestrians should be deterred from cutting across Station Road and through the space behind International House. He anticipated that liaison meetings would commence shortly with the college and it was agreed that the issue of station signage and directing of students on foot should be raised and bottomed out before the college began to send out their literature to new students.

Wealden Wheels

- 3.7 The Chairman advised that he had invited Wealden Wheels to the meeting as part of the Group's drive to support and increase voluntary transport in the Borough. Graham Sivyer advised that Wealden Wheels was a 'not for profit' community based transport company based at Pluckley. They had a fleet of four minibuses, a pool of 21 volunteer drivers and undertook around 10,000 passenger journeys a year. For a modest annual membership fee local groups, clubs, schools, other organisations as well as families and individuals could hire the minibuses, either on a self-drive basis or with one of their volunteer drivers. The aim of the company was to bridge the transport gap in rural villages by providing affordable and suitable transport, whether social, leisure or health-inspired. Members included organisations working with children, youth groups, the disabled, elderly, housebound or otherwise socially disadvantaged people, as well as those who simply liked to go out with like-minded friends to visit places of interest and wished to travel in one vehicle rather than having to take several cars. They were supported financially by the Parish Councils of the six founding villages - Challock, Charing, Chilham, Egerton, Pluckley and Smarden, although use was not restricted to residents of these villages. Day-to-day running costs were largely met through annual membership and vehicle hire fees. There were a couple of regularly scheduled services to take people shopping in Faversham or to a social club in Tenterden.
- 3.8 The Chairman thanked Graham for his introduction. He said he was relatively

new to the role of Cabinet Member, but he knew the Leader of the Council was extremely interested in stretching the model of Wealden Wheels around the Borough. He understood that Wealden Wheels may not have the capacity to do that themselves, but they may have a model that could be rolled out to other areas. Graham Sivyer said he would be happy to meet the Chairman outside of the meeting to discuss this matter further, and indeed to invite him to visit their offices at Pluckley.

Ashford Driving Instructors Association (ADIA)

3.9 Derek Goodwin reported that he had sent a variety of emails to KCC Highways outlining several areas of concern with regard to Ashford's road network. On a more general note there were numerous road markings around the Borough that were wearing away. Despite these being obvious to anyone, he had previously been told that these would only be acted upon if they were pointed out. On more specific matters, he referred to the following: -

- He was extremely concerned about the yellow box marking at the Wellesley Road/Somerset Road junction. When the markings were re-painted after the new junction had been completed, only half of it had been painted and it now looked as if first half was no longer used and this was causing confusion. This had been logged with KCC and they had recognised the problem and would look to carry out work to put it right, however they had said it may have to wait until next spring when we have drier weather. He found this potential delay concerning.
- At the same junction, but coming up Mace Lane into Wellesley Road/Station Road, the signage did not specify that the left lane was left turn only from Mace Lane into Station Road. This, along with the omission of a solid island to force drivers left, meant that some drivers still went ahead in the left lane. As a result of this he considered the 'ghost' island markings would soon disappear, and drivers would continue ahead in the left lane which was dangerous. He had suggested clearer signage, a solid island and a left facing green arrow on the left lane traffic light. KCC had advised that signage would be improved, but an arrow could not be installed on the traffic lights. He had not as yet received a response on the island, but considered that the complete junction 'improvements' had not provided a good solution.
- A pedestrian controlled traffic light crossing had been in place in Newtown for about a year but had still not been opened. He had been advised that this was a developer led scheme due to the Designer Outlet Extension. The developer had incorrectly connected this to private electrical supplies and KCC had been unable to commission the lights. The developer had commissioned the contractor to arrange for the electrics to be reconnected to the main supply, however it was discovered in the proposed route that they were unable to lay the cables due to other supplies. A survey had recently been carried out and KCC were waiting on the revised proposals.
- Similarly, a zebra crossing had been in place at Stanhope near the new care home for nearly two years now without being opened. KCC had

advised that due to the damage created to the existing highway by lorries during development works, they had requested that the road be fully resurfaced before the lining that was required took place. This would be carried out when phase 2 external and building works were completed as they would then no longer have articulated lorries turning on this area. This should therefore be complete in June 2017, but this would be nearly three years since the crossing was first installed.

- The last question he had asked was if there were any plans to realign the Henwood roundabout road markings to direct traffic ahead in the left lane from Mace Lane into Hythe Road. The roundabout had originally been set up to allow traffic in the left lane to turn left in to Henwood Industrial Estate and the right lane to go straight on in to Hythe Road. At that time very little traffic turned right in to what was now Mill Court. However, with the housing and Tesco store in Mill Court, the situation was reversed and the left lane was under capacity and it would seem better to realign the roundabout. Although there had been no major accidents here, there had been numerous minor knocks that had not been reported and near misses. He had been alarmed at the response of KCC that these road markings were only advisory and had been installed purely for capacity reasons. They had no plans to make any changes to them at this time, but he considered it was dangerous and he could not understand their intransigent reluctance to look at this and other issues that had been a problem for many years. Mr Goodwin said that the driving instructors were paid to observe the road, drivers and traffic and apply common sense and it was therefore frustrating that they were continuing to be ignored.

3.10 The Chairman said that he greatly valued the input of Mr Goodwin on behalf of Ashford's driving instructors. He considered that their opinions should be given great weight as they were out using the roads every day and were the 'eyes and ears' out on the ground. He said that the new Terms of Reference of this Group referred to considering all matters related to highway management and making recommendations to the Joint Transportation Board (JTB) as appropriate. He was therefore concerned at the perceived lack of a satisfactory response from KCC and wondered if in the future this Group should be supplied with a list of the ADIA's concerns in advance. Then, as a Group, they could make recommendations to the JTB with a little extra weight behind them.

3.11 A Member referred to the junction at the Beaver Road Bridge into Station Road towards the Bowling Alley. He often witnessed cars stopping in the middle of the road because there were so many traffic lights there they were often looking at the wrong lights. He considered there were too many traffic lights in succession and this was dangerous and confusing, especially for people not familiar with the area.

Stagecoach

3.12 Dutch Docherty and Dimitri Bridgland reported on the latest commercial and operational updates for Stagecoach in Ashford. Dutch Docherty advised that he was now the Service Delivery Manager for the South East and therefore no

longer the Operations Manager for Ashford. His replacement was Louis Ferguson who would attend future meetings.

- 3.13 Dimitri Bridgland advised of the upcoming launch in December of the new Mercedes 'Sprinter' minibuses which would service the existing B-Line and C-Line routes. The buses had now been given Stagecoach livery and an example diagram was tabled for the Group. The services would be very high frequency (Park Farm to Kennington via the Supermarkets every 6 minutes and Ashford International Station to the Town and Hospital via Willesborough every 5 minutes). There were 30 vehicles and they wanted to recruit up to 40 extra drivers. That recruitment and training process was ongoing and progressing well. This operation represented a massive investment by Stagecoach and was a national trial so others would be looking at Ashford and they were keen to get it right. The buses would have new ticket machines which would allow contactless payments up to £30, although cash payments would also still be able to be taken. The routes would be managed by two members of staff on the ground who would have tablets with real time information and could monitor delays/traffic flows etc. There had been some initial problems with the vehicles in terms of the spacing of the seating which were now resolved, and the ventilation system/window openings. They were in regular contact with Mercedes about the latter point and it was envisaged that these problems would be resolved by spring, before they really became an issue. It was worth pointing out the ecological impact of the new buses which would be Euro 6 standard and have miniscule emissions compared to previous. In response to questions about the smaller buses, the Group was advised that double decker buses would still be used on routes at peak times and Stagecoach had just completed their annual head count exercise to help determine where resources would be best allocated. This would be repeated once the new Sprinter vehicles came in to action.
- 3.14 In terms of other issues, Dimitri Bridgland advised that Stagecoach had recently launched their new App for Apple and Android mobile phones. This would include journey planning, next stop information and live bus tracking. A mobile ticketing feature would also launch in the next few months allowing passengers to buy tickets on their phones.
- 3.15 Dutch Docherty advised that following the recruitment of the new drivers, numbers would increase from 120 to 160 so they had taken out a lease on a shop building in Bank Street to act as a new larger restroom for Ashford drivers.

Ashford Borough Council

- 3.16 Chris Miller gave an update on current ABC parking and highways projects and the parking and waiting restrictions that had gone through the JTB in September. The Council was working with other agencies to try and mitigate the nuisance of overnight HGV parking and the associated highway damage and anti-social behaviour. Controlled Parking Zones and overnight/weekend HGV parking bans had been agreed for the Wotton Road area and Ellingham Way Industrial Estate. Normal parking would still be allowed, but only in designated bays, however there would be an absence of yellow lines so some education may be needed along with clear signage. Helen Whately MP had

recently promoted a House of Commons debate on the enforcement of HGV parking in Kent and Local Authorities had made representations with a view to reducing the number of Penalty Charge Notices that had to be issued before clamping from three to one, and increasing the fine from £40 to £200. They also wanted enforcement officers to have the power to inspect vehicle registration documents to assist in the enforcement of fines.

- 3.17 Chris Miller also advised that ABC had launched a road safety mascot – ‘Moreline the Wizhog’, which would be visiting local schools to offer advice on road safety and teach children how to stay safe around highways and cars. The campaign was also about highlighting road safety issues such as parking and driving near schools to get parents thinking about their habits. The Council had provided warning signage to reinforce stopping restrictions and remind drivers not to park in locations which caused issues on school’s premises.
- 3.18 In response to a question about blue badge use Chris Miller advised that this was overseen by KCC but users could not ignore the rules of the road when parking. They were allowed to park on double yellow lines but still had to obey rules about not parking on bends, causing obstructions etc. This would be enforced by the Police.
- 3.19 The Senior Member Services Officer agreed to supply a Member with an update on the current situation with the Beaver Road Bus Gate.

4. Date of Next Meeting

- 4.1 Friday 7th April 2017 at 9.30 a.m.

Councillor Bradford
Chairman of the Public and Voluntary Transport Liaison Task Group