

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. 2, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **6th October 2017**.

Present:

Cllr. Feacey (Chairman);
Cllrs. Buchanan, Heyes.

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

Also Present:

Cllr Burgess.

Dimitri Bridgland – Stagecoach in East Kent, Catherine Jones – Stagecoach in East Kent, Philip Morgan – Stagecoach in East Kent, Dave Childs – Ashford Taxi Drivers, PC Alistair Pringle – Kent Police, Graham Sivyer – Wealden Wheels, James Hann – Ashford Borough Council, Andrew Osborne – Ashford Borough Council, Chris Miller – Ashford Borough Council, Danny Sheppard – Ashford Borough Council.

Present for Item 4 only: Cllrs. Bartlett, Bradford, Dehnel, Mrs Dyer, Galpin, Hicks, Miss Martin, Wedgbury, Jeremy Baker – Ashford Borough Council

Apologies:

Cllr Pickering, Matthew Arnold – Stagecoach in East Kent, Michael Claughton – Ashford Access Group, Derek Goodwin – Ashford Driving Instructors Association, Yvonne Leslie – Southern.

1. Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 Councillor Feacey made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as he was the Managing Director of Energyshift who worked with members of the taxi trade and he was on the Management Committee of UK LPG.

2. Minutes – 28th April 2017

Resolved:

That Minutes of the meeting of this Task Group held on 28th April 2017 be approved.

3. Industry Updates and Discussion

Stagecoach

- 3.1 Dimitri Bridgland reminded the Task Group of the successful launch of the

high frequency 'Little and Often' service in February serving the old B-Line and C-Line routes (for Kennington and the William Harvey Hospital and Park Farm). There had been good passenger growth over the ten month period and whilst it was still a trial, further expansion was planned. As part of the trial they were constantly assessing matters and there had been some minor route changes, ventilation in the vehicles had now been improved with openable windows and they had now gone live with contactless payments in all vehicles across the fleet. From the 19th November they would be making use of the 'Little and Often' buses on the existing E-Line and G-Line routes which would see a boost in frequency for South Willesborough, Godinton Park, Little Burton Farm and the Eureka Parks. On other matters, at the end of the summer school holidays Poynter's coaches had closed so Stagecoach had assisted KCC by taking on the Homewood School routes as a short term fix. That service was now out to tender.

3.2 The representatives from Stagecoach gave the following responses to questions and comments: -

- If changeover times for drivers in Bank Street was seen as a problem, they could put a supervisor in to monitor the situation. The changeover should be about a two minute process, but there was a possibility that delays in traffic were eating in to driver's breaks.
- Stagecoach was currently undertaking a passenger survey on accessibility of the 'Little and Often' vehicles. Whilst the seats could be slightly cramped at times, the vehicles were fully accessible and met all of the requirements on wheelchair and mobility scooter access, and there had been no reports of people struggling to get on or off the vehicles. Both Stagecoach and Mercedes were taking on board feedback as this was a national trial and they were both keen to get it right.
- In terms of success criteria for the trial, the key indicators were passenger growth and revenue. Whilst passenger numbers had increased significantly, revenue was down and that was why they were looking to make some changes to the routes to improve matters.
- Current roadworks were causing disruption to bus services in the town. It was believed that KCC were attempting to complete the 12 week process now, so that it would be finished before the Christmas shopping peak period. ABC had also lent KCC a piece of land to use as a compound which they hoped would speed up the works. The overall aim was to improve the free flow of traffic and provide pedestrian crossing points.
- Stagecoach had already built some extra time in to their new timetables to deal with peak patterns at the International Station. There was an issue with other road users stopping in 'no stopping' areas, especially at peak times and when a train had just arrived, and it was important that access was maintained so that buses could get to the kerbside.

- With regard to the accommodation bridge in to Bridgefield, James Hann advised that KCC currently had a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) out which, when implemented, would mean more effective enforcement of the bridge.

Taxis

- 3.3 Dave Childs agreed that there was an issue with private cars stopping in the Station forecourt area and blocking the way for buses and taxis. James Hann advised that there was a lot of work ongoing currently to find both a short term and longer term solution to the problems. In the short term they had to work with what they had, but over the longer term a larger masterplan was needed for the whole area and this would be a question for the new franchise holder post 2018. Officially, no private vehicles should be in that part of the Station, but it was private land and could not currently be enforced. The Council was re-painting the lines and markings to make things clearer, Stagecoach had volunteered staff to re-direct the traffic and signage was being improved. The short term fixes were more about changing people's perceptions and habits than enforcement.
- 3.4 Plans for a new taxi rank at the Station were progressing. James Hann advised that there were two parts to this, firstly the desire to improve general pedestrian and traffic flow in Station Approach by installing a pedestrian crossing in front of International House and secondly to provide a purpose built and adequate taxi waiting area on the domestic side of the Station. ABC had provided some land in the Stour Centre car park which would provide a waiting area for 17 taxis and a call forward system. This system had an intercom which would provide the option to call vehicles with disabled access. This addition had come from feedback from drivers and been funded by ABC. Once this was all in place, ABC would then be able to enforce against illegal parking for the entire length of Station Approach. Dave Childs said it was only fair to note that opinion on the proposals amongst taxi drivers was divided.
- 3.5 Dave Childs asked if there were any plans for a box junction at the Station side of the Beaver Road bridge as it was often difficult for vehicles turning right. James Hann thought this was probably something that would be assessed when the current works had been completed.

Ashford Borough Council

- 3.6 Chris Miller advised that there was currently a focus on keeping school crossings and entrances clear and the need for additional markings, railings and enforcement. This was not an issue at all schools but there were a number where they were looking at TROs. He also gave an update on current parking and waiting restrictions that had gone through the JTB in September – these included Cobbs Wood Industrial Estate which was a key project to maintain traffic flows and complement the A28 widening works.
- 3.7 Andrew Osborne advised of the Ashford International Spurs signalling project, which was one of ABC's Big 8 Projects and would enable International rail services to continue to use Ashford International Station in to the future. Work had already begun 'on the ground' and the good news was that signalling

work would be completed without any disruption to existing Eurostar services. The signalling parts of the project were due for completion by the end of February 2018, platform gauging works to be completed shortly afterwards, with new International train services commencing from 1st April 2018.

- 3.8 James Hann advised of the upcoming pilot scheme for an experimental overnight HGV parking and clamping trial on the A20 between Charing and the Drovers Roundabout. The Task Group would be aware of the major issues suffered in Kent as a result of HGV parking in unsuitable locations. Ashford had already implemented a successful clamping trial in the Borough, although this alone would not deliver countywide enforcement. It was clear that increasing overnight lorry parking capacity across the county and encouraging lorries to use those facilities would be key in finding a permanent solution, but in the meantime KCC and the Department for Transport had designed a zonal enforcement scheme that could be expanded to other areas or countywide. He was pleased to say that Ashford had been given permission to introduce the pilot scheme on the A20 between Charing and the Drovers Roundabout. This area had been selected as there were already identified problems related to safety in this area and a history of residential complaints relating to overnight lorry parking. The clamping trial would include the existing industrial estates in Ashford which already had overnight lorry parking bans. This was a national trial which would commence on the 30th October and could last up to 18 months, giving an opportunity to evaluate a new approach to enforcement. Other areas would be looking on with interest and ABC's Joint Transportation Board would be kept up to date with regular reports. Potential displacement was one of the issues that would be closely monitored.

Wealden Wheels

- 3.9 Graham Sivyer advised that he had attended the Task Group meeting last October shortly after his appointment and gave an explanation of what Wealden Wheels did. One year on, he was obviously a lot more familiar with the operation and they had produced an information leaflet which he tabled. In the last year they had increased the number of trips by 18% and they were continuing to grow. 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. They now had 131 member groups or organisations and a significant number of individual members. The two main areas of growth had been through care homes and self-drive. They had a fleet of four minibuses (a 9, 13 and two 16 seaters), a pool of 21 volunteer drivers and 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, and whilst these villages did receive a preferential rate, use was not restricted to residents of these villages.

Southern

- 3.10 Yvonne Leslie had given her apologies for the meeting but a copy of Southern's latest Stakeholder newsletter had been included within the Agenda papers. 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.

Ashford Driving Instructors Association

- 3.11 Derek Goodwin had given his apologies for the meeting but had circulated his latest list of concerns to KCC Highways regarding road marking and visibility issues on Ashford's road network. He had received a response which he had passed on to Association members. He had been encouraged to report issues directly to KCC using their online facility, or if the issues were urgent via their contact centre, but he continued to be frustrated at having to highlight the obvious. He wanted to make it clear that his motives were 100% to do with road safety.

4. South Eastern Rail Franchise Bidders

- 4.1 Following a break for lunch, the Task Group reconvened and received a series of presentations from the three bidders for the upcoming South Eastern Rail Franchise (commencing December 2018). Representatives from the three bidders: - London and South East Passenger Rail Services Ltd (Govia); Stagecoach South Eastern Trains Ltd; and South Eastern Holdings Ltd (Abellio, East Japan Railway and Mitsui & Co) attended in turn and discussed their plans with the Group, followed by questions and an exchange of views with Members and Officers. Each Company had a distinct private and confidential slot to allow them to be frank, without having to worry about speaking in front of their competitors.
- 4.2 Following the commencement of the presentations Jeremy Baker reminded Members that given the stage of the process, the information they had heard from each of the bidders should remain strictly private and confidential.

5. Date of Next Meeting

- 5.1 The date of the next Meeting was Friday 6th April 2018 at 9.30 a.m. The KCC Cabinet Member for Highways, Mr Matthew Balfour, would be present.

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