

Strategic Transport Group

Minutes of a Meeting of the Strategic Transport Group held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **6th April 2018**.

Present:

Cllr. Feacey (Chairman);
Cllr. Heyes.

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

Also Present:

Cllrs. Mrs Bell, Mrs Blanford, Bradford, Burgess, Clokie, Dehnel, Galpin, Sims, Webb.

Stephen Gasche, Principal Transport Planner – Rail – Kent County Council;
Mike Whiting – Kent County Council Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste; Chris Vinson, Senior External Communications Manager – Southeastern Railway; Matthew Arnold – Stagecoach in East Kent; Katherine Jones – Stagecoach in East Kent; Jason Atkinson – Kent Police; Derek Goodwin – Ashford Driving Instructors Association; Russell Coleman – Ashford Driving Instructors Association; Economic Development Manager – Ashford Borough Council; Head of Environment and Land Management – Ashford Borough Council; Parking, Highways and Transportation Team Leader – Ashford Borough Council; Member Services Manager – Ashford Borough Council.

Apologies:

Cllr. Buchanan; Graham Sivyer – Wealden Wheels; Yvonne Leslie – Southern.

1 Declarations of Interest

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

2 Minutes – 6th October 2017

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Public and Voluntary Transport Liaison Task Group held on the 6th October 2017 be approved.

3 Ashford Rail Developments

3.1 Stephen Gasche, Principal Transport Planner – Rail – Kent County Council gave a detailed presentation on strategic rail issues affecting Ashford. A

summary of the issues covered during the presentation is set out below:-

- Journey Time Improvement (JTI) – Phase 1 – This would reduce the journey time between Ashford and Canterbury West and therefore improve connectivity with Thanet and this project had recently been completed. Phase 2 was at the design stage with likely implementation by May 2020. The combined effect of both Phase 1 and Phase 2 would reduce the overall journey time by three minutes.
- Thames Link peak service to London Bridge/St Pancras/Cambridge – The connection from Maidstone East to Cambridge was now likely to be deferred until December 2019, however, for Ashford this initiative resulted in three additional journeys to London at the start of and at the end of the day.
- Four Trains Per Hour (TPH) to Charing Cross from Ashford. This would be two fast trains and two slow trains from December 2022 and was included within the basic specification for the current franchising exercise. The aim of this was to encourage modal shift from HS1. Hastings would also achieve a faster service to Charing Cross.
- HS1 – Marsh Link – This was a complex and expensive project to be undertaken in three phases which included the need to change the track to link Platform 2 to the Marsh Link services. The third phase was likely to be completed in 2024 or later.
- New Marsh Link timetable – May 2018 – Govia/Southern had undertaken two consultation exercises and were introducing a completely new timetable from May 2018. For Ashford, trains from the Marsh would arrive at nine minutes past the hour therefore allowing seven minutes to connect to the high speed services to London.
- International Service Improvements – Ashford Spurs Project had been completed which would enable the higher and wider trains to use the Ashford International platforms and signaling.
- Stephen Gasche would be meeting the new Chief Executive of Eurostar in May where he would present a business case for achieving one additional journey per day from Ashford to and from Brussels (via Lille).

The Chairman then opened up the presentation for questions.

- In terms of JT1 Phase 2, there were no plans to upgrade the spurs to allow services to serve Faversham. However, this could form part of the overall long term improvements up to 2044. In terms of the proposals for the Ashford to Brighton service which (would in future require this service to change at Eastbourne) Stephen Gasche explained that he believed that there would be a 10 minute wait for connecting trains and also some extra stops between Eastbourne and Brighton. He did not believe that this would significantly affect Ashford

as the majority of people travelling from Ashford did not travel beyond Eastbourne.

- In response to a question as to whether there were any proposals to overcome the overcrowding difficulties on HS1, Stephen Gasche explained that from May 2018 there would be 698 seats added to the morning peak trains of 7.44 and 8.16 by increasing these trains from six to 12 cars.
- In terms of past discussions about proposals for a halt at Park Farm, Stephen Gasche did not consider that this was an option as the Section 106 funding available for this was £180,000 whereas under the current Department of Transport regulations a fully operational station would be required to be constructed at an estimated cost of £20 million. Other issues that would affect this would be the tight timetable on the Marsh Link and the current lack of capacity on that line. In summary he believed that the solution was to utilise the Section 106 money to support public transport connections from Bridgefield to the town.
- In response to a question about whether it was preferable to change at Hastings or Eastbourne when travelling to Brighton, Stephen Gasche said it depended upon personal preferences. Eastbourne had better station facilities but getting on at Hastings meant having a seat on the train when it initially left.
- Stephen Gasche also gave details of the newly introduced service from London St Pancras to Amsterdam, which ran non-stop to Brussels. A Member asked whether there were any plans to improve the capacity of Ashford Domestic Station. Stephen Gasche said he was unaware of any initial plans but said that a part of the franchise proposals would be for the successful franchisee to work with Network Rail to assess what improvements could be undertaken, and he suggested perhaps this could include improvements to the passenger circulation area around the ticket office. In terms of the proposals outlined in the Press about an HS2 service to Gatwick, Stephen Gasche did not think that this project would be a viable option.

The Chairman thanked Stephen Gasche for his presentation.

4 Strategic View of the Road Network in Kent

- 4.1 The Group received a presentation from Mike Whiting, Kent County Council Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste on the road network in Kent and the importance of Junction 10A.
- 4.2 A summary of the issues covered during the presentation is set out below:-
 - There were two tiers of network of roads in the County with the major strategic routes falling under the responsibility of the Department for Transport and Kent County Council for the other routes.

- Proposals for a major road network – the Department for Transport had a proposal for funding to be used to improve the middle tier of the busiest and most economically important Local Authority ‘A’ roads and if successful would give KCC access to new areas of funding. These included all of the A20, the A28 from Canterbury to Ashford and Detling Hill.
- Strategic Transport Priorities for Kent – these were: enabling growth in the Thames estuary; a new Lower Thames Crossing; bifurcation of port traffic; port expansion; a solution to Operation Stack; and the provision of overnight lorry parking.
- M20, Junction 10A – this scheme would provide the infrastructure to support the provision of new development and also improve road safety.
- County-wide Priorities – these were: active travel; aviation; highways maintenance and asset management; public rights of way; home to school travel; sustainable transport; and road safety.
- Maintenance Backlog – Mike Whiting explained that a respected industry report in 2017 estimated that the road maintenance backlog in England and Wales was around £12 billion with Kent’s road backlog at around £630 million which could rise to around £1 billion over the next ten years even if the current level investment was maintained. He explained that Paul Carter, Leader of KCC had made a very clear case to the Minister with a view to receiving increased funding for Kent to take care of its highway maintenance responsibilities which included bridges, street lighting, drains and trees. In terms of a budget to deal with the pothole problem, Mike Whiting explained that KCC had a budget of £11 million and contractors would shortly commence work in repairing the identified potholes throughout the County.

The Chairman then opened up the presentation for questions.

- A Member asked whether there had been any research undertaken in terms of the durability of pothole repairs as very often repaired potholes failed. Mike Whiting said he understood that a lot of research was going on and referred to an authority in Cumbria which was using recycled plastics to repair the pothole. He advised that the County Council agreement with the repairing contractor required them to repair the pothole free of charge if it failed within two years of the first repair.
- In terms of future proposals for a lorry park following the Highways England abandonment of the former proposal for the creation of a lorry park near Westenhanger, Mike Whiting said he understood that Highways England would bring forward a revised proposal at the end of May. KCC were also encouraging the owners of existing lorry parks to expand and provide further facilities. He believed that there was probably in the region of 900 spaces short in the County per night and said that Ashford had been successful in terms of its clamping trial,

however, that had moved the lorries on to other areas. The enforcement had, however, improved the market for the provision of more lorry parking space.

- In terms of the recent road closure announcement regarding Newtown Road, Mike Whiting said he did not have the background information to this particular issue and undertook to take the concerns raised at the meeting back to Officers at County. In terms of the role of Joint Transportation Boards, he believed that they were important and performed a useful function and said that he was considering organising a meeting of all Joint Transportation Board Chairmen in due course to discuss how they operated. In terms of the proposals for the third Thames Crossing, Mike Whiting explained that he had met with Highways England who considered that traffic would use the M2 to Dover or go via Detling Hill to access Eurotunnel or the M20. They were considering widening the M2 to Faversham and also dualling the section of the A2 at Lydden. He believed that the Lower Thames Crossing scheme gave added impetus to adding Detling Hill to the strategic road network. Mike Whiting also said that he would be shortly meeting with the freight operators to discuss this issue. Derek Goodwin referred to difficulties of liaising with Highways England over some highway matters in Ashford and in particular arranging for the undergrowth to be cut down on the Cloverleaf junction on the A2070.
- The Head of Environment and Land Management advised that Aspire undertook this type of work for the Borough Council and for the County and explained that they were working with Highways England to identify effective ways to be able to gain access to the highway and resolve the problem of vegetation restricting visibility splays.

The Chairman thanked Mike Whiting for the presentation.

5 Southeastern Railway – General Update

5.1 Chris Vinson, Senior External Communications Manager – Southeastern Railway, gave a presentation on current developments and also an update of the severe winter weather and its impact on services. A summary of the issues covered during the presentation is set out below:-

- Chris Vinson advised that the provision of Wi-Fi was already available on most of Southeastern's rolling stock and the roll out would be completed over the next six weeks.
- Smart ticketing would be extended over the course of the following year which would enable season tickets to be renewed at local ticket offices and also additional journeys purchased via the on-train ticket inspector.
- From May 2018 there would be additional capacity on the high speed morning peak services and there would be a full refresh of all rolling stock forming the Southeastern railway fleet.

- In terms of the impact of severe weather the presentation covered the events of the week commencing 26th February 2018 and also the key route strategy from 28th February to Saturday 3rd March 2018. Chris Vinson also outlined details of the severe disruption on Friday 2nd March arising from significant snowfall and freezing rain.
- In terms of Sunday 4th March onwards, Chris Vinson advised that a third of the fleet were out of action due to damage and although many of them had returned to service they were more fragile than they would usually be. **Post Meeting Note:** All trains had now returned to service.

The Chairman then opened up the presentation for questions.

- A Member referred to an incident he had witnessed in terms of severe overcrowding on the High Speed 1 service which had followed the cancellation of one of the trains at Ashford which had broadly meant that the occupants of a 12 coach train were crammed into a six car train and asked whether there were any plans to add an additional six car unit when such situations occurred? He also gave details of a recent incident whereby the Wi-Fi did not work and indeed indicated that this made reference to Southern. He also asked why it was not possible to buy a ticket from a ticket machine for a future date.
- In response, Chris Vinson said it was possible to buy a ticket for a journey on a future date but there was a need to select the option on the first screen. He accepted that the wording could be clearer and explained that software updates would be undertaken to make this much clearer. In terms of Wi-Fi, he said the reason that this made reference to Southern was that the stock was at that time on loan from Southern but he undertook to feed this point back to Southeastern's engineers. In terms of capacity of HS1 units, he advised that Southeastern had 29 of the six car units and there was a need to balance the day to day capacity and resilience. Indeed most of those units were in use at all times over the network. He indicated that Southeastern did not have a policy of stopping people from boarding trains, even if they were severely overcrowded.

The Chairman thanked Chris Vinson for his presentation.

6 Industry Updates Discussion

Southern/Govia

- 6.1 Tabled at the meeting was an update from Southern and Govia Thames Link Railway.

Stagecoach

- 6.2 Matthew Arnold advised that it would shortly be a year since the Little and Often services had been in operation and he therefore wished to undertake a full review and undertook to provide an update to the next meeting of the

Group in October.

- 6.3 In terms of recent issues he explained that the biggest problem Stagecoach had faced had related to congestion on both the Strategic and KCC highway network and he was in dialogue with KCC to help improve this situation. He also explained that there had been an independent survey undertaken by Transport Focus on bus services and advised that the satisfaction level for Stagecoach was at the figure of 91% and for the fifth year running the Group had been rated as providing the best value for money. In terms of the forthcoming road works at Newtown Road mentioned earlier in the meeting, he explained that his company had not been aware of these proposals prior to being notified by a Kentish Express reporter. He explained that this would affect the Service E which would not be able to serve Newtown for the duration of the works. He also warned of potential problems in terms of rail replacement services which he believed would not be able to access the road network via Newtown bridge. He explained that he had already raised this matter with Go Ahead in London. With reference to the poor winter weather, Matthew Arnold said that Stagecoach had run a comprehensive service and had made available their services for users who were unable to travel by rail but who had a valid rail ticket. He also gave details of services the Company had provided to commuters who were stuck at Ashford Railway Station and Stagecoach had been able to take them to Canterbury. A Member asked whether the opening of the Beaver Road bollard would help in terms of bus services for Newtown and Matthew Arnold said he would consider this and discuss it with the Member outside of the meeting. In terms of the "G" Line, a Member asked why, after 7.00 pm, that service not travel via Bank Street and Vicarage Lane. Matthew Arnold explained that this issue had been examined and it was likely that from June this situation would be resolved.
- 6.4 A Member referred to the "A" Line – Arlington/Singleton and expressed concern that you often had to wait 30 minutes and when it arrived it was often full. The Member also commented that furthermore the buses were very dirty.
- 6.5 Matthew Arnold explained that when the Little and Often service was introduced, Stagecoach for Ashford had only been allocated 30 buses and although they could have covered the "A" service with those, they would not have been able to provide services on the "B" and "C" lines and therefore that type of service had not been introduced on this route. He explained that in terms of the external appearance of the buses, the area of the depot they were stored in was adjacent to a building site which had caused problems in terms of keeping them clean and also the recent very wet weather had hampered the cleaning process. He explained that they would be relocated within the next three weeks and therefore the standard should improve. In terms of punctuality he said that the Company had had a very difficult time particularly stemming from the roadworks at Station Road/Elwick Road junction and during the time of those works there had been a period where buses could no longer serve the Station due to it taking 50 minutes to access and leave the Station area. From June he indicated that Stagecoach were considering splitting the "A" line into two separate routes.

Kent Police

- 6.6 Jason Atkinson advised that the Police wish to extend an offer to undertake safeguarding training for the drivers and staff of Stagecoach which would be repeating the process recently undertaken with the Taxi trade. He undertook to speak to Matthew Arnold outside of the meeting.

7 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was Friday 5th October 2018.

Councillor Feacey
Chairman of the Strategic Transport Group