

Joint Transportation Board

Minutes of a Meeting of the Joint Transportation Board held in Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **5th March 2024**.

Present:

Cllr. Heyes (Chair) - ABC
Mr. P Bartlett (Vice Chair) - KCC

Cllrs. Feacey; Forest; Gathern; Joseph; McGeever — ABC

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c), Cllr McGeever attended as Substitute Member for Cllr Michael.

Mrs C Bell; Mr S Campkin; Mr D Robey; Mr C Simkins – KCC

Mr G Cosgrove, Mrs C Drury – KALC Representatives

Apologies:

Cllr Michael - ABC

Head of Economic Development - ABC

Also present;

Cllr. Hicks – ABC

Safety and Wellbeing Manager; Technical and Transport Officer; Democratic Services Officer.

In Attendance (virtually):

Principal Transport Planner; Highway Manager; Interim District Manager – KCC

Cllrs. Blanford; Mulholland – ABC

342 Declarations of Interest

Cllr	Interest	Minute No
Bartlett	Made a Voluntary Announcement - lived next to the Inland Border Facility	346

343 Minutes of the last Meeting

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Board held on the 5th December 2023 be approved and confirmed as a correct record, with the amendment to include Mr. S. Campkin in attendance.

344 Presentation on Eurostar service to Ashford and the findings of the Business Survey about International Rail Services

The Principal Transport Planner - KCC gave a comprehensive presentation to the Board and drew Members' attention to the key points including the impact of the withdrawal of Eurostar on businesses and possible improvements to achieve a better outcome. The Chair opened up the item for discussion and the following questions/comments were raised:

- The Vice-Chair highlighted the disruption experienced by Eurostar over the 2023/24 New Year period caused by flooding issues on the HS1 track between London and Ashford. They said that Ashford could have been utilised in that situation, and customers alternatively travelled via Charing X to Ashford, and subsequently avoid Eurostar having to cancel journeys and issue refunds.
- In response to a question asking about the varying proportion of business travel and leisure/tourism travel, the Principal Transport Planner explained that business travel had decreased during and following the pandemic, owing to the introduction of remote working, and it subsequently becoming the norm for some employers. However, businesses had reported via the survey that the Eurostar service remained an imperative tool for them to retain and grow custom further beyond the UK into Europe. Leisure and tourism travel had recovered well after the pandemic and the proportion of journeys remained high.
- A Member noted that the biometric recognition system had not yet been implemented and was a primary necessity, and asked whether central government were offering funding for that. The European Commission were still making their determination on how the new entry/exit system would fully operate, and this was leading to the delays within Eurostar's decision-making. Once decisions on the roll out of the new entry/exit system had been made by the European Commission, it should be possible to understand whether operators would face challenges with delivering the necessary infrastructure at international rail terminals to maintain efficient processing of passengers at the border, and whether interventions were needed including from government.
- The subject of increased freight trains for imported/exported goods was highlighted and investment from Network Rail was anticipated in order to unlock the possibility of increased rail freight through the Channel Tunnel and the Kent domestic network, not via the HS1 network, that it currently utilised.
- The problem of tickets not being available to buy directly from Ashford was emphasised and the additional congestion and strain this caused to passengers and the network overall, for customers having to travel to St Pancras to purchase in person tickets.

- A query was raised concerning the anticipated time line and what Members could do to assist to get things moving more quickly. The Principal Transport Planner advised that the 30th anniversary of the Channel Tunnel opening was approaching in May 2024, although the caveat was that a general election was conceivable around that time. The key narrative was therefore focussed on how effective Eurostar and the Channel Tunnel had been up until the pandemic, and what was needed in order to re-establish that success. Another factor was how environmentally friendly rail travel was, with a very small carbon footprint. The partnership would engage with Officers and Members across Kent to ensure a visible joint effort and that support for the return of Eurostar was presented as a single collective.
- There was potential for other operators beyond Eurostar to take over the line, and press reports had indicated that further rail companies had expressed interest. This was encouraging, although would involve further planning and financing, which could take longer to implement.
- A Member spoke about the aspect of rolling stock, and the importance of government and shareholder support. They considered that without that support, the timeline could keep rolling on with no feasible end in sight. The Principal Transport Planner agreed that there were commercial complexities around a rolling stock order with a manufacturer, including the initial funding. Furthermore, it was imperative to act now, given the prolonged loss of services as this increased the risk of the passenger market naturally dissolving from Kent if there were further delays in securing stopping services. Eurostar's financial recovery was progressing well, with the number of customers anticipated to resume to pre-pandemic levels, hence why it was now a good time to act and apply pressure.
- The Chair thanked the Principal Transport Planner for their comprehensive presentation. They recalled the work undertaken over three years and associated costs to build and highlighted that the Channel Tunnel was an important national asset.

Resolved;

That the presentation be received and noted and an update report be provided to a future Board meeting.

345 Update Report on implementation of the new cameras on bus gates in Ashford.

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

346 Border Traffic Management Verbal Update Report

The Highway Manager – KCC gave a verbal update to the Board about the biometric entry/exit system proposed for third country nationals, which the UK now was after leaving the EU. Implementation of the system was planned for October 2024 and registration would be required for all first time arrivals. Reviews were currently underway to assess the impact of increased queues and delays, and re-implementation of Operation Brock and TAP owing to increased traffic queues along

the Motorway network would be inevitable. Partners including KCC, Kent Resilience Forum, Port of Dover, Eurotunnel, and Department for Transport were being led by the Home Office and liaising with French agencies and the EU, to assess what could be done to mitigate the traffic impact on communities and businesses in Kent.

The Chair opened up the item for discussion and the following questions/points were raised:

- A site at Western Docks in Dover had been identified as a potential location for pre-registration/vehicle clearance, but a Member queried whether the Inland Border Facility (IBF) site at Sevington could be an alternative site for security pre-clearance. The EU rules determined that a Police Frontier Officer had to be present during vehicle clearance, and currently they were not empowered to be on site at other locations away from the Port. Western Docks had been earmarked for coach clearance, to prevent them from blocking the port as the checks were carried out and took longer than a standard car.
- A Member had emailed a number of questions relating to M20 signage, the variable speed message sign at the Ashford Truck Stop and the biodiversity plant. The Highway Manager – KCC confirmed that the M20 IBF signs, and extra signage for Church Road were on order. No update was available regarding the Ashford Truck Stop, nor the Eastern Field at Sevington.
- In relation to a query about delays to the development of the pre-registration app caused by the Paris Olympics, it was confirmed that the EU were developing the back end of the app, and individual countries would need to develop the front end, specific to their region. In France, many of the high-level IT experts were already committed to work on the Olympics project, and so this would influence the time frame available for them to develop the front end of the pre-registration app.
- The Chair thanked the Highways Manager for their update and expressed their disappointment upon hearing about the re-implementation of Operation Brock and TAP. In addition, heavier traffic flows for the Easter period were likely.
- Minimal disruption was anticipated from April 2024 when in person phytosanitary checks came into force at the IBF.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

347 Highways Works Programme Update Report

The Interim District Manager – KCC advised they could take all Members queries about the report away and provide updates at the next meeting. The report was opened up to the Committee and the following points were raised:

- Appendix E, Page 19 – works at Simone Weil junction and William Harvey Hospital; were further works expected at the traffic lights at Bybrook road and Penley point?
- Appendix E, Page 21 - A28 Canterbury Rd, new commercial access; was that

for the new Aldi supermarket?

- Appendix A, Page 14 – Finn Farm Road, Bond Lane to Violet Way; the report stated complete but road markings not completed – could this be clarified?
- Appendix B, Page 16 - Great Chart Bypass; work done to reduce flooding to the underpass. When will the pump will be serviced and has that completely solved the problem?
- Further question - were footpaths and cycle paths given the same priority as roadways?
- Appendix F, page 24 - investigation of Bridge 869 N of Drivers roundabout; Were there Potential Road works planned there?
- Appendix B on drainage – A Board Member commented that the lists were not essentially complete because a culvert that was persistently closing the road between Westwell and Charing had now been dealt with.
- Swan Community Council had submitted their Highway Improvement Plan in September 2023 and were still awaiting a response from KCC; please could an update be provided?
- Appendix E, page 21 in regard to Chilmington secondary school - ES 003493 Great chart, footway and vehicular access to the school was not yet agreed or assigned; please provide an update on timeline for completion?
- A suggestion was made to list the Highway Improvements Schemes, as Parishes were invested so it would be beneficial to receive a progress report.

Resolved;

That the report be received and noted.

348 Parking and Waiting Restrictions Update Report

The Technical and Transport Officer introduced this report and highlighted the main points, including the new 15 min bays in Tannery Lane and Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points across the Borough. The Chair opened up the item for discussion and the following questions/points were raised:

- A Member asked whether the EV contractor was in breach of contract and if any action had yet been taken against them. The Technical and Transport Officer replied that contact with the contractor had been slow coming, but more recently communication had improved and a site meeting was planned for the following day, where definitive answers would be sought. A Member requested an email detailing the outcome of that meeting be circulated afterwards to the Board.
- A KCC Board Member queried whether there was a risk that the Council would have to pay back the grant funding from the Government because of the protracted delay by the contractor. The Office for Zero Emission Vehicles who had provided the grant, were given regular updates, and they were aware of the

delays and problems encountered.

- The Chair queried the timings of Traffic Orders in the Town Centre and the Safety and Wellbeing Manager explained that this topic would form part of the Parking Strategy under the Working Group in partnership with KCC. An Update Report on the Parking Strategy work would be coming forward to Cabinet in April.
- A Member requested that the National Bus Strategy and the Kent Improvement Plan be included for consideration at the next JTB meeting.

Resolved;

That the report be received and noted.

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