

Strategic Transport Group

Minutes of a Meeting of the Strategic Transport Group held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **5th October 2018**.

Present:

Cllr. Feacey (Chairman);
Cllrs. Farrell, Heyes, Pickering

Also Present:

Cllrs. Bradford, Clokie, Galpin, Howard-Smith, Wedgbury

Rt Hon Damian Green MP, Chris Vinson, Senior External Communications Manager – Southeastern Railway; Dimitri Bridgland – Stagecoach in East Kent; Katherine Jones – Stagecoach in East Kent; Russell Coleman – Ashford Driving Instructors Association; Paul Coombes – Ashford Independent Taxi Drivers; Corporate Director (Law and Governance) – Ashford Borough Council; Head of Community Safety and Wellbeing – Ashford Borough Council; Parking, Highways and Transportation Technical Officer – Ashford Borough Council; Civil Enforcement Officer Supervisor – Ashford Borough Council; Member Services Liaison Manager – Ashford Borough Council.

Apologies:

Cllrs Mrs Bell, Burgess, Mrs Heyes, Mrs Hicks, Mr Claughton - Ashford Access, Jason Atkinson - Kent Police, Yvonne Leslie – Govia Thameslink, Graham Sivyer – Wealden Wheels

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 April 2018

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Group held on the 6th April 2018 be approved.

3 Strategic Transport Issues for Ashford and the wider South East Area

- 3.1 The Rt Hon Damian Green MP gave a presentation setting out his personal views on strategic transport issues affecting Ashford and the wider South East Area.

- 3.2 The Rt Hon Damian Green MP advised that the Department of Transport looked at issues for the whole of the wider South East Area rather than on a Kent-only basis. In terms of public spending on railways this was higher in the South East than other regions within the country outside of London, however, the spend on local transport (ie buses) was lower than any non-London Authority. He explained that a new transport body for the South-East had been established called "Transport for the South East" which was aiming to become a statutory body by 2020. He drew attention to the possible effect in terms of lobbying etc that this may have on the role of the Joint Transportation Boards throughout the county. He also explained that it comprised 16 Transport Authorities, five local enterprise areas and representatives from Highways England, Network Rail and the rail operators. The body was chaired by local councillors from regions outside of Kent and one of the first pieces of work they would undertake would be to develop a strategy up to 2050. They were also undertaking an economic connectivity review. Damian Green explained that Ashford and Kent as a whole had done well in terms of obtaining funding via the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP's) and there was therefore a need to bear in mind this body when seeking support for future projects.
- 3.3 He also advised that the Department of Transport was responsible for considering and determining the new operator of the rail franchise which he explained was intended to be a joint Network Rail and operator arrangement. The requirements of the tender were that trains had to be longer and cater for an extra 40,000 passengers and it also had a requirement to make WiFi fully available and the introduction of a smart ticketing system which would include a pilot pay as you go scheme. Improvements to customer services would also be part of the new franchise and he believed that the ultimate decision would be one of the most important decisions for the Borough for the next 10 years.
- 3.4 In terms of electric vehicles, he explained that there was a Plug-in Infrastructure Grant to enable the roll out of more charge points throughout the country and he encouraged the Borough Council to explore these particularly in terms of helping reduce the carbon footprint of the Authority and the Country.
- 3.5 Damian Green then outlined some issues of concern which included the potential for the future need to introduce Operation Stack and the Department of Transport's plans to deal with lorry parking. On a similar issue, he also said that he understood that there was a planning application to re-use Manston for airport use again and he questioned how this sat with the proposed use of this site as an emergency lorry park. Other issues included the continuing problems associated with the ability of the new Eurostar trains to serve Ashford and given the expected growth in population in the South East, he wondered whether the requirement for the rail franchises to cater for 40,000 extra passengers was sufficient. With reference to the bus service he questioned whether the timetables were sufficiently flexible and said that most users were flexible in terms of their needs for bus services, apart from school children and particularly those who lived in villages. He also referred to problems caused when Junction 9 of the M20 was closed and the lorries had to gain access to other routes via the Drivers Roundabout which quickly became congested. He suggested that consideration needed to be given to

the introduction of yellow box markings on the junction which would help keep it clear. He also explained that concerns had been expressed to him that lorries were using routes through Kennington as rat runs when the M20 was closed and he believed more proactive signing should be introduced on the M20 to reduce the incidents of HGV's travelling through residential areas.

3.6 The Chairman then opened up the presentation for questions.

- In terms of the extent of the boundary of the new transport body, it was explained that this covered Berkshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight and included Southampton and Portsmouth.
- In terms of the Eurostar services serving Ashford, it was noted that the old timetable was now in place which had stabilised services.
- With reference to the possibility of Ramsgate being opened up for cross channel traffic, Damian Green said that from his discussions with hauliers, the additional crossing time and resultant journey time still justified their use of Dover even despite the potential for delays on the M20.
- A Member considered there was a need for three x 12 car high speed trains. Chris Vinson explained that the high speed services had proved very popular and passenger growth had been 12½% year on year. Currently South Eastern had 29 x six car units and since their introduction they had extended the routes they served. Measures had been taken to refine the schedule of maintenance to ensure that the maximum available stock was able to be used. He also explained that two particular services now used 12 cars.
- It was hoped that the increased capacity for the existing lorry park would help deal with problems of lorries parking in residential areas such as Park Farm.
- It was hoped that the new rail franchise would lead to renovations of Ashford Station and improved vehicle access as it was accepted that the Station now catered for significantly more passengers than when the last improvements were undertaken approximately 15 years ago.

The Chairman thanked the Rt Hon Damian Green MP for his presentation.

4 Industry Updates Discussion

South Eastern Railway

- 4.1. Chris Vinson, Senior External Communications Manager – South Eastern Railway, explained that since the last update to the meeting in April 2018 there had been widespread disruption throughout the country in rail services but these had not really affected the services offered by South Eastern. Indeed he advised that several High Speed 1 trains had been added at peak times. In terms of punctuality, this was now amongst the highest figures

achieved in the country with more than 70% of the trains arriving exactly on time. An extensive programme of refurbishment of the train fleet had commenced at an overall cost of £30 million which would take 1½ years to complete. The refurbished stock related to the Class 375 trains which served services on the main line ie non-High Speed 1 services.

- 4.2. Chris Vinson also advised that following the timetable changes in May, there would be no additional changes in December 2018. Work was also in hand to upgrade the information screens located in stations. This would include delay information and also indicate where the train was actually located. There would also be live information showing the services on the London Underground. These improvements would cost in the region of £700,000. He also encouraged members of the Group to visit the station to see the two snow dogs and also advised that on Saturday 6 October, South Eastern were trialling a Super Saturday rail ticket which would cost £20 and allow travel all day throughout the region.
- 4.3. In response to a question expressing concern about the standard of WiFi and the availability of toilets on trains, Chris Vinson explained that the roll out of WiFi was now complete and previous issues with on-loan rolling stock from Southern Railway had now been resolved. Indeed, enhancements to the existing WiFi offer would also be rolled out which would include a full information and entertainment programme. With reference to toilet provision, he explained that following a fatal accident, there had been restrictions placed on the ability of South Eastern to empty the toilets at the depot and significant investment and work was in hand to improve the safety at depots. This had taken longer to achieve than originally envisaged, but in the long run it should resolve the overall problem.

Southern/Govia

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

Taxi Trade

- 4.5. Paul Coombes advised that this was his first meeting of the Strategic Transport Group and at the present time he had no updates.

Ashford Driving Instructors Association

- 4.6. Russell Coleman – Ashford Driving Instructors Association said that once the various roadworks within Ashford were completed, his Association would look at the junctions in and around the Borough and he anticipated reporting on the outcome of that work to the next meeting in April 2019.

Stagecoach

- 4.7. Dimitri Bridgland advised that there had been timetable changes in September to cater for the schools return from their Summer holiday period. The 666 service had been changed to revert to its former route following a request from the Kent County Council and services to the Eureka Park had

been awarded to Chartwell Coaches. Adjustments had been made to the morning peak service between Ashford and Canterbury and this now no longer served Wye village but this service was accessible at Wye station. Problems were still being experienced mainly relating to the volume of traffic and there was a need to build in extra journey time for services. He explained that there was a general perception that roadworks this year were more of a problem than previously experienced.

- 4.8. In response to a question about problems with the bus gate serving Park Farm, Katherine Jones explained that on the B Line they had replaced the Little and Often buses with the larger buses in response to the wishes of the general public. In terms of specific problems at Bridgefield regarding buses waiting for the red lights to change, she explained that residents had been advised to contact Kent County Council as they were responsible for the highways. If Members had any specific concerns over individual services, she asked that she be emailed with the fleet number of the bus and she would investigate the matter. Dimitri Bridgland explained that in terms of the Canterbury service, the main problems related to the volume of traffic particularly on the A28 leading into Thanington, but he did explain that there was a two hour off-peak service which was scheduled to take 55 minutes. A Member said that the 10A when it arrived at Ashford Station still showed the destination as Hythe which he believed was confusing for school children who mistook this for Hythe Road. Katherine Jones undertook to raise this with the Depot Manager in Folkestone.
- 4.9. With reference to the Route 2 service between Ashford and Tenterden, a Member referred to concerns expressed by residents of High Halden and Bethersden in terms of the service changes. Dimitri Bridgland explained that the changes reflected the actual usage of the route but advised that Stagecoach were constantly reviewing and looking at the operation of the various services. With reference to the operation of the Stagecoach App, Katherine Jones explained that the live feed indicator was taken from the information from the ticket machines in buses. However, she advised that if services were cancelled and the ticket machine was not switched off, this would still show as a live service on the App. She explained that she was working with her control staff to help remedy this situation. The Chairman asked that consideration be given to providing a bus service to serve the new Finberry development.

5 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was Friday 5th April 2019.

Councillor Feacey
Chairman of the Strategic Transport Group

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Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact Keith Fearon:
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