

KENT TRANSPORT BOARD

MINUTES of a meeting of the Kent Transport Board held on Friday, 24 October 2008 at Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone.

PRESENT:-

Ashford Borough Council	- Cllr Mr M Burgess
Dover District Council	- Mr N J Collor
Gravesham Borough Council	- Cllr W Dyke
Kent County Council	- Mr K A Ferrin Mr C Hibberd Mr T Birkett Mr J Muckle Mrs P Stockell Mrs E Tweed
Sevenoaks District Council	- Cllr Mrs J Davison
Shepway District Council	Cllr Mr G Bunting
Swale Borough Council	- Cllr Mr J Wright
Tonbridge and Malling District Council	- Cllr M Balfour
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	- Cllr Mr R Wedden
Kent Association of Local Councils	- Cllr Mrs N Solway Cllr Mr N Whitburn Cllr Mr J Wilson

OFFICERS: Mr Geoff Mee, Director of Integrated Transport Strategy, Caroline Bruce, Deputy Director of Kent Highways Services, Mr M Sutch, Head of Planning and Transport Strategy and Mr G Mills, Democratic Services.

Apologies:

Cllr Mr M Patterson (Canterbury City Council), Mr A Poole (KCC), Cllr Mr Dearden (Shepway District Council) and Mr R Tolputt (KCC)

1. Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 February 2008

The notes of the meeting held on 29 February 2008 were agreed as a true record.

2. Transport Strategy

(Presentation by Mr Geoff Mee)

(1) Geoff Mee gave a presentation, a copy of which was circulated to Members of the Board, which outlined the Council's proposals to develop a high level integrated transport strategy for Kent. The strategy will support the "Future Kent" proposals and provide the blueprint for a high quality transport system which would act as a catalyst for continued economic growth and provide an improved quality of life in a sustainable and socially inclusive way. The strategy would encompass road system capacity and utilisation, public transport, airports, freight, ports, sea and river transport, sustainable transport (walking, cycling etc) and the use of technology.

(2) It would be essential as the development of the Strategy is progressed, to ensure that there is wide consultation and that would include consulting with the County Council's District and Borough Council partners, Parish Councils, community focus groups and neighbouring councils. There would also need to be engagement at Government level and through stakeholders such as public transport providers, freight transport associations, transport and road user groups, the Environment Agency and the rail, port and airport operators. Mr Mee said that the Strategy would need to align with existing planning and community frameworks and stakeholder aspirations and make the best use of existing public resources. The proposal was to have an outline of the Strategy developed by Spring 2009 with the final document being available by the Summer of

2009. Once detailed plans had been developed that would feed into Local Transport Plan 3 with implementation of the Strategy commencing from 2010/11 onwards.

(3) One of the issues that will need to be addressed through the Strategy and other transport policies is action across the County to reduce the amount of freight traffic using unsuitable rural roads. Also the Strategy would only be successful if the resources necessary to achieve its ambitious outcomes were forthcoming at both national and local level. Mr Mee said that the overall aspirations of the Strategy were dependent on general economic growth and the Government had indicated that it would be making infrastructure expenditure available as part of its policies to kick-start the economy.

(4) It was said the County Council needed to recognise the essential role played by community transport schemes in providing essential transport links to some of the remoter parts of the county. Mr Ferrin said that the County Council was conscious of this as an issue and had just commenced in the Lenham area the first of four pilot schemes. Through these pilot schemes the County Council was making a vehicle available to provide transport for people in outlying rural areas and to provide a link into local bus services. The County Council was looking at possible locations in which to run the other three pilots and was looking for potential partners and funding. Asked how the Strategy fitted into the programme of other multi-agency agreements, Mr Mee said that it would be important to work closely with District colleagues in order to produce a Plan which was complimentary to District and Local Plans.

(5) Mr Wilson commended members of the Board to read a report going to the next meeting of the County Council's Highways Advisory Board describing what actions Leicestershire County Council had taken in order to mitigate the effect of HGV's on its

roads. Mr Balfour spoke about the need for the Government to recognise that Kent continued to be badly treated in terms of finance for infrastructure provision, not only for roads but also for rail. It was also said that there was a need to improve services to London on the Tonbridge line which had suffered from a lack of investment over a number of years and that having good rail services was essential to having a fully integrated transport strategy. There was also discussion around Manston Airport possibly being developed to become London's fourth airport and also the possibility of an airport together with shopping and housing facilities being built on artificial islands within the Thames Estuary. These were matters which would need to be monitored and kept under review. The Board also discussed the need to raise revenue to offset the damage caused by the number of HGV's using Kent's roads. Mr Ferrin said that of the various options the Brit Disc had never found favour at Government level and he remained convinced that the easiest way would be to place a charge on cross channel fare tickets. Mr Sutch said that the County Council would be meeting soon with Government representatives and would raise these issues with them at that time.

3. Lower Thames Crossing

(Oral report by Mr Mick Sutch)

(1) Mr Sutch said that the Department of Transport consultants were looking at short term measures to see if existing capacity around the existing Dartford Crossing could be increased. KCC and Essex County Council's had jointly commissioned a study for a lower Thames Crossing but care would be needed once the study had been completed to avoid any unnecessary blight. It was already apparent that if a bridge was to be constructed below Tilbury, then the road deck would have to be some 90 metres high which was 45 metres higher than the existing Dartford River Crossing Bridge. The cost of a new

crossing was likely to be met through a combination of a PFI plus monies taken from the Dartford Crossing Tolls which at present made an approximate annual profit of some £50m.

(2) During the course of discussion, Mr Muckle said that increasing the capacity of the existing Dartford Crossing would not provide a long term solution and therefore it was essential to have a lower Thames Crossing constructed somewhere east of Gravesend.

(3) Councillor Weeden referred to the fact that as from this November Kent lose the annual payment £1m made by Government out of the proceeds of the Dartford Crossing. Mr Ferrin said that the County Council had taken this issue up with Government as well as the effect the soon to be introduced rise in the toll fees would have on local residents. On the latter, the Government had made some concessions for people living in the Dartford area and also in Thurrock but had not seen fit to extend the concession to those living in Gravesham. Mr Dyke said that any new crossing East of Gravesend would have to be in the rural area of Higham and that would inevitably lead to a considerable number of objections against the scheme. Members of the Board then noted there would be a further updates as appropriate.

4. KCC Select Committee on Rail Issues

(1) Mr Sutch gave an update on the work of the Select Committee which KCC had appointed to look into Kent-wide rail issues. The Select Committee comprised a group of Members from KCC together with an elected Member from Medway Council. The Select Committee was looking into a number of issues including, train timetables, the condition of stations, the effect of Ebbsfleet since its opening on both the rail network and driving

patterns together with other issues such as the possibility of a park way station being built at Maidstone and access to Kent stations. Mr Sutch said that evidence to the Select Committee had been taken from a wide range of interested parties, including the rail companies together with District council representatives and MP's. The report would be published in the near future and discussed by Kent County Council's Cabinet at its meeting on 1 December 2008.

(2) During the course of discussion, it was said that it was essential to get the rail companies fully engaged in sustaining local rail services and playing their part in having a fully developed and integrated transport system. It was also said that South-East trains should have a standard charging pattern for the use of its car parks across Kent as having different charges was encouraging car users to drive further than they need to in order to find cheaper car parking. Mr Sutch said that this was not an issue which had been specifically looked at by the Select Committee, but he did recognise it was a matter which would need to be explored with the train companies. It was also said that with the opening of the new station at St Pancras, journey times from Kent to other cities across the country had been dramatically reduced. For example, it was now possible to travel from Ashford to York in some three hours and to Edinburgh in some five hours. Mr Muckle said that the ongoing development of the rail network had to be looked upon as a long term but continuing investment which was vital to the regeneration and inward investment needs of Kent.

5. Operation Stack

(1) As a result of the substantial fire which occurred on board a France bound Eurotunnel freight train on 11 September 2008, the Channel Tunnel was still operating at

reduced capacity which was in turn was triggering more need for Operation Stack. As part of the way forward to finding a permanent solution, the County Council had invited expressions of interest from consultants to look at the economic case for building a permanent solution. Much would depend on funding and as part of the research the consultants would be asked to look at charges being imposed on those who use the Port of Dover.

(2) During the course of discussion, it was said that there was considerable space available within both the Port of Dover and also the land owned by Euro Tunnel and they therefore should be required to take more vehicles onto their sites. Mr Mee said that there was undoubted space at both the Tunnel and the Western Docks but that for both operational and policing reasons the use of this land had been discounted. In concluding the discussion, Mr Mee said that the County Council would use all its efforts to maintain pressure on the Government to come forward with a funding package to provide a permanent solution.

6. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the date of the next meeting would be arranged for a date towards to the end of February 2009.

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