

Swale Joint Transportation Board  
Monday, 5 September

**A discussion document for a Swale Metro Rail network to  
contribute to a sustainable transport solution - making  
more of existing rail assets**

Mike Whiting  
Kent County Council member for Swale Central  
[Mike.Whiting@kent.gov.uk](mailto:Mike.Whiting@kent.gov.uk)

Contents:

Pages 2 to 7 The vision  
Page 8 Conclusion  
Page 9 Recommendations

## **Swale Metro Rail – the vision**

This vision aspires to include the creation of a Swale Metro Rail service in the 2014 Rail Franchise, Swale Borough Council's long-term Local Development Framework (Core Spatial Strategy) and Sittingbourne and Milton Regis Town Centre regeneration plans.

The purpose of Swale Metro Rail is to provide a coherent vision as to how we might :

- mitigate the environmental impact of increased road traffic associated with growth and any new housing and employment developments contained in the Local Development Framework
- improve accessibility across the borough for those who rely on public transport, particularly the elderly and the young

To do this by:

- Increasing the number of rail and bus journeys
- Decreasing the number of car journeys

Swale Metro Rail vision could be part of the new SouthEastern Train Operating franchise, or a stand-alone Train Operating franchise.

Swale Metro can be achieved incrementally, but only if it included in some form, as an aspiration in the relevant spatial, regeneration and transport planning documents currently being considered by Kent County Council and Swale Borough Council.

## **The Swale Metro Rail transport vision**

There are four elements to the Swale Metro vision.

- A new Swale Metro station at Bobbing
- A new Swale Metro station at Murston/Bapchild
- A new Swale Metro rail service, looping Sheerness in the north, Teynham in the east, Newington in the west and Sittingbourne, and including the new stations at Bobbing and Bapchild
- New Swale Metro bus services into Swale Metro rail stations from villages and suburban Sittingbourne

Plans are being finalised to create 2,000 new jobs related to the wind farm industry at the port of Sheerness and hundreds of new jobs are expected at three new recycling plants at Kemsley which have recently gained planning permission. These areas of development are adjacent to existing railway lines.

Other planning permissions have already been granted for new housing developments at Bapchild and Bobbing, and the Local Development Framework being prepared to guide planning decisions over the next 30 years envisages 13,500 and 18,500 new homes. Again, most of these development are in areas adjacent to the existing railway lines.

Recent traffic modeling suggest that Sittingbourne regeneration won't increase the percentage of journeys made by rail on the existing networks. Improving the rail offering could improve service and promote a modal shift away from the road and onto the rail.

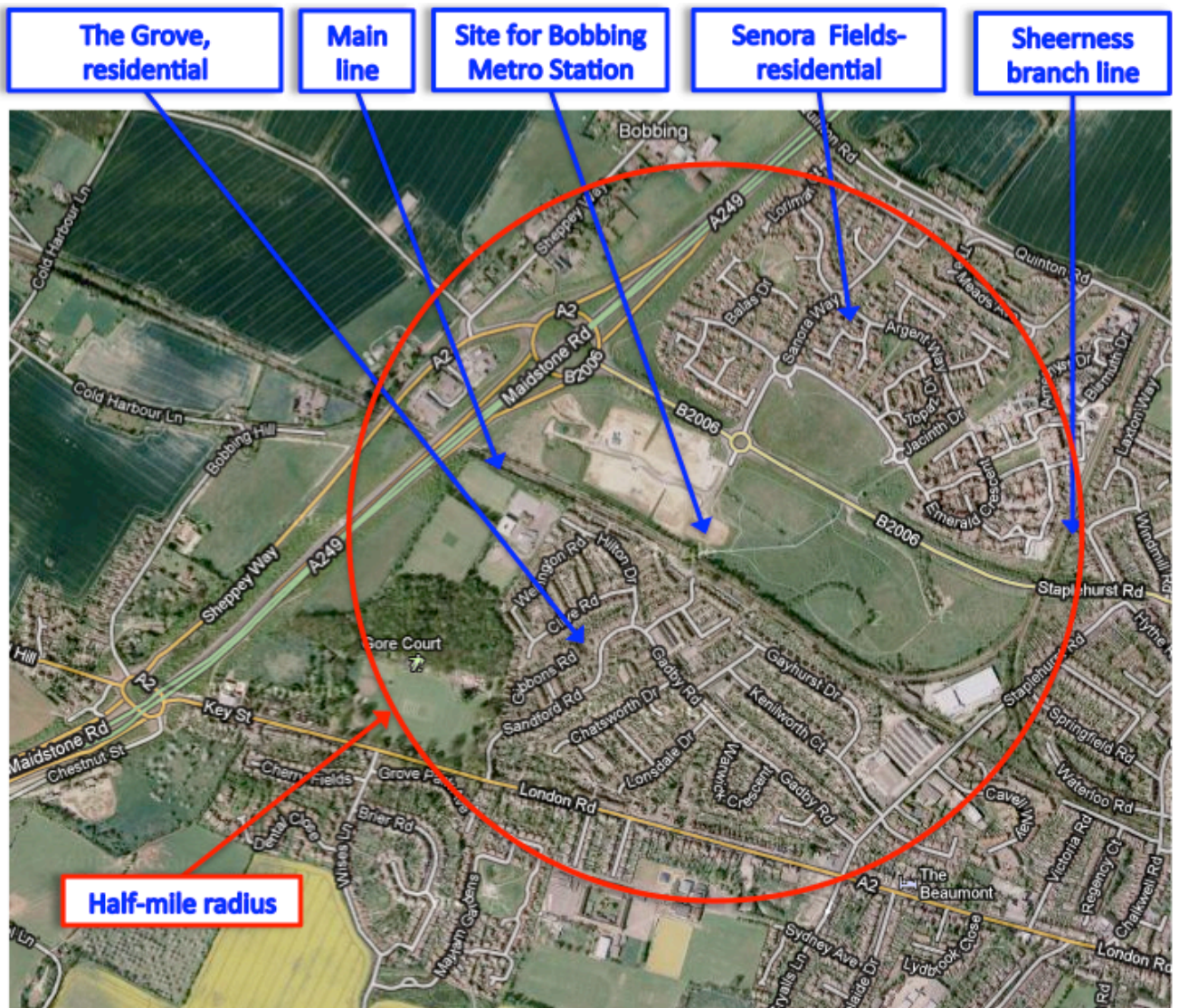
## A new Bobbing station to ease traffic to the west of Sittingbourne

A new Swale Metro rail and bus station at Staplehurst Road, to the West of Sittingbourne.

Roads provision is already laid to the entrance to the site. Adjacent land may be available for parking. A foot tunnel under the main line exists at the site.

The half-mile radius contains approximately 4,000 registered electors and includes the village of Bobbing, employment areas, Westlands Academy and Grove Park schools.

Most journeys to Sittingbourne, the rail network and elsewhere are currently made by car.

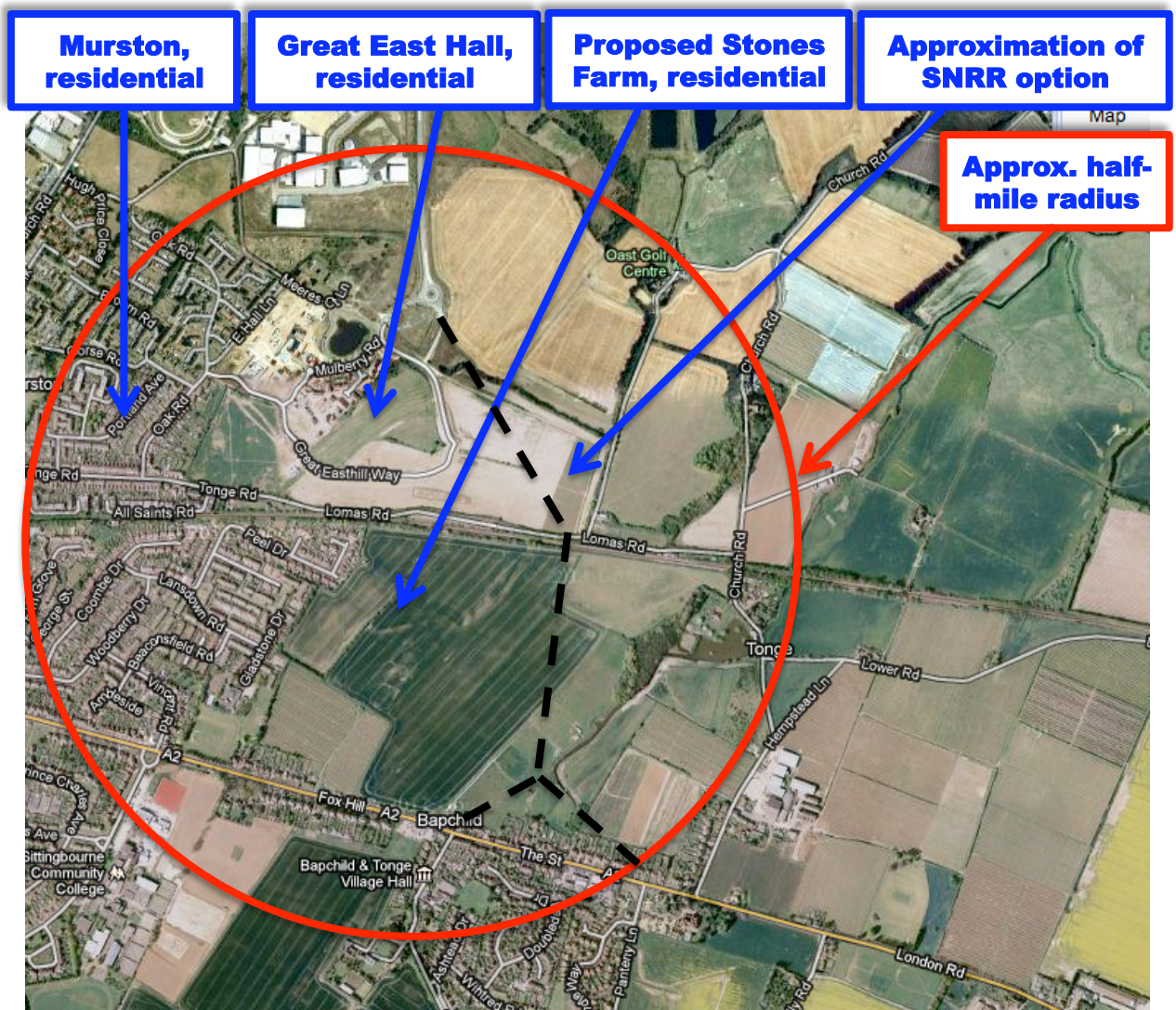


## A new Murston and Bapchild station to ease traffic to the east of Sittingbourne

This discussion document does not identify a site for a new Swale Metro Rail station serving Murston and Bapchild. As an illustration, the map below suggests the stretch of line running to the south of Great East Hall would best place to encourage pedestrian access from existing residential areas of Murston and Bapchild, ongoing developments at Great East Hall and proposed development at Stone Farm.

Sittingbourne Community College, Meadowfields and Bapchild Primary School are also within an approximate half-mile radius. The area is served by Thong Road, Peel Road, Lomas Road, Great East Hall Way, and sits close to one of the alternative routes of the Sittingbourne Northern Relief Road as shown on Swale Council's *Pick Your Own* consultation document.

Most journeys to Sittingbourne, the rail network and elsewhere are currently made by road.



## Enhancing the Sheerness branch line

The Swale Metro could run two trains at half hour intervals from Sheerness, stopping at all stations. Total journey time for each route is approximately 60 minutes.

Route 1: Sheerness, Sittingbourne, Teynham, Sittingbourne, Newington, Sittingbourne, Sheerness.

Route 2: Sheerness, Sittingbourne, Newington, Sittingbourne, Teynham, Sittingbourne, Sheerness.



## **Adding buses to the network**

A new Swale Metro Network gives us the opportunity to revisit existing bus routes and talk to providers with a view to creating a more integrated rail and bus offering to the residents of Swale.

The new network of bus services could be integrated into the Swale Metro rail stations and timetables.

The bus network would serve the villages and suburban Sittingbourne, connecting communities, businesses, retail and leisure to the rail network.

A system of transferable ticketing, valid on both rail and bus within the Metro area, might encourage use and further reduce the reliance on cars.

## Conclusion

Given the land available, it is likely the road network in Swale, particularly the local network in and around Sittingbourne, will not see any improvement in capacity and will clog up over the next 20 to 30 years.

Traffic modeling based on existing rail provision suggest no modal shift from road to rail by 2031.

We have a second infrastructure, the railway, which is under-used. It links many of the centres identified for growth in Swale Borough Council's published growth proposals, can itself be developed to link new areas where further expansion is planned, and reduce the impact of those expansions on the road network.

The existing bus services have grown piecemeal over time. This vision is an opportunity to rethink those services and integrate them more fully.

Indicative costs for the rail element of these proposals are £10m to £20m, though detailed analysis of these and the effects on the transport system in the area as a whole are required, as is access to a variety of funding streams.

However, it is a vision of what might be over time, a vision that might:

- help Swale grow without gridlock
- improve the environment by minimising the number of car journeys
- open areas for sustainable development
- improve the lives of non-car users by improving access to retail, housing, open spaces and schools
- increase tourism to the area

By considering it now, alongside the Local Development Framework and the 2014 Rail Franchise, both of which are currently being drafted, we can put a marker down for future transport provision and funding, helping to ensure a joined-up and sustainable approach to the wider development plans for Swale.

The Swale Metro Network could be a stand-alone rail franchise, separated from the wider SouthEastern operation, or be part of that overall franchise.

Mike Whiting  
County Council member for Swale Central



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to debate and agree the following recommendations:

1. To accept in principle the development of a Swale Metro system to improve connectivity and mobility within the borough and to encourage a modal shift from road to rail and bus.
2. To request Swale Borough Council includes the principle of a Swale Metro system in its development framework and future planning documents.
3. To request the relevant officers continue their discussions with the Network Rail and others to ensure the principle of a Swale Metro system is considered in the draft of the government's 2014 rail franchise.