

**To :** Maidstone Joint Transportation Board  
**By :** Tim Read – KCC Head of Transportation  
**Date :** 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015  
**Subject :** A229 Corridor Study  
**Classification:** For Information and Discussion

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**Summary :** A proposal for a Study and implementation of potential capacity improvements to the A229 Loose Road in Maidstone

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## **1.Introduction**

1.1 A Corridor Study of the A229 in Maidstone from its junction with Upper Stone Street/Sheals Crescent to the Boughton Lane/Cripple Street junction is proposed. The opportunity has arisen to use Local Growth Fund grant to investigate capacity problems on this route, to implement any appropriate minor measures, and to identify any major improvements schemes that could be funded by developer contributions. The Study would be managed by Andrew Westwood, the KCC Network Manager.

1.2 Other work is also in progress on the A229. The Bridges Gyratory improvement is due for construction over the next two financial years, and Mott Macdonald are working on behalf of Maidstone Borough Council to assess potential improvements to Linton Crossroads and Staplehurst Crossroads.

1.3 This work will run in parallel to the discussions being held by this Board over the evolution of an overall transport strategy to support the Local Plan, and will help to guide our responses on planning applications. Its conclusions will also inform future action to improve conditions in Maidstone's Air Quality Management Area, and support the Maidstone Quality Bus Partnership (through which Arriva have also raised concern about congestion problems on this route).

## **2.Background**

2.1 This section of the A229 has been the subject of considerable concern from both Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council Members, in respect of both current planning applications and the longer term Local Plan Transport Strategy.

2.2 Concerns have also been raised through the Maidstone Quality Bus Partnership, the SMART group ( a partnership of Parish Councils and local interest groups in South Maidstone), and the emerging North Loose Neighbourhood Plan.

2.3 In principle, the Study will :-

a) Look at minor improvements that have already been identified by KCC, MBC, Arriva, SMART and other parties

b) Propose a programme of actions that could be undertaken from currently available funding

c) Propose steps to make progress on any appropriate major improvements that would be needed to deal with the long term growth expected through the emerging Local Plan

### **3. Potential Schemes**

#### **3.1 Loose Road/Upper Stone Street/Sheals Crescent**

3.1.1 The junction was subject to a revised layout during recent maintenance works, which brought the two streams of traffic turning into Sheals Crescent into separate lanes. This was observed to operate well, and would overcome the blockage of Upper Stone Street that occurs when vehicles have to give way to traffic coming down the Loose Road in two lanes.

#### **3.2 Loose Road/Armstrong Road/Park Way junction**

3.2.1 There are two potential improvements here. The first would be either the relocation of the northbound bus stop on Loose Road from the south to the north of the junction, or its complete removal. The second would be the creation of a right turn lane for traffic turning right from Loose Road into Armstrong Road. This regularly causes congestion at busy times. A separate right turn lane would allow the A229 to run with two lanes south through the junction.

3.2.2 This could be achieved in two ways, one by removing the central pedestrian island and using road marking to create the lane. The other by retaining the island, but relocating it westwards and creating the additional lane by widening Loose Road into the wide footway at this point. The second option would have the benefit of retaining a crossing for pedestrians moving to and from Park Way and South Park, but would be much more expensive.

#### **3.3 Loose Road/Sutton Road (Wheatsheaf) Junction**

3.3.1 Historic attempts to create additional capacity at the Wheatsheaf junction have looked at a major change to the layout, creating a gyratory system to separate out the turning movements. The Study will initially look at less radical means of improving capacity.

3.3.2 The first step would be the removal of some of the traffic by closing the exit from Cranbourne Avenue into the junction. This would concentrate the available capacity on the A229 and A274. Traffic movements into Cranbourne Avenue would still be allowed, as these take place at the same time as other movements rather than as a separate dedicated phase of the traffic signals.

3.3.3 The restriction would be achieved by a physical narrowing of the side road, supported by a Traffic Regulation Order to create a formal ban on movements into the junction from Cranbourne Avenue. It would have to be supported by diversion signs on the neighbouring roads, so that drivers would be made aware of alternative routes. This TRO would have to be advertised and subject to public consultation. We would have to prepare evidence on the capacity benefit that we would expect to gain at the Wheatsheaf junction, and the impact that diverted traffic on the surrounding road network. If we receive a number of objections, the issue would be reported back to JTB for consideration.

3.3.4 If the proposal goes ahead, we would monitor the effect on junction capacity and nearby alternative routes.

3.3.5 A further assessment would be needed in respect of the expected long term Local Plan growth. If sufficient capacity could not be gained by the restriction of the Cranbourne Avenue arm of the junction, we would consider the next step up in providing additional capacity. This is likely to be the consideration of a widening of the A229 approach to the junction from the south to provide two lanes northbound through the junction. This would involve land outside the current limit of highway. We would only wish to do this if there was clear evidence that we could not solve the capacity problems within highway land, and that such a scheme would fit within an agreed long term transport strategy.

### **3.4 Loose Road/Boughton Lane/Cripple Street Junction**

3.4.1 This junction has experienced considerable growth in side road traffic in recent years, as well as growth on the A229. The junction was converted to traffic signal control a few years ago in association with the development of the New Line Learning Academy on the Oldborough site.

3.4.2 Further development proposals have followed on Boughton Lane and Cripple Street. Investigations have been carried out by consultants, but the approaches to the junction are constrained and do not offer easy capacity improvements. Other forms of junction control have been considered, but would have difficulty coping with the combination of competing traffic flows and the need to allow pedestrians to cross both the main road and side roads safely. As planning applications have come in, we have therefore sought contributions to the wider transport strategy along the A229.

3.4.3 A suggestion made by the SMART group will be pursued, that being a bus layby on the northbound Loose Road just south of the junction. At this point, the bus stops within the carriageway, and has been observed to hold A229 traffic back when the signals turn green, thereby artificially reducing the main road capacity. There appears to be room within the wide footway to construct a bus layby to overcome this problem

### 3.5 **Review of Other Bus Stop Locations**

3.5.1 There are other bus stops that might benefit from relocation, or the provision of bus laybys to allow traffic to pass in both directions while a bus is pick up or dropping off passengers. Laybys may not have to be of the full standard width, just enough to retain passing width. This would help to overcome issues regarding available footway width and allow buses to rejoin the traffic stream more easily.

## 4. **Summary**

4.1 The propose Study will be carried out by Local Growth Fund grant. It will be carried out over the next six months, and produce an implementation programme of small scale improvements and identify any future major works. There are some measures that could be carried out in the short term before the main programme is finalised, and these will be reported to the Joint Transportation Board in the interim, and will be subject to consultation with local Members, residents, bus companies, and other interest parties as appropriate. The outcomes of the Study will be intended to complement the wider discussion of the Local Plan Transport Strategy.

4.2 It is suggested that the first step is to convene a meeting between the Project Manager, Andrew Westwood, and the local KCC and MBC Members. This would allow Members to discuss the scope of the Study in more detail, and to advise how/when to involve both the public and representative parties such as SMART.

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### **Contact Officers:**

KCC : Andrew Westwood , Peter Rosevear – 03000 418181