

Maidstone Joint Transportation Board



**12
January
2022**

Hart Street/Barker Road – Options Report

Decision Making Authority	Kent County Council
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Lead Head of Service	Tim Read, Head of Transportation
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Wards and County Divisions affected	Fant Ward, Maidstone
Which Member(s) requested this report?	Committee

This report makes the following recommendations:

This report details investigations and works by KCC officers over the past 12 months in relation to the traffic congestion concerns at Barker Road / The Broadway (Maidstone Gyratory). Officers are seeking a recommendation from the JTB as to how officers should proceed based on the possible recommendations detailed in section 4 of this report.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Maidstone Joint Transportation Board	12 January 2022

Hart Street/Barker Road – Options Report

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report has been requested by the Hart Street/Barker Road Working Group.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report outlines the discussions and investigative work carried out to date in relation to measures for reducing queuing and congestion on Barker Road/Hart Street, and in turn the impacts this then has on the Maidstone gyratory. The large-scale options to expand and enhance the Barker Road / The Broadway junction are currently beyond the control of KCC to deliver due to funding requirements and the need to utilise non highway land, most of which is within MBC ownership. Concerns have been raised that short term options discussed to date will not solve the issues and will likely lead to other problems which are detailed further in this report.

3. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Lockmeadow Estate consists of Barker Road, Hart Street and various residential side roads and cul-de-sacs. The site contains a mix of retail, leisure and residential use and has been gradually developed over the last 5-10 years, with MBC progressing various regeneration projects more recently in this area. As a result of this gentrification and development the amount of traffic in and out of this site has increased. Although there are alternative pedestrian/cycle routes into Lockmeadow, via the river and the railway station, all vehicle access is via the one entry/exit at Barker Road onto A20 The Broadway. During the first lockdown in 2020 the issues around traffic and congestion were exacerbated by the high number of customers wishing to reach the McDonalds Restaurant drive-thru facilities. This led to vehicles queueing back out of McDonalds, along Hart Street and backing up along Barker Road and then onto The Broadway (Maidstone gyratory). Although the queues were particularly noticeable during lockdown there was previous tailbacks noted during certain times, such as when there was a particularly popular film showing at the cinema. Various residents, customers and business owners have been in contact with KCC and MBC officers raising concerns about the congestion at the site.
- 3.2 In 2020 KCC officers submitted a bid to the local transport plan (LTP) for funds to carry out detailed traffic surveys and identify some potential 'quick win' experimental schemes which may be able to help alleviate queues and congestion in the area. To ensure that officers had the support of the local community, and to allow local input, a working group was formed in 2021 consisting of all elected KCC and MBC councillors for the area, local business owners/managers and resident representatives from the Barker Road estate. Officers from both authorities were also involved with the working group.
- 3.3 Funding is available via the Section 106 money Macdonald's contributed, much of this has been used for the expenditure on the Bridge Gyratory according to the wording of the S106 and £32,314.70 is still available which can be used towards any junction improvements. In addition to this, KCC Highway Officers have successfully bid for £15,000 Local Transport Plan funding to carry out designs and initial surveys to allow possible options to be explored. The £15,000 has been spent on the various

traffic and movement surveys already carried out at Barker Road/The Broadway for the details design and auditing of the various options and the ongoing topographical surveys, which are due to be carried out next year.

- 3.4 The aim of improving the junction is two-fold. KCC is concerned about vehicles turning left into Barker Road and queuing on The Broadway which blocks the gyratory which can cause wider issues around the town and residents and businesses need relief from severe congestion at certain times of the day/week when exiting Barker Road.
- 3.5 Several options were submitted and discussed with the working group. These included variations of an experimental one-way system and a couple of options for more significant improvements to the junction of The Broadway/Station Approach and Barker Road. Plans of proposals for Barker Road and The Broadway are shown in Appendix A.
- 3.6 **Option 1** shows a clockwise one-way system with a no right turn into Hart Street from Barker Road and the introduction of a mini roundabout at the southern end of Barker Road/Hart Street.

Pros:

- The possible introduction of new on-street parking/loading bays in Hart Street
- Removes the right turn into Hart Street from Barker Road and the risk that vehicles queuing to make the turn will cause traffic to back up onto the gyratory
- Enables the traffic signals to operate more effectively but reducing the number of gaps in the vehicle flow approaching the lights.

Cons:

- This is an experimental one-way Order and if it doesn't resolve the issues may not be a long-term solution
- Any maintenance required in Hart Street would mean making the northern end of Hart Street two-way again and the removal of the build out at the Barker Road junction
- Does not completely remove the gap in traffic on Barker Road which causes issues for the efficient operation of the traffic signals
- Would make deliveries to B&Q difficult
- Not obvious to drivers how they access McDonalds

- 3.7 **Option 2** is like option 1 but gives priority to traffic exiting Hart Street over traffic travelling along Barker Road.

Pros:

- The possible introduction of new on-street parking/loading bays in Hart Street
- Removes the right turn into Hart Street and the risk that vehicles queuing to make the turn will cause traffic to back up onto the gyratory
- Removes the gap in queuing traffic which is adversely affecting the efficiency of the traffic signal junction

Cons:

- Maintenance in Hart Street would require making the northern end of Hart Street two way again along with the removal of the build-out at the Barker Road junction
- Possible issue with loading for B&Q
- Not obvious for drivers how they get to McDonalds and other businesses in Hart Street

3.8 **Option 3** is like option 2 but makes Barker Road one-way south bound between the two Hart Street junctions requiring all traffic leaving Lockmeadow to use Hart Street.

Pros:

- Potential new on-street parking/loading bays in Barker Road and Hart Street
- Removes conflict between traffic emerging from Hart Street and that heading north on Barker Road.

Cons:

- Maintenance in Hart Street would require a closure and the removal of the one-way in Barker Road and northern Hart Street, associated buildouts, and parking
- Possible issue with loading for B&Q
- Not obvious for drivers how they get to businesses in Hart Street
- People heading to business in Hart Street could get stuck in the queue of people leaving the area increasing queue length
- Exit from McDonalds more affected by queueing traffic leaving the area

3.9 **Option 4** makes Hart Street one-way southbound over its whole length and introduces a mini roundabout outside McDonald's entrance and at the Hart Street/Barker Road southern junction.

Pros:

- Potential new on-street parking/loading bays in Hart Street
- Mini roundabout by McDonalds gives priority to traffic leaving the restaurant ensuring the site does not get congested

Cons:

- Maintenance in Hart Street would require making the northern end of Hart Street two way again and require the removal of the build-out at the Barker Road junction
- Possible issue with loading for B&Q
- Does not completely remove the gap in traffic which causes issues for the efficient operation of the traffic signals
- People heading for McDonalds could get stuck trying to turn right into Hart Street causing traffic queues to back up onto the gyratory

3.10 As outlined above, various options were explored that could be introduced within Hart Street and Barker Road without making changes on the gyratory.

All of these options could be introduced on a permanent or a temporary basis but would all involve limiting movements by the introduction of either one-way systems and/or banned turning movements. These options were shared and discussed with the working group at the meeting on 21 June 2021 and various concerns were raised, including difficulties with access for deliveries, potential concern about loss of trade and likelihood of drivers disobeying the long, alternative routes. As such, officers were asked to explore further, more bold options which are detailed below, and these options were presented and discussed at the working group meeting on 19 July 2021.

3.11 **Option 5** includes alterations to the road layout at The Broadway/Barker Road junction to give a free-flowing exit lane from Barker Road. Land would be required from MBC to facilitate this option.

Pros:

- Traffic exiting Barker Road will only be held up if there are pedestrians using the pelican crossing, significantly reducing the likelihood of queues forming

Cons:

- Reducing the traffic heading along The Broadway out of town to a single lane is likely to have a significant impact on the capacity of the road to handle the traffic demand. This is likely to result in traffic backing up around the gyratory.
- There is likely to be an increase in crashes on the approach to the junction over the Medway Bridge as drivers merge lanes

3.12 **Option 6** shows a major junction alteration which includes a two lane exit from Barker Road and two lanes entering Lockmeadow from The Broadway junction. If a two-lane exit can be achieved then it would be a major improvement, although the signal green times would not be significantly altered this would allow two lanes of traffic to exit the site simultaneously.

Pros:

- This will provide a significant increase in capacity at the junction, reducing queuing into and exiting the Lockmeadow area.
- This retains the right turn into Hart Street, maintain easy access to local businesses.
- Additional carriageway space would simplify future maintenance

Cons:

- It will be necessary to remove trees
- Land will be required from MBC
- Access for deliveries to Thai Orchid/Waterfront Café bar may be affected
- Broadway News building will need to be demolished and possibly relocated in a new position
- The cost of this scheme is likely to be more than £300K and there is no identified budget for a scheme at this stage.
- Disruption to the local area during construction.

3.13 **Option 7** is a similar junction alteration to option 6 but only provides a single exit lane from Broadway onto Barker Road and prohibits the right turn into Hart Street.

Pros:

- This will provide a significant increase in capacity at the junction, reducing queuing into and exiting the Lockmeadow area.
- Maintenance of the exit lane from Barker Road onto the gyratory will be easier due to the additional carriageway space

Cons:

- It will be necessary to remove trees
- Land will be required from MBC
- Access for deliveries to Thai Orchid/Waterfront Café bar may be affected
- Not obvious for drivers how they get to businesses in Hart Street
- Potential issues for deliveries to B&Q
- The cost of this scheme is likely to be more than £300K and there is no identified budget for a scheme at this stage.

- Disruption to the local area during construction.
- 3.14 In August 2021 KCC and MBC officers met with Network Rail and Southeastern Railway to investigate the possibility of utilising Station Approach as an alternative exit through the car park from Hart Street. The land is owned by Network Rail and Southeastern Railway, and they have advised that they understand the issues in the area and are willing to consider proposals to use their land to relieve traffic. They did advise that they would have to consider their needs for the area in terms of parking, access, and rail customer safety along with the needs of various businesses who lease areas of this land. KCC have commissioned surveys of the area to enable design work for a potential route to be progressed. Network Rail have advised that the approval process for any design is likely to take a minimum of 18 months.
- 3.15 There have been safety concerns about the junction of Tonbridge Road/Station Approach due to visibility exiting the Maidstone West station and adding additional traffic would potentially increase the risk of crashes occurring so any design would have to take this into account.
- 3.16 KCC Officers have also monitored the efficiency of the traffic lights at the junction of the A20 The Broadway and Barker Road. The current signal operation is linked to other junctions on the gyratory using the Urban Traffic Control system to maximise the flow on the strategic highway network. The exit from Barker Road receives up to 30 seconds of green time and this limit is being reached during the peak periods, which typically allows up to 15 vehicles to leave every cycle. However, increasing this opportunity further would have a detrimental impact on the wider network and is not viable.
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4 AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 4.1 Continue to monitor, carry out additional surveys and review further developments closely.
- 4.2 Introduce a One-Way system (from the options outlined above) or similar experimental scheme in Barker Road and Hart Street. £15,000 has been secured via LTP funding for this.
- 4.3 Identify funding sources to progress long term solution to widen the Hart Street/Barker Road junction and make changes on the gyratory. There are currently no funding sources available apart from the Section 106 money of £32,314.70 and this scheme would cost more than £300,000 so will require contributions from both MBC and KCC.
- 4.4 Investigate the option of introducing a route through the station car park (Station Approach). There are currently no funding sources available but if the one-way system is not taken forward, there will be £15,000 available from the LTP funding stream.

5 PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 Options 4.3 and 4.4 would be the preferred ways forward and is the long-term solution. However, 4.3 is the most difficult option to achieve due to the funding requirements (any scheme will cost more than £300K) and

requires land outside of the Highway Authority's control. KCC need the commitment of the land before bidding for funding.

6 REPORT APPENDICES

Appendix A – Options drawings
Appendix B – Traffic Survey summary

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 For information the west bank of the river from B&Q to the Power Hub is a location for change and mixed use residential led redevelopment but this will not affect the Barker Road junction issue.

<https://maidstone.gov.uk/home/primary-services/planning-and-building/additional-areas/planning-guidelines-for-opportunity-sites>