

## **Relevant Extracts of Regeneration and Economic Development Minutes**

Please note, these are included for Members background information to assist in their consideration of the traffic congestion review and its recommendations and whether anything has been overlooked.

26 July 2011

### **32. Traffic Congestion Review**

The Chairman welcomed County Councillor Malcolm Robertson, Peter Rosevear, Kent Highways Strategic Transport & Development Planner, and John Foster to the meeting, and invited Councillor Robertson to begin.

Councillor Robertson gave a presentation of information, attached in Appendix A. Councillor Robertson informed the Committee that as the oldest standing Member of Maidstone Borough Council, he recalled days in 1955 when watching the traffic was a pastime sport, and shared with the Committee a Kent County Council supplemented newspaper from 1985 entitled 'Maidstone-a way ahead' that showed an artists impression of what the proposed road networks would look like, attached at Appendix B.

He informed the Committee that the 'Rail Action Plan for Kent 2011' was a good document and advised the Committee to consider the information within as part of the review. With regards to the train network, the Committee heard that the service to Cannon Street was not in the current franchise and it was deemed not commercial enough by the Train Operating Company (TOC); therefore it was no longer available. However, a new service to Blackfriars is being sought that will eventually be part of Thameslink. It is expected to include Maidstone from 2016/18. Kent is proposing that in the new franchise some services to Blackfriars should be taken from Sevenoaks and given to Maidstone for the interim period from 2014 till Thameslink happens, so as to provide a continuous service to the City.

In answer to a question, Councillor Robertson stated that if funding was available he would redevelop the south side of the town, in particular the Upper Stone Street to Hail Road area.

The Committee heard from Mr Rosevear, who stated that the Transport Strategy used 2007 data to predict the situation in 2026, and this was how all Local Authorities Planning Authorities form their strategies.

The Committee discussed the lack of vigour towards the Leeds/Langley by-pass, as it was noted that many people were travelling to the West by going through the town. Although there was much development required, it was agreed that the Committee should have a high vision and ambition in order to achieve what the borough needs, as it was noted that the by-pass was not wanted, but needed. Mr Rosevear stated that traffic was entering the town because it wanted to be there, not because it was passing through the town. The Committee asked for evidence of this information to be provided.

With regards to the gyratory system, the Committee discussed that the Traffic Control Centre visit on 26 June 2011, highlighted the need for more cameras to allow the four exits to be permanently watched, without tree foliage obstructing the view. As development on St Peters Street had been fruitful, this had created a large affect on the traffic entering the gyratory system. The Committee agreed that two cameras on the gyratory system and two tv screens in the control centre should be

provided, and a tree surgeon should be allocated to keep the trees at a suitable height.

In answer to a question, Mr Rosevear stated that traffic lights were necessary to assist the smaller side roads that join the main road network and although on temporary occasions having no traffic lights had been effective it would not hold on a permanent basis.

Mr Foster informed the Committee that a survey looking at the perception of the town centre had identified that there was not enough parking, too much congestion and type of office facilities provided was not attractive for businesses. Whilst he appreciated that there was a problem to be solved, he cautioned the Committee that the solution needed to allow Maidstone to remain attractive.

**Resolved:** That the officers be thanked for the information and that:

- a) evidence showing the traffic going to the town, not through the town be circulated to the Committee;
- b) the Committee adopt a high vision and ambition whilst carrying out the review; and
- c) 2 cameras, 2 TV screens and a tree surgeon be funded by the Council for the use at the Traffic Control Centre to assist traffic management onto the gyratory.

## Appendix A

### Traffic Congestion in Maidstone

- Very long standing issue in Maidstone. High Street traffic watching was a 'sport' when I was a primary schoolboy! Then the Maidstone Bypass was built – which is now part of the M20.
- KCC recognised worsening problem in mid 80s and started to address it. Demonstrate KCC special newspaper describing 3 schemes.
- Two schemes built. Third never built. Since then, there have been several iterations of schemes to replace parts of the original Southern Approach solution. All now abandoned. e.g All Saints Link and upper Stone Street Lay-by widening and earlier Upper Stone Street contra-flow scheme.
- I have observed this problem closely since before I was first elected in 1981 and I do have some thoughts about what can be done.
- Congestion is an interesting phenomenon. It is a very non linear process. When grid lock is close a 5% reduction in volume can produce a massive improvement in flow. That is very important to understand.
- It is most unlikely there will be any new very large capital schemes undertaken in the next 10 years. The Leeds Langley Road will not be built for very many years. Even getting any further Park & Ride launched will be difficult.
- Traffic must be kept flowing by trying to restrict growth and by small incremental improvements both on an off highway.
- KCC/Jacobs-Babtie has carried out computer traffic modelling with the VISUM model. All growth scenarios show gridlock. It is just a question of when? – How far into the

future?

- Considerable care needs to be taken with the distribution of peripheral housing allocations so as not to worsen congestion. Maximum use must be made of existing infrastructure with unused capacity.
- For instance, I believe the currently proposed distribution in the draft Core Strategy is wrong. It will lead to early gridlock in the northwest corner of the Borough. 1000 houses in west Maidstone and 500 houses in Lenham/Harrietsham is mistaken. It should be the other way round. The road network in the Maidstone / Malling interface and around Junction 5 of the M20 is already overheated at peak times. Maidstone Hospital has difficulty with blue light access. ALTERNATIVELY: There is considerable untapped capacity in the A20 east of Hollingbourne. There is easy access to the M20 at Junction 8. There are multiple road routes into Maidstone Town Centre from the east via the M20. There is a need for more passengers on the Ashford/Victoria rail line. There is available secondary school capacity. Employment land is available. I'll pursue this no further here, but you will understand the point I am making. Housebuilding and employment development will generate additional traffic.
- There will be future growth south of the town on the A274 Sutton Road and further out on the A229 Loose Road. This growth will have to be LIMITED and artificially constrained until such time as the Leeds Langley Road can be built.
- There are a number of congestion hot-spots around the borough that will need attention. New Cut Road / Bearsted Road M20 J7 area, Fountain Lane / Tonbridge Road, A274 Sutton Road Wheatsheaf. There are several more.
- **The UTMC has been very successful. Continuous improvement should be funded here. It returns excellent value for money. There is no better way of making a further investment.**
- Good quality bus route operations, especially from the south of the town, are going to be essential. Bus priority measures need to be investigated. Is an **additional** bus lane between Mangravet and the Weatsheaf economically feasible? Should there be a bus-only lane from the Weatsheaf to Sheals Crescent? Is an additional bus lane from Huntsmans Lane to New Cut Road on the A20 Ashford Road worth building?
- Park & Ride will have to play an expanded role in the future. A Park and Ride combined express bus service from Parkwood seems the only way of achieving more capacity on that corridor. The viability of a service from Linton Cross Roads will need to be borne in mind in future years. MBC retains ownership of land at the foot of Bluebell Hill – Again a future aspiration.
- Park and ride remains a conundrum in Maidstone. There is very considerable parking capacity in the town centre and only a small minority of it is under the direct control of MBC. This is different to Canterbury for instance. It makes effective establishment and operation of Park and Ride difficult. Should MBC adopt a different policy in managing its off street parking so as to make P&R more attractive as new sites are developed? It would affect revenues!
- Air pollution reduction could be a 'driver' for raising funds for congestion reduction measures at some hot-spots in the borough. This should be considered. However, air pollution due to vehicle exhaust is rapidly reducing as the vehicle fleet is being replaced. NOx, CO, and particulates are all reducing. Very modern vehicles

essentially produce just CO2 and water vapour.

- The educational School Choice policy has led to a situation where all of the desirable and preferred Secondary schools are in west Maidstone. It is leading to very unsustainable travel patterns during school term. It is a considerable contributor to traffic congestion in **all** parts of the town. Fundamental ways of addressing this need to be found. – Partnership with KCC?!!
- If every car driver substituted walking for just one car journey every week it would make a worthwhile contribution to reduced congestion on the roads!
- FINALLY – and this could be one of the most important contributors to reduced congestion. We need to be much more aggressive in our attitude to government in getting high speed Internet connections available throughout the borough. Parts of even the inner borough are very poorly served. Maidstone is not on BT's priority list for getting **Infinity** FTTB. Other Kent towns are going to get it before us. This must be changed. More people working from a home office more days of the week could dramatically cut car journeys.

23 August 2011

#### **44. Traffic Congestion**

The Chairman welcomed John Taylor, Director of the Invicta Chamber of Commerce, Rob Jarman, Head of Development Management, John Newington, Senior Pollution Officer and Christopher Finch, Member of the public to the Committee.

Mr Finch introduced himself and stated that he was a chartered surveyor by profession, and had studied pedestrianisation at university as part of his dissertation. He explained his views that were outlined in Appendix A of the report in the agenda, highlighting that Maidstone was populated with traffic lights especially around the town centre's gyratory system which did not allow vehicles to proceed in a smooth manner. Mr Finch circulated a map of the Town Centre, attached at Appendix A and suggested to the Committee that the bus stop on Tonbridge Road near Maidstone West train station should enter Station Approach, and stop outside the train station so to allow the Tonbridge Road traffic to utilise the two lanes more freely. He also suggested that due to the Whitehouse car showroom no longer trading and was up for sale, a roundabout could be placed there to allow access in and out of Barker Road and onto the Tonbridge Road/London Road, rather than use the gyratory unnecessarily, possibly as part of a wider regeneration scheme. This would make easier access for the new residences, Lockmeadow and the station, especially with the new high speed rail service being introduced. Mr Finch highlighted that London Boroughs were able to fine cars that were idle in yellow box junctions, however the Committee had learnt in its day visit to Chelmsford Borough Council that this was not possible for any Local Authority outside London. He also considered reducing the number of traffic lights/junctions at various points through the town 'ring road', and possible re-alignment or other roads as part of possible future regeneration schemes.

Mr Taylor informed the Committee that from the Chamber of Commerce's point of view, an infrastructure was needed before growth could take place. He also stressed that 'the rule of unintended consequences' happens and Maidstone had examples of that. Mr Taylor highlighted that other towns within the county were scheduled for schemes from Kent County Council (KCC) however, Maidstone was not one of them and therefore felt that the County Town was losing out on offers of funds.

Mr Jarman stated that on planning applications, KCC Highways department were consulted giving advice on highway safety, not comments regarding volumes of traffic. If an application was refused, and potentially appealed against, the Council had to objectively find harm in the plans. Consultation with the Air Pollution team was also sought for major applications.

The Committee were informed that the Planning Policy Guidance 3: Housing, was introduced in 2003 which used the 'stick and carrot' methodology for predicting traffic growth in residential areas, and that the draft Integrated Transport Strategy was due out for public consultation in September which had been written in partnership with the Highways Agency and KCC Highways. The Chairman highlighted that these agencies had declined to assist the Committee with its review.

Mr Jarman informed the Committee that by utilising the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), developers could pay for infrastructure and reminded the Committee that a number of things were asked for with regards to planning funds, namely 40% affordable housing, schools, doctor surgeries, CCTV and Parks. Mr Jarman highlighted that it was key to get KCC highways buying into a development brief, and to get the scheme into their priority list from the start.

Mr Newington stated that there was a statutory duty to monitor air quality, and when pollution was found over EU levels the Council was required to declare an 'Air Quality Management Area' and produce an air quality action plan detailing ways in which it would reduce the pollution level, which was 70-90% traffic related. Maidstone had 6 areas that exceeded annual usage, and therefore a plan had been produced using internal and external partners to form a steering group. The relationship with those external bodies was very important, as the Council did not have the control over delivering some of the actions. The action plan was produced in 2010 and sought to reduce the number of vehicle trips generated, promote cycling, walking, public transport and a range of measures such as Park and Ride, bus lanes, variable speed limits, freight studies etc were being investigated, as well as a Travel Plan, which enabled the borough council to have a larger role by engaging with businesses, including the Federation of Small Businesses and the Chamber of Commerce to bring down the number of trips into the town centre, and identified savings for businesses.

The Committee discussed the idea of a strategic route to allow traffic to cross the town without going through it. It was suggested that businesses may be content to pay £1 for a quick easy access to the motorway. However, it was also suggested that the strategic route would need to be supported with regulations to ensure that it was the only way for freight to travel.

The Committee noted that where there were vacant premises, the Council could consider purchasing the land to be used for future road developments. Mr Finch suggested that Tax Increment Financing (TIF) which was currently focussed on the Business Rates of commercial properties but understood central Government may consider widening this to include Council Tax. However, he stressed that for transparency purposes, an audit trail would be needed to reassure the public that funds obtained through this method were spent for the correct purpose, in this case for road developments. Mr Taylor confirmed that the only way to allow the traffic to be directed away from the town centre would be by using a strategic route and it was therefore a key ingredient in building the infrastructure that Maidstone needed.

**Resolved:** That the officers, Mr Finch and Mr Taylor be thanked for the information.

Appendix A

### **Maidstone Congestion Difficulties (A Practical Regeneration Led Solution?)**

Note -This is mainly a 'blue sky' exercise and has not been designed or trialled in any way.

#### **Forward**

Maidstone, similar to many towns and cities throughout UK and the world experiences traffic congestion, usually at peak times although bottlenecks may occur at any time.

Maidstone has a number of arterial roads that meet at a central point in the town centre. These roads are A26, A20 and A229. It has two dual carriageways (part of the A229 and part of A249/A20) and three junctions to the M20 motorway (J5, 6 & 7).

Near to Junction 5 and Junction 7 are Park & Ride facilities located at the A20 and A249 respectively, a further park & Ride is located further away from the town and is not viewed as a facility supporting motorway commuters.

The town has two rail stations Maidstone East & West. Maidstone east is adjacent to the town centre and Maidstone West lies to the west of town beyond the river Medway. There is a further 'halt' Maidstone Barracks which acts as a transfer point for passengers wishing to change rail-line services.

The town is served by a number of independent bus operators.

### **Symptoms of Congestion.**

Clearly the main cause of congestion at either end of the working day is commuter traffic -both work and school run related.

A second cause of congestion is the town's proximity to the M20 and should the M20 motorway become closed between Junction 4 and 8 in either direction, the traffic is mainly routed through the town centre.

Thirdly and allied to the above paragraph, is Operation Stack. This congestion related occurrence is more prevalent during times of bad weather in the Channel or industrial action at the coastal ports.

### **Causes of Congestion**

As previously mentioned the town centre acts as a focus point for three main routes that meet at the River Medway forming a gyratory (#1). The transport network at this point comprises 5 roads, all of which feed onto a bridge gyratory system. Of these 5 feed routes, 4 are controlled by traffic lights monitored and controlled by Kent Highways Services and of these 4, one route is exclusive for buses and taxis. Additionally one set of lights doubles as a 'pelican crossing'. Only one area of the gyratory is designated as a 'Yellow Box' junction.

To the west of the bridge gyratory is another gyratory (#2) at Tonbridge Road (A26) and London Road (A20), to the South-east of the bridge gyratory is a further gyratory (#3) bounded by Palace Avenue (A229/A20 -southbound), Knightrider Street ('A249/A20') and College Avenue (A229 -northbound).

On the east side of town is one further gyratory system (#4) bounded by Sittingbourne Road/Wat Tyler Way (A249) and Ashford Road (A20).

Each of these gyratory routes become heavily congested at the morning and afternoon 'rush-hours' and at times traffic can 'back up' on all the main routes into town by 1 mile, increasing journey times by 20 minutes or more. Of specific note, gyratory #2 and #3 remain extremely congested during most of the day.

Other factors which are peripheral to congestion but may be considered to potentially impact greatly upon local pinch points in the town centre include:

#### **Barker Road junction.**

This road is the only way in and out for the residents of Hart Street, the commercial trade estate and users of the Lockmeadow entertainment complex. The junction is controlled by traffic lights and at peak times these lights contribute to traffic flow issues at gyratory #1.

#### **St Peter's Street junction.**

The junction of St Peter's Street and the bridge gyratory is not controlled by traffic lights. St Peter's Street has become increasingly populated by commercial and residential interests, and recently a new hotel and furniture store has been built.

### **Romney Place junction.**

This can sometimes cause tailbacks into Lower Stone Street and round to Palace Avenue.

### **Mote Road junction.**

This junction provides right turn access to Mote Road from Watt Tyler Way and also right turn access from Mote Road to Watt Tyler Way.

### **Diagnosis of Congestion**

It is certainly clear that traffic volume peaks during the morning and evening rush-hour periods caused by people driving to work or as part of the school-run, or a combination of both. Many of the town's roads arterial roads are narrow by modern design standards, these restrictions being due, in the main, to the sides of the road being bounded by residential or commercial property on one or both sides.

The town 'ring road' (effectively J6 M20 via the A229 to J7 M20 via A249) is interrupted by gyratories # 1,3 and 4 and also traffic lights at the junction of Mote Road.

There are a number of traffic control points beyond the gyratory systems which contribute to congestion.

### **Solutions to the Problem?**

The following are suggestions for what MAY be solutions to some of the issues surrounding congestion in the town's environs, but are no means definitive.

Firstly and as a general point, it has been noticeable that congestion in the town has diminished in recent months and appears, in part to be directly proportional to the rising cost of fuel. Humans are creature of habit and it will remain to be seen whether they adapt to the environment of higher fuel costs as part of their general expenses, or that it brings forth a more permanent change in vehicle use behaviour. It could therefore be argued that some form of road-pricing may reduce vehicle transport movements further, however this is outside the scope of this paper.

In 1999 I prepared a dissertation for my BSc Honours degree which studied the effect of pedestrianisation on town centre rents, the result of this work drew a number of views from retailers and agents of which accessible and plentiful town centre parking, and an efficient road network were seen as key elements in enhancing a town centre's viability. It is certainly the case that the town's road network is not efficient and it is also questionable whether the bulk of town centre parking is accessible, the exception being Fremlin Walk, however this car park can create traffic problems onto the main road at times of peak usage, so could of itself be viewed as interfering with the efficiency of the road network.

The main routes of the town appear littered with traffic lights, at nearly every junction on the through arterial roads there is a set of traffic lights either purely for traffic management or with an element of pedestrian control. Many of the junctions may potentially be considered suitable for re-alignment, redirection or closure, with a view to reducing the interruptions to traffic flow whilst still maintaining the integrity of the road network.

Widening this to identify certain specific areas where realignment may improve efficiency of vehicle flow without detriment to the pedestrian.



**Barker Road.**

There is redevelopment potential of the immediate area bounded by Barker Road and part of Hart Street and to include the former Whitehouse car showroom. The development of residential flats at Hart Street has increased traffic flow at this location and the recent introduction of a fast service to London from Maidstone West will increase the demand for commuter parking in this area. Realignment of London Road and Barker Road to introduce a roundabout would remove the need for traffic lights at this junction, it would also negate the need for any vehicle to traverse the bridge gyratory in order to reach Lockmeadow, improve access to Maidstone West and increase the ease with which vehicles travelling from the A20 may reach the A26. Further realignment would enable the bus stop at the beginning of Tonbridge Road to be relocated to the station area, thus reducing obstruction on the traffic route of Tonbridge Road. (Benefits –improvement to the Barker Road/Maidstone West junction/access should reduce congestion in all directions).

**Earl Street & Medway Street.**

The traffic control at Medway Street could be removed and access to and from the A229 could be closed off, with traffic re-routed via Earl Street. Medway Street is little more than a service road to access retail delivery areas and a car park. Closing Medway Street would have no effect upon the operation of existing businesses or service provision. (Benefit –reduces number of interruptions/delays on A229).

**Lower Stone Street & Romney Place.**

Close off the left turn into Romney Place except for buses and private hire. Close off to private cars access to Lower Stone Street from Romney Place. (benefit –reduces tailbacks onto Lower Stone Street and Palace Avenue).

**Mote Road & Watt Tyler Way.**

Close off the right turn capability on Watt Tyler Way and Mote Road. Construct a new roundabout at the junction of Watt Tyler Way and Romney Place. (benefit –freer flowing traffic northbound on A229).

**Gyratory #4.**

Re-route traffic flow at these junctions. Close off access from Watt Tyler Way to Sittingbourne Road and create new roundabout. Redirect traffic to new roundabout at Square Hill Road linking to Andrew Broughton Way. (benefit –likely to reduce bottleneck congestion/virtual gridlock, also links 'island site' to the main town area).

I did sketch some of these out some time ago as part of a presentation to the Regeneration Group which never occurred. I have since got rid of them, but can re-draw if necessary and if considered they will aid the descriptions given above.

Christopher S Finch MRICS

6<sup>th</sup> July 2011

27 September 2011

## **57. Traffic Congestion**

The Chairman welcomed Robert Patterson, Business Development Manager of Arriva, Norman Kemp, Co-owner (Director & Company Secretary) of Nu-Venture Coaches Ltd, Dan Johns, Duty Manager of Streamline Taxis who was a substitute for Stewart Smith, Dan Pigot, Corporate Sales Manager and Alistair Rhead, Manager for Electric Vehicles for the UK and Ireland both of Mitsubishi to the meeting.

Mr Pigot and Mr Rhead gave a presentation on the Mitsubishi i-MiEV, attached at Appendix A, which the Committee were interested in as it was a zero-emission vehicle and would contribute to reducing traffic pollution.

In answer to a question, Mr Rhead explained that the figure illustrating 114g/km was from the 2007 petrol model of the i-MiEV, not the electric version. As a normal three pin socket was required for charging the vehicle, their studies found that people adapted quickly to the habit of charging their car primarily every night, and then as they grew accustomed to their driving styles and fuel usage, every two or three nights. They were aware that the future may require them to change to the European Union standard plug, but did not foresee that being for another 10 years or so. Mr Pigot stated that the maximum range was 93miles (150km), and insurance band 29 out of 50.

The Committee enquired about the safety for pedestrians, as the vehicle was renowned for being quiet and asked if any accidents had been recorded. Mr Rhead confirmed that there were currently no legal restrictions concerning the volume of noise required from vehicles, although in time that may change and to date no accidents concerning pedestrians had been recorded.

The Committee asked if Mitsubishi had been working with various breakdown recovery agencies to equip them both with knowledge and tools should an electric car break down. Mr Rhead confirmed that as part of their sales package, the client received free Pan European Breakdown Assistance cover, and had been working with the Fire and Rescue services to get them trained. They appreciated that some clients may wish to remain with their breakdown assistance providers, and therefore were working with various agencies to ensure that they could deal with said incidents.

It was noted that many residents do not have a garage or driveway to park the car and therefore ran the risk of a cable crossing a public pathway for charging the car. With this in mind, the Committee asked about the security factors as it was promoted to charge the car over night, when vandalism and theft could be invited. Mr Rhead reassured the Committee that security had been addressed, as a lock-in pin had been placed on the socket of the car, enabling the client to add a padlock if desired.

The Committee asked about the UK charging points, and whether Councils had adopted a metered approach. Mr Pigot informed the Committee that there were several Councils which had adopted the ability to share the costs of charging between the local and county authorities, enabling free parking and charging in those areas. However, where this had not been the case, other authorities had

chosen to provide metered charging points using card payments, not cash, allowing them to monitor the frequency of regular car chargers.

The Chairman noted the offer of 3 years servicing for £300, and questioned if this could be cheaper, as there were various parts of a petrol engine that were not in the electric engine, such as a cambelt. Mr Rhead confirmed that this was the cheapest service they could provide, and stated that the battery life was about 10 years which would cost 1/3 of the price of the car to replace.

The Chairman thanked the gentlemen for their presentation, and invited Mr Johns, Patterson and Kemp to introduce themselves.

Mr Patterson explained to the Committee the bus company Arriva tried to ensure that their customers receive a reliable service, and in answer to a question stated that although it may seem that recent cuts were a discouragement to passengers, some were necessary due to the financial changes that the government was imposing, such as the decreased reimbursement of Tax Fuel in April 2012.

Mr Kemp stressed that in previous years, a Transport User Group run by Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) had enabled a forum for passengers, employees and agencies including all road and rail companies to discuss potential changes, however, this had lapsed in recent times. The Committee agreed that this was vital for keeping people informed of what changes were happening within the borough, and it was suggested that although they work closely with Kent County Council (KCC), a weekly planning list from Maidstone Borough Council would assist them with any major developments that could potentially cause road delays. It was noted that there was a Maidstone Joint Transportation Board which was run by KCC and MBC collectively, with some parish and borough councils contributing. However, this was not a public forum discussion board unlike the previous Transport User Group, which the Committee requested be reinstated.

Mr Johns informed the Committee that their main problem was the unpredictability of the gyratory system. With their 'Home to School' journeys between 7-9am and 2.30-5pm being their busiest periods, Streamline had noticed it was the same hotspots that ceased to move when under pressure. The hotspots were the White Rabbit roundabout, Palace Avenue, Lower and Upper Stone Street. It was suggested that traffic lights at the White Rabbit roundabout would aid the congestion. The Committee noted this, and suggested that stronger parking enforcement should be placed in the streets mentioned and popular school sites to discourage people temporarily parking on the highway.

A member of the public, Mr Gall asked to direct a question to Mr Patterson, and the Chairman invited him to join the table. Mr Gall stated that he had written to Mr Patterson, and suggested that a circular route be devised to join up the various supermarkets, as he would like to shop using the bus, but as there were no services that went in that direction he had to resolve to using the car. Mr Patterson stated that this had not been commercially viable for Arriva. Mr Johns confirmed that Streamline had once advertised a supermarket run, however out of 400 distributed leaflets, only 1 person had responded. Mr Kemp encouraged Mr Gall to approach all bus companies within the borough, as it may be that what was not viable for one company, may be for another.

In answer to a question Mr Patterson and Mr Kemp confirmed that KCC are working on improving the 'real time' digital updates that are provided in the bus stops, as it was currently in its infancy and it was foreseen that delays would be displayed on this in the future. In the meantime, should delays mean that buses are late, and other services can assist, it was suggested that the bus drivers and posters could assist passengers with detailing the route to inform passengers of other alternative bus routes.

It was noted that these digital displays were not in the bus station on King Street, however Mr Kemp highlighted that this was a temporary one that had over the years, become a permanent fixture. He informed the Committee that a suggestion had been put forward for a new bus station to be situated alongside Maidstone East Train Station, however nothing had materialised. The Committee agreed this would be the best venue for a new bus station as it would incorporate the three main public transports being trains, buses and taxis and would attract people to use these methods of transport. The Committee agreed that this should be brought to the Cabinet Member's attention in his next meeting.

The Committee also highlighted that Arriva, Nu-Venture and Streamline could make representation on the Core Strategy, Transport Strategy and Area Action Plan. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer would circulate further information on how to do this as part of the consultation currently underway.

The Committee noted that the bus stop on Earl Street would often accommodate buses parked there for longer than normal, and enquired if this was necessary. Mr Kemp explained that the only toilet facilities that were close to the bus stops for bus drivers to use were those in Fremlins Walk. The Committee acknowledged this, and suggested that hazard lights were used to indicate that the bus was parked there.

The Committee enquired with Mr Pigot and Rhead if there were any electric commercial vehicles that Mitsubishi was focussing on. Mr Rhead stated that at present there were none on the market, though it may be possible for small vans to be devised should the demand present itself. Mr Kemp informed the Committee that Rochester were developing Hybrid Buses, and would pass on the contact details to the Overview and Scrutiny Officer if this was of interest for the review. The Chairman thanked both gentlemen, and welcomed the contact details from Mr Kemp.

**Resolved:** That Mr Pigot, Rhead, Johns, Patterson and Kemp be thanked for the information and that:

- a) The Traffic Congestion review recommends that the Transport User Group be reinstated;
- b) The MBC parking team provide stronger parking enforcement in Palace Avenue, Lower and Upper Stone Street and around schools during peak times;
- c) Arriva and Nu-Venture bus drivers and posters should assist passengers with detailing the route to inform passengers of other alternative bus routes;
- d) The Committee supports the 'real time' digital updates currently provided in the bus stops show delays in the future;
- e) The Cabinet Member be informed of the previous proposal of a new bus station adjacent to Maidstone East Train Station in his next meeting;

- f) The Overview and Scrutiny Officer circulates further information to Arriva, Nu-Venture and Streamline on how to make representation on the Core Strategy, Transport Strategy and the Area Action Plan as part of the consultation currently underway;
- g) Both Arriva and Nu-Venture encourage their drivers that hazard lights be used to indicate to other road users that the buses have stopped on Earl Street to use the nearest toilet facilities; and
- h) Mr Kemp be asked to pass the contact details to the Overview and Scrutiny Officer with regards to the Hybrid buses at Rochester.

## **Appendix A**

### **KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SUPPORTED BUS SERVICES SERVICE REDUCTIONS FROM JANUARY 2012**

On the 7 July Kent County Council advised the Districts and Parish Councils that it has decided to withdraw a number of bus service contracts with effect from the 1 January 2012. It is understood that public notices have also been issued for immediate display on the operator's buses. In the Maidstone area the contracts concerned are;-

SERVICE	Annual Cost	Average no. of passengers a day	Subsidy per passenger	Comments
332 Stockbury – Sittingbourne Schooldays.	£20,694.52	23	£6.42	<i>Primarily catering for school children it is expected this will be replaced by a school contract</i>
12RL Tenterden – Headcorn Mondays to Fridays.	£54,431.00	76	£2.86	<i>A rail commuter operation in the peak period – may have station parking implications</i>
79 Penenden Heath – Maidstone Saturday morning.	£2,388.00	3	£9.70	<i>The first three journeys on a Saturday morning between 0742 and 0842. One of them is partially covered by another service</i>
Rural services on Saturdays;- 13 Hollingbourne, Leeds and Otham. 59 Grafty Green, Ulcombe, Kingswood, Chart Sutton and Boughton Monchelsea 28/29 Marden and Chainhurst.	£31,460.00	115	£5.02	<i>This is all of the Saturday journeys on these routes – Monday to Friday no change – leaves nine rural communities without a Saturday service (Note Marden has an alternative service on route 26. This also serves the Yalding and Farleigh areas and is not affected))</i>
155 Chatham – Maidstone via Aylesford and Ringlestone. Monday to Saturday evening service after 1930 hours	£37,904.52	37	£3.25	<i>The 101 service passes nearby Ringlestone stopping at the Petrol Station/Footbridge, but may be difficult for some to access</i>

This follows a decision in the KCC Medium Term Plan to reduce the available budget for bus service support from the 1 April 2011 although efficiencies had enabled this to be postponed until the 31 December 2011. Local (County) Members were asked by KCC whether they wished to contribute funding from their discretionary Member Highway Fund, of which only one had responded.

KCC invite comments by the 2 September, or to hear from anyone representing an organisation which would be in a position to provide replacement transport. It indicates that this is now an opportunity for 'Big Society' to step in and demonstrate the true value of these services to the local community.

### KENT COUNTY COUNCIL CRITERIA

The majority of bus services are provided commercially by the operators. Where this is not the case a Council may financially support others to meet 'social needs'. Although KCC has a duty to assess the network, there is no statutory criterion to be followed in assessing whether to provide financial support to specific services (to augment the commercial network), or not. To achieve a consistent approach KCC work to the following Member approved criteria;-

*Support will be considered for a bus service that is not commercially viable if it meets one or more of the following equally weighted criteria*

- Access to work
- Access to learning
- Access to healthcare
- Access to food shops

*The maximum subsidy for an individual service will be no more than £3 per passenger journey, with Members considering whether to support services above this level in certain circumstances.*

*To assist in the consideration of these priorities, services are ranked for support in the following order of priority:*

- Monday to Friday daytime services meeting more than one criterion
- Monday to Friday daytime services meeting one criterion
- Saturday daytime services
- Evening and Sunday services

### OTHER IMPLICATIONS etc.

The implications of the announcement were considered at a meeting of the 'East of Maidstone bus service group' of Parish Council's on the 11 July. There was concern that the Saturday services had not previously been under any threat but that this had only happened due to a recent doubling of the cost of the contract (following the operator – Nu Venture – handing the contract back). The group intend to meet with the County Council etc. to discuss some possible options for providing and/or funding a service/s after 1 January 2012.

KCC have indicated that any future withdrawal by operators of commercial services, or cases of contracts being 'handed back' and costs rising may result in other services having to be withdrawn to fund these, or alternatively such services may simply not be replaced.

Clive Cheeseman

Transport Policy Officer

12 July 2011

25 October 2011

## 76 Traffic Congestion Review

The Chairman welcomed Steve Goulette, Assistant Director of Environment and Regulatory Services, Flo Churchill, Interim Head of the Core Strategy and Jonathan Morris, Principal Transport Planning Officer to the meeting. Mrs Churchill informed the Committee that the public consultation on the Core Strategy closed on 14 October 2011, and had received between 3500 and 4000 comments. She explained that the restructures in Kent County Council (KCC) had reduced their provision of transport officer support, reducing them to cover a minimum of two districts. This had meant that Peter Rosevear, Principal Transport Officer was no longer assigned to Maidstone, and that Paul Lulham was the new KCC Transport Officer. Members expressed their concern regarding the decrease in resources at such a critical point in the Core Strategy process as Mr Lulham anticipated being able to work for Maidstone only one day a week. In response to Members concerns regarding continuity, Mrs Churchill noted that Mr Rosevear had agreed to provide any required as much background information as his work enabled him to.

A Member noted the close working relationship between Chelmsford City Council and Essex County Council with regards to Highways and considered that the relationship between Maidstone Borough Council and Kent County Council was disappointing in contrast. Mr Goulette agreed that there was a requirement for closer working between the two. He also highlighted that a permanent position had been agreed for a Strategic Planning Officer in Maidstone's Spatial Planning Team and that this was due to be filled by December 2011 as Mr Morris had undertaken work for Maidstone on a temporary basis only. However, Members noted that this would not be funded by KCC.

Members considered the potential opportunities afforded by Community Infrastructure Levies (CILs) as a possible source of funding for transport solutions. Mrs Churchill stated that it could be used to cover funding gaps, but could not be used to fund existing road schemes.

In response to a question Mr Morris informed the Committee that the Integrated Parking Strategy (IPS) was a holistic document, covering town centre parking, Park & Ride, parking standards and on street parking. He confirmed that it reviewed the supply of parking and its impact on congestion, and that additional parking areas allowing access to the town centre had been considered. The Committee noted that a cost benefit analysis of the IPS would be implemented. It was agreed that the draft IPS would be presented to the Scrutiny Task and Finish Panel prior to its consideration by Cabinet. Mr Goulette emphasised that the parking strategy was just one element of the Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS) in reducing the impact of growth on congestion. Members noted that documentation including strategies related to promoting cycling, walking and public transport supported the ITS.

The Committee thanked the witnesses for an informative presentation.

**Resolved:** That the Integrated Parking Strategy be presented to the Task and Finish Panel and to make recommendation to Cabinet as appropriate.

## **77. Traffic Congestion: Summary To-Date**

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer outlined the brief outcome for each of the objectives of the review and asked Members to highlight any areas that they felt had been overlooked or required further investigation. Members noted that the Kent Permit Scheme information was a short guide and were informed that the full version of how the scheme works was available on KCC's website. A number of Members noted incidences of advertised emergency road works, which had seemingly been left without any works being undertaken for a number of days. Members requested information on what was classified as an emergency and how this was monitored. Furthermore, Members agreed to provide details of case examples to inform its review.

The Committee felt that its review was timely to enable its informed consideration and scrutiny of the Integrated Parking Strategy (IPS) and Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS) prior to a decision being made on them. However, Members felt that there was still some outstanding work to be conducted to complete the review and noted that the final report could use the data collated to inform the ITS. The Chairman suggested that an interim report was required to ensure its findings thus far fed into the IPS and ITS. The Committee agreed that its final report could be concluded following the completion of the ITS and IPS and further investigative work undertaken by the Committee as required. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer agreed to email the Committee with the review recommendations made to date and additional suggested recommendations for Members' comment prior to its next meeting to ensure that all the Committee's findings were sufficiently stated within the interim report.

Members noted that the summaries of the Committee's field trips would serve as supporting evidence to its findings and the Chairman requested that Councillors Ross and Beerling provide the Overview and Scrutiny Officer a summary of the visit to Maidstone Traffic Control Centre for the purpose of the interim report.

Due to the importance and ongoing nature of traffic congestion the Committee suggested appointing a Member to monitor the implementation and outcomes of the review's findings once published.

The Committee requested that the recommendation in minute number 32 '2 Cameras, 2 TV screens and a tree surgeon be funded by the Council for the use at the Traffic Control Centre to assist traffic management onto the gyratory' be amended to recommend 'that one camera point towards St Peters Street, and one camera towards Tonbridge Road during peak traffic flows at the Traffic Control Centre to assist traffic management onto the gyratory'



22 November 2011

## **90. Traffic Congestion Review**

The Chairman welcomed Kent County Council's Sustainable Transport Team Leader, Graham Tanner, to the meeting to discuss sustainable options as part of the Committee's in-depth review of traffic congestion. Mr Tanner gave a presentation, attached at Appendix A, on his role at KCC (Kent County Council) and the work he was undertaking. This highlighted the following:

- Given the Government's current financial economic situation it was unlikely that many new road infrastructure schemes to combat congestion would be financed in the short term and that more effort should therefore be placed in shifting attitudes to choose sustainable transport options;
- The importance of credible leadership, including in the public sector, with regard to encouraging their own workforces to choose sustainable options;
- The importance of partnership working with businesses in achieving behavioural shifts;
- Travel plans were historically considered as 'red tape'. Therefore, there was a need to work with developers to change their understanding of the role they played in enabling more sustainable development to come forward. Also, to ensure that they became more than a 'paper exercise'. Guidance on securing Travel Plans would be improved to ensure the requirement for a Travel Plan was based on a more qualitative assessment of need rather than arbitrary thresholds;
- All but one school in Maidstone had produced travel plans compared to a 95% take up across the whole county. However, KCC's school engagement staffing had reduced from 5.5 to 1 full time equivalent and this was likely to reduce the momentum of the application of the existing plans; and
- There was a lot of scope in Maidstone Borough Council's involvement in the 'New Ways 2 Work' partnership - this was a voluntary partnership program to incentivise businesses in collaboration with service providers to get employees to review their travel options and was anticipated to be a county wide 'umbrella' initiative with scope for local interpretation and implementation

In response to a question, Mr Tanner confirmed that KCC requested travel plans as a Condition or as part of a development's Section 106 (S106) when they felt it was needed. Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) was responsible, as the planning authority, for securing and enforcing such Conditions and S106s. KCC collaborated with districts to identify and prioritise S106 travel plans and gave assistance in achieving their fruition as appropriate. He noted that travel plans were resource intensive and enforcing them as part of a Condition or S106 was often difficult. For this reason a more voluntary and collaborative approach to Travel Plans, backed by the planning system as appropriate, was viewed as a better way forward.

A Member felt that Maidstone's topography did not encourage people to cycle, highlighting that places with successful cycle routes often commanded flat landscapes. Mr Tanner acknowledged this, but highlighted that east to west

movement in the borough was generally a relatively flat and easy cycle route and noted that it was well used. However, he emphasised that Maidstone's challenge to build cycle routes was different to that of places like Ashford, with a lot of new developments, as it had to retrofit these into the borough with already limited road and pedestrian space. He advised that this placed a greater importance on engaging with businesses to achieve commuter behavioural shifts towards sustainable options. Mr Tanner also highlighted that rising fuel costs was actually resulting in more people considering sustainable transport methods because it was becoming more economic than single car occupancy.

In response to a question Mr Tanner informed the Committee that School Travel Plans would ideally be monitored annually. However, KCC's relationship with some schools was changing with the emergence of Academies and therefore they had less influence than before to enforce the monitoring of school travel plans. He explained that KCC were working to encourage schools to keep plans up to date by making them available on the KCC website for prospective parents of new pupils. He also noted that the Department for Education had removed the mandatory questions, regarding how pupils had commuted to and from school, from the Annual School Census and therefore this had made it more difficult to quantifiably measure and monitor.

A Member of the Committee queried the role of KCC in securing school bus service contracts and their timetables. She noted that both of her school children narrowly missed a bus at school end and that this, in addition to lengthy journey times, understandably resulted in many other parents electing to use cars to collect their children from school. She also highlighted that a bus route through Bally Park routinely drove past school children at the bus stop as it was already a full single decked bus. Mr Tanner explained that bus contracts were procured as part of a tender process with a variety of criteria including the most cost effective methods of transporting children to schools, and that contracts generally lasted three years. He noted that KCC were seeking to make some savings on supported bus routes in the Borough where the level of per passenger subsidy was unsustainably high, but that approximately £7 million per annum was invested by KCC to subsidise socially necessary bus services across the county. Mr Tanner informed the Committee that school travel plans identified issues with timetables and that routine dialogue took place between KCC and the bus operators concerning any capacity issues at peak school times, noting it was in the operators' best interests. He also advised Members that additional buses were provided where ongoing problems were identified but that often there were difficulties at the start of the school year while travel patterns of pupils 'bedded in'.

In response to a question, Mr Tanner informed the Committee that he did not know why the Transport User Group had been disbanded but that he felt that any collaborative group discussions on transport issues could only be a good thing.

Mr Tanner informed the Committee that approximately 3500 people had signed up to use the Kentjourneyshare.com Car Share scheme. The Committee requested that data for car shares within and to Maidstone be provided.

The Committee thanked Mr Tanner for an informative presentation and in closing asked what one thing he felt was most important to be undertaken in Maidstone.

Mr Tanner advised that MBC and KCC should lead by example and consider their own businesses first and foremost, highlighting opportunities for incentivising public transport, walking, cycling and managing car parking availability.

**Resolved:** That

- a) The information provided by Mr Tanner inform its review; and
- b) Data regarding the number of Kent Journey Car Share Scheme relating to trips within and to Maidstone be circulated to the Committee to inform its review.

**Maidstone Borough Council  
Regeneration and Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee**

**Traffic Congestion Review**

**22 November 2011**

**Graham Tanner - BA Hons, MSc**

Sustainable Transport Team Leader, KCC Highways and Transportation

**My role...**

- Facilitating, empowering and championing sustainable travel choices by individuals and communities across Kent
- Developing and supporting projects and initiatives that contribute to Cutting carbon and Supporting economic growth – twin emphasis of the Government’s Local Sustainable Transport Fund
- Not mutually exclusive objectives
- Working with politicians, businesses and local communities to develop an understanding that together ‘we’ are all part of the problem but also part of the solution

**Sustainable Travel Choices and Congestion...**

- There is always more that we could and should be doing to expedite the flow of existing traffic; however we cannot simply build our way out of trouble.

*Four million more cars will be on the roads in the next 25 years, according to a recent report by the RAC Foundation.*

- Need to address attitudes and behaviour too.....very complex area because it involves dealing with people not ‘traffic’ and people can’t always be relied upon to make rational and objective decisions
- Small shifts in behaviour can have a big impact collectively
- People will generally follow a credible lead – there is more that the public sector could and should be doing to provide this

**Emphasis on partnership...**

- KCC cannot effectively cover the whole county from County Hall
- Therefore we are very dependant on building partnerships at the local level i.e. District Councils, NHS, local employers, schools etc
- We need to look beyond 'congestion' in respect of sustainable travel choices and recognise it as a 'golden thread' through policies on local economic development, health and physical activity, air quality etc
- Maidstone is a good example where all the key building blocks are in place e.g. Town Centre Management, Borough Council, KCC, Hospital, police, schools and local employers

### **Sustainable Travel Toolkit...**

- Public transport
- Zipcar
- Kentjourneyshare.com
- Skeletal cycle network
- School Travel Plans
- Workplace Travel Plans

### **Workplace Travel Plans...**

- Travel Plans routinely secured through the planning process as part of Planning Condition or S106
- Circa. 38 planning related Travel Plans (list available)
- 8 organisations engaged (to varying degrees) on a voluntary basis
- Historically seen as very much a KCC 'highways' issue and 'planning red tape' – link not made to always made to other MBC priority areas
- Disconnect between development planning process and end user
- Follow up and enforcement creates quite an adversarial situation when mutual support and co-operation is key
- Ultimate sanction is not really there, too much of a grey area
- KCC looking to revise guidance on Travel Plans to provide clearer guidelines and expectations and potentially to rationalise the approach based on a more qualitative assessment of need

### **School Travel Plans...**

- Excellent progress as part of Government funded Travel to School Initiative (2004/5-2010/11)
- Virtually all Maidstone schools have a school Travel Plan which is available on the KCC website
- Compares to circa. 95% of schools across the county
- Previously 5.5 FTEs engaged with schools across the county
- String of supporting initiatives e.g. walking bus, WOW, Walking Bug and Freedom Pass
- Now 1 FTE – therefore less 1-2-1 time and more targeted initiatives
- Realistically - some momentum may be lost unless schools can be re-engaged as part of a locally led partnership

### **New Ways 2 Work**

- Building a collaborative, voluntary partnership (backed up by the planning system)
- Inspired by Cambridgeshire Travel for Work Partnership [www.tfw.org.uk](http://www.tfw.org.uk)
- Involving the public transport operators and service providers
- Incentivising membership
- MBC are an inaugural member
- Umbrella brand for local interpretation and implementation
- Important to have a county wide consistent approach because of the amount of inter-urban movement

### **Examples of good practice**

- Sustainable Travel Towns – Peterborough, Darlington
- Cycle Towns *Tranche 1 (2005)*
- Aylesbury, Brighton and Hove, Darlington, Derby, Exeter and Lancaster with Morecambe *Tranche 2 (2009)*
- Blackpool, Bristol (cycling city), Cambridge, Chester, Colchester, Leighton Buzzard with Linslade, Shrewsbury, Southend, Southport, Stoke-on-Trent, Woking and York

### **Recommendations...**

- Start with our own organisations – lead from the front – Pied Piper effect
- Embed sustainable travel within our own business operations
- Identify one or two high profile interventions and work with the media
- Build a core public / private sector partnership with clear and deliverable goals and objectives
- Provide a clearer set of expectations for Developers and town centre employers – help them to see how they are contributing to the big picture