

A Review of Transport in Maidstone Borough – alternatives to using a car

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Opening statement from Chairman of Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Councillor Val Springett

When we embarked on this topic, I don't think we were fully aware of the size of this subject.

Congestion is a big issue in Maidstone, and any improvements that can be made to reduce congestion, would also have a big knock on effect on the quality of life of those living in the town centre, improve air quality and by improving journey times, would benefit both employees and businesses alike.



Cllr Val Springett

Encouraging a modal shift from the private car to public transport is always going to be a challenge. But if good quality, frequent, reliable, fairly priced and easily accessible public transport is available, it will encourage more people to use it. Alternative methods of transport such as walking and cycling also bring health benefits but are not suitable for all journeys. The weekly family supermarket shop would prove challenging on a bicycle!

In producing this report, we have attempted to find out what the current issues are, what improvements would be needed to increase choice and to encourage people to select an alternative to using their car when it was convenient. We have also recommended that transport user groups are created or re-established to enable issues to be aired, with Officer support. Also, that a new group is established to look at future options of transport as they become more viable.

I would like to thank all those who gave their time to address the committee and assist us in understanding the issues and challenges involved. I believe we have achieved something positive in our work and I commend this report to you.

Recommendation

A. That after the publication of this report a sub group be formed from the beginning of the municipal year 2015, by the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference, to explore:

- Alternative methods of transport for the future that will help ease congestion in Maidstone town. This sub-group to take forward research into future alternatives (for example rail halts on the Medway Valley Line, trams) and improving existing forms of transport, and;***
- Possible European Union funding to fund new transport initiatives.***

Review of Transport – alternatives to using a car

The Working Group



Report written by Tessa Mallett,
Overview and Scrutiny Officer



Executive Summary

This report has been created following a call for topics to be reviewed as part of the Overview and Scrutiny Work programme for the 2014-2015 Municipal year. Many of the suggestions received had a similar theme around congestion and transport issues within the Borough of Maidstone, as the congestion issue in Maidstone is considered a major factor affecting the future growth and economy of Maidstone. The report attempts to find out what the issues are that affect peoples' transport choices, and looks at ways in which improvements could be made to encourage the modal shift from the car to a suitable alternative.

The aim of the review was to explore how a reduction in our reliance on the car could be achieved, and it was decided that the report should look at what alternative modes of transport are currently available to residents within the borough of Maidstone, and how improvements could be made to encourage more people to use them.

The research undertaken included interviewing witnesses, from transport providers and expert authority officers to keen cyclists, walkers and service users. Improvements to communication regarding bus times and timetable disruptions was a big issue, and funding opportunities for Parish Council's to improve facilities within their areas were also discussed. Cycling usage would benefit from better cycle path provision in all areas and from interconnectivity with bus routes in more rural locations. Some parishes are including such provision in their emerging Neighbourhood Plans, such as Coxheath. Reliability and poor frequency of services were the main issues affecting the usage of bus services, and parking availability and fare costs were factors in residents using the rail network. It was established that user groups were beneficial in enabling issues to be addressed more easily and that Officer and Member support was beneficial.

An update of the draft Maidstone Borough Council Cycling Strategy, dated 2012 has been recommended, as well as the establishment of a Maidstone Cyclists Forum and the re-establishing of the Maidstone Borough Transport User Group. Better methods of communication for road closures would assist bus companies in maintaining schedules, and specific use of Section 106 monies would assist in enabling bus services and cycle and footpaths to be created alongside new developments.

There is still a long way to go to achieving reduced car usage in Maidstone. However, it is hoped that the recommendations from this report will lead to improvements being made to current alternative transport provision, and that future usage will improve as access, reliability and costs issues are addressed.

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1 Background

In March 2014, Maidstone Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny team, with the help of the Communications team, implemented a communications plan to help gather suggestions for topics for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees' Future Work Programme and reviews for the Municipal year 2014-15.

More than 50 suggestions were received from staff, members of the public, community representatives, key stakeholders/partners including parish councils and local press. 18 of the suggestions received related to the terms of reference for the Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee (PTD OSC).

On 9 June 2014, the Overview and Scrutiny Team held a workshop with PTD OSC where the committee considered all the suggestions and agreed a review topic to take forward for 2014-15.

Many of the suggestions raised concerns about transport in the Borough, including:

- Increased congestion in Maidstone town centre;
- Bus services;
- Parking;
- Public transport;
- Promoting walking and cycling, and;
- Introducing a mechanism where local people could report transport infrastructure issues to both Kent County Council (KCC) and Maidstone Borough Council (MBC).

The committee agreed to look at ways of reducing congestion in Maidstone town and would touch on all the concerns above. To do this the committee decided they needed to review different modes of transport that could be alternatives to using a car. The main groups decided upon were:

- Cycling and walking;
- Bus, and;
- Rail.

The committee recognised if these modes of transport were to be alternatives to the car they had to be convenient, reliable and attractive enough to encourage people to leave their cars at home. This in turn would reduce the need for parking in the town.

A working group was set up and met on 17 June 2014 to scope the review and presented a scoping document at the PTD OSC meeting of 24 June 2014 outlining the Terms of Reference for the review.

This review prompted interest from local media with it being reported on BBC South East on 7 October 2014 and BBC Radio Kent. BBC Radio Kent also interviewed Councillor David Burton, Cabinet member for Planning, Transport and Development on 27 July 2014 and Councillor Val Springett, Chair of PTD OSC on 7 October 2014 about the review. Kent Messenger also reported, on 1 August 2014, the recommendations of the committee meeting on 22 July 2014.

At their meeting of 16 December 2014, the committee agreed to review the Maidstone Park and Ride Service as part of this review.



2 Terms of Reference

The committee agreed by conducting this review it would aim to meet the following objectives:

To carry out a review of Transport in Maidstone Borough – alternatives to using a car to ease congestion in the town.

2.1 Cycling and walking

- Identify cycling and walking groups in the Borough;
- Establish what work is already being done regarding the promotion of walking and cycling;
- Identify and make recommendations on how MBC can work to increase the use of cycling and walking in the Borough.

2.2 Bus services

- Identify existing bus service providers operating in the Rural Service Centres ;
- Identify bus user groups in the Borough to avoid duplication of effort;
- Improve communication with the Quality Bus Partnership to enable Councillors to influence debate where they can;
- Identify the barriers to making the bus a viable alternative to using the car to travel into Maidstone town;
- Identify and make recommendations for improvements to bus service provision to and from the Rural Service Centres (RSC).

2.3 Rail services

- Identify rail user groups in the Borough to avoid duplication of effort;
- Gain an insight into KCC and rail providers' strategic plans for rail services in the Borough;

¹ Rural service centres (RSC) – outside of the town centre and urban area, rural service centres are considered the most sustainable settlements in Maidstone's settlement hierarchy. The planned development and maintenance of sustainable communities underpins the council's approach to rural areas where the primary aim is to direct development towards rural settlements that can best act as service centres for their local population and surrounding rural communities. Rural service centres play a key part in the economic and social fabric of the Borough and contribute towards its character and built form. They act as a focal point for trade and services by providing a concentration of public transport networks, employment opportunities and community facilities that minimise car journeys - (Maidstone Borough Council, 2014)

- Establish MBC member links with KCC and rail service providers;
- Identify and make recommendations for improvements to rail service provision in the Maidstone Borough.

2.4 Park and Ride Services

- Establish what is currently offered by the service;
- Establish if the service is cost effective;
- Identify the impact the service has on the town centre in terms of:
 - Easing congestion
 - Benefits to users
- Establish why do/don't people use the service;
- Investigate the stability of current agreements for delivering the service
 - Leasing of land
 - Provision of buses;
- Identify the strategic importance of the service
 - Should MBC support it
 - Should the service be continued (and what are the consequences if it wasn't);
- Establish the future requirements for the service.

3 Introduction

Congestion on our roads is a growing concern across the UK. According to the Department for Transport (DoT,) Road Congestion and Reliability Statistics², the average speeds on local 'A' roads in England during the weekday morning peak between April and June 2014 were 24.4mph. Compared to figures for the year end March 2014 this was a decrease of 0.9%. Across all nine regions in England London experienced the greatest reduction in speeds of 3.3%, followed by the South East with a 2.3% reduction.

Our reliance on car travel, even if it results in sitting in traffic with longer or unpredictable journey times, appears to be showing no let up.

Another report from the DoT, Public attitudes towards transport survey³, states, travelling by car as a driver was by far the most commonly and regularly used mode of transport with 44% of respondents reporting travelling by car as a driver every day or nearly every day. The research also stated, that on average, respondents reported making five journeys of less than two miles (3.22kilometres) by car in a typical week. Furthermore, a considerable proportion of respondents reported they could use alternative forms of travel. In 2012, 41% of people agreed they could just as easily walk many of the journeys of less than two miles they now travel by car; 39% said they could just as easily cycle (if they had a bike) and nearly a third said they could just as easily catch the bus. The challenge is encouraging people to make the change.

As can be seen by the map in **Appendix A** (Maidstone Walking and Cycling Isochrones) the vast majority of the Maidstone urban area is within the 5 kilometre threshold for trips by bike and a significant proportion of the Maidstone urban area is within the 2 kilometre threshold for trips on-foot. This serves to indicate the huge latent potential for increasing the proportion of trips by walking and cycling.

Recommendation

B. That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be recommended to carry out consultation with car users to establish why they drive into Maidstone town and what would encourage them to use an alternative mode of transport to get into the town.

² Department for Transport Road Congestion and Reliability Statistics, Congestion on local 'A' roads, England: Apr to Jun 2014 report (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/343339/congestion-local-a-stats-release-jun-14.pdf)

³ Department for Transport British Social Attitudes Survey 2012: public attitudes towards transport (July 2013)

According to the Parliamentary publication, Out of the Jam: reducing congestion on our roads, the definition of congestion is “unreliable journeys in terms of the length of time that journey will take, taking 20 minutes one day, 40 minutes the next and so on; it can mean that journeys are just too slow; or it can mean that in times of exceptional disruption, road works or special events etc., journeys are very different from the way they normally are.”⁴

⁴ www.publications.parliament.uk - Transport Committee – Ninth Report, Out of the Jam: reducing congestion on our roads published 6 September 2011.

4 Congestion in Maidstone

4.1 Maidstone journey time information⁵

In order to assess the efficiency of the highway network over time in Maidstone town centre, Kent County Council monitors and analyses journey time information on key routes. A manual survey was carried out in March 2007 in order to establish a baseline which is used to highlight poorly performing links.

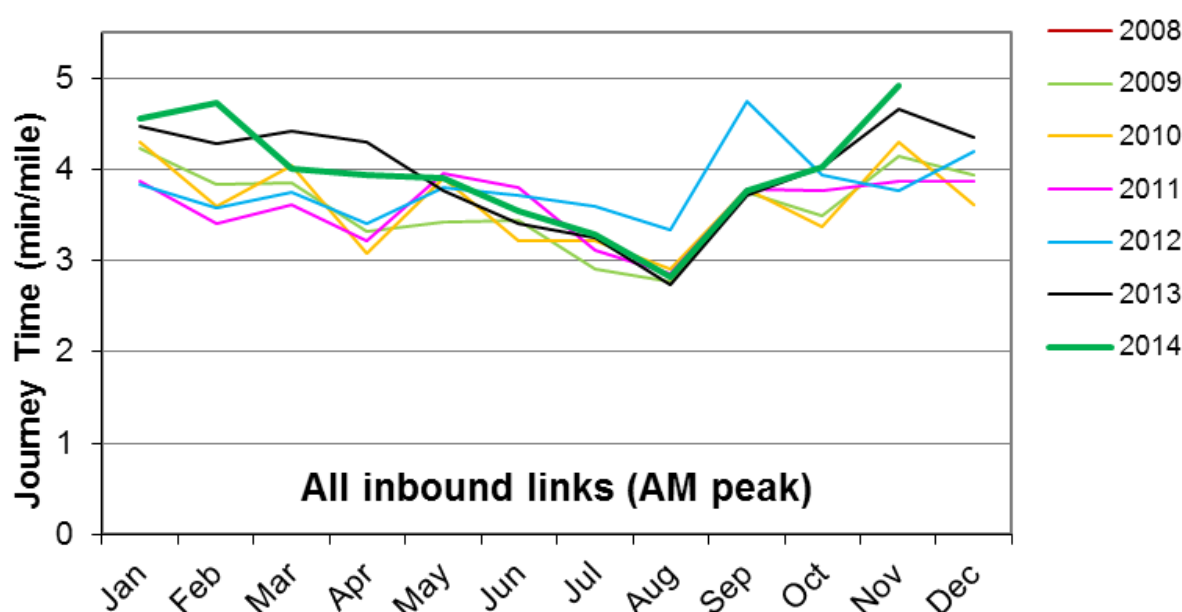
Data are collected every day at five minute intervals using Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras operated by Kent Police for the following primary routes:

- A20 Ashford Road near Caring Lane to A249 Albion Place
- A20 Ashford Road near Caring Lane to A229 Lower Stone Street / Mote Road
- A274 Sutton Road to A229 Hayle Road
- A229 Loose Road to A229 Hayle Road
- B2010 Farleigh Hill to A229 Hayle Road
- A26 Tonbridge Road near South Street to A20 Terrace Road
- A20 London Road near Beaver Road to A20 London Road / Rocky Hill
- A229 Royal Engineers Road to A26 Tonbridge Road near Westree Road
- A229 Royal Engineers Road to A229 Lower Stone Street / Mote Road
- A249 Sittingbourne Road near M20 Junction 7 to A249 Albion Place

The Highway Management Centre in Aylesford monitor these routes every weekday, with particular focus during the morning peak (0730 to 0930) and evening peak (1600 to 1800) periods. Where possible, staff will adjust traffic signal timings in order to minimise congestion seen via CCTV images or in response to reported incidents on the network.

⁵ KCC Highways, Transportation & Waste.

Below is a graph showing the monthly journey time trends since 2008



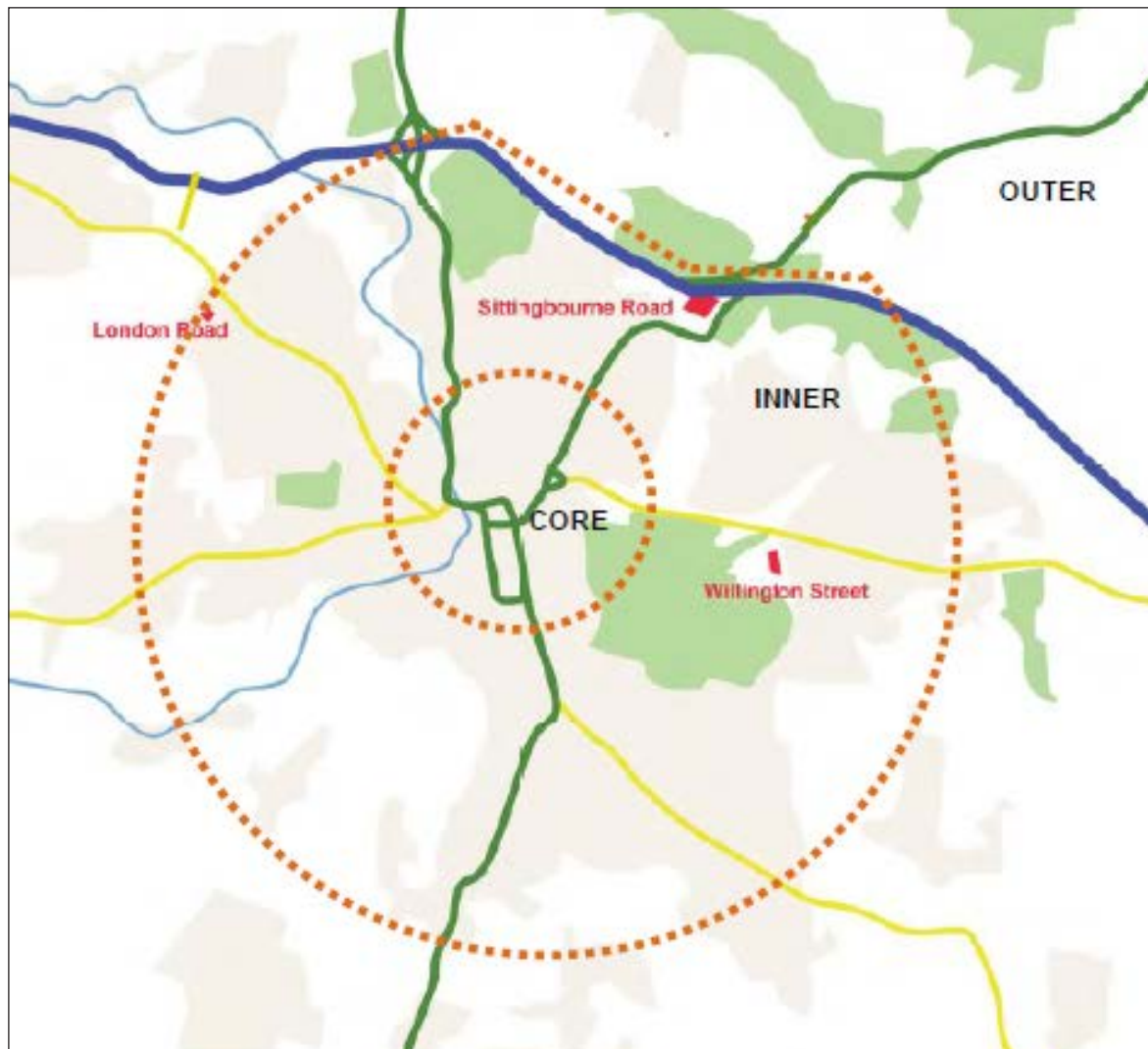
4.2 Maidstone Integrated Parking Strategy – April 2012⁶

Maidstone Borough Council appointed JMP Consultants Ltd (JMP) to undertake a series of research tasks to support the development of the Council's Integrated Transport Strategy. The strategy aimed to assess the current and future demand for travel and the infrastructure required to support the development growth outlined within the Maidstone Core Strategy (2011).

JMB used the Maidstone Visum model software to forecast future transport movements in and around Maidstone using future development assumptions. The model forecasts there will be in the region of 52,000 transport movements within the AM peak hour in 2026, excluding all walking and cycling trips.

⁵ http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/12055/Integrated-Parking-Strategy-Options-Appraisal-Report-JMP-April-2012.pdf

Fig 1 Geographical representation of the Core and Inner sectors



The report considered at least three quarters of all transport movements in and around Maidstone to be medium/long distance (>5miles). The report stated around a third of these long distance trips (25% of all movements) either originate or terminate in the Core Maidstone Sector (shown in Fig 1) and so could, theoretically, be served by a rail service, depending upon the proximity to a rail station. The report went on to say:

“Just over a third of all transport movements have both an origin and a destination in the Borough of Maidstone. These trips could, theoretically, be served by an urban and rural bus network across the borough.”

“The number of movements originating and terminating within the Core and Inner Maidstone Sectors represents around 14.5%. Many of these trips will be relatively short in distance and so have the potential to be undertaken by walking or cycling, depending upon the precise origins and destinations.”

“The number of movements originating in the Outer Maidstone Sector, Kent or London and terminating in the Core Maidstone Sector represents around 14.5% of total transport movements in the AM peak. Many of these trips could, theoretically, be targeted to travel by park & ride.”

4.3 Impact on Air Quality and Health⁷

Local air pollutants are those that have a direct impact on public health, especially that of the young and old. The main air pollutants of concern in Maidstone are nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and particulates (PM). These have been linked to lung diseases (asthma, bronchitis, and emphysema), heart conditions and cancer. Based on national estimates, approximately 5.6% of premature deaths in Maidstone are due to air pollution.

Where health based air quality objectives are not being met Air Quality Management Areas must be declared. Maidstone declared an Urban AQMA due to exceeding the annual average nitrogen dioxide objective (objective level = 40ug/m³). This is a long term objective aimed at protecting the most vulnerable members of the population from the chronic (debilitating) effects of air pollution.

The Council undertook monitoring at 57 sites in 2013 (using diffusion tubes attached to street furniture) to monitor airborne NO₂ concentrations. The annual mean objective was exceeded at twelve sites, all within the Maidstone AQMA.

The very high results recorded at four of those sites (Upper Stone Street, and the A274/A229 junction), indicate a potential exceedence of the 1-hour mean NO₂ objective (200ug/m³ hourly mean not to be exceeded more than 18 times in a year).

The short term hourly objective is aimed at protecting the most vulnerable members of the population from the acute (immediate) effects of air pollution, which may involve irritation of the eyes, nose and throat and an increase in the symptoms of existing respiratory conditions such as asthma, bronchitis or emphysema. Breaches of the hourly objective are more infrequently observed in urban environments than breaches of the annual average objective, indicating that day to day peak levels of nitrogen dioxide pollutant concentrations are increasing.

A recent report from World Health Organisation (WHO) ‘Review of evidence on health aspects of air pollutants’⁸ has produced new evidence of long-term effects of nitrogen dioxide for people suffering from existing respiratory and heart problems and indicates that these effects can occur below the current air quality objective levels.

⁷ Mid Kent Share Services – Environmental Health

⁸ http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/193108/REVIHAAP-Final-technical-report-final-version.pdf

4.4 Central Government Growth Fund

On 7 July 2014, Kent County Council⁹ published a press release reporting that the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership¹⁰ had won £104 million from the Government's 'Growth Deal'. The benefits to Maidstone from this cash injection were reported to be:

- A Gyratory Bypass - £4.56 million to go towards a relief scheme to help overcome congestion and delays in the town centre;
- Maidstone Integrated Transport - £8.89 million;
- Sustainable access to Maidstone employment areas (River Medway cycle path, East Farleigh to Aylesford) £2 million.

Recommendation

C. That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be recommended to lobby Kent County Council on the reconfiguration of the Maidstone Gyratory system to ensure safe cycle passages. The design of the gyratory system should incorporate surface cycle passages (not subways) for cyclists heading in and out of the town from west Maidstone using the A20 and A26.

4.5 Maidstone Integrated Transport Strategy

On 27 January 2014, Maidstone Borough Council's Cabinet approved the vision and objectives for the Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS) and work programme for developing the ITS to a full draft document to go out to public consultation in the Summer of 2014. This has been delayed to Summer 2015.

Because of peak period congestion and poor air quality across the urban area of Maidstone the ITS would focus primarily on demand management measures for one of the core principles of the National Planning Policy Framework, to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling. The principle being this would enable people to make informed choices about how and when they travel to and from the town centre and other destinations in the Borough.

⁹ <http://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/news/news-and-press-releases/jobs-news/jobs-and-transport-boost-from-104m-growth-deal-funding>.

¹⁰ Kent and Medway Economic Partnership is the local arm of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SE LEP) which brings together key leaders from business, local government, and further and higher education to boost economic growth across Kent, Medway, East Sussex, Essex, Thurrock and Southend.

A report to Cabinet¹¹ on 27 January 2014, paragraph 1.3.16 stated the essential elements of the new ITS would include:

- A more targeted park and ride service, with new and/or improved sites in the vicinity of M20 Junction 7 and at Linton Crossroads on the A299 corridor to the south of the town, aimed at long-stay commuters into the town centre;
- Bus priority measures in tandem with the enhanced park and ride service;
- Highway capacity improvements at the bridges gyratory and at other key junctions in and around the strategic development areas of north west Maidstone, south east Maidstone and M20 Junction 7, to improve journey time reliability and air quality;
- Increased bus service frequencies (to at least every 7 minutes) on radial routes serving Maidstone town centre;
- Walking and cycling infrastructure, focusing on improved wayfinding, safer crossing points at the town centre gyratory, and improvements to the River Medway towpath;
- A car sharing initiative in partnership with local employers, and;
- A refreshed town centre parking strategy, which will look to increase long-stay car parking charges and reduce car parking supply to promote the use of park and ride, and a reduction in short-stay car parking charges to prioritise shoppers and visitors.

4.6 Maidstone Draft Local Plan 2014-2031

The Maidstone Borough Council Draft Local Plan¹² (paragraph 3.9) transport vision states that Maidstone will have a transport network that will have sufficient people and goods-moving capacity to support the growth projected by the local plan to 2031.

¹¹ <http://services.maidstone.gov.uk/meetings/documents/g2059/Public%20reports%20pack%2027th-Jan-2014%2018.30%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>

¹² <http://dynamic.maidstone.gov.uk/pdf/Local%20Plan%20Regulation%2018.pdf>

5 Methodology

The committee sought evidence from a variety of sources. For example select Committee-style interviews with a number of witnesses for each section of the review were undertaken.

5.1 Cycling and Walking

On 22 July 2014¹³ interviews were conducted with witnesses who had an interest in or whose work involved the promotion of walking and cycling.

The witnesses invited to attend were:

- Bartholomew Wren – Economic Development Officer Regeneration and Transport, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council;
- Colin Finch – Senior Public Rights of Way Officer, Kent County Council;
- Tay Arnold – Cycling Transport Planner, Kent Highways, Kent County Council;
- Sarah Ward, Community Development Team Leader, Maidstone Borough Council;
- Tim Hapgood, Transport Consultant, Spatial Policy Team, Maidstone Borough Council;
- James Gower – local cycling enthusiast who sent a suggestion via Twitter for the committee to review congestion in the town;

The specific questions asked of these witnesses to help prepare for the meeting can be found as **Appendix B**.

Other witnesses included:

- Councillor Paul Harper;
- Mr Elliott Dean, resident and cycling enthusiast.

5.2 Bus Services

On 16 September 2014¹⁴ interviews were conducted with:

- Dan Bruce, Local Transport Planner (Mid Kent), KCC;
- Shane Hymers, Public Transport Policy and Strategy Manager, KCC;
- Norman Kemp, Nu-Venture Coaches Ltd;

On 30 September 2014¹⁵ interviews were conducted with:

¹³ <http://services.maidstone.gov.uk/meetings/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=555&MId=2184&Ver=4>

¹⁴ <http://services.maidstone.gov.uk/meetings/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=555&MId=2186&Ver=4>

- Matthew Arnold, Commercial Manager, Arriva;
- Mike Fitzgerald, Chairman of East of Maidstone Bus Group;
- Norman Kemp, Nu-Venture Coaches Ltd was also in attendance;
- Councillor Peter Spearink, Staplehurst Parish Council.

Specific questions asked of these witnesses can be found in **Appendix C**.

The committee also consulted with all 35 Parish Councils and 55 MBC Councillors, asking them for details of the following:

- Any bus service issues you may have in your constituency;
- Any bus user groups you are aware of in your constituency.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer attended a meeting between the Director of Regeneration and Communities (MBC), Officers from MBCs Community Development Team and a representative from Arriva. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss ways of making bus services more accessible to those residents on low incomes.

5.3 Rail Services

On 18 November 2014¹⁵ interviews were conducted with:

- Mike Gibson, Public Affairs Manager, South Eastern Rail
- Mike Fitzgerald, Chair Kent Community Rail Partnership and Medway Valley Line Group
- Keith Harrison, Chief Executive, Action with Rural Communities
- Written response from Stephen Gasche, Principal Transport Planner – Rail, Kent County Council

Specific questions ask of these witnesses were:

- What are your perceptions of the where the weaknesses are in rail services in the Maidstone borough?
- What could Network Rail do to relieve some of the congestion pressure in Maidstone?
- What do you do to integrate your services with other public transport services?
- How can scheduled changes be better communicated to users?

The committee also consulted with all 35 Parish Councils and 55 MBC Councillors, asking them for details of the following:

¹⁵ <http://services.maidstone.gov.uk/meetings/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=555&MIId=2184&Ver=4>
¹⁶ <http://services.maidstone.gov.uk/meetings/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=555&MIId=2188&Ver=4>

- What issues does your parish have with train services within the borough that result in people using their car rather than the train?

5.4 Park and Ride Services

On 8 January 2015 the working group conducted interviews with the following witnesses:

- David Edwards, Director of Environment and Shared Services;
- Jeff Kitson, Parking Services Manager;
- Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development;
- Steve Clarke, Principal Planning Officer, Spatial Planning;
- Matthew Cotton, Service and Transport Coordinator;
- Martin Smith, Senior Transport Planner.

Desk research was carried out by the Overview and Scrutiny Officer to seek further evidence for the review.

Table 1 Pedal cycle flow 2000 to 2013 at DfT count points in Maidstone as a proportion of all traffic

Year	Pedal Cycle Flow	All traffic	%Pedal Cycle
2000	1634	641738	0.3%
2001	1535	650495	0.2%
2002	1424	652861	0.2%
2004	1407	657381	0.2%
2005	1183	641219	0.2%
2006	1589	646603	0.2%
2007	1192	638341	0.2%
2008	1380	607332	0.2%
2009	1539	603059	0.3%
2010	1499	617823	0.2%
2011	1659	611695	0.3%
2012	1419	588721	0.2%
2013	1657	584032	0.3%

The proportion of pedal cyclists to all traffic is normally between 0.2% and 0.3% on the A roads in Maidstone.

The 2011 Census journey to work data¹⁹ indicated that journeys to work in Maidstone by bike have increased since 2001. However the change has been very small and the proportion of journeys to work by bike still only account for 1% of total trips.

The Institute of Highways and Transportation suggests that journeys of up to two kilometres were achievable on foot and journeys of up to five kilometres were achievable by bike. In particular the research suggested that journeys within these thresholds had the most realistic chance of replacing car journeys by trips on foot and by bike. The vast majority of the Maidstone urban area is within five kilometres of the town.²⁰

Data on journeys to work on foot from the 2011 Census is not yet formally available. However early indications suggest they account for approximately 1% of journeys to work in Maidstone.

For comparison the committee sought evidence from a similar authority to establish how they approached the promotion of walking and cycling and how successful they had been. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council was chosen because of its comparative size and location.

¹⁹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcn%3A77-295663>

²⁰ Report of Head of Planning and Development to PTD OSC 22 July 2014 - <http://services.maidstone.gov.uk/meetings/documents/s37180/agenda%20item%2011%20Question%20Sheet%20-%20for%20front%20of%20Committee%20reports.pdf> page 21 paragraph 3.5

6.1 Cycling in Tunbridge Wells

It was reported that cycling in Tunbridge Wells had increased in recent years, but still only accounted for 2% of road users. Tunbridge Wells was developing a strong cycling culture with a specialist café providing a shop and meeting point for cyclists.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's (TWBC) draft transport strategy had gone out to consultation in 2013 and provided a high level introduction to cycling. A stand-alone cycling strategy was planned to re-engage with the established local cycling forum and was due to go out to consultation late 2014.

Mr Greg Clark MP had supported a public meeting in November 2013 on cycling in Tunbridge Wells. A series of recommendations from the meeting had been suggested to feed into the new cycling strategy. The suggestions included proposed new cycling routes; increased cycle parking; installation of advance stop lines, 20mph speed limits; overcoming deficiencies in existing cycle routes; cycle education and awareness for young people and adults.

In January 2014, the Tunbridge Wells Cycling Forum was launched with its own terms of reference but no decision making powers. The meetings of the Forum were chaired by TWBC's portfolio holder for Planning and Transport and were reported to be well attended. Officers provided administrative and technical input but no support. Sub groups of the Forum focussed on areas such as education, events and infrastructure.

Cycling events supported and promoted by TWBC included safety campaigns with the AA; Bikeability training²¹ part funded by the Department for Transport; Tunbridge Wells Great Bike Ride, and; Cycle Friday (launched 6 June 2014)²².

Final thoughts from Tunbridge Wells included; to be successful resources needed to be made available, and partnership working was important and should include agencies such as Sustrans, KCC, developers, landowners and local businesses; Department for Transport and the Highways Agency.

6.2 Existing work to promote walking and cycling in the Maidstone Borough

KCC reported that Maidstone has 11.3% of the 4,200 miles of Public Rights of Way (PROW) in Kent providing a good historical asset of walking and cycling routes.

The Mote Park regeneration project provided traffic free routes which were being very well used by pedestrians and cyclist.

Inter parish 'behind the hedge (Public Rights of Way) schemes' had been developed – for example East Farleigh, Forge Lane route linking the village to the school and a similar scheme at Hunton linking the village to the church and village hall – providing safe pedestrian routes.

²¹ Bikeability.dft.gov.uk

²² <http://www.cyclefriday.co.uk/>

The Millennium River Project along the River Medway corridor provided a safe route for pedestrians and cyclist.

Work is being carried out to improve footpaths to Len Valley, Medway Valley and the Loose Valley Conservation area. It was considered the following footpath networks could be developed to form an orbital cycle and footpath route around Maidstone linking to Maidstone town centre via radial routes:

- Len Valley to the north of Maidstone;
- Medway Valley to the west of Maidstone;
- Tovil Nature Park;
- The Loose Valley Conservation area;
- Boughton Monchesea; and,
- Langley to the east of Maidstone;

Recommendation

G. That the Head of Planning and Development be asked to report back to by the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference during the 2015-2016 municipal year on:

- ***The identity of potential routes for the provision of cycle ways from rural locations (villages and hamlets) with poor bus services, to bus stops on major routes with a more frequent bus service;***
- ***The possibility of creating an orbital cycle and footpath route around Maidstone linking to Maidstone town centre via radial routes such as:***
 - ***Len valley to the north of Maidstone***
 - ***Medway Valley to the west of Maidstone***
 - ***Tovil Nature Park***
 - ***The Loose Valley Conservation area***
 - ***Boughton Monchelsea, and***
 - ***Langley to the east of Maidstone***
- ***The costs of firstly providing cycle parking at the end of these routes;***
- ***The cost of the longer term aim of developing the cycle route to the cycle parking.***

KCC reported, that although MBCs planning policy ENV26 was considered a very effective policy, which stated no development would be allowed where there were Public Rights of Way, unless developers agreed to maintain or divert the routes. This had discouraged developers from developing in these areas. This in turn resulted in what has become known as 'back garden allies' where PROW were overgrown, unsafe and unused.

Bikeability cycle training was being offered to children and adults in the Borough using funding subsidised from the Department for Transport and Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF).

Work was being carried out with Kent Highways through a working group comprising of Kent Public Health and Kent Sport to promote the health benefits of cycling pitched at getting people on bikes who were not already using one. Maidstone Health Walks²³ scheme had lead three walks; Maidstone Town Centre Walk; Mote Park Health Walk; Cherry Orchard Health Walk. Data as of 7 July 2014 showed 662 walk hours had taken place since January 2014 with 57 registered walkers.

British Cycling and Sky TV²⁴, part funded by Kent Public Health, encourage people of all levels to get involved in cycling through running events, guided rides, support and tips through the Sky Rider Local scheme. Four events took place in the Maidstone Borough between 20 July and 9 November 2014.

KM (Kent Messenger) Charity Team²⁵ work to encourage parents and children to walk to school. 'Walking Buses' operate along set routes, picking up children at pre-arranged points on the way to school. Parents take turns to escort the group of children to school, with everyone wearing a high visibility tabard for safety.

At the time of reporting (22 July 2014) 200 primary schools were using the KM Walk to School resources to promote green travel every week. During the last academic year (2012-2013) 218,000 school run car journeys were removed by local schools. For the academic year (2013-14 to July 2014) 22,517 school run car journeys were reported to have been removed from the roads in Maidstone.

Cycleplus²⁶ is a government approved scheme allowing employees to hire purchase a bike and safety equipment from their employers for commuting to work and for use outside of work. Bikes can be provided at up to 32% less than the usual cost and repayments can be spread across 12 to 18 months. Maidstone Borough Council offers this scheme to all its employees.

²³ www.walkinforhealth.org.uk

²⁴ www.goskyride.com

²⁵ <http://www.kmcharityteam.co.uk/schools/schoolswalk/>

²⁶ <http://www.cyclescheme.co.uk/employers/employer-faqs>

6.3 Walking and Cycling groups

Much of the work in the promotion of walking and cycling is focussed on the health and social benefits they provide as leisure activities. There was very little evidence of explicitly encouraging either walking or cycling as a means of making other journeys such as getting to work. However, 39% of frequent riders had said that Sky Ride Local had influenced them to use their bike to commute to work.

Walking and cycling groups found by carrying out a search of the internet included:

- Maidstone Ramblers²⁷ – runs regular walks and social events around Kent.
- Maidstone Invicta U3A²⁸ – has a membership of 250 of older people no longer in full time work and has, amongst others, a short walk group (less than 5 miles).
- Mid Kent Outdoor Pursuits and Social Group²⁹ – has a membership of around 50 and organises activities, including walking around the Maidstone and Medway countryside.
- West Kent Walking and Outdoor Group³⁰ – is a walking group for those aged 30 to 50 and provide a mixed programme of walks most weekends.
- San Fairy Ann Cycling Club³¹ – The largest cycling club in Kent with over 500 members from across the county. San Fairy Ann organise all types of cycling activities catering for riders of all abilities.

6.4 The draft Maidstone Cycling Strategy

The Draft Maidstone Cycling Strategy was produced in June 2012 by MBC officers and local interest groups and cyclist. The strategy was produced by understanding the current issues and the existing network, carrying out route audits and identifying opportunities for infrastructure improvements and developing an action plan. A copy of this document is attached as **Appendix D**.

Some parts of the draft Maidstone Cycling Strategy have been implemented, in particular the provision of cycle parking in the town centre and at train stations and improved route provision along a number of key corridors. The location of the existing and proposed cycle parking are shown on page 29-30 of the draft strategy.

Walking and cycling forms an integral part of the Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS) and is covered by a number of objectives set out in the framework ITS agreed by MBC Cabinet on 27 January 2014. The strategy includes improving infrastructure and wayfinding, through securing Travel Plans for new developments as well as schools and existing businesses, introducing behaviour change projects to help influence how people travel.

²⁷ Maidstoneramblers.org.uk

²⁸ u3asites.org.uk

²⁹ www.midkentgroup.co.uk

³⁰ www.wkwg.org.uk

³¹ www.sanfairyancc.co.uk

The draft Maidstone Cycling Strategy is still to go out to public consultation before being adopted.

Recommendation

E. That the Head of Planning and Development be recommended to urgently refresh and update the draft Maidstone Borough Council Draft Cycling Strategy, dated June 2012 and present it to the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference in the new municipal year 2015-2016 before taking it for public consultation.

Recommendation

F. That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, use the principal proposals from the refreshed Cycling Strategy to inform the emerging Integrated Transport Strategy.

Recommendation

G. That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be recommended to:

- Proceed with establishing the Maidstone Cycling Forum and ensure it is supported by an officer with responsibility for cycling in their job description;***
- Identify a lead member to act as a cycling champion within the authority.***

6.5 Safety

The Chief Medical Officer's (CMO) Surveillance report dated 27 March 2014³² is a compendium of data covering a number of public health areas. One of the key areas of concern for the CMO was:

"Walking and cycling – Safety for pedestrians and cyclists must be improved if we are to encourage people to walk and cycle more and reap the associated health benefits. The risk of serious injury for each kilometre travelled on a bike is 21 times higher than by car. The CMO says that the relative risks of walking and cycling are unacceptably high and must be reduced and that an integrated approach to improving safety for all road users must be taken."

³² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chief-medical-officer-publishes-annual-report-on-state-of-the-publics-health>

³³ <http://www.nhs.uk/news/2014/02february/pages/cycling-safety-a-special-report.aspx>

However, in a Cycling Safety Special Report by NHS Choices³³ researchers concluded that the benefits of cycling far outweigh the potential risks.

Researchers estimated that,

“On average, the benefits associated with regular cycling equated to up to 14 months extra life expectancy. The risks equated to a decreased life expectancy of up to 40 days; however, this was the upper limit and the figure may be closer to the 20-day mark. This represents an impressive benefit to risk ratio, despite only looking at the physical benefits of exercise. However, there are also documented psychological benefits of exercise, such as an improvement in mood, increased self-confidence and reduced risk of depression.”

6.6 Safety in Maidstone

In Maidstone Borough, pedal cycle casualties increased from 21 in 2009 to 41 in 2013. Killed or seriously injured (KSI) pedal cycle casualties are low and numbers vary with a peak in 2012 of 10.³⁴

Pedestrian casualties injured in the Borough, after a peak in 2011 have recorded decreases in 2012 and 2013.

Table 2 Pedestrian and pedal cycle casualties in Maidstone District by year and severity

Year	Severity	Pedestrians	Pedal Cyclists	Total
2009	KSI	8	2	10
	Slight	60	19	79
	Total	68	21	89
2010	KSI	7	5	12
	Slight	54	22	76
	Total	61	27	88
2011	KSI	16	2	18
	Slight	64	26	90
	Total	80	28	108
2012	KSI	16	10	26
	Slight	52	28	80
	Total	68	38	106
2013	KSI	10	5	15
	Slight	52	36	88
	Total	62	41	103

Whilst the A229 recorded the highest number of pedestrian and pedal cycle collisions in the last 5 years, the route with the highest rate of collisions was the B2012 (Well Street in Maidstone town centre).

³² Maidstone Borough Pedestrian and Pedal Cycle Data, Road Safety Team, KCC

Table 3 Collisions involving pedestrians or pedal cyclists in Maidstone by route, 2009 to 2013

	Approx route length in km	Pedestrians				Pedal cycles			
		KSI collisions involving pedestrians	All collisions involving pedestrians	KSI collisions involving pedestrians/km	All collisions involving pedestrians/km	KSI collisions involving pedal cycles	All collisions involving pedal cycles	KSI collisions involving pedal cycles/km	All collisions involving pedestrians/km
A20	25.2	3	28	0.12	1.11	5	20	0.20	0.79
A2054	1.6	0	0	0.00	0.00	1	1	0.63	0.63
A229	31.4	6	53	0.19	1.69	6	28	0.19	0.89
A249	25	2	13	0.08	0.52	1	3	0.04	0.12
A26	6.5	2	26	0.31	4.00	1	13	0.15	2.00
A274	16.3	4	16	0.25	0.98	0	7	0.00	0.43
B2010	9.6	2	6	0.21	0.63	1	2	0.10	0.21
B2012	1.4	2	6	1.43	4.29	1	3	0.71	2.14
B2079	8.1	0	2	0.00	0.25	0	0	0.00	0.00
B2162	9.4	0	1	0.00	0.11	2	4	0.21	0.43
B2163	15.7	3	11	0.19	0.70	0	4	0.00	0.25
B2246	1.4	0	1	0.00	0.71	0	1	0.00	0.71

The casualty profile for pedal cyclists in Maidstone shows peaks in the 10 to 14 and 45 to 49 age brackets with 19 each. KSI casualties recorded a peak in the 25 to 29 year old age bracket.

34% of KSI pedal cycle collisions occurred on weekends (5 on Sunday, 3 on Saturday). All but two of the KSI collisions involved another road user. Of the 19 10 to 14 year old pedal cycle casualties, 90% of the collisions occur on weekdays with a peak at 0800-0859 (3) and between 1500 and 1659 (8).

6.7 20mph Limits and Zones

Although not a major part of this review, 20mph limits and zones were part of the committee's discussions.

For clarity 20mph speed restrictions are limits and rely solely on signage, and 20mph zones have traffic calming measures in place (build outs, speed humps, etc.) to reduce speed. Highways Authorities such as Kent Highways have powers to introduce 20mph speed limits that apply only at certain times of day.

From October 2013 for up to a period of 18 months, KCC carried out a trial of 20mph schemes near six local schools in the Borough to gather evidence to establish whether such schemes could provide cost effective road safety benefits.

At the meeting of the Environment, Highways and Waste Cabinet Committee on 3 October 2013³⁵ Decision No: 13/00063 paragraph 12.7, it was decided:

“Taking in to account all the evidence gained from current local and national experiences there is insufficient evidence to recommend KCC adopts a blanket policy for the implementation of 20mph schemes. It is proposed that KCC continues with its policy of implementing 20mph schemes where there is clear justification in terms of achieving casualty reduction as part of the on-going programme of Casualty Reduction Schemes. However, in addition it is now proposed to identify where 20mph schemes can be implemented that would encourage more walking and cycling notwithstanding the casualty record. This will assist with delivering targets set out in Kent’s Joint Health and Well Being Strategy”.

The committee heard a lack of street lighting after midnight created safety issues for some pedestrians and cyclist. It was also stated segregation of pedestrians and cyclists from cars was very expensive and required a large element of public land to accommodate it.

It was suggested dropped and tactile curbs supported walking, as did pedestrian priority at junctions and traffic lights.

Witnesses reported the main roads in Maidstone were unpleasant for non-motorised users, there was little cycling infrastructure and crossings were designed to prevent inconvenience to cars rather than being convenient for cyclists or pedestrians. Witnesses also reported that the infrastructure in existence was often of poor quality and was mostly a pedestrian infrastructure with cyclists allowed. It was felt cycling was not considered a proper mode of transport and when it was is was as an afterthought or “squeezed in at the sides” and cycling specific schemes were rarely considered.

“Don’t be anti-car – be pro cycling”

James Gower, Cycling enthusiast,
Maidstone

³⁵ <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s43305/B1%20Updated%20Policy%20for%2020mph%20limits%20and%20zones%20on%20KCC%20roads%2003102013%20Environment%20Highways%20and%20Wast.pdf>

7 Bus Services

Approximately 80% of the local bus network in Kent runs on a commercial basis and in Maidstone is operated by the likes of Arriva and Nu-Venture. Kent County Council (KCC) builds on this network by providing £6.8 million in discretionary subsidy towards the other 20% of the network. This equates to approximately 166 local bus services which are not commercially viable for local bus operators but are considered to be socially necessary as they provide the only access to key services.

Additional services such as the Maidstone Borough Council funded Park and Ride facilities are also provided on top of this core network. This service is reviewed in part 9 of this report.

7.1 Quality Bus Partnership

The Quality Bus Partnership (QBP)³⁶ is a voluntary partnership between MBC, KCC and the primary commercial bus company, Arriva. NuVenture is represented by KCC at the QBP as their services are mainly funded by KCC. The Partnership

“is committed to encouraging the use of public transport in and around Maidstone to help residents get around more easily, to reduce the effects of traffic congestion, to help Maidstone’s economy and reduce emissions.”

The Partnership discusses operational issues of the principal commercial public transport companies operating in and around Maidstone.

Some of the achievements of the QBP outlined on their web page include:

- Spending £3.3 million on 11 new hybrid buses for Route 71, serving the A20 and A26 - this was funded by the Green Bus fund, KCC and Arriva;
- Adding six new buses on Route 82, serving Park Wood;
- Spending £100,000 to fully-refurbish seven mid-life buses;
- Building 12 new bus shelters;
- Spending £50,000 to refresh Maidstone’s Chequers Bus Station;
- Improved the quality of bus stops;

“Much of the negative feedback on bus services focuses on two rural routes. This represents just four out of the 62 bus services Arriva and NuVenture operate in Maidstone. It should be noted that issues affecting these four rural buses are not representative of the good work that has gone on under the auspices of the Quality Bus Partnership which has delivered significant investment and improvements throughout the Borough.”

Arriva Buses

³⁶ <http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/residents/parking-and-streets/quality-bus-partnership>

- Increased the number of clearways at bus stops, reducing obstructions to buses and delays to services;
- Starting a forum for discussing route changes, bus issues, performance and customer feedback;
- Helped set up trials for contactless payments;
- Helped increase the number of satisfied passengers using the buses in Maidstone;
- Helped improve the punctuality of the bus services in Maidstone and
- Introducing the A20 Statutory Quality Partnership Scheme - the scheme sets the minimum standards for buses and bus stops along the A20, and;
- All of Arriva's Maidstone fleet now have low-floors and are 100% wheelchair accessible.

At a meeting with representatives of the QBP on 16 September 2014, it was agreed a proposal would go to the Partnership to recommend a Councillor from MBC be invited to join the QBP.

Recommendation

H. That a member of Maidstone Borough Council's Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee (PTD OSC), or a member of the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be invited to join the Quality Bus Partnership.

7.2 Service issues in the Rural Service Centres and Parishes

In preparation for the review of bus services in the Maidstone Borough the working group consulted with all Borough Councillors and Parish Councils asking for the following information:

- Any bus service issues you may have in your constituency, and;
- Any bus user groups you are aware of in your constituency.

The responses received were used as the basis for the questions put to the witnesses, who kindly agreed to attend meetings with the working group and the committee for this review.

The responses demonstrated the parishes who did respond were either not aware of any bus user groups in their parish or omitted to respond to the question.

Responses were received from 12 parish councils. The issues raised focussed mainly around:

- Reliability – buses arriving early, late or not at all;
- Availability/Frequency – some parishes had a bus service but it was too infrequent;
- Cost of fares;
- Bus stops and shelters.

7.3 Reliability

Road closures

The reliability issues raised focussed mainly on certain buses arriving late or not arriving at all due to road works or road closures.

It was reported that KCC Highways system of notification to bus service providers of road closures had worked well. However service providers reported it had recently become “erratic”. Service providers stressed the importance of receiving this information in a timely manner, to minimise disruption, was paramount to them being able to deliver their services.

The Traffic Commissioner requires bus service providers give eight weeks-notice of road closures but it was accepted that this was not always possible with emergency road closures. The Traffic Commission, the regulator for bus service providers, has a rigid legal framework service providers have to work within.

Service providers are required to give 56 days notice of changes to bus routes and the Commissioner applies this requirement rigidly. If bus services followed diversions put in place because of road closures they could be found to be breaking the law. However, there is some flexibility in this. Whilst there is a need for operators to register changes to their timetables and routes (with short notice support from the Local Authority where appropriate) the Traffic Commissioner does have a facility whereby operators can register short notice variations required due to road works at no cost and without the need for 56 days notice. Operators can also specify within their permanent registrations that the registered route “may be subject to change in the event of an emergency or if roads specified are not available”.

Responsibility for putting up notices to notify service users of cancelled or suspended services lies with KCC for their part funded routes. Arriva are responsible for putting up notices for all their routes.

It was reported that KCC Public Transport department had recently moved to the same site as Kent Highways department and was now under the same banner of Kent Highways. It was planned to organise regular meetings between Public Transport Planners and Highways to liaise and discuss approaches to road closures taking into account the needs of the service users affected by them.

It was noted that an appreciation that some road works have to take place at short notice due to the emergency nature and as such bus service cannot always be fully considered.

Parked cars blocking roads

This was an issue already being considered through groups such as the Quality Bus Partnership (QBP) and the Punctuality and Improvement Partnership (PiP). Issues can be raised by the predominant commercial operator (Arriva) as these forums are attended by the appropriate authorities to deal with these issues.

Where parked cars become regular occurrences on roads served by buses, service providers report it to MBC as the delegated parking authority so the appropriate measures can be considered, for example, enforcement. NuVenture reported they always found MBC very responsive in dealing with such reports.

Buses arriving and leaving earlier than scheduled

There are legal obligations on bus companies to ensure buses run to time and use of electronic ticketing equipment makes it much easier to detect issues. Early running of buses is always avoidable and generally dealt with through disciplinary action.

“Provision of a regular and reliable bus service is paramount for the passenger – and for their part, the operators will always seek to provide the most reliable service”

*Norman Kemp, NuVenture Coaches Ltd,
16 September 2014*

Groups such as the QBP and PiP see various partners work together to help buses run more reliably where possible. Discussions at meetings include looking at issues such as congestion, bus priority measures and funding streams to increase service provision. KCC have a performance monitoring/compliance process in place for contracted services to ensure they are running as per the Kent Bus contract terms and conditions and agreed service specification.

Real time service updates

Real time service updates could be provided at bus stops or in nearby shops. Technology to provide this service was already available on every bus, transmitting details of where they were.

Where funding is available this service could be provided by parish councils or funded through Section 106 Agreements. The cost would need to be weighed against the number of users. The maintenance and repair of the equipment would also need to be taken into consideration.

Commercial services are monitored by the responsible statutory body, the Traffic Commissioner.

Recommendation

I. That the Public Transport Team at Kent County Council at meetings with KCC Highways, raise the following requests and report back to the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference during the 2015-2016 municipal year:

- A definitive list of forthcoming road closures be sent to bus service providers in a timely manner to facilitate compliance with the Traffic Commissioners regulations;***
- A set of processes and procedures are established and put in place for communicating road closures to avoid problems when changes to Highways personnel are made;***
- A definition of what constitutes an emergency road closure is published and shared with bus service providers.***

7.4 Availability

Issues raised by parish councils included:

- Services finishing too early and not catering for workers returning home and the twilight economy;
- Services not linking rural villages to train stations or Maidstone town;
- No Sunday bus service;
- No cross Borough service, eg, Headcorn to Lenham or Staplehurst;
- One bus per hour out of the parish was not enough;
- Not enough return services from Maidstone;
- Some bus routes not serving local shop and other facilities.

It was reported that the KCC's Local Bus budget was fully allocated. KCC had managed to maintain a high number of subsidised services despite the current financial climate. If a new service required funding KCC was not currently in a position to fund it.

Funding streams were becoming increasingly important in providing bus services such as Section 106 Agreements, Kickstart and the Community Transport sector.

Recommendation

J. That the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for Community and Leisure in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be recommended, as part of the Parish Charter refresh, to include a section on the powers and opportunities parish councils have in the provision of transport services and capital equipment, such as bus shelters and real time transport information, and funding streams available to them.

7.5 Quality Contracts

A House of Commons Transport Select Committee report on Passenger Transport in Isolated Communities³⁷ raised the potential for local authorities to use Quality Contracts to introduce franchising systems similar to those operating in London – where the local transport authority specifies what service is required and the private sector competes for the right to provide it.

For KCC contracted services there is usually a tender round per district (involving the majority of services within that district) every four years. The tendering of a district as one allows operators to submit proposals, where appropriate, to provide a more total network solution. KCC Public Transport was going through a restructure and will look to challenge traditional tendering methods. Quality Contracts are an area that may be explored further. The re-structure will see the combining of Local Bus and Mainstream (school transport) functions at KCC.

7.6 Service enhancements

The 20% reduction in Bus Service Operator Grants was still having an effect on supported bus services. This reduced the ability of local authorities to respond to transport needs in isolated communities and impacted on employment and the local economy.

NuVenture reported if there was enough demand for a particular service they would be interested in providing it. Parish councils and residents who had ideas for bus service enhancements were encouraged to speak to the bus operators. If the idea was considered viable and linked with an existing service it is possible it could be provided.

NuVenture also reported they would be happy to provide a 'twilight' service if funding was available. Medway Council are currently running a pilot twilight service that could be used as a model.

³⁷ HC288 published 22 July 2014

Any local authority (District or Parish) could use their funds to provide a service. If the service is proven to be socially important, authorities can put the service out to competitive tender.

Recommendation

T. That a Maidstone Borough Council Officer be asked to investigate and report back to the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference Committee during the municipal year 2015-2016 on the progress and lessons learnt from the Medway twilight bus service once the trial is completed.

7.7 Cost

Concern regarding the cost of bus services was raised by several parish councils particularly for their unemployed and low income residents.

MBC's Maidstone Financial Capability Partnership (MFCP) has been looking at ways to assist residents with making their money go further and provide support during, what may be for some, financially difficult times using partner organisations expertise across the Borough.

The project has been looking at household expenditure including transport costs. A meeting between members of MFCP and Arriva officers was held on 29 September 2014 to discuss the role of bus services in social inclusion.

During the meeting it was discussed that Arriva may be able to allow organisations to bulk buy tickets, and give to struggling families who are in crisis. Each organisation would apply for the deal, and decide which family to help with a discounted ticket. Organisations who would benefit from this are Children's Centres, Kent Support and Assistance Service (KCC), and Troubled Families Programme (MBC Maidstone Families Matter). A bulk buy scheme could also benefit residents attending work experience, interviews and apprenticeship schemes through Job Centre Plus, MBC and KCC.

Demographic information on residents of the Maidstone Borough would enable Arriva to revise their fare structure for the more deprived areas of the Borough.

7.8 Total Transport

The House of Commons Transport Select Committee report on Passenger Transport in Isolated Communities previously mentioned discusses the concept of Total Transport.

“Total Transport involves integrating transport services that are currently commissioned by different central and local government agencies and provided by different operators. Such integrated services might deliver improved passenger transport in isolated communities by allocating existing resources more efficiently. That might entail, for example, combining conventional bus services with hospital transport.”

The concept of Total Transport for Maidstone Borough was considered by service providers as a way forward. However, they reported the issue would be how to calculate how much of the fares each provider would get and what methods would be used to buy services. Joint thinking and working was key to success and was something providers were keen to investigate.

7.9 Bus Stops and Shelters

Several parishes reported issues with the provision of bus shelters and bus stops. The issues included safety; positioning, shelter from the weather; seating and maintenance.

The basic ‘advertising’ bus shelters are managed by MBC through a contractor. The new contract was in the process of being procured and if the existing contractor was unsuccessful in renewing the contract they would be likely to take away the existing shelters.

Parish councils can provide their own shelters and can apply for up to £2000 Rural Bus Shelter Grant from KCC, which would require match funding. There is a Kent Design Guide to help parishes with the design and siting of their shelter and signing and on-going maintenance to ensure it is built in keeping with the surrounding area.

Recommendation

L. That the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for Community and Leisure in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be recommended, as part of the Parish Charter refresh, to include a section on the powers and opportunities parish councils have in the provision of transport services and capital equipment, such as bus shelters and real time transport information, and funding streams available to them.

KCC and bus service providers agreed it would be useful for parishes to get involved with Kent Highways regarding the siting of shelters. It was also recommended the bus service providers are consulted on the design to ensure drivers are able to see there are passengers waiting to be picked up. Tovil Green’s new bus shelter was described as a good example of an effective bus shelter.

Recommendation

M. That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new 2015 municipal year, be recommended to include the potential use of Section 106/Community Infrastructure Levy monies to support the provision of bus services, and/or provide capital equipment for bus services in the Borough in the Local Plan.

Recommendation

N. That Kent County Council Transport Planning Officers be recommended to make strong arguments where they can to give Section 106 agreements impetus to provide bus services in and around the Borough of Maidstone.

7.10 Bus User Groups in the Maidstone Borough

East of Maidstone Bus Group (EMBG)

Membership of this group includes eight parish councils in the East of Maidstone; Kent County Council; NuVenture and Arriva.

The group meets two to three times each year to consider and address issues raised by parishes or bus operators to help improve and safeguard services across the area, draw attention to issues raised, publicise services and help drive up passenger numbers.

The main concerns raised by this group were:

- **Journey times** – and their impact on people deciding to travel by bus (or not). It was suggested that new routes should be considered side by side with the Local Plan;
- **Community Bus Services** – it was suggested it would be unrealistic for local authorities to expect voluntary/community projects to compensate for decreased bus services;
- **Section 106 Agreements** – should be used to support new/revised routes supporting the Rural Service Centres;
- **MBC Transport Committee** – this group was disbanded some years ago. It had high level representatives from bus service operators; Network Rail; Southeastern Rail; service users; MBC officers; KCC officers. The group discussed transport service issues across the Maidstone Borough as well as safety issues, planning consents and contributions from developers. EMBG considered this group to have been a valuable asset to driving forward improvements to public transport and should be re-established.

Local Transport Accessibility Group (LTAG)

This group represents Staplehurst, Frittenden, Sissinghurst, Cranbrook, Hawkhurst, Sandhurst and Bodiam, parishes who are connected in some way to Hawkhurst by bus.

The group meets every two months and is attended by parish councillors, residents' associations, bus service providers, Arriva, Kent County Council and service users. The group provides a forum for service users and providers to have face to face discussions regarding bus service provision.

The main concerns raised by this group were:

Performance and reliability of the No 5 bus route – the group reported the unreliability of this service had resulted in many parents not risking their children going to/from school using this service due to reliability and capacity issues. Parents chose to take their children to school by car instead.

It was requested that better, more timely, information from KCC in relation to the issuing of bus passes for young people and those in school, college or training, would help bus operators plan more effectively, especially at the start of the academic year when passes were issued and re-issued.

7.11 The Number 5 Bus Service

The number 5 service has distinct flows of children to Cornwallis Academy and Maidstone schools in one direction and to Angley School in the other. The service came under the spotlight during the 2013-14 academic year regarding both capacity and operational issues. As a result Arriva delivered a number of operational changes to help with reliability, such as the introduction of a regular set of drivers and more frequent maintenance inspections of vehicles. It is believed these changes have had a positive effect on the service.

“KCC funds three additional capacity vehicles on the number 5 service and are confident that the corridor is now robust enough to cater for all intending passengers. Our understanding is that correspondence this year has centred around operational issues which are actively being addressed by Arriva as the commercial operator. Ultimately, these need to continue to be raised with Arriva or failing that with the Traffic Commission which is the statutory body responsible for the regulation of commercial bus service operations. KCC is confident with the capacity on the corridor but continues to liaise with Arriva on this and other issues.”

KCC Local Transport Planning (Mid Kent)

Regarding capacity, KCC's involvement with the commercial network is to purchase season tickets for children in education who are entitled to free home to school transport. Due to this, and the existence of the Young Persons Travel Pass, KCC do work with commercial operators to assist with genuine issues of overcrowding where they are identified and take an interest in the network in general.

Arriva App for mobile phones – in relation to providing real time information and the location of buses was considered a useful advance and would make life easier for those who owned a Smart phone. However, many rural bus service users did not own a Smart phone.

Recommendation

0. That parishes, residents associations and neighbourhood forums be encouraged by the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, to form groups similar to the East of Maidstone Bus User Group.

8 Rail Services

Kent's rail network is the result of historic competition between rival railway companies in the 19th century; consolidation under the Southern Railway and then British Railways in the 20th century; and dramatic change delivered by the present franchise operator with the arrival of High Speed services which have transformed journey times between East Kent and London in the 21st century.³⁸

On 11 September 2014 Southeastern Trains announced that a 'Direct Award' contract had been agreed with the Department for Transport. It was stated "customers would see a host of schemes rolled out over the next three and a half years to improve train services and the passenger experience. The new franchise would run from 12 October 2014 to 24 June 2018."³⁹

In previous franchise agreements Southeastern Trains would have received revenue support from the Government to provide rail services. The new franchise put Southeastern Trains in 'Revenue Risk'. This meant they had to generate all their income. This should result in more effective marketing and partnership working with local bus service providers and tourist attractions.

As a result of this review the committee acknowledge the good work commuter rail user groups are doing, but note that their primary focus is travel from Maidstone to London and other commuter destinations, whilst our review has been focussing on local travel into Maidstone. However as the Council moves forward in implementing the proposals in our review there will be some issues where these concerns overlap and opportunities for appropriate future co-operation will be considered.

On Tuesday 18 November 2014 the Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting focused on Rail services as part of this review. Witnesses who attended this meeting were:

- Mike Gibson, Public Affairs Manager, Southeastern Rail;
- Mike Fitzgerald, Chair Kent Community Rail Partnership and Medway Valley Line Group;
- Keith Harrison, Chief Executive, Action with Rural Communities;
- Stephen Gasche, Principal Transport Planner – Rail, Kent County Council – written evidence presented to the meeting.

³⁸ Rail Action Plan for Kent April 2011, Kent County Council

³⁹ <http://www.southeasternrailway.co.uk/about-us/latest-news/southeastern-awarded-new-contract-to-continue-operation-of-train-services/>

8.1 Improvements to rail service provision in the Maidstone Borough

In preparation for the review of rail services in the Maidstone Borough the working group consulted with all Borough Councillors and Parish Councils asking for the following information:

- What issues does your parish have with train services within the borough that result in people using their car rather than the train?

The responses received were used as the basis for the questions put to the witnesses, who kindly agreed to attend meetings with the working group and the committee for this review.

Feedback received from parish councils and borough Councillors focused on four main areas:

- Cost
- Station parking and 'rail heading'
- Convenience and reliability
- Safety

8.2 Cost

Comments received included "more travellers would use the train instead of their cars if the train fares were more affordable"; and, "the high cost of train travel means that the fares are a prohibiting factor to many potential users."

Southeastern Trains regularly surveyed its customers. Data gathered demonstrated that value for money services was one of their customers' main priorities along with more frequent trains at times convenient to them and a seat on the train.

Value for money was going to be a major focus for Southeastern Trains over the next four years. While government set the cost of regulated fares, for example season tickets, Southeastern Trains had control of off peak fares. At the Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 18 November 2014⁴⁰, Mike Gibson, Public Affairs Manager of Southeastern Trains stated "in the coming months customers would see more offers on off peak services."

On 5 December 2014 Southeastern announced a freeze on super off peak fares for 2015 claiming this will cut the cost of more than one million off peak journeys for passengers in Kent and East Sussex. The company is also making the special fares available on more routes, including the high speed service, which runs from Kent into London. The train operator also announced it will offer Advance fares for the first time in 2015 allowing customers a discount by pre-booking off peak fares via the Southeastern website.⁴¹

⁴⁰ <http://services.maidstone.gov.uk/meetings/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=555&MId=2188&Ver=4>

⁴¹ <http://www.southeasternrailway.co.uk/about-us/latest-news/southeastern-announces-a-rail-sale-huge-reductions-for-more-than-a-million-off-peak-journeys/>

8.3 Station Parking and 'rail-heading'

Comments received from parish councils regarding the issue of station parking related to the availability of spaces and the cost of parking at rural stations. Both were considered, by respondents, to be a deterrent to encouraging the use of rail as an alternative to using the car to get to Maidstone.

Rural stations such as Headcorn and Staplehurst provide good services for commuters into London. It was reported this resulted in commuters from other areas in the borough, where services into London were not so regular and fast, travelling across to Headcorn or Staplehurst to use the rail services. This practice was described as 'rail-heading' and occurs in locations along the Maidstone East line and the Tonbridge/Sevenoaks line.

Rail-heading results in rural station car parks being full to capacity or nearby residential streets being used rather than the car park (due to the cost), Headcorn was given as an example.

Since the Canon Street service from Maidstone was stopped in 2009, SET had seen an increase in passenger numbers from Paddock Wood. It was reported to the committee that it was possible to find out where season tick holders lived who were travelling from this station to establish how far they had driven to use the service.

Network Rail owned the land used for station parking. Suggested solutions to alleviate parking pressures at rural rail stations included approaching Network Rail to consider expanding car parks (noting this would require funds) and Southeastern Trains reducing the parking charges to encourage their use instead of residential streets.

Recommendation

P. That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be recommended to survey the users of Maidstone East railway station car park to find out their reason for using it to establish how many users were rail passengers and how many were not.

Recommendation

Q. That the Cabinet Member for Planning Transport and Development or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be recommended to:

- Respond to the Department for Transport's franchise consultation, which was due in 2016;***
- To reduce unnecessary car travel within the borough, this response should request improved commuter and off peak services using high speed trains and Thameslink services to reduce the number of rail users travelling across the borough by car to other stations that offer better service than their local station;***
- Continue to promote aspirations for re-securing a Maidstone to Canon Street service.***

Recommendation

R. That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be recommended to re-establish the Maidstone Borough Transport User Group. Membership to include representatives from all public transport service providers, KCC transport planners, MBC officers/members, parish councils, service users and other interested parties to ensure on-going issues with transport and ideas for enhancements to services are communicated and dealt with

KCC, in partnership with East Sussex County Council persuaded the Department for Transport to bring the new Thameslink services for Kent to Maidstone East rather than Tunbridge Wells. From May 2018 Maidstone East will be served by a direct half-hourly service to four key London stations (Elephant and Castle, Blackfriars, Farringdon and St Pancras). It is hoped this new service will substantially reduce rail-heading

8.4 Convenience and reliability

Parish councils raised the issue that rural train stations can be a long way out of the village, resulting in residents having to get in their car to travel to the station. It is thought, once in their car, residents felt they may as well continue their journey to Maidstone by car.

One parish council suggested a bus service from the village centre to the train station, linking up with train times, would help increase rail use in these parishes.

Southeastern Trains stated they were working with other public transport providers to link up and coordinate services. Plus Bus was a scheme currently in operation which included bus and rail travel, however, it is not advertised well. Stagecoach in Thanet was given as an example of where the two (bus and rail) services worked well together.

Another example of where bus and rail coordination worked well was the route 123 between West Malling station and Kings Hill. This bus service has a timetable based entirely on rail connections at the station to provide a link between the employment and residential area of Kings Hill and the rail services provided at West Malling station.

Kent was one of the smallest franchises in geographical terms, with 178 stations. Service specifications (for example trains per hour) were set by Government. The times of the trains were set by the operator (Southeastern). Train services would be quicker if there were fewer infrastructure issues (the responsibility of Network Rail) and trains did not stop at so many stations.⁴²

⁴² Statement by Mike Gibson, Public Affairs Manager of Southeastern Trains at meeting of PTD OSC 18 November 2014.

An on-going issue with the 07:45 service from Bearsted caused by a freight train regularly breaking down resulting in the service being cancelled. The knock on effect was parents having to take their children to school increasing the number of cars going into the town.

Network rail allocate time slots to service providers and freight operators. The freight trains used are old and prone to breaking down. Southeastern Trains have been working with Network Rail, at a senior level, to ensure the 07:45 service from Bearsted and other affected stations on this route receive a reliable service.

Through working together KCC, Network Rail and SET have made the 7:47 service from Ashford to Maidstone East more reliable. There was frequent occasions when this service was cut or operated non-stop between Ashford and Maidstone, leaving school children stranded. Now SET and Network Rail's joint control centre knows this train must operate, even if it means making changes to other services as a result.

Southeastern Trains stated that information provided to its customers was crucial, especially when services were delayed and the reasons for the delay. In the first four months of the new franchise 100 additional staff had been employed. Plans were in place to provide front line staff with iPads to assist customers with timely information on rail services. A mobile phone app was also available. Information boards at Maidstone stations were due to be upgraded.

To assist with reliability issues, Network Rail would be removing speed restrictions and improving their programme of asset repairs and maintenance. Southeastern Trains claimed issues with timetables for 2015 had been resolved.

8.5 Safety

Feedback from parish councils stated the increase in anti-social behaviour on the trains with insufficient staff on the trains to deal with it was a major concern.

Concern was also raised regarding the transport infrastructure in the proposed Rural Service Areas in the draft Local Plan, such as Lenham and Harrietsham. Stations in these areas were considered by councillors to be in a poor state of repair with no lighting and no staff.

SET reported they were planning to make stations more welcoming to customers to encourage people out of their cars on to trains. This would be achieved by more attractive off peak travel, providing decent, clean stations where customers could buy a ticket and improved timetable information.

SET reported they were investing £5m in station improvements in partnership with Kent County Council and local businesses. All South East rail stations will be deep cleaned by the end of 2015. Other improvements would include online information, CCTV, ticket machines and ticket gates.

As mentioned under point 8.5.6.8 SET have increased the number of front line staff at stations.

SET stated they were expanding their City Safe Haven scheme with local police, where train stations were used as a place of safety for the public. The scheme had been trialled in Medway and London and SET were planning to extend this to other areas.

8.6 Kent Community Rail Partnership⁴³

The Kent Community Rail Partnership (KCRP) partners include Kent County Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and South Eastern trains as members, together with the following parish councils:

- Yalding;
- East Malling & Larkfield;
- Barming;
- East Farleigh;
- Aylesham; and,
- Maidstone Borough Councillor, Fay Gooch.

KCRP is funded by its members.

KCRP focuses its work on rail lines considered unlikely to attract investment from the rail industry. It works to bring social, economic and environmental benefits to the communities served by the rural and secondary rail services by improving community links with rail operators and initiating projects to make rail service more attractive to residents and visitors.

The Medway Valley Line is one line the KCRP promotes. This line runs from Strood in North Kent to Paddock Wood in the Weald of Kent with Maidstone West station, the only staffed station along the line, set centrally along it. To the south of Maidstone the line follows the course of the River Medway as far as Yalding and is mainly rural. To the north of Maidstone the area is mainly urban and industrial.

Regular services run from Maidstone West to Strood and Tonbridge. The High Speed service to and from St Pancras runs at peak morning and evening times Monday to Friday.

KCRP uses pop up displays to promote rail services to those who do not use them and to gather information and help to improve the services for those that did by influencing the service providers.

⁴³ <http://www.kentcrp.org.uk/>

KCRP had promoted the provision of cycle parking at Maidstone East station. It was reported there had been an increase in passengers cycling to the station with 50 to 60 passengers using the facility on most days.

The work of KCRP also included promoting health and safety on the railways to children between the ages of 10 and 12. Their work in schools also included promoting rail travel to children.

KCRP also run Station Adoption Schemes and Station Champion Schemes. This is where parish councils or an individual take responsibility for enhancing the facilities and look of a station. The schemes have resulted in one or two stations being adopted and had shown signs of reducing crime at these stations. KCRP are keen to expand this scheme to more stations.

Recommendation

S. That Councillor Chittenden investigate how Maidstone Borough can be represented on the South Eastern Public Transport User Group and report back to the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015

Recommendation

T. That the Head of Planning and Development be recommended to ensure Section 106 funding be sought from developers at every opportunity to:

- Support public transport links to and from new developments linking bus and rail services, and;***
- Ensure the provision is timed in a way to provide services that increase as occupation of developments increase.***

Recommendation

U. That the Chairman of the Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee write to Mr Mike Gibson, Public Affairs Manager, South Eastern Trains to:

- Establish how parish councils can access funding for improvements to rural rail stations;***
- Request he take forward his suggestion to approach Network Rail regarding the possibility of expanding rail station car parks at Bearsted and Headcorn and look into the possibility of extending this to other rural rail stations;***
- Request he take forward his suggestion to reduce parking costs at rural rail stations such as Headcorn to discourage rail users from parking in residential areas.***

9 Park and Ride Services

The first Park and Ride service was introduced to Maidstone during the early 1980's on a Saturday only basis, where bus services operated from Springfield and Armstrong Road.

In November 1989, the first all-week Park and Ride car park was opened at Willington Street, followed by sites at Coombe Quarry (1990), London Road (1991) and Sittingbourne Road (1998).

The existing Park and Ride service was introduced as a result of severe peak hour traffic congestion in and around the town centre, together with growing pressures in the densely populated residential streets around the town where long stay commuter parking had become a significant problem.

In 1990, the concept of resident zone parking was introduced in and around Maidstone which excluded all day free parking except for valid permit holders. Much of the displaced parking has been accommodated in the Park and Ride car parks and has provided some parking easement in residential streets.

In policy terms, Maidstone Park and Ride is described primarily as a long stay parking facility although it has also become very popular with shoppers particularly at Christmas. The Park and Ride is a vital aspect in accommodating significant numbers of visitors to the town centre and reducing volumes of traffic during peak periods of demand. Its popularity is based on a high quality bus service and conveniently placed car parks.

Maidstone Borough Council ceased the Coombe Quarry service in 2006 and presently operates three bus services.

9.1 What is currently offered by the service?

The following Park and Ride bus tickets are currently available:

Peak Day Return before 09:00, Monday - Friday	£2.60
Off-Peak Day Return	£1.60
10 Trip Ticket valid for 3 months	£10.30
4 Week Ticket only available via mobile M-Ticketing App	£41.20
12 Week Season Ticket	£103.00

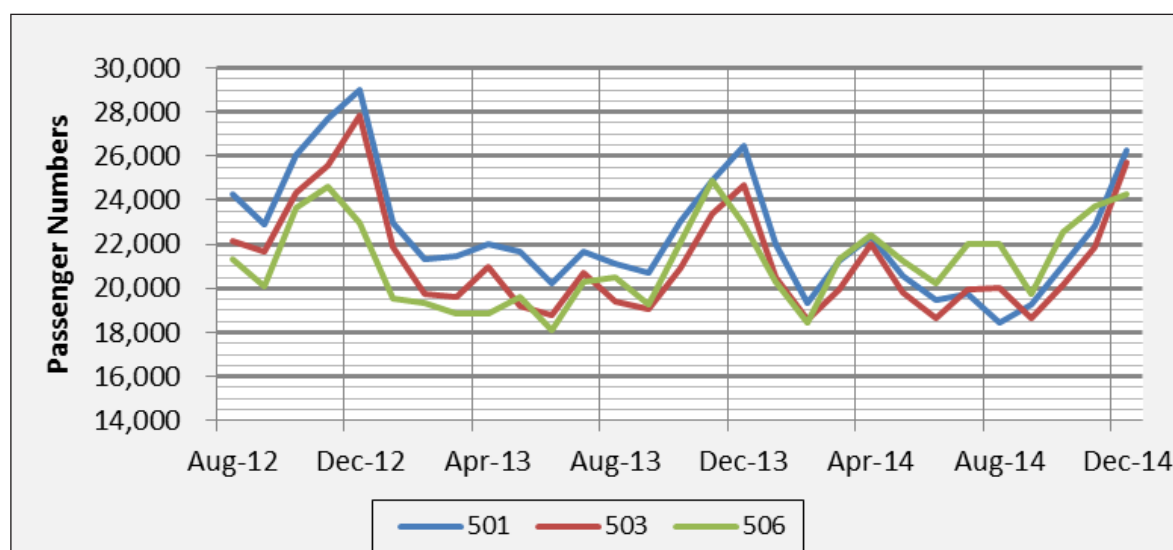
Continued Overleaf

Maidstone Borough Council operates three Park and Ride bus services where customers park for free at each site and pay a fare to travel on the bus into the town centre. The three sites are:

- Willington Street (501);
- London Road (503); and,
- Sittingbourne Road (506).

The two graphs below show passenger numbers for all three services from August 2012 to December 2014.

Maidstone Park & Ride Passenger Numbers



	501 Willington Street	503 London Road	506 Sittingbourne Road
Aug - Dec 2012	129,993	121,554	112,535
Jan - Dec 2013	267,423	248,417	244,197
Jan - Dec 2014	252,692	245,926	258,346

9.2 Is the service cost effective?

Parking Services department at MBC reviewed Park and Ride passenger statistics during 2012 and removed a number of journeys considered to be non-viable. This was to realign services to passenger demand and, with effect 14 January 2013, reduced operational costs by £121,390 per annum.

The budgeted subsidy for Park and Ride for the 2014/15 financial year was £522,340 and it is predicted that expenditure will be on, or perform slightly better, than budget.

The Council negotiated a new three year contract with Arriva Kent and Surrey starting 1 June 2014, this new contract represented further savings of £26,026. In addition, 140 spaces at the Sittingbourne Road site have been leased to Towergate Insurance and Kent Institute of Medical Science for a fee of £60,000 per annum. Parking Services also plan leasing up to 70 spaces at the Willington Street site for a potential further income of £60,480.

9.3 What impact the service has on the town centre?

Easing congestion

Across the three sites the service provides off road parking for a total of 1,438 vehicles with an additional 58 disabled bays. The service provision is considered by MBC Officers to be fundamental in reducing ever-increasing levels of traffic, particularly during peak morning and evening periods.

Benefits to users

Commuters and visitors to Maidstone can use the service and access the car park sites which are all located in close proximity to the town centre; off the Ashford Road A20 and M20 motorway (junctions 5 & 7).

The buses operate every 20 minutes throughout the day, providing transport services to and from the town centre.

9.4 Why do/don't people use the service?

Using the service

Tariffs applied at short and long stay car parks in Maidstone are more expensive per day compared to when travelling via the Park and Ride bus service.

Short stay tariffs:

30 minutes	1 hour	2 hours	Up to 4 hours
50p	90p	£2.00	£3.00

Long stay tariffs:

1 hour	3 hours	4 hours	5 hours	Over 5 hours	Overnight 6:30pm-8am
90p	£2.00	£3.00	£4.50	£6.00	£1.50

A greater number of parking spaces are available at the sites than at the public car parking facilities in the town centre. This makes finding a parking space easier than it is in the town.

All buses have been re-liveried, refurbished and are WiFi enabled. This modernisation of the buses provides free internet access when travelling to and from the town centre.

Not using the service

Traditionally, members of the public prefer to drive rather than use public transport.

The existing Park & Ride bus routes may take longer than travelling by car into the town centre. Maidstone has limited designated bus lanes meaning buses sit within 'general' traffic during peak periods.

Operational hours of the service are limited and may ultimately deter potential users who wish to work or stay in the town beyond 6pm. No services operate on a Sunday.

9.5 Stability of current agreements for delivering the service

Maidstone Borough Council owns the site at Willington Street, but leases the areas of land at both London Road and Sittingbourne Road.

Traffic modelling highlights Sittingbourne Road as the prime location for a Park and Ride site in Maidstone due to its access to and from the M20. The future of this site is tentative due to the landowner's own development aspirations, the varying cost to MBC for occupying the land and the existing lease which will expire on 8 November 2015.

9.6 The strategic importance of the service

The strategic direction of transport provision in the Maidstone borough will be set in the Integrated Transport Strategy as part of the Maidstone Borough Local Plan to ensure transport requirements meet the demands of the development needed in the borough to 2031. MBC Officers consider it important the Park and Ride service is supported by MBC until the Integrated Transport Strategy is adopted.

If the service was to be discontinued commuters who use the service daily for travelling to and from work would have to find alternative means of transport. This would result in an increased demand for long stay town centre parking due to the volume of traffic.

Parking Services would need to revise the balance between short stay and long stay parking to cater for the new demand. This may also influence the car park market as private operators meet demand.

Other impacts of discontinuing the service would include (but not limited to):

- Increased congestion;
- Reduced journey times within and across the town centre;
- Increased air pollution;
- Reduction in economic growth in Maidstone as a result of the infrastructure being unable to support it.

9.7 The Future of Park and Ride in Maidstone

In order to maximise income, the Council has previously explored the viability of customers' paying a combined fee for car parking and bus fare at each of the Park and Ride sites in a similar way to how Canterbury city Council charge for their service. This is being investigated further. There are VAT implications relating to this method of charging that will need to be taken into consideration.

In addition, the cost to repair the faulty lighting circuit at Willington Street site has been secured this year and will be fully operational by autumn 2015.

Ultimately, if the service is to continue, site investment must be secured for Sittingbourne Road and Willington Street to ensure facilities are modernised to attract further patronage.

Until recent years the budgets for Park and Ride and Parking Services were different service units. The budgets for both services, in the wider national analysis of service spend, are both categorised under the heading of 'Transport'. However, in Maidstone these two budgets have always been reported separately as two individual services. Some members felt there was a clear relationship between the pricing structure of the two services (Park and Ride and Parking) and the consequent relative demand for each of the services.

Recommendation

V. Maidstone Borough Council, through the Committee with responsibility for transport in its terms of reference from the new 2015 municipal year, consider aggregating the Park and Ride Service and Parking Services Budgets to ensure that the access to the Town Centre is managed in a more coherent and integrated manner and to safeguard against possible changes in the regulatory climate.

Recommendation

W. Maidstone Borough Council, through the Committee with responsibility for transport in its terms of reference from the new 2015 municipal year, should actively investigate and seek to bring forward an express bus service linked to the Park and Ride service, with particular attention initially being paid to the South Maidstone route.

10 Recommendations

- A. *That after the publication of this report a sub group be formed from the beginning of the municipal year 2015, by the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference, to explore:*
- *Alternative methods of transport for the future that will help ease congestion in Maidstone town. This sub-group to take forward research into future alternatives (for example rail halts on the Medway Valley Line, trams) and improving existing forms of transport, and;*
 - *Possible European Union funding to fund new transport initiatives.*
- B. *That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be recommended to carry out consultation with car users to establish why they drive into Maidstone town and what would encourage them to use an alternative mode of transport to get into the town.*
- C. *That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be recommended to lobby Kent County Council on the reconfiguration of the Maidstone Gyratory system to ensure safe cycle passages. The design of the gyratory system should incorporate surface cycle passages (not subways) for cyclists heading in and out of the town from west Maidstone using the A20 and A26.*
- D. *That the Head of Planning and Development be asked to report back to the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference during the 2015-2016 municipal year on:*
- *The identity of potential routes for the provision of cycle ways from rural locations (villages and hamlets) with poor bus services, to bus stops on major routes with a more frequent bus service;*
 - *The possibility of creating an orbital cycle and footpath route around Maidstone linking to Maidstone town centre via radial routes such as:*
 - *Len valley to the north of Maidstone*
 - *Medway Valley to the west of Maidstone*
 - *Tovil Nature Park*
 - *The Loose Valley Conservation area*
 - *Boughton Monchelsea, and*
 - *Langley to the east of Maidstone*
 - *The costs of firstly providing cycle parking at the end of these routes;*
 - *The cost of the longer term aim of developing the cycle route to the cycle parking.*

- E. *That the Head of Planning and Development be recommended to urgently refresh and update the draft Maidstone Borough Council Cycling Strategy, dated June 2012 and present it to the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference in the new municipal year 2015-2016 before taking it for public consultation.*
- F. *That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, use the principal proposals from the refreshed Cycling Strategy to inform the emerging Integrated Transport Strategy.*
- G. *That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be recommended to:*
- *Proceed with establishing the Maidstone Cycling Forum and ensure it is supported by an officer with responsibility for cycling in their job description;*
 - *Identify a lead member to act as a cycling champion within the authority.*
- H. *That a member of Maidstone Borough Council's Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee (PTD OSC), or a member of the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be invited to join the Quality Bus Partnership.*
- I. *That the Public Transport Team at Kent County Council at meetings with KCC Highways, raise the following requests and report back to the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference during the 2015-2016 municipal year:*
- *A definitive list of forthcoming road closures be sent to bus service providers in a timely manner to facilitate compliance with the Traffic Commissioners regulations;*
 - *A set of processes and procedures are established and put in place for communicating road closures to avoid problems when changes to Highways personnel are made;*
 - *A definition of what constitutes an emergency road closure is published and shared with bus service providers.*
- J. *That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be recommended to re-establish the Maidstone Borough Transport User Group. Membership to include representatives from all public transport service providers, KCC transport planners, MBC officers/members, parish councils, service users and other interested parties to ensure on-going issues with transport and ideas for enhancements to services are communicated and dealt with.*
- K. *That a Maidstone Borough Council Officer be asked to investigate and report back to the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference Committee during the municipal year 2015-2016 on the progress and lessons learnt from the Medway twilight bus service once the trial is completed.*

- L. *That the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for Community and Leisure in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be recommended, as part of the Parish Charter refresh, to include a section on the powers and opportunities parish councils have in the provision of transport services and capital equipment, such as bus shelters and real time transport information, and funding streams available to them.*
- M. *That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new 2015 municipal year, be recommended to include the potential use of Section 106/Community Infrastructure Levy monies to support the provision of bus services, and/or provide capital equipment for bus services in the Borough in the Local Plan.*
- N. *That Kent County Council Transport Planning Officers be recommended to make strong arguments where they can to give Section 106 agreements impetus to provide bus services in and around the Borough of Maidstone.*
- O. *That parishes, residents associations and neighbourhood forums be encouraged by the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, to form groups similar to the East of Maidstone Bus User Group.*
- P. *That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be recommended to survey the users of Maidstone East railway station car park to find out their reason for using it to establish how many users were rail passengers and how many were not.*
- Q. *That the Cabinet Member for Planning Transport and Development or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be recommended to:*
- Respond to the Department for Transport's franchise consultation, which due in 2016;
 - Reduce unnecessary car travel within the borough, this response should request improved commuter and off peak services using high speed trains and Thameslink services to reduce the number of rail users travelling across the borough by car to other stations that offer better service than their local station;
 - Continue to promote aspirations for re-securing a Maidstone to Canon Street service.
- R. *That the Cabinet Member for Planning Transport and Development or the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015, be recommended to promote the appointment of a Kent County Councillor for Maidstone and a Maidstone Borough Councillor to the Steering Group for the Medway Valley Line and Kent Community Rail Partnership to ensure Maidstone borough's needs are pursued.*

- S. *That Councillor Chittenden investigate how Maidstone Borough can be represented on the South Eastern Public Transport User Group and report back to the relevant new Committee with responsibility for transport and development in their terms of reference from the new municipal year 2015.*
- T. *That the Head of Planning and Development be recommended to ensure Section 106 funding be sought from developers at every opportunity to:*
- *Support public transport links to and from new developments linking bus and rail services, and;*
 - *Ensure the provision is timed in a way to provide services that increase as occupation of developments increase.*
- U. *That the Chairman of the Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee write to Mr Mike Gibson, Public Affairs Manager, SouthEastern Trains to:*
- *Establish how parish councils can access funding for improvements to rural rail stations;*
 - *Request he take forward his suggestion to approach Network Rail regarding the possibility of expanding rail station car parks at Bearsted and Headcorn and look into the possibility of extending this to other rural rail stations;*
 - *Request he take forward his suggestion to reduce parking costs at rural rail stations such as Headcorn to discourage rail users from parking in residential areas.*
- V. *Maidstone Borough Council, through the Committee with responsibility for transport in its terms of reference from the new 2015 municipal year, consider aggregating the Park and Ride Service and Parking Services Budgets to ensure that the access to the Town Centre is managed in a more coherent and integrated manner and to safeguard against possible changes in the regulatory climate.*
- W. *Maidstone Borough Council, through the Committee with responsibility for transport in its terms of reference from the new 2015 municipal year, should actively investigate and seek to bring forward an express bus service linked to the Park and Ride service, with particular attention initially being paid to the South Maidstone route.*

11 Thanks

The Committee would like to express their thanks to:

- Bartholomew Wren – Economic Development Officer Regeneration and Transport, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council;
 - Colin Finch – Senior Public Rights of Way Officer, Kent County Council;
 - Tay Arnold – Cycling Transport Planner, Kent Highways, Kent County Council;
 - David Edwards, Director of Environment and Shared Services;
 - Jeff Kitson, Parking Services Manager;
 - Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development;
 - Steve Clarke, Principal Planning Officer, Spatial Planning;
 - Matthew Cotton, Service and Transport Coordinator;
 - Martin Smith, Senior Transport Planner.
 - Sarah Shearsmith, Community development Team Leader, Maidstone Borough Council;
 - Tim Hapgood, Transport Consultant, Spatial Policy Team, Maidstone Borough Council;
 - Giuliano Gianforte, Environment Officer (Air Quality);
 - James Gower;
 - Stephen Horton, Road Safety Team, KCC
 - Dan Bruce, Local Transport Planner (Mid Kent), KCC;
 - Shane Hymers, Public Transport Policy and Strategy Manager, KCC;
 - Norman Kemp, Nu-Venture Coaches Ltd;
 - Matthew Arnold, Commercial Manager, Arriva;
 - Mike Fitzgerald, Chairman of East of Maidstone Bus Group and Chair Kent Community Rail Partnership and Medway Valley Line Group;
 - Parish Councillor Peter Spearink, Staplehurst PC;
 - Mike Gibson, Partnership Manager, South Eastern Rail
 - Keith Harrison, Chief Executive, Action with Rural Communities
 - Stephen Gasche, Principal Transport Planner – Rail, Kent County Council
- **Parish Councils:**
- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| • Bearsted | • Kingswood and Broomfield |
| • Boughton Monchelsea | • Leeds |
| • Boxley | • Marden |
| • Coxheath – Neighbourhood Plan | • Staplehurst |
| • East Farleigh | • Sutton Valence |
| • East Sutton | • Teston |
| • Headcorn | • Yalding |

12 Evidence Log

Witness sessions

22 July 2014	<p>Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, interviews with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bartholomew Wren – Economic Development Officer Regeneration and Transport, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council;• Colin Finch – Senior Public Rights of Way Officer, Kent County Council;• Tay Arnold – Cycling Transport Planner, Kent Highways, Kent County Council;• Sarah Shearsmith, Community development Team Leader, Maidstone Borough Council;• Tim Hapgood, Transport Consultant, Spatial Policy Team, Maidstone Borough Council;• James Gower – local cycling enthusiast who sent a suggestion via Twitter for the committee to review congestion in the town;
16 September 2014	<p>Working Group meeting and interviews with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dan Bruce, Local Transport Planner (Mid Kent), KCC;• Shane Hymers, Public Transport Policy and Strategy Manager, KCC;• Norman Kemp, Nu-Venture Coaches Ltd;
30 September 2014	<p>Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, interviews with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Matthew Arnold, Commercial Manager, Arriva;• Mike Fitzgerald, Chairman of East of Maidstone Bus Group;• Parish Councillor Peter Spearink, Staplehurst PC;• Norman Kemp, Nu-Venture Coaches Ltd was also in attendance;• Councillor Peter Spearink, Staplehurst Parish Council.
8 January 2015	<p>Working Group meeting and interviews with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• David Edwards, Director of Environment and Shared Services;• Jeff Kitson, Parking Services Manager;• Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development;• Steve Clarke, Principal Planning Officer, Spatial Planning;• Matthew Cotton, Service and Transport Coordinator;• Martin Smith, Senior Transport Planner.

Websites

- https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/343339/congestion-local-a-stats-release-jun-14.pdf
- www.publications.parliament.uk
- www.bbc.co.uk/history/domesday/dblock/GB-576000-153000/page/3
- http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/193108/REVIHAAP-Final-technical-report-final-version.pdf
- <http://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/news/news-and-press-releases/jobs-news/jobs-and-transport-boost-from-104m-growth-deal-funding>
- <http://services.maidstone.gov.uk/meetings/documents/g2059/Public%20reports%20pack%2027th-Jan-2014%2018.30%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>
- <http://dynamic.maidstone.gov.uk/pdf/Local%20Plan%20Regulation%2018.pdf>
- www.cedar.iph.cam.ac.uk/blog/walking-cycling-public-transport-wellbeing/
- <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-295663>
- <http://services.maidstone.gov.uk/meetings/documents/s37180/agenda%20item%2011%20Question%20Sheet%20-%20for%20front%20of%20Committee%20reports.pdf>
- Bikeability.dft.gov.uk
- <http://www.cyclefriday.co.uk/>
- www.walkinforhealth.org.uk
- www.goskyride.com
- <http://www.kmcharityteam.co.uk/schools/schoolswalk/>
- <http://www.cyclescheme.co.uk/employers/employer-faqs>
- Maidstoneramblers.org.uk
- u3asites.org.uk
- www.midkentgroup.co.uk
- www.wkwg.org.uk
- www.sanfairyancc.co.uk
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chief-medical-officer-publishes-annual-report-on-state-of-the-publics-health>
- <http://www.nhs.uk/news/2014/02february/pages/cycling-safety-a-special-report.aspx>
- <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s43305/B1%20Updated%20Policy%20for%2020mph%20limits%20and%20zones%20on%20KCC%20roads%2003102013%20Environment%20Highways%20and%20Wast.pdf>
- <http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/residents/parking-and-streets/quality-bus-partnership>

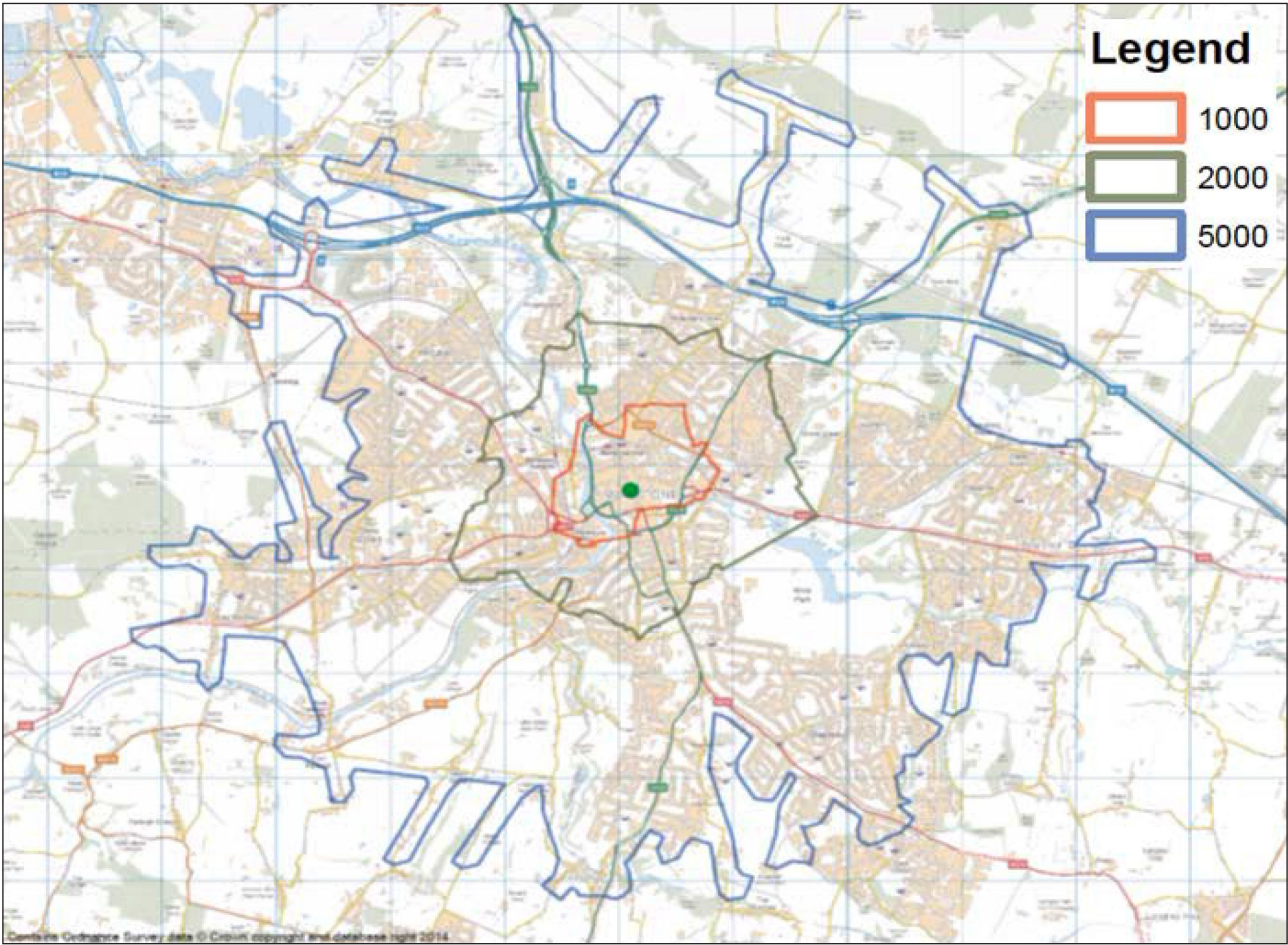
Written Evidence

Email responses to requests for feedback on bus and rail services were received from the following parish councils:

- Bearsted
- Boughton Monchelsea
- Boxley
- Coxheath – Neighbourhood Plan
- East Farleigh
- East Sutton
- Headcorn
- Kingswood and Broomfield
- Leeds
- Marden
- Staplehurst
- Sutton Valence
- Teston
- Yalding

Written responses were presented by:

- Mike Fitzgerald, Chairman of East of Maidstone Bus Group and Chair Kent Community Rail Partnership and Medway Valley Line Group;
- Councillor Peter Spearink, Staplehurst Parish Council;
- Stephen Gasche, Principal Transport Planner – Rail, Kent County Council



Cycling and Walking external witness interviews

Questions asked of witnesses to help them prepare

James Gower, cycling enthusiast. Tay Arnold, Cycling Planner, Kent Highways, Transport and Waste and Colin Finch, Senior Public Rights of Way Officer, Kent County Council:

- What is already being done to encourage cycling and walking in Maidstone and the Borough?
- What is working?
- What is not working?
- What are other areas doing?
- What is your 'dream vision' for cycling and walking in the borough?
- What can Councillors do to help?

Bartholomew Wren, Economic Development Officer, Regeneration and Transport, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council:

- What are Tunbridge Wells doing to encourage cycling and walking?
- What is working?
- What is not working?
- What is your 'dream vision' for cycling in Tunbridge Wells?

Sarah Shearsmith, Community Development Team Leader, Maidstone Borough Council:

- What is happening to promote walking in the borough?
- What is working?
- What are the issues/barriers to success?
- What is your 'dream vision'?
- What can Councillors do to help?

Tim Hapgood, Transport Consultant, Spatial Policy, Maidstone Borough Council (MBC):

- Where is MBC now with cycling and walking in the Integrated Transport Strategy?

Bus Services external witness interviews

Questions asked of witnesses to help them prepare

- How viable is it to enhance the bus services (listed on the right) including to compliment the 'twilight' economy?
- If Arriva are unable to provide the suggested enhancements – is there funding KCC could provide?
- The House of Commons Transport Select Committee report on Passenger transport in isolated communities (HC288 published 22 July 2014) discusses the concept of 'total transport' which involves pooling transport resources to deliver a range of services, eg, combining hospital transport with local bus services – Is it possible to create a form of total transport for Maidstone Borough?
- Could an 'oyster card' type system be introduced to provide flexibility to move from service to service?
- What would need to be done to ensure bus routes are in place and running before new developments are completed?
 - What can MBC do to help with this?
- Has any consideration been given to providing a radial bus service running around Maidstone?
- How possible would it be to provide a 'flag down' service for rural services where bus stops are situated on roads without footpaths?
 - Could a service such as this be trialled?

When will real time service update boards be provided at rural bus stops?

- What can be done to minimise disruption ie car parked blocking roads and lack of timely information going to service providers
- How can the criteria for the different bus services be clarified?
- Why are people who live within 500 meters of a bus stop not able to use the Kent Carrier Service?
- How viable would it be to introduce interchangeability of tickets between the different service?
- What is being done to combat buses arriving and leaving earlier than scheduled?
- The House of Commons Transport Select Committee report on Passenger transport in isolated communities (HC288 published 22 July 2014) raise again the potential for local authorities to use Quality Contract to introduce franchising systems similar to those operating in London – where the local transport authority specifies what service is required and the private sector competes for the right to provide it – how viable would Quality Contracts be for the Maidstone borough?
- Has KCC investigated how the test case, Nexus in Tyne and Wear, has performed with Quality Contract? If not, is this something they could find out?

