

Maidstone Transport Strategy

A report by the Head of Transport & Development to the Joint Transportation Board

Report To: Joint Transportation Board

Date: 20th April 2011

Report Author: Peter Rosevear

Summary:

This report describes the current position with regard to the preparation of a Transport Strategy in support of the Core Strategy of the MBC Local Development Framework

Decision: Report for Information and Comment

Affected Wards: All

Recommendations: Members of this Board are invited to comment and contribute to the evolution of the Transport Strategy

Financial Implications:

The measures that will emerge into the final version of the strategy will be funded from a variety of sources, mainly through new development, and including Kent County Council (via the Local Transport Plan), and Maidstone Borough Council.

Purpose of the Report

1. Update Members on the Maidstone Transport Strategy

Background

2. Kent Highway Services and Maidstone Borough Council have been working together on the evolution of a Transportation Strategy that would support the expectations of growth identified in the LDF Core Strategy, and address existing and newly created transport issues.
3. The LDF will set out the planning authority's development expectations for the period up to 2026. The revocation by the government in early July 2010 of the South East Plan, which previously identified targets and policies for the LDF, requires that the Borough Council now identifies development targets which it believes are more locally appropriate. The SEP target for housing was 11,080

new homes to be built in the period 2006-2026. MBC adopted a lower target of 10,080 homes in February 2011. A decision on the amount and location of employment development has been deferred.

4. MBC and KCC Members were invited to a Transport Workshop on 16th March, and discussed issues related to the predicted growth. Members have been circulated with responses to queries raised on the night.
5. Various options have been tested with a Visum multi modal transport model. The results from this, as would be expected, show that the increasing demand for travel (on an already congested network) from the additional homes and jobs would lead to a severe increase in peak hour congestion if no changes were made in transport provision or people's travel choices. The model is a strategic tool. It is not intended to make accurate predictions of traffic flows on every road, or turning movements at every junction in the peak hours in 2026. It provides a base from which to assess the performance of the transport network for various options, testing the impact of assumptions on the level and distribution of future development and the transport measures that might be implemented to support them.
6. As we have little opportunity to make significant increases in the capacity of the network by building new roads, particularly in the town centre, we have concentrated on looking at a combination of investment in sustainable transport, including the Park and Ride service, and demand management. The latter element involves the reduction in the number of long stay car parking spaces in the town centre, and the substantial raising of fees for those spaces remaining. This approach tries to "rebalance" the future demand to encourage more people to travel by more sustainable modes. The initial results from the model show considerable increases in travel times and overall network congestion, even with assumptions of a significant increase in the number of Park and Ride spaces and restrictive car park management, and hence emphasise the scale of this challenge.
7. Without these measures, predicted congestion would continue to rise further. It is extremely unlikely that drivers would choose to stay in ever increasing peak hour queues. Their most likely choices (certainly in the morning peak) would be to travel at off peak times, explore the potential for working at home, or choose a different destination.
8. Members therefore have a difficult set of decisions to deal with. If there is no action taken to address congestion, it is likely to be a deterrent to the inward investment needed to fulfil the Borough's regeneration aspirations, and to deal with a increasing population. However, if demand management measures are applied, they might also be considered as a deterrent to development. In addition, if congestion continues to increase, the air quality problems within the Borough's Air Quality Action Area (which covers all the built up area) would also deteriorate.
9. The acceptable levels of investment in public transport have also yet to be determined. The current Park and Ride services run by the Borough Council require a substantial annual subsidy, so there are

pressing concerns about the funding of the service in its current format, as well as consideration of the potential for investment in additional sites and services that would contribute to the town's prosperity. The relationship between the provision of Park and Ride spaces and the reduction of town centre car parking spaces is also a matter for debate, as are the parking standards to be applied to new housing and employment developments.

Views of Local Members

10. All members representing Maidstone wards will be invited to comment, both through this Board and the wider consultation in the summer.

Views of Statutory Consultees

11. All stakeholders and interested parties will have the opportunity to make representations through the public consultation process.

Conclusion

12. Most of the issues on the highway and transport networks are not new, and many have been the subject of much discussion at this Board and elsewhere. The opportunity now exists to set these issues into the context of the Borough Council's long term spatial planning objectives, and seek to coordinate public and developer funding streams towards potential solutions. The next steps will be the confirmation by MBC of the full LDF Core Strategy development proposals for 2026, including the size and location of housing, employment, and retail sites. In addition, a schedule of transport measures that will be implemented to mitigate the impact of growth must also be determined. The model will then be used to create a final set of transport evidence that accompanies the LDF Core Strategy out to public consultation.

Contact: Peter Rosevear – Kent Highway Services
Email: peterrosevear@maidstone.gov.uk or peter.rosevear@kent.gov.uk
