

Maidstone Borough Council

Regeneration & Economic Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 27 September 2011

Traffic Congestion Review

Report of: Overview & Scrutiny Officer

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In June 2011 the Committee agreed to review Traffic Congestion, focussing on five objectives.
- To identify how to unlock the congestion and capacity of traffic in Maidstone town, by using best practice techniques investigating Chelmsford and other local neighbouring towns;
 - To investigate the consideration given to new developments by the planning authority in relation to traffic volume and road maintenance;
 - To look at the future as modern technology using electric cars will not solve the traffic congestion;
 - To establish ways to educate the residents to promote car sharing and public transport; and
 - To make recommendations as appropriate.
- 1.2 The borough relies heavily on public transport, however with bus services being cut and traffic congestion remaining a problem for the borough, the Committee is requesting information as to how bus services are measured when considering service cuts, and how the Council could help educate the residents to promote public transport, whilst keeping the air quality within the borough in accordance with EU levels.
- 1.3 Streamline Taxis use their GPS system to ascertain the length of the journeys taken across the borough. The Committee would like to know if there were particular areas that could be eased if provisions were made, and what provisions would be necessary to aid the traffic flow throughout the town.
- 1.4 The modern technology of electric cars can be an illusion for solving traffic problems as it is a zero-emissions vehicle. However, as it remains on the road it does not solve the traffic congestion. The Committee is requesting information on how durable the i-MiEV is with regards to standstill traffic, and how the Council could help educate the residents with car sharing.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is recommended to interview Robert Patterson, Business Development Manager of Arriva, Norman Kemp, Co-owner (Director & Company Secretary) of Nu-Venture Coaches Ltd, Stewart Smith, Business Development Manager of Streamline Taxis, Dan Pigot, Corporate Sales Manager and Alistair Rhead, Manager for Electric Vehicles for the UK and Ireland both of Mitsubishi.

2.2 Areas of questioning could include but are not limited to:

- In response to the recent service changes outlined in Appendix A, what has your involvement been in the decision making process – were there other options for services that you feel may better serve the residents;
- What is your company policy regarding engines being on whilst at standstill – do you monitor emissions as part of your engineer works to busses;
- What are the key challenges you face regarding traffic congestion – is it the time of day, or certain areas and how could this be improved, and with what resources;
- How do electric cars cope with standstill traffic – as 100amps are required to charge the vehicle, are there enough service stations that hold this power, and how do the drivers know where they can charge it whilst out; and
- How can the your company assist the council with promoting car sharing and using public transport, as this would aid the traffic congestion at hand.

3. Traffic Congestion – Background to the Witnesses

- 3.1 Maidstone Borough Council does not own, licence, franchise or control local bus services or the operators who provide them. The history of the services is as follows:

Between 1930 and 1986 there were very strict controls on the provision of bus services, where each service had to be separately licensed by the Traffic Commissioner for the area and changes had to be advertised to allow public objections to be made. Competition was not permitted and many bus companies were owned by either the Government (National Bus Company) or local councils.

From the mid 1970's Kent County Council (KCC) provided blanket subsidies to the National Bus Companies and Maidstone Borough Transport was financially supported by the Borough Council.

Under the Transport act 1985 this all changed. Bus companies were given freedom from October 1986 to operate services on a commercial basis where and when they considered it was in their interests to do so. The National Bus Company was privatised and council's were required to operate their own bus undertakings. Maidstone Borough Transport (Boroline) ceased trading in 1991.

Whilst bus companies have freedom to operate where and when they choose they are required to give the Traffic Commissioner eight weeks notice of new services, changes or withdrawals. This is primarily for the purpose of fuel tax reimbursement. The documentation is copied to KCC, who have the power (but not a duty) to support services where there is a social need that is not met by the commercial network.

About 80% of the network is currently provided on a commercial basis and 20% is supported by KCC. It is a matter for the Transport Authority to define and prioritise social need – it is not defined in the primary legislation. In Kent this is set out in the paper from KCC about its proposed bus service

withdrawals from January 2012. Maidstone Borough Council are not in a position to reverse these decisions or commit funding to new services, however comments or suggestions are welcomed in writing to Transport Integration. A summary of the KCC paper prepared by Maidstone Borough Council is attached in **Appendix A**.

- 3.2 Streamline Taxis are one of numerous companies that operate throughout the borough, and hold 70 years experience covering Maidstone, West Malling, Paddock Wood, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks and Southampton. Their control centre in Maidstone monitors Kent's roads and all incoming and out going flights on a wall of screens 24 hours a day.
- 3.3 In the UK the i-MiEV has been involved in official government trials since December 2009. It is a zero-emissions vehicle, which even when taking into account CO₂ emissions at the power plants which generate the power needed for charging the car, it emits approximately 30% of the CO₂ of a petrol city car. The cost per mile to drive the i-MiEV is less than 6% than that of a comparable petrol vehicle, costing £270 to charge for 12,000 miles driving, or £135 if using Economy 7 tariff and also comes with zero road tax (VED) and free parking in certain London Boroughs. Using the on-board charger, the vehicle can be charged with a standard UK 240V domestic power source. All that is required is a three pin plug socket and the car will charge itself from completely flat to 100% in 7 hours.

4. Impact on Corporate Objectives

- 4.1 The Strategic Plan 2011-15 states the Corporate Priority for "Maidstone to have a growing economy" with the outcome of "A transport network that supports the local economy".