

**To:** Maidstone Joint Transportation Board

**By:** Tim Read, Head of Transportation  
David Edwards, Director of Change, Planning and the Environment

**Date:** 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2013

**Subject:** Integrated Transport Strategy Update

**Classification:** Information item (for discussion)

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**Summary:** This report updates Members on progress with the Draft Joint Integrated Transport Strategy since the previous meeting of the Board in October and details the implications of the Borough Council's decision to reschedule its Core Strategy programme.

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## **1. Background**

- 1.1 At the last meeting of the Joint Transportation Board (JTB) on 24<sup>th</sup> October, Members considered the Draft Joint Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS), which had recently been subject to public consultation alongside the Core Strategy Strategic Site Allocations document. Members raised a number of concerns about the ITS, including its overall affordability; the level of forecast journey time increase on arterial routes to 2026; the proposed scheme of mitigation for current and forecast congestion at the A26 Tonbridge Road / B2246 Fountain Lane junction; the lack of Park and Ride services to the south of the town; and the proposed inbound bus lane on the A274 Sutton Road. The Board resolved that Kent County Council (KCC) and Maidstone Borough Council (MBC)'s Cabinet Members be recommended not to approve the ITS and that officers be asked to reconsider the proposals.

## **2. Progress to date**

- 2.1 In light of this resolution, initial meetings have been held between senior Members and officers of both authorities, including the Council Leaders and Cabinet Members and the JTB Chairman, to discuss potential amendments to the ITS and how the Board can effectively participate in its redrafting. It is acknowledged by all parties that the strategy must strike a difficult balance between planning positively for the significant housing and employment growth proposed by the Core Strategy whilst identifying an affordable, deliverable and sustainable package of compensatory mitigation measures for what is already a constrained transport network. As such, a stronger emphasis must be

placed on maximising the use of existing highway and public transport capacity through effective demand management, rather than identifying major infrastructure enhancements which will not adequately address peak time congestion. This could potentially include new and/or enhanced Park and Ride services aimed at long stay commuters and visitors to Maidstone; better utilising town centre car parks; and enhancing the borough's railway stations and services to promote modal shift.

- 2.2 Members have also expressed a desire for the traffic modelling underpinning the Bridge Gyratory Bypass scheme to be updated to take into account the latest Core Strategy and background traffic growth projections; for bus priority measures to be investigated on the A229/A274 corridor beyond the Wheatsheaf junction; and for alternative forms of mitigation at the A26 Tonbridge Road / B2246 Fountain Lane junction to be explored. Officers have subsequently commissioned further work in each of these areas; the results of which will be reported to the Board in due course.

### **3. Core Strategy programme**

- 3.1 At the time of the last meeting of the Board, it had been officers' intention to present the Publication draft of the Core Strategy to MBC's Cabinet on 21<sup>st</sup> November for approval to undertake the next stage of public consultation in December. However, in recent months a number of Core Strategy Examinations in other parts of England have been suspended because the presiding Inspectors were not satisfied with the evidence base supporting the local authorities' housing and employment targets. There would appear to be an increasing emphasis at Examinations on meeting national projections rather than locally determined targets and Planning Inspectors are advising that authorities must use the latest 2008 base date household projections published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) that were published in November 2010.
- 3.2 The demographic and labour supply forecasts used in the Maidstone Core Strategy were published by KCC in October 2010 and were based on 2006 DCLG household projections, which were the latest published figures at the time. However, the County Council's forecasts are now being updated using the DCLG's 2008 household projections. Given the Inspectors' reasons for suspending Core Strategy Examinations, together with the impact of the recession and the need for up-to-date data, MBC's Cabinet has agreed that a rescheduling of the Core Strategy programme is required to ensure that the evidence supporting it is sound, which will delay its Publication and Submission by several months. The revised ITS will therefore be similarly delayed, as it must react to any substantive changes to the Borough Council's housing and employment targets. During the intervening period, KCC and MBC will continue to secure appropriate contributions to transport infrastructure

and service enhancements through the development management process.

#### **4. Next steps**

- 4.1 It is proposed that the Informal Member Group on the ITS should continue to meet on a regular basis to guide the redrafting of the Strategy, with a membership consisting of three KCC Members, three MBC Members and the JTB Chairman.
- 4.2 A further progress report on the ITS will be presented to the next meeting of this Board.

#### **Recommendations**

Members are asked to note the report.

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<b>Background documents:</b>
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- 1. Draft Maidstone Integrated Transport Strategy (2012-2026), KCC and MBC, July 2012
- 2. Core Strategy Programme Report to Maidstone Borough Council Cabinet, MBC, November 2012

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