

## TUNBRIDGE WELLS PUBLIC TRANSPORT FORUM

**Minutes of a meeting held on Wednesday 14 May 2008 at the Town Hall, Tunbridge Wells.**

**Present:**

Councillor Peter Davies (Chairman) (PD)  
 Mike Appelbe, Parish Councillor, Hawkhurst Parish Council  
 Lene Beynon, TWBC, Borough Engineering Officer (LB)  
 June Bridgeman, Programme Action Chair, Soroptomists International (JB)  
 Lorna Blackmore, Soroptomists International (LB)  
 Cheryl Clark, TWBC, Committee Administrator (CC)  
 Michael Coggles, Chairman, Access Group (MC)  
 James Cook, KCC, Senior Transport Planner (JC)  
 Murray Motley, Acting Route Enhancement Manager, Network Rail (MM)  
 Brian o'Kane, General Manager, Arriva (BoK)  
 Richard Phillips, Parish Councillor, Sandhurst Parish Council (RPh)  
 Richard Powell, Director of Services to the Community, TWBC (RP)  
 Francis Rook, Cranbrook Parish Council (FR)  
 John Spurling, TWBC, Principal Planning Officer (JS)

**Members of the Public in attendance:**

Maurice Knight

**Apologies received from:**

Mike Gibson, Southeastern  
 John Goodfellow, on behalf of the Town Forum  
 Norman Kemp, Nu-venture

**Action  
By:**

**MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

**ACCURACY**

- (1) The minutes of the last meeting held on 30 January 2008 (previously circulated) were agreed as to accuracy.

**MATTERS ARISING OR STILL OUTSTANDING**

- |     |  |                     |
|-----|--|---------------------|
| (2) | <b>Update still to follow on the access to buses at the end of the route at Barnett Woods, High Brooms.</b><br>Still outstanding | <b>PD</b>           |
| (3) | <b>Sharing of car park charge information between TWBC and Network Rail.</b><br>Still outstanding                                | <b>MM RP<br/>GS</b> |
| (4) | <b>Network Rail Project Manager to attend future meeting to update on siding/stabling/tunnel work.</b><br>Still outstanding      | <b>MM</b>           |

- (5) **Taxis on the lower side of the station (opposite the former Morrisons site).** **LB** advised that Gary Stevenson, Head of Environment and Street Scene had spoken to a representative of the taxi-drivers to look at improvements in the signage. Although a design had been proposed consistent with the rest of the Town's signs, permission was required from Network Rail before installation. **JB** stressed that the public needed to know how and where to queue and standard signs were available from the DfT. **MC** also mentioned that all signs now had to be DDA compliant.  
**It was agreed that Taxi Rank Signage would be placed on the next agenda. LB**
- (6) **Parking Attendants to travel free on buses as a means of catching individuals parking at Bus Stops.** **LB** updated that Gary Stevenson was considering this as an option and would probably need to identify areas of particular concern. **JC** commented that it would also be useful to ensure that there were 'clearways' (a new type of traffic restriction) marked at bus stops.
- (7) **Southern Rail connection to Gatwick.** **LB** advised that TWBC, MBC and KCC had all registered disappointment that this service was to be discontinued and the Chairman agreed that further representations would be made, whenever a further opportunity arose.

## UPDATES FROM NETWORK RAIL

### DDA IMPROVEMENTS

- (8) **MM** advised that he had met with **LB** to discuss. The programme rolled out from the DfT was entitled 'Railways for All' and the aim was to increase accessibility at all stations and the first of these had been selected by the DfT. The criteria for selection had been based on footfall, weighted according to numbers of disabled and then further adjusted to avoid a concentration in the Southeast. The nearest stations affected were Orpington and Staplehurst where a footbridge and lifts would cost up to £2.75m. But it was noted that no stations had actually been selected within the Borough itself. It was felt by members of the forum that intensive local lobbying of the DfT would be required for TW to be included.  
**Action LB to draft letter LB**
- (9) Additionally Small Schemes funding will be available for bids from Train Operating Companies (TOCs) for small projects. **MM** drew attention to works at TW, which had been sponsored by Southeastern to install ramps to the platform and toilets on the lower side of the station.
- (10) Further plans were under consideration for the reinstatement of an old goods lift to provide a passenger lift on the Mount Pleasant side of the station at TW. There were no plans for High Brooms as the siting was particularly difficult to improve accessibility. **MC** still had concerns but commented that the assistance link could be used at High Brooms for Tonbridge or TW and he thought some improvements had been made at Paddock Wood by swapping trains to the most convenient platform to accommodate pre-booked disabled assistance.

## NATIONAL STATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

- (11) **MM** advised that this was another DfT funded programme with £150m available nationally next year. The intention was to use potential funding as a means of leveraging matching spend from third party sources. The types of projects concerned might be refurbishing toilets and waiting rooms.
- (12) **JB** asked for clarification of the responsibilities of Network Rail and the TOC, as Soroptomists International had prepared a report on accessibility of toilets across the region at the request of the TOC not Network Rail. **MM** explained that Network Rail worked very closely in partnership with the TOC as part of a Local Development Group for Kent, and yes whilst the TOC were in fact the responsible party, he could assure the Group that he guaranteed to pass on any comments.
- (13) **JB** also expressed concern on how the public wants and needs were fed into the system. **MM** advised that feedback was taken from groups such as this Forum, the National Passenger Survey and of course many people wrote in direct to the TOCs eg Southeastern

## CAR PARK PROGRAMME (PADDOCK WOOD)

- (14) **MM** advised that there were issues at many stations relating to parking but he felt that difficulties over the use of the waste ground at Paddock Wood had been resolved and there should be no reason for further delay to convert it to car parking.

## UPDATE FROM SOUTHEASTERN

### REPORT TO TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL MAY 2008

- (15) Although no representative from Southeastern was at the meeting, **LB** circulated a report received from **MG**.  
**Action: Any questions to be forwarded to LB for onward transmission to MG with any responses to be appended to these minutes if received in time.** **LB**
- JB** suggested that as part of the Borough wide 'Love where we live' day on 6 June, the embankments behind the railings at Tunbridge Wells Station could be cleared of the litter and rubbish that had accumulated there.  
**Action: MM agreed to take this forward as it would impact on Network Rail to access this area.** **MM**

## MANNING LEVELS

- (16) **MC** reiterated previous concerns over new legislation coming into effect in October that would cut benefits to the disabled if they were fit for work but did not attend. He advised that if this was due to deficiencies in public transport for example if manning levels were insufficient to allow independent travel to work, both Network Rail and Southeastern might be held to account. **PD** commented that manning levels also impacted on many other users of public transport and **MC** suggested that the legal requirements of DDA might be used as leverage for the benefit of all.

**Action: LB to draft letter expressing the concern of TWBC to Southeastern LB**

## QUALITY BUS PARTNERSHIP FOR TUNBRIDGE WELLS AND SOUTHBOROUGH

- (17) **LB** advised that the Quality Bus Partnership (QBP) for Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough between TWBC, KCC and Arriva Southern Counties had been signed earlier today. The partnership had already achieved a new Town Centre Bus Link, The Shopper Hopper, new shelters and the Freedom Pass. Future initiatives would progress these and introduce new buses and shelters and a real time information system.
- (18) **JC** explained that previous real time systems had been based on radio links and had for that reason never been workable in the Tunbridge Wells area. The new system to be trialled in TW had a capital expenditure budget of £380k and would cover mainly urban areas including Hawkhurst and Cranbrook. **MC** enquired whether an audible service would also be available for the real time information and **JC** would look into this although he thought there was only one provider who might be able to offer this service. It was also suggested that mobile/text or web-based services might be another option.
- (19) **JC** also mentioned other projects including 'Clearways' on the A26, bus boarders to ease the access to low floor buses. The 281 service was also up for tender and it was anticipated that as a result the frequency would be increased on Arriva's evening and Sunday services for a minimal increase in cost.
- (20) **BoK** affirmed support for the QBP and confirmed that Arriva had invested heavily in services for TW and would continue to do so. The QBP would add weight when putting the case for new projects and capital expenditure. **BoK** additionally advised that the 402 service to Bromley had been upgraded and new red single deck buses were being introduced.
- (21) **JB** congratulated everyone on the set up of the QBP. She felt it was an important achievement and had made visible improvements to the bus services in TW particularly for the elderly and she supported the real time initiative. She was concerned however about potential problems with stress and staff shortages at Arriva.

- (22) **MC** raised an issue about the No. 6 route from TW to Maidstone via Pembury Hospital and wondered why it did not also link with Maidstone Hospital. He also reminded the Group of the 'Enys Plan' for linking hospitals. **BoK** explained that the potential diversion to the No. 6 would disrupt the ability of Arriva to provide a 20 minute service. **JC** advised there was a possibility of having a special bus gate to link the hospital via a housing estate which would improve the route and avoid the detour, However, there were planning issues and Section 106 conditions to take into account. **BoK** mentioned that there was also potential funding available from Maidstone Borough Council but the whole project needed to be considered in much greater detail and would not happen in the near future.

### **BUS ROUTES TO SHERWOOD KNIGHTS PARK AND PEMBURY**

- (23) **BoK** advised that the Sherwood/Knights Park route had been supported by Section 106 Planning Condition funding as a result of the retail park development and this had ceased at the beginning of 2008. Without this funding the previous service levels were unlikely to have been commercially viable. The Knights Park area was now served with a basic hourly service Monday to Saturday by the 287 Pembury service, with some additional peak service journeys on Monday to Friday.
- (24) **BoK** provided positive news on the 277 service, with a revised timetable between the town centre and Sherwood and increased daytime frequency every 15 minutes. This was a prelude to a complete service revamp planned for early autumn when three brand new vehicles, each costing £100k would be introduced. **PD** noted that although the 277 would cover Sherwood it would no longer extend to Knights Park.
- (25) **JC** advised that KCC's criteria for bus service support were provision of access to one or more of employment, learning, health facilities or essential food shopping. There might however be alternative options to serve Sherwood and Knights Park along the lines of the previous timetable with a new provider and he would look into this further

### **UPDATE FROM ARRIVA ON FACILITIES AT HAWKHURST**

- (26) **BoK** advised that queries had been raised at the last meeting about turning arrangements and bus stops at Hawkhurst following the closure of the bus station there. There had been teething problems but they had liaised with the Parish Council and by extending the No. 5 service from Hawkhurst had avoided turning issues and provided a facility through to Sandhurst, Cranbrook and Maidstone using existing bus stops in Hawkhurst.
- (27) **JC** indicated there were difficulties with links to the East Sussex service which has a very long route and waits for 3 minutes only in Hawkhurst. **JC** mentioned that the local Parish Council had been very helpful and supportive with ideas and suggested that it might help to label bus stops in Hawkhurst A,B,C etc and provide maps indicating the whereabouts of each stop. He also suggested that it might be possible to install a lay-by which would provide a waiting area for the East Sussex Service. **RPh** wondered if it would be helpful for Countryliner to come and address the Forum.

- (28) **MA** noted the loss of the asset of the parking and turning area for buses in the area advised there were still issues with the closure of the bus station and although fenced off, he envisaged it would become an eyesore in the Conservation area. He was also concerned it would remain so for some considerable time in view of the recent down turn in the property market.
- (29) **BoK** explained that the decision to close the Hawkhurst depot was taken as a result of a number of factors. Following the loss of the East Sussex County Council tendered services to Countryliner in October 2006, the depot was under-utilised. Substantial building maintenance investment would have been required in order to modernise and upgrade the premises and given the level of remaining services operating from this location, the decision was made that large scale investment would be commercially unsustainable. The site would therefore be sold for development purposes and **MA** advised that the Parish Council would be interested to see any proposals.

### **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

- (30) **RPh** asked for the changes to the **concessionary bus fare scheme** to be considered. **JC** then announced the recent KCC Cabinet decision to re-introduce a 9.00am start time, rather than the current 9.30am, with effect from 30/06/2008. It had also been agreed at the Cabinet meeting that KCC would fund the additional cost.
- (31) **JB** asked that the Public Transport Forum be consulted in respect of the **TW Borough Regeneration plans**. It was explained by **JS** and **RP** that input would be required into both the LDF probably in mid 2009. Timescales were still uncertain for the Masterplanning exercise as work had still not been finalised on legal and partnership issues with Laing/Gladedale but input would be anticipated around spring2009.  
**Action: PD agreed that an update on progress on the Masterplan be included as a standing item on the agenda to ensure that opportunities to input on implications for public transport would not be missed.**

**LB**

### **NEXT MEETING**

- (32) **LB** advised the next meeting would be held on 24 September 2008. The interim meeting on 25 June, which was still to be confirmed at the time of the meeting, has since been cancelled.  
**Action: Any further agenda items for the next meeting should be submitted to the Chairman by 10/09/08 and copied to LB.**

**All**