

Tunbridge Wells Public Transport Forum

Town Hall, Committee Room A

31 January 2007 – 6pm

Minutes

In attendance:

Cllr Peter Davies (Deputy Leader of TWBC/Councillor and Portfolio holder) Chairman
Lene Beynon (TWBC)
Gary Stevenson (TWBC)
Kieran Healy (Network Rail)
Mike Appelbe (Hawkhurst PC)
Richard Phillips (Sandhurst PC)
June Bridgeman (SITWD)
Norman Kemp (Nu-Venture)
James Cook (KCC)
Richard Powell (TWBC)
Michael Coggles (TW Access Group)
Nick Green (TWBC)
Cllr Maurice Knight (Southborough TC & KAPC)
Martin Lewis (TW Rail Travellers Association)
Nigel Jarrett (South Eastern Railway – pp Mike Gibson)
John Goodfellow (Town Forum) – Arrived 7.30pm
Estelle Grant (TWBC) – for item 2 on agenda
Sue Little (minutes)

Apologies received from:

PC Paul Crane (Kent Police)
PC James Ball (Kent Police – pp Paul Crane)
Mike Gibson (South Eastern Railway)
Brian O’Kane (Arriva)

Agenda Item	Details	Action By
1.0	Introduction of New members Cllr Peter Davies chaired the meeting and it was agreed that this would continue until a chairman and deputy chairman could be elected. The meeting commenced with introductions from all present. It was agreed that, where possible, all correspondence would be sent to forum members by email. It was agreed that the forum would discuss strategic issues and not specific individual cases unless in exceptional circumstances if a user group does not get satisfaction with an individual service provider. The Forum hopes to bring together the main service providers and user groups, although members of the public are welcome. The Forum expressed concerns that there was not a representative from the Arriva Bus company at the meeting as there were current issues on the agenda for discussion.	
2.0	Minutes of the previous meeting It was agreed that the final paragraph in section 5 of the minutes should read: ‘Free travel is proposed for 11-16 year olds from families living in the county for trips within Kent. It is hoped that this can start next year. With this amendment, the minutes were agreed.	

3.0 Presentation of the Community Plan

- Estelle Grant gave a short presentation on the TW Community Plan.
- Copies of the plan will be distributed to the group when they are ready. LB
- It was highlighted that the Community Plan does not cover public transport but Key issues can be fed back to EG. LB

The presentation prompted discussions on:

- A public consultation of the proposed 2009 rail timetables will be carried out in Summer 2007. (including the reduction of services in some areas and rail stations that may be affected by reduced opening hours).
- The increase in road traffic should rail services be reduced.
- Railway stations outside of the borough that serve borough residents, especially in rural areas. (The nearest station may be outside the borough).
- Arriva are unable to fund a bus link from the new hospital to Maidstone hospital.
- WKPCT proposal to open new medical centres but these may not be linked by public transport. RP confirmed that TWBC Scrutiny committee would be looking at how this can be addressed. It was agreed that this would be added to a future agenda and a representative from WKPCT invited. RP LB
- No bus service from Pembury to Paddock Wood
- Grant funding often only being available if disabled access is provided limits bus companies' chances of receiving grants.

4.0 School Transport Assistance

JC informed the group that the pilot scheme for free travel, for all scholars aged 11-16yrs in Tonbridge and TW, is going to KCC's cabinet on 8 February with a view to commencing in June 2007. The initial pilot scheme will run for 18 months and will include travel at any time of the day so that out of school activities will be included. Funding is in place for this pilot scheme.

JC confirmed that discussions for the scheme to include rail travel were happening but there are currently some issues that need to be resolved.

PD requested that the group receive an update on how the pilot scheme is going (perhaps one year into the scheme). LB

RP offered assistance with the launch or the promotion of the scheme.

Unfortunately there was no representative from the Youth Council at the meeting, but it is hoped that one would be able to attend the next meeting.

There is a code of conduct for acceptable behaviour on the buses currently for those children who are entitled to free home to school transport. This, or something very like it will be extended to cover the 11-16 free travel pilot.

PD advised the group that the grant from central government to provide free travel to older persons was not covering its costs and TWBC currently had to find extra funding for this scheme.

JC is aware that the scheme may cause an increase in the use of buses, which may cause an overcrowding issue, but the pilot scheme funding includes the provision of some extra bus services if necessary.

The pilot scheme will be available to students at all Town Centre schools, including independent school, as well as Cranbrook School and Paddock Wood.

It may be possible for some smaller bus companies to help with the supply of buses on school runs.

5.0 Quality Bus Partnership

Arriva were not present at the meeting to discuss the 'need for' and 'use of' bus lanes. NK offered to identify areas of congestion and it was noted that TWBC would discuss this matter further with KCC. PD/NK

JB expressed concerns that taxi drivers were not able to use bus lanes and problems with the series of segments instead of a complete bus route. County policies often prevent TWBC from addressing local transportation issues.

RP confirmed that LB is TWBC's dedicated officer to engage with partners to address strategic transportation issues and there is capacity to lobby issues for the good of the community.

PD is aware that the police are not enforcing regulations in bus lanes but this is currently under review. Add to agenda for next meeting. LB

It was noted that the bus stop signage for the new shopper-hopper scheme could be improved but it was also noted that this was only a pilot scheme and that it would need addressing with more prominent signs if the scheme continues.

JC confirmed that he was the KCC contact for improving information at bus stops such as at Meadow Road and Sainsbury's JC

It was noted that very few of the borough's bus stops have the new digital displays and that real time information is not available in TW. This is because they work by radio and the reception in TW is not good enough for the system to work. JC confirmed that this is currently under review and hoped to introduce the real time information and extend the provision on key routes.

6.0 Improvements to Railway Stations

KH highlighted Network Rails' change from a maintaining railway to an enhancing railway with improvements including:

- Team architects for station design.
- Modular design for stations.
- Entirely private funding.
- Network rail owned land being developed and profit being used to enhance stations.
- The single point of contact now for Network Rail is Kieran Healy.
- The current improvement plan will ensure that 50 stations (nationally) per annum are improved for DDA compliance.
- The plan will avoid part re-development of stations that will only be a temporary measure and will need to be done again at a later date. This is the best use of resources available although some work required may be just cosmetic.
- Currently trying to move the engineering site to Sevenoaks to avoid engineers having to travel from Ashford.
- Second big project is car parking at stations and KH agreed to investigate if High Brooms station is on the project list but it was noted that network rail land is required for any car park projects. KH can provide maps of land that is owned by Network Rail and SE Railways.

JB gave a copy of the Soroptimist report (2002) to KH, which highlights some issues that rail passengers want including:

- The re-development of High Brooms Station.
- Consistency of style/type of ticket machines throughout the different rail companies.
- More public consultation.

MC highlighted the need for lifts for disabled passengers but it was noted that reasonable access was a difficult issue with some listed buildings but Network Rail will work in partnership to resolve issues.

TWBC agreed to meet KH to discuss car parking at railway stations and to discuss linking town centre improvements with improvements to the TW Railway Station. KH agreed to share the Network Rail project list with the group at a future meeting.

KH/RP

7.0 New Time-table and Services

The new winter rail timetable has been issued with a view to persuading travellers to use off peak travel.

Rolling stock will be strengthened with longer trains and newer rolling stock on S.E. trains.

375 new trains, nationally, will be fitted with a counting mechanism that counts passengers as they enter the train.

JB would like to discuss the internal design of rolling stock and agreed to meet with S.E. trains at a future date for this. JB

KD confirmed that a substantial project is due to start in June on the line between TW and TW West for a line/siding to couple trains.

ML thanked SE trains for their assistance. The Rail Users Group identified issues of overcrowding on trains and SE trains' response was very positive and they also thanked them for the bold step of timetabling a ½ hourly service on Sundays.

MK expressed concerns that there was not enough prior warning to passengers of planned engineering work and suggested that pocket timetables could contain this information. NJ confirmed that the information was not currently published on pocket timetables but all planned works are available on their website.

NK informed the forum of a proposed new scheme called (PLUSBUS), which allows train passengers to add unlimited local bus travel to the start, or finish, or both ends of their rail journey for a small additional fee. From Spring 2007 the scheme should be extended by the participating local bus companies, to journeys in Tunbridge Wells.

8.0 Paddock Wood – Medway Railway Line

It was noted that new rolling stock is now being used on this line. It was agreed to carry this item over to the next meeting agenda.

LB

There is an event being held on the afternoon of 23 February. Information on this event will be passed to PD by Action with Communities in Rural Kent.

Action with
Comm. in
Rural Kent

9.0 Disability Access to Taxis

GS informed the group that an independent survey had been undertaken by TWBC. The survey included information on:

- Disability access to taxis.
- The number and location of taxi ranks

The survey and suggestions from the report are currently being considered by TWBC. A copy of the survey is available on the TWBC website. Suggestions include:

- Hackney Carriage Licences – unmet demand and conditions to these licences to vehicles with disability access.
- A taxi rank at the top end of the town with a suitable number of spaces available (Millenium Clock area).

MC requested that if TWBC consider adding conditions to licence applications for the provision of taxis with disabled access that they do not insist on taxis with side access only.

10.0 Future Agenda Items

Items for discussion with Arriva will be added to the next meeting agenda.

PD requested that any future agenda items be emailed to PD or LB.

It was agreed that the minutes would be made available within 2 weeks of the meeting. All minutes will be emailed to group members unless a postal copy is requested.

SL/LB
PD

11.0 AOB

It was suggested that the Forum invite other bus companies to the meetings as some of the smaller companies may be able to provide solutions to areas that Arriva are unable to serve. JC can supply a list of suitable operators that may assist with this and he agreed to provide LB with a copy.

JC/LB

MC suggested that the group read and discuss the report written by Borough Councillor Ransley.

JG suggested that the signage at Meadow Road bus stop needed improvement and should include Shopper Hopper signs. It was agreed that this would be discussed with Arriva.

JC/Arriva

MK highlighted the problem of High Brooms buses having to end their route in Barnetts Wood at Blackthorn Avenue. They are unable to serve the whole estate efficiently due to Planning restrictions/A public right of way. PD agreed to pass this issue to the Western Area Planning Committee and ask that they review the conditions.

PD

Next Meeting Date:

Wednesday 16 May, at the Town Hall at 6pm

Future Dates for your diaries:

Wednesday 19 September – 6pm

Wednesday 16 January 2008