

Minutes of the meeting of the **DOVER JOINT TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Thursday, 12 December 2024 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor E A Biggs

Councillors: M Bates
D G Beaney
S S Chandler
D G Cronk
M F Hibbert
O C de R Richardson

Also present: Mr K Gowland (Kent Association of Local Councils)
Mr P Tapsell (Kent Association of Local Councils)

Officers: Dover District Manager (Kent County Council) (*attended remotely*)
Fastrack Development Manager (Kent County Council) (*attended remotely*)
Democratic Services Officer

131 APOLOGIES

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from District Councillors J S Back and D J Parks, County Councillors T A Bond, N J Collor and D P Murphy, Councillor Mike Walters (Deal Town Council), and Mr A P Minns (Kent Association of Local Councils).

132 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Mr P Tapsell was present as the named substitute for Mr A P Minns (Kent Association of Local Councils).

133 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

134 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

135 DOVER FASTRACK UPDATE

Mr Shane Hymers, the Fastrack Development Manager (FDM) updated Members on the Fastrack project. He advised that the new service had started on 17 November and its early performance was encouraging with a week-on-week growth in patronage. Current figures stood at nearly 400 passenger journeys per day, with 95% of buses operating on time (defined as no more than 1 minute early or 5 minutes late). A few pinch points, such as the bridge at the Tesco roundabout, had been identified which would necessitate some adjustment to the timetable.

In response to Councillor O C de R Richardson who enquired about electric vehicles, the FDM advised that Volvo BZL buses had been ordered, were being customised for Dover and it was anticipated that they would be on the road in August. He added that the supporting infrastructure at Dover Priory station was expected to be completed by late March/early April.

Councillor M Bates commented that the no. 61 bus was unable to access the bus-stop within the Tesco site which meant that passengers could not travel from Tesco directly into Dover town centre and vice versa. The FDM advised that installing a bus-stop opposite the Tesco petrol station would require a reconfiguration of the road, and Tesco had been difficult to engage with. Moreover, there were other complications that had to be taken into account such as journey time variability and traffic backlog at the petrol station. Nevertheless, Kent County Council (KCC) officers continued their efforts to engage with Tesco. Councillor Bates indicated that he had been assured that Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology would deter unauthorised vehicles from using the Fastrack route and asked whether compliance statistics could be provided. He also mentioned that the timetable publicised the service as connecting to the first and last departures at Dover Priory, running from 7.00am to 7.00pm.

The FDM acknowledged that the bus connections at Tesco were not ideal and that the signage to the Fastrack bus-stop needed improving which officers were in the process of doing. He advised that there had been a 20% reduction between weeks 2 and 3 in unauthorised vehicles using the Fastrack route. The current approach was to issue warning letters rather than fining drivers immediately. He confirmed that officers were working on a revised timetable that would link the timing of buses to the first and last high-speed trains at Dover Priory. It was anticipated that the new timetable would be introduced in February/March. The reason for the delay was due to Stagecoach's costs being higher than expected which meant that the funding from developer contributions had had to be split over a year.

In response to Councillor D G Cronk who asked about battery charging and Pencester Road, the FDM advised that three buses would be running at any one time. The pantograph model of bus used for the Fastrack service would take a top-up charge on each circuit of the bus route. The more the batteries were topped up, the longer they lasted. When KCC had bid for grant funding for electrification, provision had been made for two chargers for Dover – one at Dover Priory and the other in the vicinity of Archers Court where the Fastrack service was likely to be extended to under a future phase of the project. When not in use, buses would be stationed at Stagecoach's depot at Whitfield where there were also plug-in chargers. A good deal of testing had been carried out on the vehicles and having depot chargers would provide additional resilience. He confirmed that the average lifespan of diesel buses was 16 years, but electric buses would be expected to last longer, providing the batteries were well maintained. A battery replacement programme had been built into the cost of the project. He advised that highway works at Pencester Road were on schedule to be completed in February.

The FDM commented that, whilst there had been teething issues, this was to be expected for a large project. The Dover scheme was similar to an existing one in Dartford which had seen development spring up around it and eventually the introduction of a night bus service.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Members received the report on highway works scheduled for completion in 2024/25 and 2025/26.

Councillor Bates read out a statement on behalf of the chairman of St Margaret's-at-Cliffe Parish Council, raising concerns about the number of road closures planned at Bay Hill at St Margaret's Bay from 13 January through to 4 April. The parish council was disappointed at the delays in communication from KCC regarding the closures and particularly from its Highways Manager. Despite requesting further information in September, this had only been forthcoming in late November – and only after an intervention by the KCC Leader's office. These delays had limited the parish council's ability to engage constructively about the closures and therefore potentially lessen their impact on the community. It was evident that KCC's lack of coordination and proactive communication had hampered the management of disruption caused by the works. Finally, an invitation issued to Councillor Neil Baker, KCC's Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, to have a meeting with the parish council in December had gone unanswered.

The Dover District Manager (DDM) emphasised that it was KCC's Street Works team that was responsible for managing roadworks whilst he and his team were solely responsible for reactive highway works. He noted that the parish council had written to the Street Works team but had not received a response so he would follow it up. Whilst he was happy to attend a meeting with the chairman and clerk of the parish council, it was for the Street Works team to deal with the matter. He suggested that the invitation to Councillor Baker should be followed up with his office. Councillor E A Biggs requested that the information aired at the meeting should be passed on to Councillor Baker.

In response to queries from Councillor Beaney, the DDM advised that engineers would be meeting shortly to look at a solution for Barville Road which was subject to frequent flooding. Although the soakaway had been cleaned out recently, it was almost at capacity and flooding had recurred. It was a difficult site to work at as the road had to be closed which was not popular with businesses on the industrial estate for obvious reasons. In relation to the road between Kearsney Abbey and Chilton Avenue, he advised that the road had been flagged up for surface dressing or micro-surfacing treatment in 2025/26. An engineer would be visiting the site, but it was possible that the road was in such poor condition that a complete resurface would be required. Once clarified, the item would go back into the report and he would update Councillor Beaney.

Members were advised that there was no lighting at Tilmanstone roundabout as a result of a road traffic accident where a vehicle had crashed into a feeder pillar. A replacement had been ordered but would take some time to arrive. In respect of developer-funded works, Councillor S S Chandler referred to the state of the road following construction of a development at the former Summerfield Nursery site in Staple. Staple Parish Council had complained that the developer had now left the site without reinstating the road to its former condition. The DDM advised that it was difficult to pin down whether such remedial work should be conditioned as part of the planning permission or the subject of a Section 278 agreement between the developer and KCC. He undertook to check with Dover District Council whether the repair of the road had been included as a planning condition. In response to Councillor Chandler who questioned why such works could not be included in the Local Transport Plan, the DDM advised that there was no appetite from KCC to do so given that it was only a consultee on planning applications.

Councillor Bates referred to the closing date of end January for Community Transport Grant applications. He requested that the date be extended to the end of February as none of the parish clerks to whom he had circulated information were aware of it and the Christmas break was fast approaching. The FDM offered to make the request to Dan Bruce at KCC who led on the matter.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 6.49 pm.