

The Ashford Transport Strategy

A report by the Head of Transport Projects to the Highways Advisory Board on 10th January 2006.

Introduction

1. In 2003 the detailed masterplanning for the Ashford Growth Area commenced. This has led, inter alia, to the development of mutually supporting land use and transport strategies. Work on the two strategies has proceeded 'hand in hand' with a number of iterations between the two, such that the finally proposed land use distribution offers the prospect of the most sustainable transport option.
2. The principles of the Transport Strategy are in line with the broad thrust of National and County policy and the document will provide the source of LTP programme support for the Growth area. The document incorporates a whole range of action points which it is recommended should be picked up by the Ashford's Future Delivery Team, and by the Divisional Office when preparing the Integrated Transport Programme for the LTP.
3. A copy of the Transport Strategy has been sent to all members of the Board with the papers for this meeting.

Fundamentals of the Strategy

4. The Transport Strategy has been characterised as a 'Ten Point Strategy' as follows:
 - (i) *Improved public transport, including a new SMARTLINK express transit system;*
 - (ii) *Park & Ride service;*
 - (iii) *A car Parking Strategy managing supply and cost to promote demand management;*
 - (iv) *A car park relocation policy to areas outside of the existing Ring Road;*
 - (v) *A comprehensive quality cycling and walking network;*
 - (vi) *A limited programme of highway improvements, but including motorway junction improvements, a new Victoria Way and the dualling of Chart Road;*
 - (vii) *A programme of public realm improvements, including modifying the Ring Road into a series of quality two-way streets;*
 - (viii) *A Public Art Strategy for the town centre integrated with public realm improvements;*
 - (ix) *A step improvement in transport information and communications;*
 - (x) *An underlying strategy of personal security and mobility for all.*

Programme and Phasing

5. The key proposals of the Strategy, SMARTLINK and the Park & Ride services, have been the subject of specific viability analyses to establish their optimum routeing / sites. The ideal programme of the key items of transport infrastructure / events is as follows, although this is, of course, subject to funding becoming available from various sources:
 - Signing of Quality Bus Partnership with Stagecoach: 2005/6
 - Through trains running to Brighton: 2005
 - M20 Junction 10 Interim Improvements: 2006
 - M20 Junction 9 improvements: 2006-07
 - Ring Road modifications: 2006-09
 - New Park & Ride site at The Warren with conventional bus use: 2008

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- CTRL Domestic Services running: 2009
- New Town Way constructed: 2006-10
- New multi-storey car park on Victoria Way: 2010
- New M20 Junction 10a: 2010-11
- Victoria Way constructed: 2009-12
- New Park & Ride site at Waterbrook with conventional bus use: 2012
- SMARTLINK Phase 1 implemented The Warren to Waterbrook: 2012
- New rail station at Park Farm: 2012
- A28 Chart Road widening: 2013-14
- New multi-storey car park on New Street: 2014
- SMARTLINK Phase 2 extensions to urban villages: 2014
- New Park & Ride site at A28 Chilmington: 2017
- SMARTLINK Phase 3 completion: 2017
- New multi-storey car park at Mace Lane: 2022

Discussion

6. Ashford is planned to be an area of significant growth. The ODPM's Sustainable Communities Plan identifies the importance of Ashford, as well as other growth areas, in delivering the Government's planning and housing agenda in the South East. Overall, it is envisaged that Ashford will grow to accommodate a further 31,000 houses and 28,000 jobs by 2031.
7. The Borough Council have endorsed a masterplan for the town as their 'preferred option' for the spatial strategy for the growth area. The Ashford's Future Delivery Board partnership of authorities is charged with delivering the strategy.
8. The land use strategy and the devised Transport Strategy within this report is designed to ensure a significant increase in the number and proportion of public transport trips. Growth in car traffic will also be significant but will be lower than the corresponding growth in public transport and the modal share of the car is expected to drop from 65% at 2003 to 55% in 2031.
9. A new advanced public transit system, SMARTLINK, will form the 'backbone' of the strategy. SMARTLINK is a fundamental part of the strategy to deliver sustainability in all areas of the development and growth programme. A three leg SMARTLINK system is proposed with alignments to: Chilmington Green, to the south west; Cheeseman's Green to the south east; and Eureka/Bockhanger Wood to the north west. Significant demand and a resulting revenue stream is predicted. An assessment of the business case indicates that the scheme should be viable and capable of attracting funding.
10. SMARTLINK will be complemented by a range of initiatives including improved interchange, new and improved 'classic' bus services including school buses and supporting infrastructure.
11. Parking will play a key part in the overall strategy for encouraging use of sustainable transport modes. Both the supply and cost of parking in the town centre will influence modal share. There will, however, be a need to strike a balance between restricting the supply of parking (which will promote public transport) and encouraging investment in the town centre.

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12. Town centre parking demand will be satisfied by the construction of new car parks but also by Park & Ride at the edges of the town. The additional levels of parking required for the delivery of the land use strategy have been determined. Increases in town centre parking charges are also proposed, particularly for long stay commuter parking. Again, future charges will be set to achieve a balance between encouraging sustainable modes, reducing traffic flows and ensuring the investment needed to ensure the expansion of the town centre is achieved.
13. Park & Ride car parks and associated bus services will form part of the overall Transport and Parking Strategy for the Ashford growth area. Three Park & Ride sites are proposed, based on consideration of travel patterns, demand assessments and the results of the assessment of the need for future town centre parking restraint. The Park & Ride sites will be phased to coincide with demand and SMARTLINK. They will anchor the three legs of SMARTLINK.
14. Overall, it is anticipated that the transport strategy will support the preferred spatial strategy for the Ashford growth area, will assist in the delivery of development and will facilitate economic growth.

Conclusion

15. Subject to the views of this Board, it is proposed recommend to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Supporting Independence that The Transport Strategy for Ashford be approved for implementation, and as a supporting Strategy for the Local Development Framework.

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Background documents:

The Greater Ashford Development Framework, Urban Initiatives, April 2005.