

## Fastrack

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

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1. *Fastrack* has continued to make good progress in recent months. This report sets out the current situation and issues for the future. A plan showing the planned routes and the major sites in Kent Thameside will be available at the meeting.

### Major Scheme and Route B

2. The Local Transport Plan (LTP) funded major scheme will be completed on time in February. This will provide the track and priority measures for Route B between Dartford town centre and Bluewater. The scheme will also be completed within the original budget allocation of £15m. The footbridge at Home Gardens in Dartford, designed by our consultant Jacobs Babbie, has already been opened, on 3<sup>rd</sup> December. This provides an excellent statement of quality design at this key town centre location.
3. A fleet of 14 *Fastrack* buses has been ordered at a cost of £2.46m and is being delivered: the first vehicle was delivered in November, in time to be displayed at the Thames Gateway Forum. The *Fastrack* Route B service between Temple Hill, Dartford and Gravesend town centres is expected to start to operate in March following a major launch event.
4. The contract to run the Route B *Fastrack* services is being awarded to Arriva with the timetable and fare structure agreed such that an enhanced service will be provided at a similar cost to other bus services in KTS and without the need for a subsidy from KCC.
5. Shelters are being provided through a combination of the major scheme funds and the ODPM funds, following a competitive tender process. These shelters will provide real time information and state of the art journey planning and travel information facilities.
6. A *Fastrack* Marketing Manager has been appointed to ensure the *Fastrack* brand is promoted well, with good publicity up to the launch of the service and thereafter. Thus Route B is in a good position for a successful launch, but there remains a great deal to do

### Route A

7. Route A will run from Dartford town centre to Bluewater via The Bridge (North Dartford) and Crossways. The service will be provided entirely (infrastructure, buses and operation) by the developer and will commence in spring 2007.

### Further Infrastructure

8. Bids have been submitted for Community Infrastructure Fund (CIF) monies to build the track at Everard's Link Phase 2 (between Greenhithe Station and Ingress Park) and at Thames Way. These bids were accepted in outline last spring, with further assessment submitted subsequently. We are currently waiting for a decision on whether the schemes have received full acceptance. The bids total £14.3m for funding in 2006/07 and 2007/08. CIF funding is 100% grant. A successful bid for Interreg money

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was also made which has brought €3m of funding for Thames Way, related to the Ebbsfleet International Station. These are the principal sections of track infrastructure that are expected to need public funding. Track through new developments such as Eastern Quarry and Ebbsfleet will be provided by the development.

### **Fastrack Delivery Executive**

9. A report was submitted to the July meeting of this Board about establishing a *Fastrack* Delivery Executive (FDE). The FDE Board has now been formed, including member representation. The FDE Business Plan has been developed and submitted to the ODPM. This sets out the milestones over the life of the project up to 2011 and the funding needed to make progress with the scheme. We await a decision from ODPM on this funding but it is absolutely essential if the project is to make satisfactory progress beyond March of this year. That is when the current tranche of ODPM funding expires and it is this funding that has provided the resources to push the project strongly forward over the last two years.

### **Statutory Quality Contract**

10. The business plan is based on the service developing so that around 2011/2012 the private sector can take it on entirely (ie operation, maintenance etc) and remove the majority of the remaining financial risk from the public sector. The best mechanism currently available for doing this is a Statutory Quality Contract (SQC). Legal advice has been sought and discussions held with the DfT to establish whether this is feasible and the indications are that it is. This is still some years away but some preparatory work will be carried out over the next two years to develop the SQC concept.

### **Financial Implications**

11. The LTP major scheme will be completed within the budget allocation. The *Fastrack* vehicles plus a contribution to the cost of the shelters are being funded by the ODPM grant. The resources currently employed on the project are funded either from the KCC staff budget, the Kent Thameside Delivery Board, the ODPM grant or the LTP allocation (50% grant and 50% supported borrowing). The *Fastrack* service has been designed such that it requires no KCC subsidy and the revenue risk lies with the operator. Thus there are no additional financial implications for KCC beyond what is already known.
12. Principal risks are that the ODPM does not provide funding beyond next March and that the service does not attract the increased numbers of passengers expected and hence revenues are lower than expected. A lack of sufficient government funding is more a risk to the rate of progress of the project and the wider regeneration of Kent Thameside than to KCC funds. Fewer passengers than forecast is initially a risk for the operator under the contract but could translate into a risk to KCC funds in the future.

### **Conclusions**

13. *Fastrack* is making excellent progress. The Route B service is expected to start in March. The Bridge development has now started and will provide Route A in 2007. Confirmation of funding from DfT and ODPM is needed though if the excellent progress is to be maintained.

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Background documents:

Plan of routes and development sites to be on display at the meeting