

National Rail Station Travel Plan Pilot

A report by the Head of Transport and Development, to the Highways Advisory Board on 8th July 2008.

Introduction

1. A partnership led by Kent Highway Services has recently made a successful bid to participate in a National Rail Station Travel Plan Pilot. The Rail White Paper proposed that station travel plans be tested through a series of pilots, and ATOC is co-ordinating the pilot projects on behalf of the Department for Transport (DfT). Ashford station was selected as one of 24 successful applications across England out of a total of 70 bids. Bids for Canterbury West and Folkestone Central/West were unfortunately not successful but it is hoped that lessons learnt from the pilot will enable best practice to be rolled out to these and other stations across the county.
2. This report is to make members aware of the Ashford Station Travel Plan project which will develop good practice in improving integration and enhancing access to the station as well as reducing the impact of increased rail travel on the local road network. It is timely given forecast increased demand from the introduction of High Speed Rail Services from 2009. It also has the potential to complement short to medium term infrastructure improvements led by the HST Task Force and linked to Ashford's Future.

Potential Benefits of Rail Station Travel Plans

3. The National Passenger Survey (NPS) shows that walking is the most popular means of accessing the station, with other public transport (underground, rail, bus/coach) also having a high share. Car travel accounts for 21% of passengers, while cycling has a marginal share at 1.7%. Station Travel Plans have the following potential benefits:
 - increased passenger numbers, particularly in the off-peak (surveys have shown, many people are deterred from travelling by rail because the station car park is full)
 - more sustainable travel to the station will reduce emissions and benefit the environment
 - passengers who switch modes or share a car will save on car park fees and fuel
 - reduced congestion around the station will reduce journey times for everyone

Why Ashford?

4. Ashford Station is on the edge of Ashford town centre, about 600 metres walk from the south eastern corner, and a 5 minute walk from the McArthur Glen shopping centre. As the junction of several railway lines, it offers a frequent service to London via Tonbridge or Maidstone to the North, Canterbury, Margate and Ramsgate to the East, Folkestone and Dover to the South and Hastings through to Brighton to the West. There is a fair amount of rail-heading from a wide catchment area, including many rural villages. The station also provides an important geographic link between the town centre (to the north-east) and the Designer Outlet retail park (to the south) which has implications for public transport, walking and cycling provision.

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5. The introduction of Domestic Services on High Speed 1 (HS1) in December 2009 will reinforce the importance of Ashford station for domestic users, and it is expected that there will be growth for all modes of transport including rail-heading. The planned expansion of the town will increase the population from approximately 60,000 to 135,000 by 2029 and will also increase demand for services significantly.
6. Southeastern have carried out forecast studies from now until 2014, during this period there is a predicted increase of 46% in footfall at Ashford Station. Footfall in 2006/2007 was 2,432,484, by 2010/2011 this is predicted to grow to 3,227,963 and by 2013/14 footfall is predicted to be 3,543,496, an extra 1,111,012 passengers a year.
7. Forecast growth will put significant pressures on the infrastructure at the station. With this in mind and also taking into account passenger satisfaction surveys, Ashford Station has been included on the National Station Improvement Programme, (NSIP) and £1.2m is in the budget to improve facilities for customers on the station lease area. These longer term plans will look to enlarge the station building, improve customer waiting areas and customer information, as well as toilets, lighting etc. Southeastern and Network Rail are working with both KCC and ABC to improve facilities at and around the station and to integrate the station with the town by providing improved bus facilities, an improved taxi waiting area and greater segregation from car traffic.

Delivering Station Travel Plans

8. To be included in the pilot programme, the Ashford Station partnership led by Kent Highway Services, in conjunction with Southeastern Trains and Ashford's Future has been asked to agree to the following:
 - Baseline data and monitoring to be carried out during the Autumn of 2008
 - Commitment of financial and staff resources for the projects' duration
 - Evaluation and production of regular reports to enable the dissemination of lessons learned and good best practice.
9. In return for signing up to these conditions, pilot stations can expect to receive:
 - A financial contribution to the pilot (likely to be for research elements of the work)
 - Support from other pilot sites and the Steering Group
 - Positive publicity for their company / organisation
10. A Kick Off Conference for the successful projects will be held on 23rd July and following that the project is expecting to follow a timeline as set out in Appendix A.

Conclusions

11. The National Rail Station Travel Pilot provides an exciting opportunity for Kent to participate in a national initiative to promote sustainable travel to rail stations. The development of the Travel Plan and supporting initiatives will assist the sustainable expansion of commuter rail travel in Kent as a result of the new HS1 services. It is intended that best practice be rolled out to other stations in due course.

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Project Partners:

Kent County Council, Ashford Borough Council, Southeastern, Network Rail, British Transport Police, Sustrans and Stagecoach

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Appendix A

SUMMARY: STATION TRAVEL PLAN PROJECT PLAN													
Stage	TASK Activity	2008 - 09											
		Q1			Q2			Q3			Q4		
		Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
1.0	SELECTION												
2.0	RESEARCH												
2.1	Tender & appoint consultants												
2.2	Consult pilots & finalise surveys												
2.3	Carry out passenger surveys												
2.4	Additional information collected												
3.0	PREPARATION												
3.1	Pilots draft implementation plan												
3.2	Review by Steering Group												
3.3	Final plans accepted by SG												
4.0	DELIVERY	APRIL 2009 – MARCH 2011											
5.0	EVALUATION	APRIL – JUNE 2011											
6.0	RECOMMENDATIONS AND FORWARD STRATEGY	JULY – SEPTEMBER 2011											