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To: Regeneration and Economic Development Policy Overview
& Scrutiny Committee - 19 January 2012

Subject: Growth without Gridlock – Regional Growth Fund and Rail
Links to Thanet

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This brief report outlines progress to date with the County Council's Regional Growth Fund scheme to improve rail journey times to Thanet as outlined in our 20 year transport delivery plan, Growth without Gridlock.

1. Introduction

The successful £40m Regional Growth Fund (RGF) 'Expansion East Kent' programme to promote business growth and employment creation in East Kent, includes funding for 'Business Critical Infrastructure Grants'. £5m has been identified for the improvement of rail line speeds between Ashford and Ramsgate. It is an opportune moment to update Members on progress with this key proposal.

2. Rail improvements for Thanet

Rail journey times between Ramsgate and London via High Speed 1 will be reduced by approximately 10 minutes as a result of the line speed enhancement scheme. Progress is good and the County Council is working closely with Network Rail who are in the process of determining exactly what can be achieved and by when. The scheme is two phases:

Phase 1: Assessment of track, structures and level crossings for up to 90mph running speed;

Phase 2: Assessment of signalling for up to 90mph running speed.

Initial assessment of the track is that it is suitable for increasing the train speed and minimal work to the track will be required. This means that some of the speed restrictions can be lifted next year once Network Rail's statutory processes are completed and these could come into effect for the December 2012 timetable changes.

The critical issue will be the structures and level crossings (faster trains means greater sight distances will be required for vehicles / pedestrians) and these are all being assessed in the early part of 2012. It is mitigation at these which will be the greatest call on the £5m RGF money, but with double benefits - line speed

and improved safety. It is anticipated that all of the benefits will be realised by April 2014. The total cost of the project is estimated at £10m, with the balance of the funding coming from Network Rail.

The construction of a Thanet Parkway Station was the subject of a first-round RGF bid in January 2011. Unfortunately the bid was unsuccessful, as it was considered by Government that the bid would not create a sufficiently large number of direct jobs within the three-year period of the Fund but the business case for the Station nevertheless remains very strong, with a Benefit-Cost Ratio of 5:1, and KCC will continue to work with Thanet District Council, Manston Airport and local businesses to identify suitable delivery opportunities.

A new peak time high speed service to/from Deal and Sandwich, supported by the County Council, commenced in September. The service has reduced peak journey times to/from St. Pancras from 135 to 90 minutes and passenger uptake has been better than expected and continues to grow.

3. Funding for transport infrastructure

Throughout the past 12 months, officers have met with Ministers and officials at DfT and DCLG, to call for greater flexibilities and freedoms around funding streams and local delivery. A business case for hypothecation of funding from new revenue streams is being developed with DfT officials, alongside discussions with investment bankers to gauge market appetite for investment in strategic transport infrastructure. The Government has proposed a new system of funding major schemes beyond 2015 through Local Transport Consortia which will provide greater freedoms and decentralisation of decision making to Local Transport Authorities. Indications are that SELEP (the South East Local Enterprise Partnership comprising Kent, Medway, East Sussex, Essex, Thurrock and Southend Councils), as a Local Transport Consortium, would receive approximately £36.8m per annum for four years from April 2015, giving a total of £147.2m. The Government will consult local authorities on Local Transport Consortia in spring 2012. At this stage no indication has been given as to how projects would be prioritised for funding.

4. Recommendations

Members are asked to note the progress outlined in this report.

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