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KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

HIGHWAYS ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES of a meeting of the Highways Advisory Board held on Tuesday, 10 July 2007 at Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone.

PRESENT: Mr R F Manning (Chairman), Mrs A D Allen (substitute for Mrs P A V Stockell), Mr T J Birkett, Mr J R Bullock, MBE, Miss S J Carey, Mr C G Findlay, Ms A Harrison (substitute for Mr A R Poole), Mr S J G Koowaree (substitute for Mr D S Daley), Mr C J Law, Mr R A Marsh, Mr J I Muckle, Mr R Tolputt, Mr R Truelove and Mrs E M Tweed (substitute for Mr W A Hayton).

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr G Harrison-Mee, Director, Kent Highway Services; Mr D Hall, County Transportation Manager; Mr J Farmer, Regeneration and Projects Manager; Mr M Sims, Divisional Manager, East Kent; Mr I Procter, Road Safety Manager; and the Head of Democratic Services (represented by Mrs K Mannering).

Prior to the commencement of the meeting the Chairman referred to the Tour de France. Around two million people lined streets and villages in Kent on Sunday, 8 July 2007, to watch the 126 mile race pass through the County. The Board wished to place on record its thanks and appreciation to all the KHS staff involved in making the event such an enjoyable success.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Membership
(Item 1)

The Board noted that Mr T J Birkett and Mr R Truelove had replaced Mr R J E Parker and Mr K Sansum.

2. Minutes
(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 May 2007 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

3. Presentation on Maintenance Funding, Potholes and an Interim Review of the Asset Maintenance Plan
(Item 5 – Report by Divisional Manager, East Kent)

(1) The presentation from Matthew Sims explained some of the pertinent changes that had been implemented this year to improve KHSs approach to cyclic maintenance. The main points of discussion were a change of approach to street lighting faults, which had already seen a dramatic decrease in outstanding faults; targeting of specific maintenance activities to achieve an approach to maintenance which allowed the optimum balance between the efficiencies of planning work and the need to be responsive to customers. This was primarily in the field of potholes, patching, signs & lines, safety fencing and gully emptying.

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- (2) There was also an explanation of the need to target 'safety critical maintenance' as a priority, enabling KHS to provide evidence of a risk based approach to maintenance.
- (3) The need to review the HAB approved policy of highway maintenance would explain the gap between policy statements, available budget and vision of how maintenance should be undertaken. The presentation was a forerunner to a paper at the next HAB which would seek authority for an interim policy on the asset maintenance plan.
- (4) Finally, the presentation explained the issues surrounding potholes and the way in which they occurred and the complexities of repairing. The presentation discussed the issues of materials, traffic management, cost and volume; there was also a look at the possible future of pothole repairs.
- (5) Following a question and answer session, Mr Sims undertook to circulate copies of the slides used to Members of the Board.
- (6) The Chairman thanked Mr Sims for a very informative presentation.

4. Sittingbourne Northern Relief Road – Objections to Statutory Orders *(Item 6 – Report by Capital Programme Manager)*

(1) In December 2005, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Supporting Independence took the decision, following public consultation, to progress the scheme known as Alternative Route B. The Officer recommendation was for Alternative Route A and Members of the Highways Advisory Board were split equally in their views between the two options. The adopted route was strongly opposed by M-Real New Thames Ltd and M-Real Sittingbourne Ltd, who owned Kemsley Mill, and the adjacent and associated private sector interests of Fletcher Challenge Industries, Rexam Property Developments and Kemsley Fields Ltd who were now all directly affected (all referred to for ease in the report as 'the Mill'). They saw no basis for departing from the established proposals and affecting their existing and future interests to the benefit of residents of new housing development in the Recreation Way area.

(2) The adopted scheme had been progressed and it achieved planning consent in September 2006. The Mill retained their strong opposition to the scheme. The Compulsory Purchase Order, Side Roads Order and the S106 Scheme for the Milton Creek Crossing were published in February 2007. The Mill again retained their objections to the Compulsory Purchase Order and Side Roads Order and submitted formal statutory objections. There were 27 objections to the S106 Scheme.

(3) The normal process would now be for the Secretary of State to instruct a Public Inquiry following the advice of the County Council on a suggested venue and dates. At the Inquiry the County Council would present evidence to convince the Inspector, appointed by the Secretary of State, of the merits of the scheme. This could be done and a robust case could be presented. However, there were a number of aspects that needed to be considered in view of the continued and sustained objections of the Mill. These could be summarised as follows:-

- The Mill was a long standing major employer and contributor to the economy of the town.
- A key purpose of the scheme was to support existing businesses and future regeneration.

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- The scheme reduced the length of storage available for in-bound HGV's on the approach to the Mill and the weighbridge.
- The scheme took land from that designated in the Local Plan for a possible future paper making mill – while the land take was relatively small, paper mills were long linear production lines and any loss of land was considered significant by the Mill.
- The Scheme encroached onto land that the Mill was seeking to have designated in the Local Plan for commercial development.
- The route of the Relief Road was long established and pre dated residential development in the immediate area and particularly Recreation Way.
- Owners of the houses would have acquired the properties in the knowledge of the proposals for the Relief Road.
- The Officer recommendation was for Alternative Route A.

(4) Officers had maintained contact with the Mill to better understand the operation of the mill, their objections and to challenge their validity. While their initial reaction to the chosen route was understandable, the objections had not lessened with time. Many of the objections could be tested by simple inspection and others were related to the history of the Relief Road and local development. The issue of the impact on a future paper making mill was harder to judge without a concept design, however, it could not be denied that the site was constrained by a pylon to the north and Ridham Avenue to the south and any loss of land however small could be a concern.

(5) The availability of compulsory powers of acquisition was a powerful facility available to local authorities. Compulsory Purchase Orders were not confirmed lightly and there was stringent scrutiny where there were statutory objections. As part of the process at Inquiry, an Inspector might reasonably ask if there was a compromise solution. In view of the sustained objections from the Mill and in anticipation of the public inquiry, investigations had been carried out.

(6) The fundamental objectives were to see if an amended junction arrangement was possible at Ridham Avenue that would:-

- Avoid landtake from the site identified for a future paper making mill.
- Maximise the length of road available for the storage of HGV's entering the Mill.
- Keep the basic alignment of the Relief Road route on the east side of the overhead electric power line to try and maintain distance from the houses in Recreation Way that was a key reason for the Cabinet Member's decision to adopt Alternative Route B.
- Reduce the landtake where the Mill had commercial development aspirations.

(7) Three options had been considered:-

Option A – Relocating the roundabout and centred on the pylon. – Drawing no. 4568/WD/86RevA and Fig. 2.

This avoided critical land take and increased HGV storage. It was a conventional roundabout layout.

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Option B – Extending the existing roundabout into a lozenge shape enclosing the pylon - Drawing no. 4568/WD/87RevBO and Fig 3.

This avoided critical land take and maximised HGV storage. It lengthened the junction which would probably be a concern to residents. Its unconventional layout was a slight concern with the risk of faster traffic on the straight sections.

Option C – Extending the existing roundabout along Ridham Avenue into a lozenge shape – Drawing no. 4588/WD/88RevO and Fig. 4.

This option involved the least change from the current scheme but was not favoured. It still required land from the future mill site and was physically constrained by the power line pylon making it difficult to achieve the Relief Road and Mill entrance link connections in the space available.

(8) If an amended scheme was to be proposed then it was a choice between Option A and Option B. Option A was to be preferred because it was a conventional layout and had least increased impact on residents of Recreation Way. There would be a slight increase in noise levels although a noise bund topped by a noise fence would help to mitigate the effects. In noise assessment terms 3 properties were predicted to have a noise increase of just over 3dB(A) but still well below the 68dB(A) threshold whereby noise insulation would be offered.

(9) If an amended scheme was promoted then the residents of Recreation Way in the immediate area of the relocated roundabout could be expected to be concerned. If such a scheme was pursued then they might object to the revised planning application that would be required and in due course might become non-statutory objectors to subsequent statutory Orders.

(10) The Mill supported the concept of the Relief Road and were frustrated that they felt obliged to object to the current scheme in order to protect their operational, financial and commercial interests. In 'without prejudice' discussions they had indicated that while they continued to believe that Alternative Route A should have been adopted and would argue this at Inquiry, they would be willing to support Option A because it goes a significant way to addressing their concerns. Support for Option A was however conditional because they were very concerned about the potential Land Compensation Act Part 1 liability in respect of the Kemsley Fields element of the Relief Road that required to take account of the future use of the full Relief Road. This was a difficult issue to resolve and for now only a commitment to discuss this concern with them to see if there was any equitable solution that could be considered could be given. Despite this issue, it was not directly related to the fundamental operational and land use objections and it was considered that there would be more confidence in defending the compromise layout offered by Option A at any future Public Inquiry.

(11) In regard to other issues, if the land south of the Mill was accepted by the Local Plan Inspector for commercial development then under any scheme scenario it was unlikely that access would be acceptable off Ridham Avenue. In that eventuality it was accepted that access would be required from a 'T' junction directly off the Relief Road. In the event that the retained land between the Relief Road and Recreation Way had development potential then under any scheme scenario it would be possible for access to be provided from the roundabout as a fourth arm.

(12) Swale Borough Council was keen for the Relief Road to proceed to support the immediate need and on-going regeneration of the town. It had informally indicated that it would support a compromise scheme and preferably Option A.

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(13) The S106 Scheme provided for a fixed link bridge and an air clearance of 4.2m above Mean High Water Spring tide levels. The proposal had been the subject of public consultation and was reported to the Board in January 2006. Of the 27 objections, 17 were from individuals with boating interests and 7 were from representatives of boating organisations. The objections were generally that an opening bridge should be provided because the fixed link would deny access to yachts, limit the regeneration and tourism opportunities and fail to acknowledge the key role that Milton Creek played in the history of Sittingbourne.

(14) The reality was that the Creek was little used and an opening bridge had a high extra-over capital cost and in particular an annual ongoing operation and maintenance revenue cost. Up until now, these had been subjective statements based on experience and objectors had expressed concern that these had not been substantiated. It was acknowledged that further research would be required in any event to present as evidence at an Inquiry and that this would be shared with objectors. Our consultant, Jacobs, had produced a draft Report that indicated that an opening bridge would have an increased capital cost of between £3.5 – 4.0m and a revenue cost of between £30,000 - £90,000, depending on the number of openings per annum, that would equate to an equivalent extra-over commuted sum provision of £0.8m to £2.3m. The maintenance costs of a fixed link were relatively negligible in this context.

(15) The concerns of the objectors were well known and understood but existing use was minimal and any recent increased use had probably been generated by the threat of the proposal. Future potential use was not really supported by local policy framework or emerging development proposals. The Relief Road was an expensive scheme and could not support the increased median cost of about £5.0m.

(16) The conclusion had to be that the proposed S106 Scheme for the fixed link should continue to be promoted. In any event, it would be desirable to republish the S106 Scheme because of a technical error in the Order drafting.

Proposed Way Forward – Compulsory Purchase Order and Side Roads Order

- (a) The Board support the concept of a compromise junction arrangement at Ridham Avenue with a preference for Option A.
- (b) The Mill and the other private sector interests be consulted with the expectation that they would give conditional support to Option A.
- (c) The residents of the Recreation Way area be informed about the reasons for the change to the proposals and invited to make comments.
- (d) The Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste then be invited to take a formal decision.
- (e) On the presumption that the decision was for a compromise junction arrangement an amended or new planning application would be submitted.
- (f) Subject to achieving planning consent, revised Orders would then be published.

Proposed Way Forward – S106 Scheme

- (a) The Board note the draft Bridge Report and the view that the proposed scheme for a fixed link should continue to be promoted.
- (b) The objectors to the Scheme be invited to a briefing on the draft Bridge Report and given the opportunity to make further comments.

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- (c) The Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste be invited to take a formal decision on the form of the bridge crossing prior to the republication of the S106 Scheme.

(17) The local County Members had been consulted on the Report and particularly the compromise option aspects at Ridham Avenue. They would also have the opportunity to comment before the Cabinet Member took the decision.

(18) The Relief Road was an important scheme for Sittingbourne and it was important that progress was made quickly and any further slippage avoided. It would be the objective for the consultation on the compromise layout at Ridham Avenue to be conducted by letter with a response time of two weeks so that the Cabinet Member was in a position to take a decision at the end of July.

(19) There were no immediate financial implications. The works costs of a compromise junction were comparable to the proposed scheme. The land costs could be expected to be less with a compromise scheme that had the support of the private sector although this would be offset in part by likely increased Land Compensation Act Part 1 liability to residents of the Recreation Way area.

(20) Clearly if any decision was taken to promote an open bridge crossing of Milton Creek then this would have significant cost and funding implications.

(21) The Board supported the proposal for recommendation to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste that the proposals outlined above under 'The Way Forward' be approved.

5. Proposed Safety Camera, Loose Road, Maidstone *(Item 7 – Report by Director of Kent Highway Services)*

(1) The report was for Members' information and referred to the proposed introduction of a new safety camera housing on the A229 Loose Road in Maidstone. A previous proposal for narrowing of the carriageway and construction of a pelican crossing was withdrawn and other means of addressing local concern about the creation of a safe crossing point had subsequently been investigated.

(2) This was a very busy section of the A229 Primary Route, and there had been considerable discussion at the Maidstone Joint Transportation Board about highway problems in the area. The concern was based on the desire to protect pedestrians crossing the wide, four lane carriageway, and to prevent vehicles from approaching the sharp bend into Sheals Crescent at high speeds, the road was subject to a 30mph speed limit.

(3) Pedestrian crossing movements were dominated by students heading for the Maidstone Boys Grammar School in Barton Road in the morning, and parents/children heading to and from Southborough Primary School. Although there was a pedestrian bridge near the Primary School, it had long approach ramps and steps at the top, so many pedestrians chose to cross at ground level. The speeding issue also caused concern to residents of Sheals Crescent, who had seen the crash barrier at the bend struck and damaged.

(4) Other means of speed management were investigated. The A229 being a primary route and four lanes wide, did not allow traffic calming measures to be implemented. The possibility of an interactive bend warning sign was considered, but the alignment of the road would make it difficult to locate a sign to give drivers adequate warning of the bend,

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without placing it so far away that vehicles would have time to build up speed again before the turning into Sheals Crescent.

(5) An additional speed camera housing was therefore considered, as the stretch of road lay between two other existing sites. It would therefore be seen as an additional measure on a road already subject to camera enforcement where crashes continued to be reported.

(6) A site meeting was held to look at the potential location for a safety camera on Loose Road just south of Sheals Crescent. The most suitable location for a camera to reduce speeds approaching the sharp bend was in the entrance of the former vehicle access to Southborough School. This would encourage drivers to approach the bend at a lower speed than currently occurred reducing the risk of crashes. There would be some requirement for ancillary works in association with the camera, including kerb protection for the camera post, setting back of the guardrails within the school access, removal of one road sign, and some new carriageway surfacing in which to bed the detector loops. It was also felt that the lay-by area offered a suitable and safe location from which to carry out camera maintenance.

(7) The crash record supported the use of an additional camera bid. In the last five years there had been four serious and three slight crashes between the footbridge and Sheals Crescent junction and also one serious and three slight crashes prior to the footbridge. Three crashes involved pedestrians of which two were children. Three other crashes involved loss of control due to speed, two of which hit the Armco barrier on the bend.

(8) In September/October 2005 a week long speed survey was carried out at a location just prior to the new camera position opposite Heather Drive. An average figure was taken for the whole week with an 85% speed of 37.6mph and a mean speed of 32.8mph with slightly higher figures at the weekend. Throughout the week 28% of vehicles were exceeding 35mph, this was on average 3435 vehicles per day.

(9) Local consultation had been carried out by Councillor Mrs Wilson, the local Borough Council Member. The general response had been favourable to the proposed location. It was therefore the wish to proceed on the basis that this was the final option available and pursue the installation of a camera housing at this location in the current financial year.

(10) The cost of the works would be some £33,000 and the money could be available from within the budget allocation for safety cameras. The addition of the site to the schedule of sites administered by the Kent and Medway Safety Camera Partnership would not trigger the need for a bid for a new camera itself.

(11) After considering all options available including narrowing of the carriageway, a pelican crossing and an interactive bend sign all of which were deemed not feasible, therefore a safety camera was seen as the most suitable and effective mechanism to reduce speed and injury crashes on this stretch of road.

(12) During debate the Chairman referred to the receipt of a letter from Mr Gidley, resident of Loose Road. Mr Hall undertook to contact Mr Gidley. *(Since the meeting, Mr Gidley had met with the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste).*

(13) The Chairman expressed concern as to why, if it was a fait accompli and the decision had already been made, the report had been submitted to the Board.

(14) The Board noted the introduction of an additional safety camera.

6. Safety Cameras

(Item 8 – Report by County Transportation Manager)

(1) The Kent and Medway Safety Camera Partnership (K&MSCP) was launched in 2002. The partnership operated across the Kent Police area covering both Kent and Medway and its sole purpose was to reduce road crash casualties.

(2) The K&MSCP produced an annual report for each Partner organisation setting out progress to date and challenges for the future. Each year the report was presented to the Board as Appendix 1, and considered six issues associated with safety cameras in the county and the Kent Police area as a whole:-

- An overview of the partnership and its structure
- Funding
- Operations during 2006/07
- Casualty reduction
- Communications
- Future activity and funding arrangements

(3) In recent years road crash casualties in Kent had reduced overall. The success was due to a variety of factors involving many areas of work undertaken and supported by the various partners and stakeholders. However, the contribution of the work of the Kent and Medway Safety Camera Partnership should not be underestimated. The partnership had been in existence for five years, during this time its work had reduced casualties at camera sites, consistently performing at above the national average. To fulfil KCC's commitment to reducing all seriously injured (KSI) casualties by 40%, by December 2007, 478 fewer KSIs were needed, 69 had already been achieved by safety cameras alone.

(4) The Board acknowledged the annual report of the Kent and Medway Safety Camera Partnership.

7. 2006 End of Year Crash and Casualty Numbers and Progress Against National 2010 Casualty Targets

(Item 9 – Report by County Transportation Manager)

(1) The crash records for 2006 for Kent were finalised in May. The totals were used in establishing best value performance indicators, government targets and establishing trends. In 2006, 89 people were killed on roads in Kent (excluding Medway), 658 received serious injuries and 5748 were slightly injured. There were 4752 crashes. Appendix 1 of the report showed crashes and casualties by severity for 2006.

(2) To help focus on achieving continuous improvement in road safety the Government had set a national target for reducing casualties by 2010. Compared with the 1994-98 average the target was:-

- A 40% reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured in road accidents (KSI) – KCC as part of PSA2 intended to achieve the target by the end of 2007.

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- A 50% reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured.
- A 10% reduction in the slight casualty rate expressed as the number of people slightly injured per 100million vehicle kilometres (MVKm). Kent did not have a traffic model appropriate for KCC roads. Therefore a simple 10% reduction in slight casualties had been used to set targets in Kent.

(3) Appendix 2 of the report showed that compared with the 2010 target KSI, casualties on Kent roads including motorways and trunk roads were 3% above the 2010 target. Child KSI casualties were just below the 2010 target. Slight casualties showed a reduction of 3%. Appendix 3 of the report showed that on the roads for which KCC was responsible, the 2010 targets had been achieved. Casualties on roads for which the Highway Agency was responsible had increased in 2006 compared with the previous year. However individual year on year figures were volatile and the overall trend provided a better indication than individual years. The overall year on year trends were shown in Appendices 4, 5 and 6 of the report.

(4) Appendix 2 of the report also showed that on Kent roads child KSI casualties increased from 47 in 2005 to 74 casualties in 2006, however the 2006 figure compared with the 2004 figure of 87, showed a decrease of 15%, indicating 2005 was abnormally low. The variable nature of year on year totals were shown on the trend graph from 1990 for child KSI casualties. The 2006 total KSI casualties on Kent roads showed a 1.3% reduction compared with 2005, which might indicate a flattening out of the overall downward trend. 2006 slight casualties on Kent roads showed a 1.5 % reduction compared with 2005.

(5) Overall KCC's performance was good and well placed to meet and maintain the 2010 KSI targets. The trend in casualties continued the well established downward pattern albeit that it did appear to be flattening out. It was vital that programmes of work aimed at both improving the road infrastructure and road user behaviour continued to be delivered. Focused and stronger casualty reduction links with the Highway Agency, Police, Fire and Rescue and the other partners were being progressed to sustain the downward trend countywide. This year was crucial, as the target of reducing KSI casualties, including those on motorways and trunk roads, by 40% compared with the 1994-1998 average, needed to be met and sustained by the end of 2007 to achieve PSA2. Based on the long term influence on casualty reduction to date by the County Council and its partners, there was confidence that the target could be achieved.

(6) The Board noted the contents of the report.

8. Priority Vehicle Lanes for HGV's, Buses and Other Vehicles

(Item 10 – Report by County Transportation Manager)

(1) At the meeting of the Board in May 2007, Members requested a report on the feasibility of bus lanes in Tunbridge Wells operating at peak times only and allowing HGV's access. As there were bus lanes elsewhere in Kent, consideration of the issue should be on a countywide basis. The report outlined options under consideration both nationally and locally for the use of bus lanes by other vehicles and on a part-time basis.

(2) A priority vehicle lane was an area of carriageway reserved, using a Traffic Regulation Order, for the use of buses, bicycles, goods vehicles and taxis. In addition to conventional bus lanes, a number of other models of priority vehicle lanes had been trialled in the UK and the report identified the benefits of each approach. The Road Traffic

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Regulation Act 1984 allowed local authorities to introduce experimental Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO's) without public consultation.

(3) A bus lane was an area of carriageway reserved, using a Traffic Regulation Order, primarily for use by buses and coaches during the advertised hours of operation. Unless the bus lane had a 24 hour restriction, outside of these hours, all traffic was permitted to use bus lanes. In Kent, bicycles and Hackney carriages were also permitted to use the lanes but not Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV's) or Light Goods Vehicles (LGV's). Private Hire taxis were also excluded from using bus lanes. The concept of using designated lanes for buses was well understood and widely used by highway authorities in urban areas where bus services were adversely affected by traffic congestion. The introduction of priority measures in Kent (for example bus lanes) had played a significant role in generating the 17% increase in bus usage achieved during Kent's first Local Transport Plan (LTP), through increasing the profile of services as well as improving reliability.

(4) Bus priority measures were designed and introduced to help achieve easier and more consistent journey times through congested areas, particularly in towns and cities. Reliability was also very important in assisting operators to meet the standards set down by the industry regulator, the Traffic Commissioner. The challenge of operating 95% of all services within a "window" of 1 minute early and 5 minutes late was becoming increasingly difficult as traffic conditions worsened and congestion increased. Without assistance from the Highways Authority, the costs of catering for congestion would lead to a reduction in more marginal routes which were currently operated without financial support.

(5) Reliable bus services were also important to passengers. In almost every survey about bus services, reliability was one of the most important issues for bus users. Unreliable bus services led to declining bus patronage, increasing congestion on already busy roads. Providing bus priority measures such as bus lanes were also important in generating operator investment in new buses through Quality Bus Partnership agreements. In Canterbury, Stagecoach introduced 18 new low floor double-decker buses following the provision of bus lanes on the outskirts of the city centre.

(6) The hours of operation of any bus lane would need to consider:-

- the hours of bus service operation and frequency
- the extent and timing of traffic congestion and its impact on bus reliability
- the method for enforcing bus lanes

(7) Bus lanes generally operated for one of the following periods:-

- 24 hours
- 12 hour period (usually 7am – 7pm)
- peak hours only (usually 7-10am and 4-7pm)

(8) Some local authorities outside London did use 24 hour operation of bus lanes. However as most bus services did not operate between the hours of 12pm and 6am such a restriction was excessive and many such authorities were reverting to a 12 hour period.

(9) Although bus services derived most benefit from bus lanes at peak periods, such peak periods were spreading (for example in Canterbury) and traffic patterns were becoming less predictable due to changing employment patterns (e.g. shift work and call centres). With this in mind, many local authorities had reverted from a peak-hour operation to a 12 hour period of operation (i.e. 7am – 7pm).

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(10) Many local authorities had found that the most appropriate hours of bus lane operation to include in Traffic Regulation Orders was 7am – 7pm. This made such measures self-enforcing and reduced the need for camera enforcement and the issuing of Penalty Charge Notices. The majority of bus lanes in Kent operated between these hours and experienced relatively low levels of abuse by other traffic despite the absence of camera enforcement. Within Tunbridge Wells, there was little potential benefit to motorists from entering bus lanes during the off-peak period. The cost of changing the signage was £10,000 and this could provide better value for money spent on other appropriate schemes.

(11) A Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) was defined as a vehicle with a maximum gross weight in excess of 7.5 tonnes and were identified through yellow and orange striped rear marking plates. At present the DfT had not produced any specific guidance on the use of bus lanes by HGV's.

(12) There were concerns amongst bus operators about the use of bus lanes by HGV's. It was not clear whether HGV use encouraged other vehicles such as Light Goods Vehicles, for example white vans and delivery vehicles, or other traffic to use bus lanes which could undermine bus reliability. There was also concern about HGV's, particularly non-UK lorries, parking or waiting in bus lanes and causing an obstruction or making slow turning movements into side streets, further delaying bus movements. It was recommended that more work was undertaken in consultation with the DfT before making a decision on this in Kent.

(13) DfT note 2/07 provided guidance on the use of bus lanes by motorcycles. A number of experimental Traffic Regulation Orders had been made permanent allowing motorcyclists to use bus lanes. Research conclusions suggested both potential benefits and drawbacks. The main drawback of such an approach was the potential conflict between motorcyclists and other users, such as pedal cycles and pedestrians. Motorcycles tended to travel at faster speeds than buses, cycles and HGV's and this could have safety implications. DfT guidance suggested consultation with other road user groups before making a permanent TRO. In London, cycling groups strongly opposed the introduction of motorcycles into bus/cycle lanes as part of a pilot scheme, citing an increase in road accidents. Motorcycles had been permitted to use bus lanes in Northern Ireland since 2004. Motorcycles were easily distinguishable from other vehicle types using existing detection techniques so technical issues with enforcement were unlikely.

(14) A High Occupancy Vehicle lane was an area of carriageway restricted under a Traffic Regulation Order to allow cars with multiple occupants to use it. HOV lanes had been backed in Traffic Advisory Leaflet 3/06 from the Department for Transport. It stated that "HOV lanes are a method of utilising spare capacity in existing bus lanes". Car sharing organisations such as Liftshare supported the extension of bus lanes to HOV status.

(15) One of the few trials of HOV lanes had taken place on Stanningley Road in Leeds which was introduced in 1998. The lanes were available to buses, coaches, other vehicles carrying two or more people, motorcycles and pedal cycles. HGV's over 7.5 tonnes were not permitted to use them. The HOV lanes operated in the morning and evening peak periods (07:00 – 10:00, 16:00 – 19:00 on Mondays to Fridays). Monitoring data had shown increases in average car occupancy and bus patronage as well as big improvements in journey time reliability for people using both modes.

(16) The application of an HOV lane was most suited to heavily trafficked corridors, particularly during peak times, where a Local Authority wanted to encourage car sharing and discourage single occupancy car traffic. There were at present no HOV lanes in Kent

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and with no means of camera enforcement at present it would be difficult to ensure that such lanes were not being abused.

(17) There were a range of priority vehicle lanes that had been piloted across the UK with varying degrees of success. Any measure needed to be appropriate to the local conditions but clearly understood by motorists and other road users. The vast majority of the travelling public understood which vehicles were permitted to use conventional bus lanes, without referring to each individual sign or marking. Bus lanes provided priority through congested urban areas which helped to ensure bus reliability.

(18) The Board:-

- (a) supported the proposal for recommendation to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste that bus lanes in Kent continue to be operational between the hours of 7.00am and 7.00 pm; and
- (b) did not support further investigations being undertaken to establish the benefits and disbenefits of HGV's using bus lanes.

9. Bus Roadside Publicity and Infrastructure Unit

(Item 11 – Report by County Transportation Manager)

(1) The report outlined the current arrangements for providing bus timetable information and infrastructure at bus stops in Kent. The Transport Act 2000 provided a duty for each Local Transport Authority in England and Wales to ensure that adequate information was provided by local bus operators. It also empowered them to make arrangements as necessary to plug any gaps in the provision of information, recharging the costs to the appropriate bus operator. Transport Authorities set out their proposals in an Information Strategy which formally came into effect in April 2002.

(2) Kent County Council's Public Transport Information Strategy was first published in 2001 and reviewed by a specialist independent consultant in 2006. The consultants report recommended that greater attention was given to the arrangements for and funding of the provision of information at bus stops. The Strategy (2001) concluded that:-

“Roadside information for bus service users is poor in many parts of Kent and the County Council in partnership with Arriva has developed a Roadside Infrastructure Unit which is responsible for the display of up-to-date information on bus services throughout the County. This scheme was initially introduced on a trial basis during 1999 and the County Council has agreed a formal two-year arrangement with Arriva.”

(3) The consultants review in 2006 concluded that:-

“These arrangements are still in place today, but the procedures and resources for providing roadside information must be reviewed if it is to meet the desired target level of 75% of bus stops in the County. Also improvements must be made to the design standards to ensure the public find the publicity easy to understand and it improves the image of public transport services in the County.”

(4) The Roadside Infrastructure Unit was formed in 1999 through a fixed cost contract with the main bus operator in West and Mid Kent, Arriva, to provide timetable publicity and information at bus stops and interchanges. Arriva post timetables and other relevant information at bus stops giving information on all bus services in Kent ran either on a commercial basis or under contract to Kent County Council. KCC currently spent £7

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million per annum on procuring “socially necessary” bus services across Kent. Approximately £200,000 of this budget was spent on promoting and advertising the services. The only exception to the arrangement was that Stagecoach, who opted out of the countywide scheme, maintained all stops in areas where they were the sole or principal bus operator. This covered most Districts of East Kent and some areas of Mid Kent such as Ashford town.

(5) The Roadside Infrastructure Unit officers carried out a number of functions:-

- they sought to ensure that timetables for all commercial and Kent County Council funded bus services were accurate, up-to-date and readable;
- they resolved or reported to the relevant authority, cases of vandalism, graffiti and traffic damage to bus stops;
- they dealt with a large number of enquiries from members of the public acting as the agent of Kent Highway Services, aiming to respond to reports of dangerous bus stops within 24 hours and 48 hours for less urgent enquiries;
- they helped to distribute timetables to outlets across Kent; and
- they provided roadside information about short term changes to bus services caused by roadworks.

(6) There was now a need to review the arrangements currently provided by Arriva under contract to Kent County Council. Between 1999/2000 and 2005/2006 the Roadside Infrastructure agreement remained virtually unchanged with only minimal inflationary price rises to cover the bus operators cost increases. However the value of the contract increased from £30,000 in 2005/06 to £40,000 in 2006/07 to reflect Arriva’s proposal to expand the team from two to three officers, with the aim of providing a more responsive service to the public and higher quality information at bus stops and interchanges.

(7) To maintain consistency with the procurement of local bus services, the current arrangements needed to be put out to tender from April 2008. This would give all interested bus operators and other organisations such as Kent County Council’s Commercial Services Department the opportunity to tender for the work, thereby ensuring best value for the County Council and the highest possible level of service to the public.

(8) The Board supported the proposal for recommendation to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste that approval be given to putting the Roadside Infrastructure agreement out to tender with the new contract starting in April 2008.

10. Sustainable Travel to School Strategy

(Item 12 – Report by County Transportation Manager)

(1) A key requirement of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 was for Kent to produce a Sustainable Travel to School Strategy. The report sought Member approval for a consultation draft of the strategy. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 placed a general duty on local authorities to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport on the journey to school. Section 508A of the Act, in force from April 2007, required local education and transport authorities to develop a strategy for the sustainable travel and transport infrastructure within the authority so that the travel and transport needs of children and young people were better catered for.

(2) The strategy comprised a statement of the authority’s overall vision, objectives and work programme for improving accessibility to schools. The accessibility strategy should build on, and be developed in the context of the authority’s community strategies and

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Local Transport Plan (including its accessibility plan and bus strategy). The strategy was intended to be an important source of information to parents on the travel options available to them when expressing their preferences for particular schools in the admissions round.

(3) In developing its strategy, the local authority should consider how improvements could help to deliver other objectives, including environmental improvements (from reduced levels of congestion and pollution), health benefits (from increased levels of walking and cycling) and enhanced child safety and security. The strategy should be evidence-based, including an assessment of the accessibility needs and problems of the local authority's area and demonstrate how a range of interventions could address the problems. The strategy should set out the accessibility priorities over a time frame that fitted the LTP cycle.

(4) The Education (School Information) (England) Regulations 2002, amended with effect from 1 June 2007, required local authorities to publish their Sustainable Travel to School Strategy on their web-site by 31 August each year, starting in 2007. Local authorities must monitor the implementation of their strategy and revise these annually as they felt necessary.

(5) In response to the requirement, Kent Highway Services had established a Steering Group, including representatives from CFE and Commercial Services to oversee the development of a Consultation Draft of the Kent Sustainable Travel to School Strategy. This would be consulted on internally during July and August 07 and would be published as a draft for external consultation on the kent.gov site in time for the DfES deadline of 31 August 2007. The September 2008 revised version, would therefore constitute the final strategy.

(6) Subject to the deletion of Section 4.4.2 on page 30 of the Strategy, the Board:-

- (a) supported the development of Kent's Sustainable Travel to School Strategy;
- (b) agreed that the Strategy be finalised in draft form for consultation under delegated powers; and
- (c) agreed that the Strategy be published as a draft at the start of the new school year in September 2007, as required by the Act.

11. The Draft Local Transport Bill Consultation

(Item 13 – Report by County Transportation Manager)

(1) The report outlined the provisions in the recently published draft Local Transport Bill and their implications for Kent. The Bill was intended to help tackle congestion and improve public transport. The consultation would close on 7 September.

(2) Many of the measures proposed were aimed at major urban areas or modified provisions in the Transport Act 2000 that local authorities had not chosen or been able to use. The legislation was also updated to allow local authorities to take forward local road pricing schemes should they choose. The proposals most relevant to Kent were those that:-

- provided new powers enabling local authorities in non-Metropolitan areas to set up Passenger Transport Authorities (PTAs).
- made the implementation of Quality Contracts with public transport operators a realistic option in areas where it was in the public interest for local authorities to take greater control over bus services. This could provide a

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mechanism to secure the delivery of Smartlink in Ashford and future phases of Fastrack in Kent Thameside.

- provided a new regime to deliver improved bus punctuality, holding local authorities as well as bus operators to account for their contribution to punctuality performance. Local Authorities were required to provide the Traffic Commissioner with information connected with the performance of their network management duties under the Traffic Management Act 2004 (TMA). Should Kent be found not to be identifying and addressing the causes of poor punctuality the Secretary of State might choose to issue an Intervention Notice under the TMA.
- supported further development of the community transport sector than was currently permitted. Kent had a mix of such community transport schemes across the county and this should ease the development of new and expanded schemes and would provide an opportunity to review the provision of services to rural areas.

(3) Whilst the elements of the draft legislation set out above had the potential to be of use to Kent, and would feature in the response to the consultation, most of the proposals related more to large metropolitan areas. Indeed Kent was already making good progress with delivering improvements to bus services through voluntary Quality Bus Partnerships with operators. In contrast to much of the country, Kent had managed to sustain a year on year 2% growth in bus patronage. In 2005/06 there were 45.7 million trips made in Kent and in 2006/07 there were 47.1 million trips. Members would be aware of Fastrack in Kent Thameside where passenger numbers were 50% over projections and included 19% of people who would have previously used their car. There were similar examples in Thanet and Canterbury. This would form the basis of the response to Government. In the context of the developing Kent Thameside and Ashford areas, consideration would be given to the potential benefits of applying for PTA status in order to access additional Government funding.

(4) Given the timing of the consultation, where responses were being asked for by 7 September, the Board agreed that a response, along the lines of that set out above, be produced and sent to the DfT under delegated powers.