

21 January 2013		ITEM: 6
Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
STRATEGIC TRANSPORTATION UPDATE		
Report of: David Bull, Corporate Director of Planning and Transportation		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Accountable Head of Service: Andy Millard, Head of Planning and Transportation		
Accountable Director: David Bull, Corporate Director of Planning and Transportation		
This report is Public		
Purpose of Report: to inform the Committee of the Strategic Transportation issues affecting the Borough.		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council is engaged in numerous strategic transportation issues that are of significant importance to the Borough in the context of maintaining adequate transportation links and supporting economic growth and the Council's regeneration programme.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1.1 That the Committee notes the strategic transportation issues affecting the Borough together with the measures planned to tackle these.**

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

- 2.1** In November 2011 a report, "Transportation Issues in Thurrock", was presented to this Committee. This report provides a further update on the strategic transportation issues affecting the Borough.
- 2.2** The Borough is strategically placed in terms of national transportation links. The M25 corridor runs north-south through the Borough and includes the Dartford Crossing. The A13 runs east-west linking Southend, and its airport to the national strategic road network section of the A13 and beyond to the M25 at Junction 30.

- 2.3 The Southend to London Fenchurch Street railway route also runs through the Borough serving several communities within Thurrock via 7 stations. The line also carries a significant level of freight traffic.
- 2.4 Both the local and strategic transport network will need to accommodate the resultant demand from significant growth up to 2026. In the Borough alone it is anticipated that there will be over 18,300 new homes and 26,000 new jobs including the new London Gateway deep-sea port which is the largest development project in the UK, and the redevelopment of the Lakeside Basin to create a new town centre.
- 2.5 The Council has a skilled and experienced team that is not only successfully dealing with the transportation needs of the Borough, but also leads on Strategic Transportation matters for the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) and is a key member of the Thames Gateway South Essex Transportation Board and the Regional Transport Forum. In addition, Thurrock is leading on the setting up of the new Local Transport Body for the SELEP area, required as a result of the devolution of the Government's responsibilities for local major transport schemes.
- 2.6 In 2008, the Transportation Service was acclaimed as the most improved service in the Country. Since then it has built on those foundations as evidenced by the recent maximum award of £5m as a result of a successful bid in relation to the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (in recognition of the Council's regeneration and sustainability credentials).

3. ISSUES, OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS:

Thames Crossing

- 3.1 In 2011 the Department for Transport (DfT) consulted on proposals to increase charges at the Dartford Crossing. They were duly increased in October 2012 and will be increased further when free-flow charging is introduced. There are no further proposals to change the levels of charging. Dart-Tag and residents discounts will continue.
- 3.2 Free-flow charging is due to commence at the Dartford Crossing in October 2014. This will improve traffic flow and reduce congestion and delays by removing the current requirement for drivers to stop at the barriers. Booths and barriers will be removed in favour of remote payment of charges by telephone, website, post and retail outlets.
- 3.3 The Council is concerned that free-flow charging at The Crossing is not planned to be operational until October 2014 and continues to lobby the Government to ensure that processes are fast-tracked to enable an earlier implementation date.
- 3.4 The Highways Agency (HA) is currently undertaking a consultation on "Introducing Post-payment Periods and Enforcement Measures for Free-flow Charging at the Dartford-Thurrock River Crossing". This relates to the new Charging Scheme Order necessary for the introduction of free-flow charging.

- 3.5 In addition, the Department for Transport (DfT) is undertaking a consultation on the “Road User Charging Scheme (Enforcement) (England) Regulations (2012-18)”. This relates to proposed new national regulations to enable enforcement of road-user charging schemes including free-flow charging at the Dartford-Thurrock Crossing.
- 3.6 The closing date for both consultations is 28 January and a report on these is being considered by Cabinet on 16 January 2013. Whilst the set questions have very few strategic implications, the Council, in its responses, has taken the opportunity to reiterate its concerns about free-flow charging not being implemented until October 2014.
- 3.7 The Government is continuing its Lower Thames Crossing Options Review into a new crossing and the Director of Planning and Transportation represents the Council on the related Stakeholders Panel. All three options being considered by the DfT are located in Thurrock and are shown at Appendix 1 of this report. The Council’s Policy is that there should be no new crossing in Thurrock and that measures to improve capacity at the existing Crossing must be implemented including the early introduction of free-flow charging.
- 3.8 The DfT intend to undertake a consultation on the three options from mid May 2013 to July 2013 and to make an announcement in Autumn 2013. It will be crucial that the Council remains fully engaged in this process and that elected Members, the public and local businesses are kept informed. The outcome of the DfT’s Options Review will have a significant and long-lasting impact upon the Borough including the operation of the strategic road network including the A13 and Junction 30/31.
- 3.9 At the full Council meeting on 28 November 2012, the following motion was unanimously agreed:
“Thurrock Council welcomes the Government’s intention to move to Free Flow Tolling for the Purfleet to Dartford Crossing as this will significantly reduce congestion at the crossing. To further cut congestion Thurrock Council calls on Government to bring forward improvements to the A13/M25 junction and remains opposed to any new crossing in Thurrock”.

Junction 30/31

- 3.10 The Council continues to make representations to the DfT, both directly and through the SELEP and TGSE, regarding Junction 30/31. The Council is deeply concerned that, if not rectified, the inadequacies of junction 30 will constrain the future development and regeneration of Thurrock and the wider Thames Gateway area beyond.
- 3.11 Whilst there is an interim J30 scheme to be provided by the London Gateway (LG) Port development this is a minimal scheme that may not address long-term capacity issues without additional investment from the Government. In

addition, details of a larger scheme to be provided by LG at a later date are unclear. Currently, an HA major Junction 30 improvement scheme is programmed for “post 2015”. However, the Government has not provided details of the scheme and have stated that there is a wide-range of design options ranging from £150M to £900M.

3.12 The DfT has advised that:

- The preferred New Lower Thames Crossing option, which will be announced in Autumn 2013 will affect the design of the HA’s J30 scheme, and,
- The Design is also linked to DP World’s planning obligations for Phase 2 of the London Gateway Port development.

3.13 On 8 May 2012, Roads Minister, Mike Penning announced that the J30 Improvement Scheme had been selected to have its *“pre-construction development work funded in order to maintain a future pipeline of major investment in the strategic road network”*.

3.14 In his Autumn Statement on 5 December 2012, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that £150M will be made available for *“improved interface between Junction 30 and the A13”*. However, it was not made clear how this differed from previous announcements or whether it offered additional infrastructure. The DfT added that *“The £150M is the minimum amount required to address traffic issues at this junction but the exact level of expenditure will be determined at the next Spending Review in 2014”*. It is crucial that the Council presses the Government for further clarification.

3.15 Currently it is unknown whether the major J30 scheme will also deal with the deficiencies at J31. The Council will continue to press the Government for a standalone J31 scheme if the J30 scheme does not address the issues at J31. In addition, the Council will continue to lobby the Government to fast-track processes where possible to enable the early delivery of a J30/31 improvement scheme.

3.16 It is important to note that the new South East Local Transport Body (SELTB) is likely to receive only £98M +/- 30% over 4 years for the delivery of local major transport schemes which will be distributed over its entire geographical area.

A13 Corridor

3.17 The Council is currently responsible for the section of the A13 between the A1089 and A176. London Gateway has a planning obligation to provide £4M toward widening of the section between the A1014 Manorway and the A128 junction. However, this scheme is estimated to cost up to £30M leaving a current funding gap of £26M. The Council is extremely concerned about this funding gap and has taken every opportunity to promote the strategic importance of the route in lobbying the Government and EU on the need for investment and in discussions with adjacent authorities and the SELEP. However, no additional funding opportunities have so far been identified.

- 3.18 In addition, the Council considers that once the new port is operational the A13 from the A1089 junction to the A176 together with Manorway leading to the port, should be taken over by the Government as part of the Strategic Road Network. The Council will open discussions on this matter with the DfT at that point.

South East Rapid Transit

- 3.19 Thurrock, Essex and Southend Councils led on the development of the South Essex Rapid Transit (SERT) project on behalf of the Thames Gateway South Essex Transportation Board.
- 3.20 The proposed SERT network comprised of a series of high quality linked bus rapid transit corridors developed to a common level of services with the highest specification of vehicles and effective bus priority measures.
- 3.21 However, the Government has decided not to provide the necessary funding for SERT and this has left a gap in the planned infrastructure provision that would have facilitated development and regeneration especially in the Grays Town area.

Grays Town Transportation Strategy

- 3.22 The demise of SERT has created an immediate need for work to be undertaken on a transportation strategy for Grays to provide options for sustainable and integrated transport solutions to be implemented as part of an all-encompassing regeneration package for Grays.
- 3.23 It is anticipated that work will start on this project early in 2013.

Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF)

- 3.24 In April 2011 The Council submitted a bid to the Department for Transport (DfT) Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) to enable the delivery of sustainable transport solutions that support economic growth whilst reducing carbon. The period covered by the LSTF is 2011/12 to 2014/15.
- 3.25 On 5 July 2011 the DfT confirmed that the Council's bid for £5M had been successful and sent full details of the related conditions on 23 August 2011.
- 3.26 The Council's LSTF project includes an integrated and complementary package of both capital and revenue measures that, if delivered effectively, will support economic growth and reduce carbon emissions in the Borough. The package includes:
- Smarter Choices – work place travel planning, school travel planning, rail station travel plans, personal travel plans, lift share, marketing and promotion
 - Walking and cycling improvements

- Public transport improvements
 - Sustainable freight measures
- 3.27 Cabinet approval was given on 6 July 2011 for the LSTF package of measures and a project manager has been appointed to progress the project.
- 3.28 The project is now nearing its half-way point, coming up to two years of successful delivery of both soft (e.g. marketing and promotion) and hard measures (e.g. infrastructure).
- 3.29 Listed below are some outcomes and benefits likely to be gained (at some level) following delivery of Thurrock's LSTF project:
- Employment growth from the freeing up of road capacity to enable economic development to come forward
 - Improved access to key services by public transport, walking and cycling
 - Reduced road traffic collisions and injuries
 - Reduced child obesity, particularly at schools where sustainable transport infrastructure is improved and modal shift away from the car is achieved
 - Reduced adult obesity and increased physical activity, particularly at workplaces undertaking travel planning activity and in areas where personalised journey planning is undertaken
 - Possible increase in life expectancy from reductions in obesity, cardiovascular disease and diabetes as a result of increased physical activity, particularly in areas where personalised journey planning is undertaken
 - The possibility of revoking freight related air quality management areas (AQMA 4, 10, 12, 13 and 23), following on from the successful delivery of the LSTF freight package of measures

Transport Strategy

- 3.30 The Council has a statutory duty, under the Transport Act 2000, to produce a Transport Strategy and Implementation Plan as part of its Local Transport Plan. In 2008 the Council adopted its Transport Strategy document and Cabinet approved the Council's Implementation Plan on 12 January 2011.
- 3.31 The Transport Strategy 2008 – 2021 sets out the Council's transport policies and priorities. However, there arises a need for this to be refreshed in response to a number of important changes to the context in which the Thurrock Transport Strategy was developed. These changes include:
- Lakeside expansion to a Regional Town Centre consisting of 3,000 additional homes and 9,000 additional jobs;
 - Tilbury Port expansion including 4,000 additional jobs;
 - London Gateway Port consisting of approximately 12,000 direct jobs by 2021, with a further 30,000 indirect jobs created in the UK

- The delivery of the local growth agenda in Thurrock, focussed around five growth hubs in Grays, Lakeside and West Thurrock, London Gateway, Purfleet and Tilbury;
- The creation of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP), and their role in establishing a Local Transport Body.
- A change to the timescale of the Thurrock Local Development Framework Core Strategy and Policies for the Management of Development (previously to 2021, now to 2026) and its progress through to its adoption in December 2011;
- The Highways Agency proposals to implement a highway improvement scheme at Junction 30/31;
- Developing 'free-flow' tolls at the Dartford River Crossing;
- Significant additional funding from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) to deliver sustainable transport improvements; and
- The significant progress made on developing local operational policies for traffic management and maintenance.
- The proposed demise of the East of England Plan and Regional Planning bodies;
- The Transport White Paper, published in January 2011;
- The economic downturn since 2008;

- 3.32 Of particular importance is the growth agenda and the need to make sure that transport helps to deliver sustainable growth and regeneration in the Borough. The growth Thurrock needs to accommodate is significant. Between 2001 and 2026 an additional 18,500 new homes need to be built and 26,000 new jobs created. Growth and regeneration in Thurrock will be driven forward by the Council's Local Development Framework, and Thurrock Council's transport policies and priorities need to keep pace with this.
- 3.33 The wider planning context is now at a stage where a much greater degree of certainty is available compared to that in recent years. The Local Development Framework's Core Strategy and Policies for the Management of Development has been through its Examination in Public and was formally adopted by Thurrock Council in December 2011, providing a clear direction for the spatial distribution of jobs and housing.
- 3.34 Now that this greater certainty is available, with a longer time horizon of 2026, it is important to refresh the Transport Strategy to align and integrate it with the Local Development Framework.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- 4.1 At the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2011, Members requested that an update on Transportation Issues be brought back at a later date. Hence this update has been produced and Members are asked to note the current Transportation Issues affecting the Borough.

5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 None

6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

6.1 The matters covered in this report impact upon all the Council's Corporate Priorities.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
 Telephone and email: **01375 652772**
mxjones@thurrock.gov.uk

The report is for noting and provides an update on Strategic Transportation. However, the following financial implications are noted:

Traffic Management Plan & Transport Asset Management Plan

As part for the Councils Medium Term Financial Strategy, £70,000 has been identified for the Transport Infrastructure Audit and £5,000 Traffic Management Plan as part of the 2013/14 budget. These have been included in the reports to Cabinet on the 2013/14 Base Estimates.

Transport Strategy

The existing level of funding as well as agreed LTP funding from central government is available to support meeting the objectives of the strategy.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Alison Stuart, Principal Lawyer**
 Telephone and email: **01375 652040**
Alison.stuart@bdtlegal.org.uk

This report is for noting and there are no legal implications arising from it.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**
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The report is for information purposes only, as such there are no direct equality or human rights issues noted in the report.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- Appendix 1 – Lower Thames Crossing Options Review Routes

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