

Infrastructure and Regeneration

Continued

Transportation

Local Growth Fund

In 2014, the government announced planned investment of at least £12bn nationally to promote growth in local economies through a series of 'Growth Deals' to operate over six years from 2015/16. Known as Local Growth Funding (LGF) it would finance infrastructure and skills schemes that, in turn, would unlock housing growth and encourage job creation.

In March 2016, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government announced the release of Round Three of Local Growth Funding (LGF3), worth £1.8bn across England. The Government stipulated that the LGF3 funding would be allocated to Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) through a competitive bidding process. Of this South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) received £102m of government funding to help create jobs, support businesses and create new growth opportunities.

Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has called for all LEPs to ensure that any LGF underspends are invested in the most effective way. In response, SELEP devised the LGF3b process, whereby a pipeline of schemes was agreed to be funded as and when LGF underspend becomes available. For Kent, this has meant the following schemes will now be delivered:

- Thanet Parkway Railway Station
- M2 Junction 5, Stockbury
- Kent and Medway Medical School, Canterbury
- Advanced Technology Horticultural Zone, East Malling

Kent County Council is responsible for the programme management of all 36 Local Growth Fund projects in Kent.



Springhead Bridge, Ebbsfleet Garden City.

There are, however, specific projects where third-party organisations are responsible for delivery.

Lower Thames Crossing

In April 2017 the Secretary of State for Transport announced the preferred route for the new Lower Thames Crossing, which it is hoped will form the first part of a new strategic route from the Channel ports to the Midlands and North. It will be a bored tunnel under the River Thames east of Tilbury and Gravesend and will connect to the A2. This new crossing will add more than 70% to road capacity between Essex/Kent, unlock investment and create thousands of new jobs.

The preferred route was carefully selected to minimise community and environmental impacts as far as possible, whilst providing the transport and economic benefits of a modern, alternative crossing. It will help address existing congestion, deliver significant economic growth and provide resilience on the strategic road network. The 70mph, 13-mile route and crossing will be built to the highest safety standards incorporating the most up-to-date engineering and information technology.

Consultations have been undertaken since the preferred announcement including a statutory consultation in 2018, a supplementary consultation in early 2020 and a further design refinement consultation in summer 2020.

The scheme is being taken through the Development Consent Order (DCO) planning process for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). Highways England expect to submit the DCO to the Planning Inspectorate by the end of 2020. Construction is due to start in 2022 and the new crossing is expected to open by 2028. A commitment to take the scheme through development and into delivery was announced with the second Road Investment Strategy (RIS2) by the Department for Transport in March 2020.

Operation Brock/Stack

Operation Brock was introduced as a measure to queue port bound freight vehicles on the approach to the Channel ports and Channel Tunnel as a result of potential border and customs checks if the UK was to leave the EU without a deal. It consists of a contraflow on the M20 between junctions 8-9 on the London-bound carriageway enabling 2-way flows while the coastbound carriageway is used to queue port-bound freight vehicles. Brock is part of a multi-agency plan that includes the Dover Traffic Access Protocol (TAP) on the A20, the use of the runway at Manston Airport and the use of the M26 in a worst-case scenario for queuing additional vehicles if required.

Overnight Lorry Parking

Kent County Council has been working with the private sector to promote the delivery idea of a network of overnight lorry parks across the county.

Ashford International Truck Stop formerly with 390 HGV parking spaces now has a capacity for 600 HGV's on the new site. Kent County Council is also working with the Department for Transport, District Councils and Kent Police on stronger enforcement action against illegal lorry parking to address the problems of inappropriate lorry parking across Kent.

Currently being constructed is the Ashford customs clearance facility being built off the A2070 at the MOJO site near M20 Junction 10a. It is proposed to have up to 1,800 spaces for HGVs and to be open for 1st January 2021.

Local Transport Plan 4

Local Transport Plan 4: Delivering Growth Without Gridlock 2016 – 2031 was adopted by Kent County Council in July 2017. This plan aims to deliver transport priorities for Kent which will contribute to a safe and efficient transport system.

Transport for the South East (TfSE)

This body consists of Kent, Medway, East Sussex, West Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire, Brighton & Hove, Southampton, Portsmouth, Isle of Wight and the Berkshire local authorities, plus the five Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) within this area. It has continued to progress its development and in July 2020 submitted its proposal to government to become a statutory body following adoption of its Transport Strategy for the South East.

TfSE is already making the case to government for investment in rail and the Strategic Road Network (SRN) and submitted its priorities for the next Road Investment Strategy (RIS) which informed the government's announcement on RIS in March 2020. In Kent, RIS priorities that received commitment from government include the new Lower Thames Crossing and the development of pipeline schemes for improvements to the M2/A2 corridor at M2 Junction 7 (Brenley Corner) and improved access to Dover via the A2.

Improvements to the connection between the M2 at Junction 3 with the M20 at Junction 6 via the A229 (Bluebell Hill) were not included in RIS but are being developed by Kent County Council for a bid through TfSE to the Department for Transport (DfT) for Large Local Major (LMM) scheme funding. This bid was part of the work that TfSE were asked to do by the DfT to prioritise schemes for the Major Road Network (MRN), a new category of road announced by government in December 2018 for the most important local authority A roads. In Kent, schemes that are being progressed for MRN funding include improvements to the A249 at M2 Junction 5 (Stockbury) to ensure that this Highways England RIS scheme is delivered, which is essential to the Swale Local Plan; and a new relief road of the A28 around Birchington, Westgate and Acol which will enable growth in the Thanet Local Plan.

Rail network improvements in Kent

Projects in progress to support economic growth through improvements to the rail service in Kent are:

Journey Time Improvement (JTI) Scheme

Phase 1 of this scheme to improve the journey time between Ashford and Canterbury West is now almost completed. Following successful testing, the main journey time improvement from this phase has benefitted passengers

since its inclusion in the December 2019 timetable. There is one further enhancement required to deliver the full 2 minutes' saving in both directions on this section, and this is programmed for completion by May 2023.

Phase 2 of this scheme between Canterbury West and Ramsgate is focused on an intervention between Sturry and Minster, which is planned to deliver a further ½ minute saving in both directions. This work has now been approved with a successful application to Government for funding and is programmed for delivery by May 2023.

The whole JTI scheme will support economic growth in Thanet and is essential to support the delivery of the planned Thanet Parkway station. The total journey time saving in both directions will be 2½ minutes, which will mitigate the time penalty of trains calling at the new Thanet Parkway station.

Thanet Parkway Station

Kent County Council (KCC) plans to deliver Thanet Parkway, a new railway station near Cliffsend, for operation by May 2023. This new station will significantly improve rail access to and from London for local communities and developments at Discovery Park and Manston business parks and is expected to offer journey times to London of just over one hour from Thanet Parkway.

Ashford International: The Ashford Spurs Project

This project was successfully completed and commissioned in December 2019, with the resolution of the technical problems associated with the upgraded signalling and train protection system on the 'Spurs' which link Ashford International Station with High Speed 1. The Local Growth Fund has been the primary source of funding through the South East LEP. Eurostar had planned to restore the full level of services to Paris and Brussels in May 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed this following the announcement that Eurostar would have to suspend services at both Ebbsfleet and Ashford until 2022 at the earliest due to the 90% reduction in demand for its services.

Once normal service levels resume to and from continental destinations, the full timetabled service is expected to be restored at both Ashford and Ebbsfleet. Kent County Council and Ashford Borough Council will continue to work in close

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partnership with Eurostar and have re-submitted a business case for an enhancement to the level of the Ashford – Brussels service once commercial conditions permit.

Network Rail's Kent Area Route Study

Kent County Council responded to the consultation on the new Kent Area Route Study undertaken by Network Rail and published in May 2018. It sets out a range of options for funders for infrastructure enhancements required on Kent's rail network between 2019 and 2024, and also indicates the further growth in rail infrastructure required in Kent to 2044. This study also recognises the significant planned increase in demand at Ebbsfleet, given the development plans for housing growth in Ebbsfleet Garden City.

South Eastern Area: New Concession

The previous competition for a new South Eastern franchise operator was cancelled by the DfT. The whole franchise system has now been terminated by the DfT, and all Train Operating Companies (TOCs) are temporarily controlled by Emergency Remedial Measures Agreements (ERMAs) with the DfT due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the meantime, the rail industry and stakeholders are waiting for the publication of the much delayed Williams Rail Review, which the DfT has already pre-announced will lead to the granting of concessions to TOCs, with deep level partnership working required with the relevant Network Rail Route.

KCC will respond to the eventual public consultation on this new concession for the South Eastern operation when it is published, but at present the widely held expectation is that the existing Direct Award to the current operator Southeastern will be extended beyond April 2022 for at least a further year.

Kent Rail Strategy 2021

KCC has developed a comprehensive 'Kent Rail Strategy 2021', the draft of which has now been approved by the Council's Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee and published for public consultation. The principal purpose of this new rail strategy is to influence the train service and rolling-stock fleet specifications which will inform the next South Eastern concession, for the operation of Kent's rail passenger network for at least the next decade.

The Kent Rail Strategy is aligned with national and local transport policies which recognise rail as a key element of the County Council's transport priorities for the next decade, as well as the need to deliver modal shift of passengers and freight from road to rail, supporting the climate change agenda by reducing carbon emissions and thus contributing to a healthier environment.

The draft rail strategy includes a wide-ranging list of proposed service enhancements for the new concession's train service requirement, and KCC has now commenced an extensive 8-week consultation process with rail industry representatives, local authorities and stakeholders across the county.

Thameslink

Two new services had been scheduled to serve Kent and Medway. One commenced in May 2018 and has replaced the previous Southeastern service between Rainham/Gillingham and London. The other was due to commence in December 2019, but this has now been further delayed and is still to be confirmed by the DfT. If this service is introduced it would provide an additional route linking Maidstone East, West Malling (for Kings Hill), Borough Green & Wrotham, Otford and Swanley with London Blackfriars.

Ebbsfleet International: Ebbsfleet Garden City

The existing High Speed service at Ebbsfleet Garden City cannot meet the projected demand from the planned housing growth in the new Garden City. All peak High Speed services which serve Ebbsfleet are already full to capacity, and it is often impossible to obtain a seat in the off-peak periods. This is a serious issue which will need to be addressed by other rail infrastructure, as the current level of service, which is itself constrained by the terminal capacity on HS1 at St Pancras, will not meet the projected growth at Ebbsfleet.

Abbey Wood to Ebbsfleet: Future Provision of Public Transport

With the planned opening of Crossrail 1 (Elizabeth Line) to Abbey Wood now postponed until at least 2022, KCC and other local authorities are jointly considering, with Transport for London, the Greater London Authority and other public authorities, the options for future provision of public transport between Abbey Wood and Ebbsfleet, one of which could be an extension of Crossrail to Ebbsfleet. The Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for this concept was presented to Government (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) in December 2018. Funding of £4.85m had been offered by Government towards the development of an Outline Business Case (OBC), and if there were Government approval for a future extension Crossrail 1 (Elizabeth Line) could play a key role in delivering the additional rail capacity required for Ebbsfleet Garden City and north-west Kent.

Since then however the DfT has insisted that alternative modes of transport be considered for an improved link between the Elizabeth Line terminus at Abbey Wood and Ebbsfleet, including tram, Fastrack bus and improved Metro options. Only when the existing SOBC has been expanded to consider all these options will there be a short-list to be taken forward to OBC stage. At present this project is therefore further delayed, with no prospect of any delivery until the mid-2030s at the earliest.

Sandwich Station

Kent County Council was the client local authority for the Sandwich Station capacity upgrade project, which has now been successfully delivered on time by Network Rail. The project, which consists of two platform extensions, a new footbridge, and access to a new walking route to the Royal St George's Golf Club, will provide the additional capacity required for rail passenger access at The 149th Open Championship, which will now be held in July 2021. The project will also ensure that the enhanced station has the capacity required to serve all future major golfing events hosted at Sandwich.

Westenhanger Station: Otterpool Park Garden Town

Folkestone & Hythe District Council is the lead local authority on the development of Westenhanger Station, in partnership with Network Rail, Southeastern and Kent County Council.



Proposal for Thanet Parkway station.

The proposed enhancement is planned to support the new Otterpool Park Garden Town, which is planned for development to the immediate south of this station on the Ashford – Folkestone mainline.

The station is currently constrained, with limited length platforms and no provision for disabled users. The plans include lengthened platforms, a new footbridge and lifts, and a new station building with ticket office and other facilities, as well as a dedicated station car park. KCC's involvement is primarily concerned with obtaining DfT approval for the inclusion of a future High Speed service at Westenhanger in the eventual Train Service Requirement (TSR) for the next South Eastern concession.

This new service would require an additional stop on the existing High Speed service to/from Dover/Ramsgate, which would provide a direct fast service for commuters and leisure passengers travelling between Otterpool Park and Central

London. The new service would only commence when an agreed level of dwelling occupation had been achieved at Otterpool Park.

High Speed Service Enhancement

KCC has recently engaged in discussions with High Speed 1 (HS1) and the East Kent Delivery Board (representing all the District Councils in East Kent, KCC and local businesses) concerning the need to enhance the provision of High Speed capacity and service levels. The working presumption has been a post-COVID environment, from about 2025 onwards, in which demand for these services has returned to its previous levels and continues to outstrip supply due to the continued growth in housing and population throughout the county.

There are two key elements essential to the delivery of such an enhanced level of service and capacity: first, the need for an increase in High Speed rolling-stock, the lead-time

for which is about four years from approval to delivery; and second, the installation of a new connection between HS1 and the Mainline, either to the west of Folkestone West at Bargrove, or to the west of Westenhanger.

These two elements would deliver the systemic capacity required to meet the planned growth in demand, and to ensure that future growth into the 2030s and beyond would be accommodated by the High Speed rail network.

KCC is also working in partnership with East Sussex County Council and Network Rail to facilitate the delivery of an enhancement at Ashford, connecting HS1 to the Marshlink route to Hastings and beyond, which together with the planned uplift in the High Speed fleet would enable operation of through High Speed services between St Pancras and East Sussex.