



TRANSPORT REPORT for Town Forum Meeting 25 Mar 2010.

REVISION of the BOROUGH TRANSPORT STRATEGY.

The periodic Revision of the TW Borough Transport Strategy is now underway by the Transport Strategy Group, chaired by the Leader, and assisted by transport consultants, Jacobs, who have been engaged by TWBC & KCC. Jacobs' Technical Director – Transportation, Darren Cook, gave an interesting presentation to a Special Joint TWBC/KCC Transportation Board Meeting on 8 Mar, which I attended.

This revised Strategy must have due regard to the joint status of Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge as a Regional Hub which requires a range of multi-modal transport services to support its higher order economic, cultural and service activity.

Key challenges are – to address inefficiencies of present network, tackle congestion in town centre and key routes, such as A26, A264 & A21(T), improve air quality notably along A26, improve safety and security of transport network especially for vulnerable users, and provide a range of transport options.

Scenarios under consideration are tested and assessed by a transport model called VISUM; to be completed by Sept.

Proposed scenarios which apply to RTW are –

- (1) Develop a high-quality bus rapid transit and park & ride system for the hub, to be introduced in up to four phases, the first being the A26 from Tonbridge to RTW, and the second the Pembury Rd from a park & ride site at Tesco's;
- (2) Improve the bus network, especially integration with train services;
- (3) Improve the walking network, with special attention to aiding the mobility impaired to access transport services; investigate the potential of "shared space";
- (4) Improve the cycle network, and provide cycle storage facilities;
- (5) Improve local road safety by using an intelligence-led approach, target road safety improvements, and engage with county and national safety campaigns; and
- (6) Develop a sustainable parking strategy for commuters, tourists and shoppers, which safeguards finite parking capacity for vital short-stay trips.

RE-CONNECTION of the RAILWAY from TUNBRIDGE WELLS to ERIDGE and beyond.
Consideration by the LOCAL ECONOMY & HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE.

This committee provided a Road Safety & Transportation Review in Feb 2009 which recommended (Recommendation 22) – "The planning protection for the railbed between Tunbridge Wells West Station and Tunbridge Wells Station be retained with an appreciation of the benefits of the re-opened railway for Tunbridge Wells."

This recommendation accepted evidence from the Town Forum by Philip Whitbourn and myself, and recognised that the railbed onwards was effectively protected by the Spa Valley Railway. Two members of the Select Committee (Cllrs Ransley & Neve) have now provided a local input to the Review of the TW Transport Strategy in the form of a thoughtful analysis of the town's transport problems with proposed improvements, one being to start schools down St John's an hour earlier at 8am.

But the immediate concern for the Town Forum, was that the Ransley/Neve 30 page draft report in 2.0.18 asserts "support from TWBC towards the reopening of the TW West – Central and Uckfield – Lewes abandoned railway lines can now be withdrawn. The sharply curved and wooded stretch at the Grove Tunnel has been partially adopted by householders in the area and this at least ensures the land is looked after. " And so on.

Then in 3.5.5 "The connection from TW West to Central stations has been built over by the Sainsbury's supermarket and other features. There is no business case for reopening this section and for all practical purposes the Council can consider the line closed."

The former vital link is indeed closed, but a Transport Strategy is about the future and there would be substantial benefits to Tunbridge Wells (especially as a Hub!) if the railway were to be reopened through to Lewes and beyond, and if the northern connection at Birchden Jtn to London were relaid.

All the affected district and parish councils in Sussex are striving to get re-connected to Tunbridge Wells, so Tunbridge Wells should continue to support this, rather than pronounce "support can now be withdrawn", and send such a dispiriting message to Sussex for no useful reason.

I therefore addressed the Select Committee meeting (copy Appended) and they agreed that the withdrawal of support message was undesirable and the text should be revised.

Cllr Woodward agreed to do this with Cllrs Ransley & Neve.

But there was no mention of this revision in a short item in the Town Ed of the Courier 12 Mar p13 which says -

"the town forum is campaigning to reopen a train line into the town" whilst councillors in a "recent renegade transport document" say "We must accept that the line will not be reopened as a commercial operation".

Unfortunately, the dispiriting message has gone even more strongly to Sussex in a substantial article in the Sussex Ed of the Courier for 12 Mar p5 headed – COUNCILLORS SET AGAINST RAIL ROUTE REINSTATEMENT – Reopening line a "pipe dream only". But the Town Forum's support and appreciation of the benefits of reopening were reported in some detail.

I duly informed the Select Committee that the Sussex Courier article was entirely the Courier's initiative, and that a letter was likely to come from the Sussex councils down to Lewes inviting TWBC to co-operate with them to achieve reconnection for the benefit of all.

JOHN V GOODFELLOW.
Transport Champion, RTW Town Forum.

25 Mar 2010.

Local Economy & Housing Select Committee – 4 Mar 2010 Item 8-
Draft Revision of Royal Tunbridge Wells & Southborough Transport Strategy.
By Cllrs Ransley & Neve.

Address by John Goodfellow.

I am the RTW Town Forum Lead or Champion for Transport and its representative on the TW Public Transport Forum. I have taken a keen interest in all transport matters for many years.

I welcome this stimulating report with its fresh approach and many good points. It values the contribution of the railways, which carry people without adding to the congestion on the roads.

So it is devastating to see that the possibility of restoring the Eridge Line from Tunbridge Wells Central & West, is dismissed without even any recognition of the benefits restoration could provide for Tunbridge Wells (and the whole region).

Royal Tunbridge Wells could be in effect the county town of the Weald.
25 - 30% of the traffic in the town comes in from the Wealden area to the south.
The Crowborough & Uckfield area continues to grow fast, now approaching 40,000 people.
Many would welcome the opportunity to come in by train.

The Council should welcome this and join all the concerned District and Parish Councils in Sussex who strive for restoration of their railway connections to both Lewes and Tunbridge Wells. They note the significant number of favourable reports and studies, and regard the business study last year as highly controversial and manipulated.

We should not “withdraw support” as suggested by this draft report, and certainly not send such a dispiriting signal to Sussex. May I be re-assured that there is no thought of terminating planning protection for the railway land from Tunbridge Wells Central to the borough border near Eridge. This regulatory protection costs nothing to maintain; what better use is there for embankments and cuttings than being a natural screen in the town area, as recognised in our Local Plan?

The case for restoration continues to increase; apart from all the other benefits in my Note, the benefit of connecting Tun Wells West to Oxted and London Victoria is now being appreciated again.

May I urge this Committee to note the authors's Recommendation 22 in their Report on Transport & Road Safety Feb 2009 to retain planning protection, and not agree withdrawal of support for the Eridge Line connection; we should keep all options open for Rail improvement and expansion.

I offer my help and invite Questions.