

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, a further design refinement consultation in summer 2020 and a community impacts consultation in summer 2021.

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 2021. Construction is due to start in 2024 and the new crossing is expected to open by 2029/30. 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 cross-channel freight vehicles on the approach to the Port of Dover and Channel Tunnel if there was disruption as a result of the end of the UK's transition out of the EU. 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 cross-channel freight vehicles. The barrier to enable this contraflow is stored on the hard shoulder when not in use

(allowing both carriageways of the motorway to operate as normal) and can be moved into position if needed. Brock is part of a multi-agency plan that includes the Dover Traffic Access Protocol (TAP) on the A20 and the Inland Border Facility (IBF) Sevington.

Overnight lorry parking

Kent County Council has been working with the private sector to promote the delivery of a network of overnight lorry parks across the county. Ashford International Truck Stop has recently expanded from 390 to 600 spaces and other sites are being considered by the private sector. 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.

Local Transport Plan

Local Transport Plan 4: Delivering Growth Without Gridlock 2016 – 2031 (LTP4) 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. Since the adoption of LTP4, there have been rapid changes in both local and national government policy around the environment, significant changes to how we work and travel due to the pandemic, and advancement of technology for electric vehicles and personal mobility. To address these challenges, KCC is proposing to produce a new Local Transport Plan 5.

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.

In 2020, TfSE submitted its proposal to government for statutory status. The Secretary of State declined this proposal and instead decided that TfSE should remain a voluntary partnership working together for the benefit of economic growth both within the region and nationally. However, the Department for Transport has been instructed to have regard to the Transport Strategy for the South East in developing government policy. This strategy was published in 2021 during the pandemic. The 30-year strategy aims to produce

a better transport network across the region so that people are better connected with jobs, education, businesses, family and friends. The goals are for a more productive and sustainable South East, with net-zero carbon at the forefront.

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 (and was given planning approval by the Secretary of State in June 2021), 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.

Infrastructure and Regeneration

Continued

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

There is good progress on 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. Network Rail is delivering the new station through their contractor BAM Nuttall following completion of the new road junction by Eurovia working for KCC.

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 One. 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 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 partnership with Eurostar and have re-submitted a business case for an enhancement to the level of the Ashford to 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

Since the last Kent Property Market Report, train services in Kent remain with Southeastern working directly for the

DfT due to the continued collapse of rail demand following successive lockdowns. The Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail was published in May 2021 outlining the future for the industry. This includes a new body, Great British Railways, that will absorb Network Rail and some of the functions that currently sit with the DfT and franchisees. Franchising will be replaced by new Passenger Services Contracts. In this new era, Great British Railways will specify the timetables, branding, fares, and other service requirements and then agree a fee with a service operator via a commercial procurement.

KCC will comment on any consultations on future train services in the area in line with the Kent Rail Strategy which was adopted by KCC's Cabinet in March 2021. It is now understood that the Direct Award to Southeastern is being reviewed.

Kent Rail Strategy 2021

KCC has adopted the 'Kent Rail Strategy 2021'. The principal purpose of this new rail strategy is to influence the train service and rolling-stock fleet specifications which will



Works underway on the railway embankment for the new Thanet Parkway Station.

CREDIT: NETWORK RAIL



CREDIT: MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

The upgraded Maidstone East station.

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 strategy includes a wide-ranging list of proposed service enhancements for the new concession's train service requirement.

Thameslink

Thameslink operates to Kent, serving Medway via Dartford. A second route has been planned via Maidstone East and was due to commence in December 2019, but this has now been further delayed and the date of its introduction 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 One service at Ebbsfleet Garden City had been forecast to be unable to meet the projected demand from the planned housing growth in the new Garden City, prior to the impacts on rail demand arising from the pandemic. All peak High Speed One services which served Ebbsfleet prior to the pandemic were already full to

capacity, and it was often difficult to obtain a seat in the off-peak periods. This is a serious issue if demand returns to pre-pandemic levels and will need to be addressed by lengthening trains on the High Speed One network, running more services where possible, and supporting travel demand by improving the wider National Rail and local transport networks.

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. Public consultation has taken place in 2021 on the range of public transport options to support growth in the north Kent corridor between Abbey Wood and Gravesend. The work has been funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, with oversight by the Department for Transport. In late 2021, a new Strategic Outline Business Case will be submitted to government to set out the case for funding development of preferred options.

More information on those consultations is available at www.abbeywood2ebbsfleet.com

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, provided the additional capacity required for rail passenger access at The 149th Open Championship, 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

The District Council is the lead local authority on the development of Westenhanger Station. Kent County Council, as the local transport authority, is inputting to the development plans to help ensure transport impacts of the development are as sustainable as possible by improving

the network as necessary. One of these improvements is a proposal to upgrade the station to enable High Speed One services to stop. 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.

This new service would require an additional stop on the existing High Speed One service to and from Dover/Ramsgate, which would provide a direct fast service for commuters and leisure passengers travelling between Otterpool Park and London. The new service would likely only commence when an agreed level of dwelling occupation had been achieved at Otterpool Park.

High Speed One service enhancement

KCC has recently engaged in discussions with High Speed One 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-pandemic 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 One 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 on the route west of Folkestone West. These two elements would deliver the capacity required to meet the planned growth in demand, and ensure that future growth into the 2030's and beyond would be accommodated by the high speed rail network.

KCC is also inputting to work by the DfT and undertaken by Network Rail to explore the delivery of an enhancement at Ashford, connecting High Speed One to the Marshlink route to Hastings and beyond, which together with the planned uplift in the high speed fleet could enable operation of through high speed services between St Pancras and East Sussex.