



Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells

Tonbridge Urban Transport Strategy Delivery



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1 Introduction

1.1 The Aim of this Technical Note

This Technical Note sets the context for modelling work in support of the Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan (TCAAP) and it should be read in conjunction with a parallel Technical Note on Option Testing. It can be considered as a logical step forward from the previous work carried out in the 1999 Tonbridge Urban Transportation Study (TUTS)¹ and 2002 Tonbridge High Street Studies² carried out in advance of the Local Development Framework (LDF) process.

The overall aim of the TCAAP is to regenerate and improve the vitality of the town centre. The broad strategy is founded on the need to carefully co-ordinate development with infrastructure and public realm improvements.

Current work also seeks to add ideas to improve connectivity within Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. Largely the emphasis is on public transport, walking and cycling as a means to reduce traffic in Tonbridge town centre and between the two towns to help deliver the goals for Tonbridge/ Tunbridge Wells set by the South East Plan.

The structure of the remainder of the note is as follows:

- *Sustainable Transport;*
- *Roads and Parking Strategies;*
- *Gateways to Tonbridge Town Centre;*
- *Tonbridge High Street;*
- *Summary.*

Tunbridge Wells town centre issues have not been developed in detail at this stage. However a number of public transport issues relating to Tunbridge Wells are discussed in Section 2.

It is noted that Kent County Council has recently prepared a draft cycling strategy for Tonbridge, so it is not the intention in this preliminary note to repeat what has already been said in this context. This Draft Cycling Strategy for Tonbridge & Malling is expected to be adopted in early 2008 after public consultation.

Air Quality Management will be a critical issue in bringing the strategy to fruition and objectives in this respect will be factored into the overall assessment.

1.2 Policy Background

Tonbridge/ Tunbridge Wells are defined as a regional transport hub in the South East Plan. *“Policy CC8b establishes the concept of regional hubs as centres where the provision (or potential to provide) a range of multimodal transport services, which support the concentration of land uses and higher order economic, cultural and service activity.”³*

¹ **Kent County Council (1999):** *Tonbridge Urban Transportation Study.*

² **Babtie Group (2002):** *Tonbridge High Street Infrastructure Improvements.*

³ **SEERA (2006):** “Section D4 – Communications and Transport” in *The South East Plan*, pp. 92-103.

Tonbridge/ Tunbridge Wells are also identified as a primary regional centre in the South East Plan's Strategic Network of Town Centres⁴. The South East Plan envisages that the network of primary and secondary regional centres will be the focus for large scale developments.

Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells are identified as a joint centre reflecting not only the proximity of the two centres but also their complementary roles: Tunbridge Wells as a significant economic and service centre and Tonbridge as a significant educational, leisure and business base as well as being a major transport interchange.⁵ Both centres have considerable status in terms of sub-regional retail and tourism.

The South East Plan supports the sequential approach set out in PPS6 for identifying the preferred location for new development. Town centre sites are to be considered first, prior to edge-of-centre and out of-centre sites. The Plan also states that the development being considered should be appropriate to the centre's role within the network.

1.3 Air Quality Management

Irrespective of any development in the town centre, the Local Transport Plan acknowledges the declared Air Quality Management Area at the southern end of Tonbridge High Street.

The TCAAP builds on the LTP by providing measures within its integral transportation strategy aimed at addressing the Air Quality problem. It describes a series of elements aimed at reducing the overall levels of motorised traffic going through the High Street. The entrances at either end need to be made less of an attraction to through traffic. The streetscape needs to be remodelled to provide wider footways and a better environment for people on foot. The growth in traffic generated by development will be attenuated through "Smarter Choice" techniques and school and work place travel planning. Traffic signing strategies will be worked on to influence driver route choices further away from the town to reduce through journeys.

Meanwhile careful attention will be paid to the risk that such a traffic reduction in the High Street might exacerbate air quality elsewhere on the network. The aim will be to maximise the environmental and air quality gains in the High Street through a managed reduction in traffic without creating unacceptable air quality conditions elsewhere.

1.4 Ongoing Development of a Transport Strategy for Tonbridge

The need to provide solutions to transport problems in order to deliver sustainable development in Tonbridge has long been recognised and work such as the 1999 Tonbridge Urban Transportation Study (TUTS) and the 2002 Study on High Street Infrastructure Improvements has helped to influence the Local Development Framework (LDF) process.

⁴ **SEERA (2006)**: "Section D9 – Town Centres" in *The South East Plan*, pp. 190-202.

⁵ **SEERA (2006)**: *South East Plan Technical Note 2 – Town Centres March 2006*.

The Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan⁶ takes into account the emerging aims of the South East Plan as well as building on the precursor work done on transport issues.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has reviewed its transport strategy in 2003⁷ and this provides useful ideas to aid connectivity between Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells, even though at that time the two had not been declared as a hub.

Jacobs is currently in the process of developing a spreadsheet traffic model of the town centre. This aim of this 'development control tool' is to help shape the nature and scale of new development and to demonstrate what practical steps could be taken to enable development to proceed with complementary transportation investment. It provides the Borough Council with the flexibility to adapt to changing development scenarios (e.g. increased densities) that are always likely as part of any Local Plan/ Local Development Framework implementation. Critically it will help quantify the extent to which transportation management solutions involving modal change, travel planning and "Smarter Choices" techniques will be required as part of the overall transportation mix.

1.5 Smarter Choices and Travel Planning

'Smarter Choices' (or 'softer measures') is the term used to describe the policy, promotion and Travel Plan measures that can be put in place to complement 'Hard' sustainable transport measures (cycle and pedestrian routes, public transport infrastructure and service improvements) discussed elsewhere in this Report. Area wide, both 'Soft' and 'Hard' sustainable transport measures are needed to deliver maximum modal shift to non-car modes and aid the sustainable development of Tonbridge town centre.

Cairns et al. (2004)⁸ presented a literature review of a number of studies into the impact of soft measures. This concludes that a 5% reduction in vehicle trips attributable to softer measures is reasonable if these initiatives continue to be implemented piecemeal as normally happens at the moment. However they conclude that there is potential to reduce traffic further if soft measures are introduced with higher intensity and supported by control measures to prevent induced traffic swallowing the released capacity. For instance the authors suggest that:

- *Peak period traffic could be reduced by 14% for non urban areas to 21% for urban (i.e. large cities).*
- *Off-peak period traffic could be reduced by 7% to 13% for these respective areas.*

A realistic figure for Tonbridge is likely to be at the lower end of the scale given that Tonbridge attracts people from surrounding rural areas. Cairns et al. suggest that a comprehensive package of demand management measures would have to be adopted. For Tonbridge these could include:

- *Re-allocation of road capacity and other measures to improve public transport service levels;*
- *Parking control;*
- *Traffic calming;*

⁶ **Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council (2006):** *Local Development Framework – Tonbridge Central Area Action Plan.*

⁷ **Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (2003):** *Tunbridge Wells Borough Transport Strategy.*

⁸ **Cairns, S et al. (2004):** *Smarter Choices – Changing the way we travel.*

- *Pedestrianisation;*
- *Cycle networks;*
- *Other use of transport prices and fares; and*
- *Better public transport information.*

The character of development proposed in Tonbridge town centre, in parallel with some work already in place will help to achieve these demand management measures.

For example, the Borough Council has rationalised the management of its off-street parking stock to make a clearer distinction between short and long stay parking, and as part of that process has rebalanced the amount of parking to make more spaces available for short stay parking at locations convenient for, and close to, the town centre shops.

Measures promoted in the 2002 High Street Study looked actively at the reallocation of road space to pedestrians in the High Street. These ideas are promoted in Section 4 and 5 of this report in addition to pedestrian improvements in other parts of the town. It is also important to realise that the nature of the development proposed in the Botany area of Tonbridge will, if realised, promote an improved pedestrian environment, with all parking on the east of the site and uninhibited pedestrian routes between the new retail development, relocated Sainsbury's store and the existing High Street, and new residential development.

Possible road links such as the Hadlow Road to London Road link will provide the opportunity to reduce the impact of traffic flows on Bordyke and East Street, making these parts of the historic town centre more pedestrian friendly. The Hadlow Road London Road link should also remove traffic from residential roads such as Dry Hill Road, Yardley Park Road and The Ridgeway. In conjunction with the link road the opportunity should be taken to change the character of these relieved roads to ensure that induced traffic does not swallow this released capacity.

1.5.1 School Travel

Kent County Council is also making use of its ability to influence the price of public transport and is offering a pilot scheme for school travel for 11-16 year olds in specified schools in Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells, Paddock Wood and Cranbrook. From the 4th of June 2007, pupils aged 11-16 will be able to purchase a bus 'Freedom Pass'. This will be valid for travel by bus to and from school, and can also be used in the evenings, weekends and holidays for any bus journey that stops in Kent. Pupils will pay just £50 to cover administrative costs and passes will be valid until the end of August 2008.

Kent County Council is marketing the initiative through the schools, with a launch in Tunbridge Wells during the late May half-term. For its part, Arriva will be providing additional capacity to cater for increased demand.

It is hoped that this initiative will cut car use for some of the shorter journeys to the area's schools, where walking is not an attractive option (1 to 3 miles). Free travel at other times will also reduce the need for friends and family to offer escort trips by car and moreover, by encouraging young people to use the bus more, sow the seeds of a greater public transport mode share in the future. Kent County Council will be able to begin to assess the impact of this initiative once the new school year (2007-08) begins in September.

Associated with this pilot is a proposal to stagger school opening hours to reduce the impact of the school peak on traffic flows, and help the bus companies to spread their peak capacity. This proposal is still under development.

KCC are also in the early stages of developing a county wide School Travel Strategy, in pursuance of the Education and Inspection Act 2002, which is likely to identify further initiatives which can be undertaken.

1.5.2 Travel Plans

The potential of workplace Travel Plans to reduce car trips to new development sites is well established, and local procedures have been established by a number of Authorities for setting mode share targets for individual sites as part of the Development Control process. Reductions in car use achieved have varied between nil and 52% below the estimated unrestrained demand figure, with around 8% to 10% commonly demanded and achieved⁹.

Securing effective Travel Plans through the Planning Process is essential to reduce the transport impact of specific developments. While the Travel Plan is produced and implemented by the Developer and/or Occupier of the site, and can be enforced either by Planning Condition or by Agreement, input from the Planning Authority is also required to agree, monitor and enforce the Travel Plan.

A number of techniques that can greatly reduce the car use generated by new residential developments are now available. When implemented alongside reduced levels of parking provision on the site, and good public transport provision nearby, substantial reductions in trip generation can be achieved.

For housing and mixed use developments, a new residents 'starter pack' would usually be provided by the developer, including information about public transport services, cycle and pedestrian route maps, and passes for free or discounted travel on public transport for an introductory period. At the highest level, a Car Club with designated spaces, a free bicycle for each new resident and internet links to real time public transport information in each dwelling might also be included. This information could be provided by the Local Authority using S106 funds.

A number of these measures are already recommended in Kent Design. Others could be included in the Development Brief for new development sites in Tonbridge as appropriate.

KCC already have a strong School Travel Plan team in place, supported by central government funding, who are working towards a target of every school in Kent having a School Travel Plan by 2010. Currently four schools in Tonbridge have a Travel Plan and evidence suggests that these have been able to cut vehicle trips to/from the school site by 11% after implementation.

Car Clubs can be set up as part of a particular residential or mixed development, but can also be established in existing residential areas. They are particularly suited to areas such as town centres, where parking is at a premium and the majority of everyday trips can be made by non car modes.

⁹ **Department for Transport (2002):** *Making Travel Plans Work – Lessons from UK case studies.*

Car Clubs offer the potential to reduce trip making, since the availability of a new car for use on an infrequent basis provides the flexibility and freedom that a car gives, but at a vastly reduced cost compared to that of owning a car. Since people pay to use the car as they would do for a train or a bus ticket they are likely to think more about their need to use a car, and consider other modes more often, for their journeys.

Most Car Clubs to date have been established in cities. However there is substantial potential for these in other locations as well. A Maidstone Car Club has already been set up and if this is successful, KCC will be looking to extend this initiative to other locations.

Many Tonbridge residents already work in London and thus do not need a car for the daily commute. They are also likely to have a more 'metropolitan' mindset on transport issues generally. Tonbridge could therefore be an excellent location for a Car Club, particularly where relatively high density housing with low parking provision is being provided.

The planning authority can help to promote Car Clubs by securing revenue support for Car Clubs from developers as part of a S106 agreement to provide a guarantee to the likes of Streetcar, Whizz Go, City Car Club in the initial start-up phase.

1.6 Improving Local and Regional Connectivity

It is important to understand recent improvements and committed proposals that will help to ensure that the hub has better internal and external connections.

1.6.1 Bus Improvements

Improvements to the A26 bus corridor in recent years between Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells have included the following measures:

- *New shelters with raised kerbs;*
- *Southbound bus lane on St. John's Road between Woodbury Park Road and Grosvenor Road.*
- *Southbound bus lane on St. Johns Road between the TA centre and Somerset Road.*
- *Northbound bus lane on the approach to Speldhurst Road junction.*
- *Southbound bus lane through Southborough Common.*

Arriva has recently reviewed its interurban and urban bus network and timetables in the Tonbridge/ Tunbridge Wells area with changes taking place on the 1st of April 2007.

Increased frequencies on route 7 between Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone and on route 402 between Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks has enabled Arriva to provide a 10 minute headway on the A26 between Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge Monday to Saturday. To help promote the 10 minute frequency on the A26 route through Southborough, a buses towards Tonbridge/ Tunbridge Wells poster has been produced in addition to separate leaflets for each service.

The additional service between Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone also enables Arriva to offer a 20 minute headway for services between Mereworth, Hadlow and Tonbridge.

Within Tonbridge itself, the 218/ 219 services between North Tonbridge (Willow Lea) and the town centre has been reviewed, and all services now use Shipbourne Road between the north and the town centre. Arriva has also taken the opportunity to double the frequency offered on each of these routes, meaning that there are in effect 8 buses an hour between the town centre and the Pinnacles, offering a 'turn up and go' frequency.

Despite these welcome improvements the general perception is that evening and weekend services are not as good as they could be. A lack of evening services can be a barrier to using the bus to reach the station in the morning, since passengers will want flexibility in the evening. New development offers the opportunity to use revenue to pump prime bus services at these times.

1.6.2 Forthcoming rail improvements

Southeastern has recently improved the evening and Sunday services between London, Tunbridge Wells and Hastings. The December 2006 timetable update resulted in the following improvements that will make commuting from Tunbridge Wells and High Brooms more attractive, reducing the need to drive to Tonbridge station:

- *Additional evening services giving a half hourly service from London to Tunbridge Wells after 9pm on weekdays*
- *A half hourly service from Hastings to London via Tunbridge Wells on Sundays during the day and early evening.*

In 2008, Network Rail will be providing a 12 car turnback facility at Tunbridge Wells to improve reliability and capacity. This will enable 12 car trains to terminate at Tunbridge Wells, which is currently not possible.

Southeastern will be taking the opportunity to recast its timetable in 2009 when CTRL domestic services are introduced on other routes. Tonbridge services will see the following changes:

- *Doubling the off peak frequency of Charing Cross to Tunbridge Wells via Tonbridge services from 2 to 4 per hour, which will make use of the new turn-back facilities.*
- *Provision of a direct hourly service to Maidstone West and Strood increasing connectivity between Tonbridge and the neighbouring transport hubs of Maidstone and Chatham.*
- *Loss of the 2 fast services per hour between London and Ashford via Tonbridge. However Paddock Wood will still have 3 services an hour to Tonbridge as at present.*

1.6.3 Public Transport Integration

The 'Plusbus' scheme was re-launched in Kent on the 19/20 May 2007. It is a joint rail/ bus industry scheme and allows rail passengers to buy tickets which include connecting bus travel as a daily, weekly, monthly or annual add-on to rail season tickets. However, this option needs to continue to be promoted and publicised if it is to be successful and encourage greater integration between bus and rail.

Integration between bus and rail could also be significantly enhanced through improvements to Tonbridge railway station. Development of a fully integrated rail/bus interchange is only likely to be feasible in conjunction with development of the goods yard site opposite the station. However there is potential for some 'quick win' improvements to be made, the most important of which is improved information

on bus services for rail passengers alighting at the station. Measures could include ‘spider’ diagrams illustrating routes of buses with the name of the bus stop clearly delineated on a summary map.

The public transport improvements described, in conjunction with the free bus travel pilot for 11-16 year olds, will do much to improve connectivity within the Tonbridge/Tunbridge Wells hub.

1.7 The Importance Walking and Cycling

1.7.1 National and Local Policy

In 2004, around 78% of all trips made in the UK were between two and five miles, and 22% were of less than 1 mile¹⁰.

To address congestion and air quality issues, and to provide people with healthier and more active transport options, the Government’s aim for the next 20 to 30 years is to increase walking and cycling by making it a more convenient, attractive and realistic choice for many more short journeys, especially those to work and to school¹¹.

In pursuance of this aim, Worcester, Darlington and Peterborough have been identified as Sustainable Transport Demonstration Towns and between 2004 and 2008 will be implementing a wide range of measures including new facilities for walking and cycling, improved information and promotion, as well as travel planning and behavioural change programmes. Lessons learned from these pilot schemes will be used to inform sustainable transport initiatives elsewhere in the UK.

Kent’s Local Transport Plan for 2006-2011 also seeks to develop walking and cycling further. Key benefits and how these are achieved are summarised below:

Accessibility	Better footpaths, enhanced lighting and lowered kerbs at crossing points.
Healthier lifestyles	Reducing car dependence, encouraging more walking and cycling for children and adults, education and investment in walking and cycling routes.
Mobility	Ensuring the pedestrian and highway environment is accessible for everyone

This illustrates the fact that increasing walking and cycling is important not just in terms of reducing urban congestion. It also has a positive impact on other key public policies such as health, and reducing social exclusion.

The Tonbridge Urban Transport Strategy aims to reflect these policies, and build on established best practice to provide a suitable package of measures to increase the proportion of pedestrian and cycle based trips.

¹⁰ **Department for Transport:** *National Travel Survey, 2004*

¹¹ **Department for Transport (2004):** *The Future of Transport.*

1.7.2 Transport and Health

A report from the Chief Medical Officer in 2004¹² illustrated that there was extensive evidence to reinforce the view that physical inactivity is one of the major contributory factors to the current epidemics of chronic disease.

The Chief Medical Officer recommended for general health, “a total of at least 30 minutes day of at least moderate intensity physical activity on five or more days of the week reduces the risk of premature death from cardiovascular disease and some cancers, significantly reduces the risk of type-2 diabetes, and it can also improve psychological well-being.”

For many, walking and cycling as part of daily travel patterns can offer an easy way of fitting half and hour’s moderate physical activity into the daily routine

1.7.3 Transport and Social Exclusion

In “Making the Connections”¹³ the Social Exclusion Unit identified a number of reasons why certain groups find it difficult to access services and suffer disproportionately from particular problems. Making it easier to access services on foot can help to address Social Exclusion issues in the Borough.

Key factors in explaining why people don’t walk include:

- *Badly lit walking routes and waiting areas contributing to a fear of crime;*
- *Dangerous roads preventing people from walking and cycling as much as they could, and this includes walking to public transport.*
- *Some of the barriers to walking and cycling are psychological, being based on unfair or outdated perceptions.*

These factors will need to be addressed by the Tonbridge Urban Transport Strategy.

¹² **Department of Health (2004):** *At least five a week. Evidence of the impact of physical activity and its relationship to health.*

¹³ **Social Exclusion Unit (2003):** *Making the Connections: Final Report on Transport and Social Exclusion.*