

APPENDIX A

To: Dartford Joint Transportation Board
By: Stephen Pay, Transport Integration Manager
Date: 4th March 2014
Subject: Fastrack Project Update
Classification: Information only

Summary: As previously reported to Dartford JTB, the Fastrack project remains a vital part of the transport solution for Kent Thameside and a priority project for Kent County Council. Patronage on route B has risen significantly, although the planned developments have been considerably slower coming forwards than anticipated when Fastrack began operating in 2006. Patronage on route A has been much slower, largely due to the slow rate of build at The Bridge and the lack of anticipated other supporting developments.

Route A

Fastrack route A is contracted by ProLogis, the developer at The Bridge. ProLogis remains committed to the principle of Fastrack as the journey solution of choice for local journeys. KCC will continue to work with Dartford, Arriva and ProLogis to ensure Fastrack route A develops into part of the wider sustainable public transport network in the area.

Discussions on a joint contract covering provision of both route A and route B are beginning in earnest. It is anticipated that a holistic approach to procuring the Fastrack network will help to ensure the long term viability of both routes.

Route B

Fastrack route B is contracted by KCC. KCC remains committed to the principle of Fastrack as the journey solution of choice for local journeys and that Fastrack should be introduced into new developments at the earliest possible stage to establish travel patterns before car use becomes the default choice where possible.

Voluntary Quality Bus Partnership

It is hoped that a QBP can be formed covering the whole of Kent Thameside, specifically including a section dedicated to Fastrack. Based on the successful QBP model already in place in Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells, it is hoped that Dartford and Gravesham Borough Councils, Kent County Council and Arriva Kent and Surrey Ltd, possibly with ProLogis and London & Continental Railways Ltd, could be included.

QBP's have been successful in improving the bus network across Kent and ensuring developer funding received through S106 agreements is spent appropriately and delivers best value for money. A Kent Thameside QBP could act as a project oversight board for Fastrack, assisting with the delivery of Fastrack services to new developments as they are occupied and ensuring that the quality that sets Fastrack above other local bus services continues to be delivered.

Medium Term Plan

As mentioned in the initial report to the JTB last year, it is likely that other services will be introduced initially into some larger scale developments to "pave the way" for Fastrack to follow later.

Eastern Quarry – Castle Hill (phase 1) – I have been asked to comment on the Fastrack busway requirement for the initial phase of development at Castle Hill, I expect to be invited to attend a meeting on this over the next few weeks. The developer is keen to ensure the Fastrack corridor is appropriately designed and aesthetically in keeping with the location as Fastrack services may not be using it during the early stages. Initial discussions between KCC, ProLogis and Arriva indicate that the most appropriate solution for Eastern Quarry is to investigate extending Fastrack route A from Bluewater to Ebbsfleet via Eastern Quarry, possibly using Alkerden Lane initially. This would have the added benefit of creating new direct links between The Bridge, Temple Hill and Crossways Business Park and Ebbsfleet International Station, helping assure the long term viability of route A.

Dartford Northern Gateway (GSK site) – Initial discussions with the consultant acting on behalf of the developer were encouraging. A degree of priority for Fastrack was agreed in principle and the need to manage reliance on private cars for local journeys established. It remains the intention to divert at least one of the Fastrack routes currently using Temple Hill through the new development.

Infrastructure

A review of Fastrack infrastructure is planned for 2014. This will include a refresh or tired or damaged shelters and associated works. It is hoped that a trial of Near Field Technology at Fastrack shelters can be carried out this summer in partnership with ClearChannel, the shelter provider for both Dartford and Gravesham and the Fastrack project. Passengers with NFC enabled phones will be able to simply tap their handset against the interactive panel to get direct access to a number of web pages including timetable and service information, journey planning tools and local authority websites.

Conclusion

KCC remains committed to the Fastrack project and continues to work proactively with Arriva and both Dartford and Gravesham Borough Councils to deliver a high quality, high frequency bus rapid transit system for Kent Thameside.

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