

## **REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**27 JUNE 2013**

### **MEMBER'S ITEM: TRAFFIC FLOW IN CHATHAM**

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture

Author: Steve Hewlett, Head of Integrated Transport

#### **Summary**

This report sets out a response to concerns raised by Councillor Mackinlay, regarding traffic flow in Chatham.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1 Under Medway Constitution Overview and Scrutiny rules (Chapter 4, Part 5, Paragraph 9.1) Councillor Mackinlay has requested that an item on this matter is included on the agenda for this meeting.

#### **2. The Issue**

2.1. Councillor Mackinlay raised concerns regarding traffic flow in Chatham at the January meeting of this committee and requested that an item was placed on the agenda.

- At the committee meeting he raised the issue of the road network in Chatham and how, in his opinion, it did not flow properly with two major 'pinch points' which made journeys through Chatham town centre difficult. He acknowledged that the Chairman had offered to consider this matter as part of the 'De-cluttering Town Centres' task group review but that it was an issue to be looked at in its own right.

#### **3. Director's comments**

3.1 Major alterations to the road network in Chatham were delivered as part of a strategic initiative to regenerate Chatham town centre. The key objective of the new traffic management arrangements was to remove the traffic barrier between the town centre and the River Medway to enable the regeneration of this area. The early phases of this strategy have proved successful with the

opening on the new Chatham Waterfront Bus Station, which has also improved pedestrian accessibility to the river and improved public realm.

- 3.2 Annual traffic counts recording 24 hour daily traffic flows at The Brook and Best Street over the period between 2005 and 2012 are detailed in the table below. This data shows two-way traffic flows on the Brook of in the region of 19,000 vehicles per day in 2012 compared to a one way flow of approximately 17,000 vehicles prior to the work commencing. For a similar period, traffic on Best Street has reduced from approximately 16,000 vehicles one way flow prior to the scheme to in the region of a two way flow of 11,000 vehicles per day in 2012.

		2005	2006	2007	2010	2011	2012
The Brook	Eastbound		11,541	6,228	6,951	9,229	9,894
	Westbound		10,017	10,043	9,658	8,785	8,856
	One way	16,793					
	<b>Total</b>	<b>16,793</b>	<b>21,558</b>	<b>16,271</b>	<b>16,609</b>	<b>18,014</b>	<b>18,750</b>
Best Street	Eastbound		6,332	6,238	9,658	5,832	6,333
	Westbound		7,029	3,115	6,851	4,149	4,310
	One way	15,835					
	<b>Total</b>	<b>15,835</b>	<b>13,361</b>	<b>9,353</b>	<b>16,509</b>	<b>9,981</b>	<b>10,643</b>

- 3.3 A significant quantity of traffic passes through Chatham town centre due to Chatham effectively being a cross roads between the east/west A2 and north/south A231 Dock Road / A230 to Maidstone, rather than travelling to Chatham as a destination. Whilst there is an argument that through traffic should be discouraged because it does not bring economic benefit to Chatham town centre, the data would appear to demonstrate that drivers are generally not being discouraged by the new traffic management system to drive though Chatham.
- 3.4 Travel journey times do increase during busy peak times and this is symptomatic of travel demand exceeding highway capacity. This is common on Medway's strategic highway network and the road network in the south east generally.
- 3.5 The design of the road layout along The Brook was influenced by the width of the corridor available to widen the carriageway. As a result of some difficulties with land acquisition the carriageway was constructed as a single lane in places and this has an impact on highway capacity.
- 3.6 The key locations that are generating congestion on the network in Chatham town centre are:
- The Brook in the vicinity of Whiffens Avenue/Chatham Waterfront Bus Station
  - Union Street

- 3.7 Officers are developing improvements to Traffic Management including adjustments to network to improve capacity along The Brook and Union Street. These include:
- a) New timing plans for traffic signals from the junction of Dock Road/Globe Lane (Chatham Waterfront Bus Station) to The Brook/Slicketts Hill to provide better coordination between traffic signals along this stretch of road.
  - b) Timing alterations involving the introduction of new plans at the junction of Whiffens Avenue and Globe Lane to improve coordination and allow better utilisation of the traffic reservoirs between signals.
  - c) Convert existing signal controlled pedestrian crossings to 'puffin' crossings at all crossing points along The Brook. These new controllers will detect the presence of pedestrians at crossing points and will cancel a demand to cross if the pedestrian crosses between stationary traffic rather than waiting for the signal to cross. This will stop unnecessary pedestrian crossing phases being triggered which cause delays to traffic.
  - d) Possible removal of traffic signals at the bus station ramp.
  - e) The council now has the ability to display messages on 23 Variable Message Signs (VMS) located on Medway's highway network. Protocols will be developed to enable messages to be displayed on the VMS warning of congestion in Chatham town centre if journey times reduce to a predetermined figure. Officers have experimented with this approach and it does appear to have a noticeable effect on traffic flows. However, this initiative needs to be approached with caution, as it may discourage people from visiting Chatham and it will quickly reduce its impact if used too regularly.
  - f) Improved dissemination of traffic information acquired by the Traffic Operations Room. It is anticipated that this will involve developing systems to enable real time traffic information to be displayed on the web and phone apps to enable travellers to make real time decisions about their journeys.
  - g) Investigations are also underway into the possible reallocation of road space to allow two lanes straight ahead at the junction of Slicketts Hill. It may be possible to introduce the current two lane section southbound earlier due to the removal of the signals (option d above) and possible removal of the associated island and the loss of the short sections of on carriageway cycle lane.

#### 4. Risk Management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
Congestion	Slow vehicle journey times in Chatham town centre impacting on business, visitors, bus services and deliveries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Adjustment to traffic signal timings;</li><li>- Removal of traffic signals that are judged surplus to requirements;</li><li>- Information on VMS</li><li>- Improve dissemination of traffic information</li></ul>

#### 5. Financial and Legal Implications

5.1 The cost of the alterations to puffin crossings is £80k .

5.2 a) The cost of the altered signal timing plans and signal conversions to puffin crossings is £8k.

b) The cost of the removal of the signals at the bottom of the bus ramp is yet to be costed but it is expected to be in the region of £25k.

c) The possibility of funding through the LTP investigated, and funding approval will need to be sought through DMT and Project Board.

d) There are no legal implications

#### 6. Recommendation

6.1. Members are asked to support the above measures.

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#### Background Papers