Fastrack Update - Dartford JTB (September 6th 2016)

Summary: This report has been produced in order to provide an update on the Fastrack Bus Rapid Transit Project in Kent Thameside. Members are asked to note the content of this report for discussion / comment at the JTB meeting.

For reference, the current operational model for Fastrack sees two services in operation:

**Fastrack A** (contracted by Pro-Logis): Dartford to Bluewater via The Bridge, Crossways and Greenhithe Station.

**Fastrack B** (contracted by Kent County Council): Temple Hill – Gravesend via Darent Valley Hospital, Bluewater, Greenhithe, Ingress Park, Swanscombe and Ebbsfleet International Station.

Both services are envisioned to contribute significantly to the transport provision relating to ongoing development in the Kent Thameside area. The development of further Fastrack routes is also seen as an integral part of the Transport Strategy related to the Ebbsfleet Garden City developments being overseen by the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation (EDC)

**Changes / Improvements Introduced Since January 2015:**

As previously reported to the JTB, a number of projects have been undertaken since January 2015 in order to improve the passenger experience on Fastrack. These have been delivered through KCC funding and in some cases through contributions from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) and Arriva:

- The introduction of a new vehicle fleet which includes: e-leather seats, information screens, charging points, Wi-Fi and a refreshed livery.

- A major shelter refurbishment programme for route B which saw the removal of redundant kiosks, the repair and refresh of roof seals and panels, the repair and replacement of any damaged glass / vinlys and the installation of new RTI brackets to house RTI screens which previously formed part of the kiosks. A deep clean also took place as part of the programme which included jet washing.

- New banners installed at route B shelters which display the stop name and include information on destinations served by buses departing from them.

- Updated website, bus stop signage and timetable displays to reflect the new livery design.

- The replacement of two bus shelters at Ebbsfleet International Station with modern alternatives.
- New Real Time Information (RTI) screens at Fastrack B shelters capable of displaying local traffic information. If any issues with the screens on route B are observed then these can be reported via the Go-Fastrack website.

**Service Reliability / Priority Signal Upgrades:**

Reliability on service B was a concern for a long period due to roadworks at Temple Hill, Craylands Lane and Galley Hill Road. Now that works have been completed, reliability has improved and Arriva have reported passenger growth for the first time in a number of months. Operating conditions continue to be challenging due to congestion in the town centres where the service starts and terminates but a number of initiatives are in place to help service reliability as far as possible including:

- Regular meetings of the Punctuality Improvement Partnership (PIP) to investigate mitigation measures to help improve bus punctuality. This work is being led by KCC’s Traffic Manager and looks at issues such as parking enforcement, junction layouts, overgrown foliage and signal phasing.

- Input from Fastrack into the ongoing work being delivered by KCC / Highways England with respect to congestion issues resulting from the introduction of Free Flow at the Dartford Crossing.

- A project to improve the response times of priority signal software on route B which has been raised as a concern. On guided busways, priority is generated by loops in the road surface when buses travel over them. Work is ongoing to install magnetometers in the busways to call the priority earlier, leading to a quicker signal response.

**Ingress Park – Greenhithe Station Fastrack Link:**

Non Fastrack use of the bus lane linking Ingress Park and Greenhithe Station continues to be a concern. KCC and DBC are working closely on this issue and have commissioned traffic counts to be conducted in early September at Ingress Park and at two other sites (Bluewater – Darent Valley Hospital link and Darenth Road) in order to identify the scale of the problem. This will enable appropriate consideration to be given to possible mitigation measures.

**Ingress Park – Manor Way Link:**

As per the original plan for Fastrack’s development, the link from Ingress Park to Manor Way will shortly be available for use by Fastrack B. The new link will see Fastrack B operating through Ingress Park in its entirety, taking away the current need to turn within the development. Arriva have noted that the introduction of the through route will further help to improve reliability on the service. London Road (A226) and residents from the Knockhall Chase / Knockhall Road area will continue to have the high frequency Sapphire service available as an alternative or may choose to walk to Ingress Park Avenue / Manor Way in order to continue to utilise Fastrack B.

**Fastrack Management Board:**

The Fastrack Management Board continues to meet and acts as an important forum for partners to discuss both operational and strategic issues related to the project. The Board has representation from Kent County Council, Gravesham Borough Council, Dartford Borough Council, Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, Arriva, Bluewater and Prologis and ensures that all representatives are able to provide input into the project’s direction and
Moving forwards, thought is being given to the benefits of splitting the Board into separate strategic and operational segments to enable more detailed and focused discussions to take place. Work is also ongoing to establish whether other groups should be established / resurrected such as the Fastrack Delivery Executive (FDE) which previously oversaw the delivery of Fastrack in its present form.

**Fastrack Development Manager:**

With the emerging developments linked to the Ebbsfleet Garden City and others in the Thameside area Fastrack is once again beginning to require a greater level of focus. The project has sat with the Public Transport team at KCC since a department restructure in January 2015. Moving forwards, David George has been appointed to the role of Fastrack Development Manager and will be working towards developing a strategic plan for Fastrack. David was previously with the Fastrack project from its inception in 1999 until 2012. The Public Transport department will still have a high level of involvement with the scheme and will continue to lead on operational matters.

**Future Development of Fastrack:**

Bringing about delivery of the Fastrack rapid mass transit system that is required to facilitate development within the Ebbsfleet Garden City and wider Kent Thameside area is not just a single project: rather it requires a programme of projects delivered in a phased and programmed way, with individual projects being delivered by various public and private sector stakeholders through a range of varying funding packages. Work is progressing to define the programme of necessary projects and to prepare a programme-level business case. It is hoped that a Fastrack programme-level business case will be ready by the end of September 2016. Initial work has identified 21 projects, primarily comprising infrastructure to be delivered by developers, but also including procurement of a vehicle fleet and putting in place appropriate operating arrangements. The scope of the projects reflects long-established historic plans for Fastrack delivery but with appropriate updating to reflect changed circumstances, notably the opportunities and impetus now arising through the Ebbsfleet Garden City. A report on the Fastrack programme-level business case will be given to the Joint Transport Board in December 2016.

Report By:

Dan Bruce (Infrastructure and Development Senior Officer, KCC Public Transport)