MAIDSTONE GREEN PARTY

TRANSPORT PROPOSALS 2020

1. Introduction

The past decades have seen a dramatic rise in the distances generally being travelled and a great shift towards the use of less equitable and unsustainable methods of transport. Thus, while the number of trips has not changed significantly, there has been a decrease in walking, cycling and the use of buses and an increase in trips by car. Road freight has also increased at the expense of rail and water–borne freight.

As the amount of traffic has increased so have the negative consequences. Road traffic is a major and increasing source of many of the worst pollutants, including nitrogen dioxide (NO_2), carbon dioxide (CO_2), carbon monoxide, carcinogenic particles and noise. These emissions cause massive damage to the natural and built environment and have serious effects on human health.

Many pedestrians and cyclists have been frightened from travelling as a consequence of the rise in motor vehicle use, the increasing weight of road freight and the increasing ability of cars to be driven at high speeds. Meanwhile, thousands of people are being killed and hundreds of thousands injured on the roads every year, of which pedestrians and cyclists make up a disproportionate percentage of the total.

Society has begun to recognise some of the damage caused by these changes in transport patterns, and this has led to some changes in rhetoric from local government in transport policy. However, there has not been any clear vision about how these problems are to be tackled, leading to policies that are contradictory and ineffective. Transport is now seen as one of the public's major concerns.

2. Aims and Objectives

Aims

The principle aims of the transport policy are:

– Accessibility rather than mobility.

– Transport to be equitably accessible to all people irrespective of their age, wealth or disability, with local needs given priority over travelling greater distances.

– Where mobility is desired or needed, to satisfy this through sustainable modes of transport.

– Transport and its infrastructure to have the minimum impact on the environment.

– Transport means should make use of sustainable and replaceable resources.

– Degradation of community life by inappropriate transport modes, especially excessive car use, to be reduced and reversed wherever possible.

– Transport should not endanger users or others and, where possible, should play a role in bringing about a more healthy population.

Objectives

To achieve these aims, the principal objectives to these proposals are:

– To reduce the total distance travelled by reducing journey lengths, particularly by encouraging the development and retention of local facilities.

– Reduce the number of journeys made by unsustainable modes of transport, particularly by car.

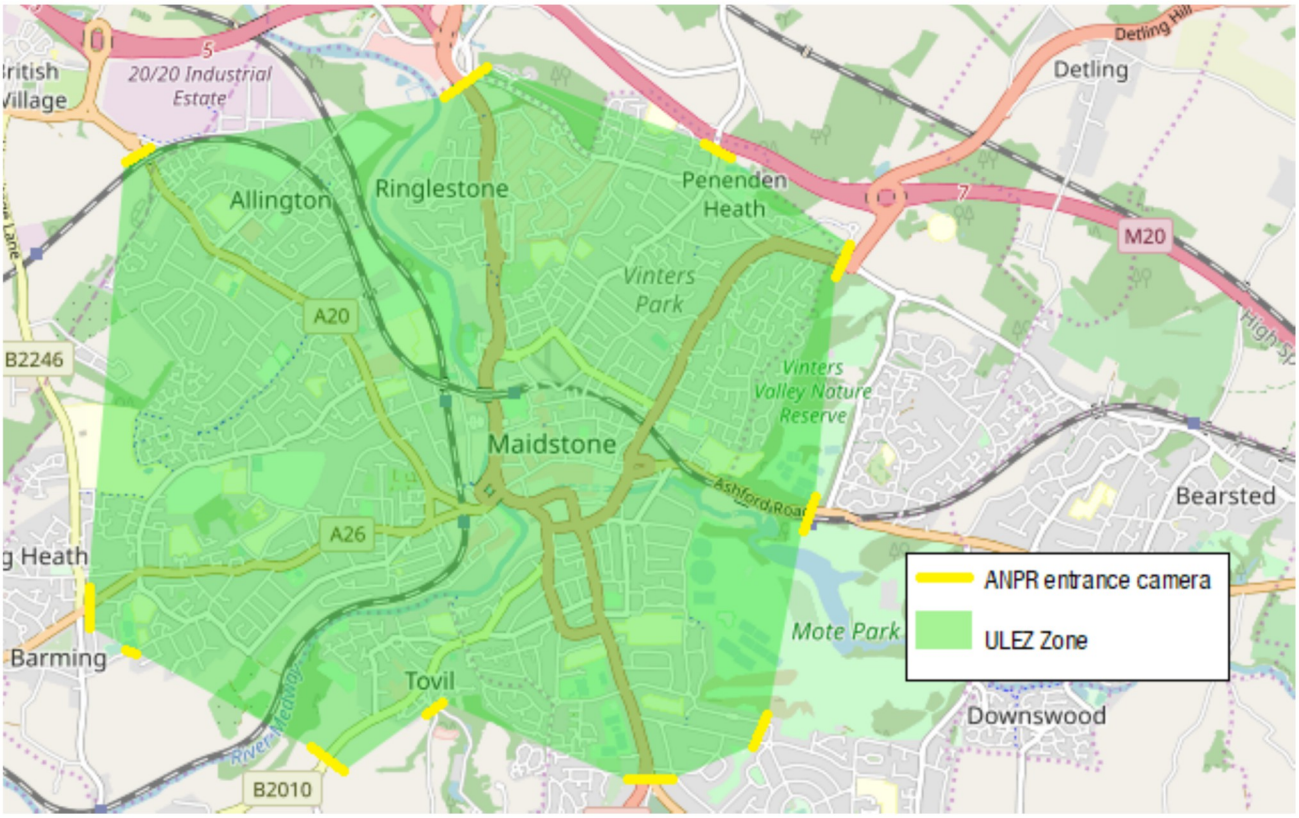
– Encourage a switch to sustainable methods of transport through integrated transport planning.

– Enable integration of different sustainable modes of transport so that these forms of transport are simple and efficient, including convenient interchanges for both passengers and freight.

3. Ultra Low Emissions Zone (ULEZ)

After research conducted by Maidstone Green Party identified Maidstone town centre as having some of the UK's most polluted air outside of London[1], We believe it is time to look to the measures implemented in London to combat dangerous air pollution. The introduction of the ULEZ in London resulted in a 32 mg/m^3 reduction in roadside concentrations of nitrogen dioxide, a reduction of 36% [2]. There has also been a reduction in motor vehicles entering the LEZ and ULEZ of 25 to 30%. In addition to this, revenues gained from the ULEZ (which were reinvested in the public transport network) exceeded £150million in the first year [3].

The ULEZ operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year. Most vehicles, including cars and vans, need to meet the ULEZ emissions standards[4] or their drivers must pay a daily charge to drive within the zone. The zone targets the most heavily polluting vehicles, while most vehicles registered after 2007 already achieve these targets. Vehicles are identified by ANPR cameras at entrance points. We propose that in Maidstone we follow the model implemented by Transport for London, within the area indicated below. Revenues from the ULEZ should be used for reinvestment in other transport projects included in this document.



[1] https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/feb/27/pollution-map-reveals-unsafe-air-quality-at-almost-2000-uk-sites
[2] https://www.london.gov.uk//WHAT-WE-DO/environment/environment-publications/central-london-ulez-six-month-report
[3] https://www.london.gov.uk/questions/2018/3170
[4] https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/driving/ultra-low-emission-zone/ways-to-meet-the-standard

4. Walking

We would like to see walking, or cycling, become the natural choices for shorter journeys in Maidstone, or as part of a longer journey, regardless of age, gender, fitness level or income.

For journeys of less than 2km walking should be the preferred method of Transport. A reduction in traffic, particularly HGV's, in Maidstone town centre with the implementation of a ULEZ would make walking a more pleasant option and encourage modal shift to zero carbon and zero pollution forms of transport. These are solutions which cost little, but can encourage some to make fewer journeys by car.

Traffic signal prioritisation

For areas of heavy pedestrian footfall, for example at the junction of Bishops way and the High Street, and at the junction of Wat Tyler Way and Ashford Road, Pedestrian signals should be reprogrammed to prioritise Pedestrian movement over motor vehicles. This would improve the experience for pedestrians as well as reducing their time exposed to air pollution at these junctions.

Pavement improvements

Prioritising pavement and cycle lane repairs over road repairs, to remove risks to the safety of pedestrians and cyclists, including ensuring that they are kept clear of undergrowth, graffiti and rubbish and prioritisation of street light repairs on pedestrian routes. Dropped kerbs should be provided at all junctions to facilitate wheelchair users

Pavement Parking

Pavement parking in Maidstone has increased significantly in recent years and presents an obstacle forcing pedestrians, including those using wheelchairs and push chairs, into traffic. We recommend that Maidstone Borough Council apply for the required powers introduce a ban on pavement parking across the borough and provide enforcement.

4. Walking (cont.)

Car Free Days

Many European cities have introduced Car Free Days on a monthly basis which encourages motorists to give up their cars for a day. Organized events are held in some cities and countries on September 22, World Car Free Day. The events, which vary by location, give motorists an idea of their towns and cities with fewer cars. The first Car Free Day took place in Bath as early as 1996, and London began taking part this year.

In cities where Car Free Days have been implemented they have been shown to be successful in achieving social change bringing together people from across all areas and of all social classes. Car Free events also have a tangible impact on public health by encouraging people to engage in physical activity, whether it is walking, cycling or skating around a car free course or participating in the complimentary events (e.g. aerobics) which are offered in some cases. Some studies suggest that savings accrued through health benefits alone are enough to justify the staging of such events.

The wider economic impact of these events has also been examined and there is clear evidence that they have a positive impact on both existing businesses and local entrepreneurs who establish businesses specifically for the event. In the San Francisco, 44% of businesses reported an increase in customer activity and sales during “Sunday Streets”, increasing their income on that day by $466. Similarly positive results were also experienced in Bristol where 75% of businesses reported that the event supported their business by increasing footfall. Both Bristol and San Francisco businesses also reported increased awareness of their business which could have a more long term and sustained impact on their businesses.

Source: http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2015/regdev/2215.pdf

5.Cycling

For journeys ranging from 2km to 15km cycling should be the preferred method of Transport. A reduction in traffic, particularly HGV's, in Maidstone town centre with the implementation of a ULEZ would make cycling a more pleasant option and encourage modal shift to zero carbon and zero pollution forms of transport.

Currently in Maidstone large percentage of cycling provision is limited to ‘signs only’ and does not extend far enough to make cycling a viable alternative. We would propose that all future road developments woud also aim to remove or segregate cyclists from road traffic on pathways, or on dedicated cycle lanes. In addition many cycling paths in Maidstone have fallen into disrepair, we would aim to prioritise pavement and cycle lane repairs, to remove risks to the safety of pedestrians and cyclists

In April 2018, Sustrans released a “Walking and Cycling Assesment” of Maidstone, which detailed improvements that could be made to Maidstones infrastructure to allow more cycling. We would advocate adoption of these measures to improve accessibility for cyclists.[1]

In addition we would like to see the development of public bicycle hire scheme (as seen in London, Swansea, Milton Keynes etc). As in other towns and cities the scheme could be sponsored to mitigate costs. This should be combined with an increase in cycle storage facilities at stations, schools, and key locations.

[1] https://meetings.maidstone.gov.uk/documents/s61070/Appendix%204%20Walking%20and%20Cycling%20assessment.pdf

6. Rail

As Maidstone's population has increased in recent decades, and large housing development has sprung up close to the railway lines, station development has not kept pace. Therefore we propose 2 new types of stations be built:

– Three pedestrian only halts, in residential areas with noise restrictions on announcements and no parking facilities. These stations will only add approximately 1 minute per stop to existing schedules and will only be serviced by local stopping services.
– One Parkway station to improve Park and Ride services, and reduce commuter traffic in Maidstone town Centre.

Maidstone Parkway

On the Maidstone East line, immediately south–west of the railway bridge over the London Road. The station should be maximum length for 12 cars and consist of four tracks and two island platforms, so that fast services could call there as well as local services. It would also be the only station between Ashford and Swanley where fast passenger trains could overtake slow trains, including freight trains. The existing London Road Park–and–Ride facility would need to be relocated to one side of the railway station. Buses on Routes 71, 72 etc, would provide good interchange with the station in both directions.

NB: This area is located just over the boundary within Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council and will require cooperation between councils.

6. Rail (cont.)

Tovil/Fant – Pedestrian

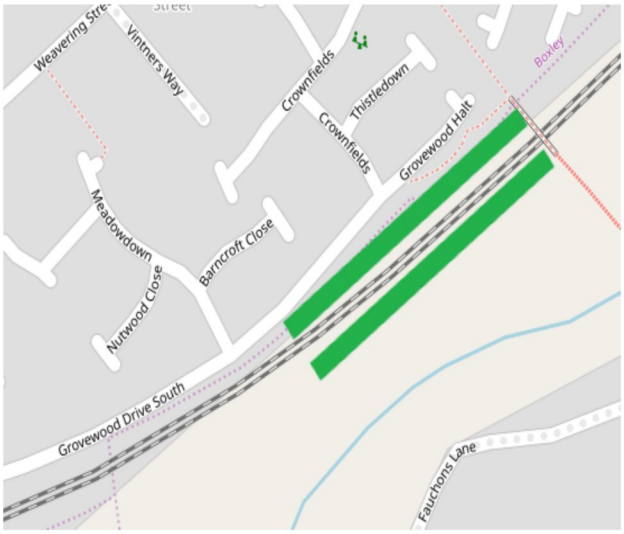
On the exact site of the former Tovil station, (south–west of Maidstone West station), at the southern end of Bower Lane, on the Medway Valley line.

Mote Park – Pedestrian

On Maidstone East line, alongside Ashford Road east of the bridge over it, opposite Huntsman Lane. Good quality illuminated footpaths should be provided north to Huntsman Lane (to provide access to residents and for schools) and south to Blythe Road and Mote Avenue.

Grove Green – Pedestrian

On Maidstone East Line, close to Grovewood Drive. This would serve the major housing developments, on both sides of the line, and significantly improve travel opportunities for residents. Good illuminated footpath access should be provide to housing on both sides of the line.



7. Public Transport

Light Rail

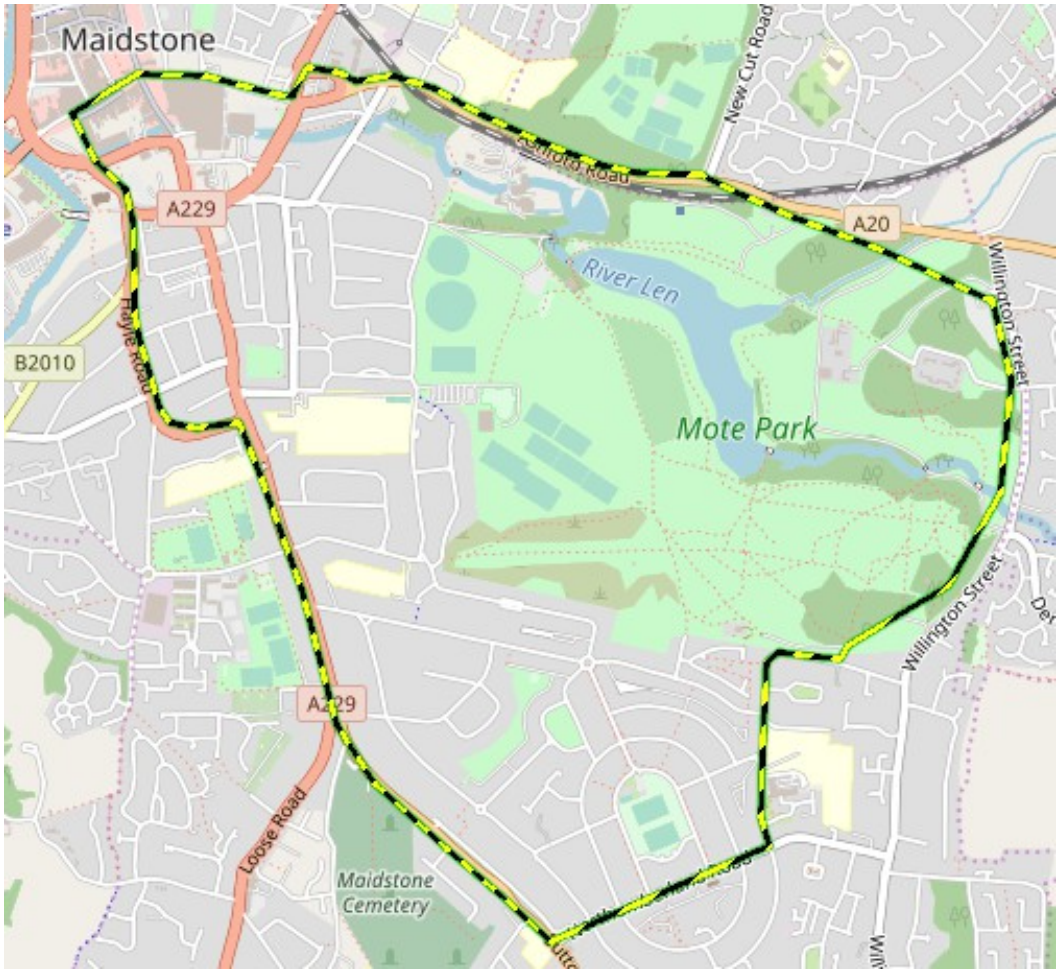
Light rail systems such as trams having significant advantages over buses and other public transport. They are carbon neutral at point of use, modern trams are virtually silent when standing still and quiet when in motion, In areas with steep gradients substantial power savings can be made by regenerative braking, using the motors as brakes and feeding the electricity they generate back into the overhead line so as to power other trams.

In addition the public perception of a tram is very different from that of a bus. A properly planned tram service is speedy, cheap, reliable and not disrupted by congestion. It does not carry a 'second–class' stigma, If the aim of a public transport system is to attract people away from car use, trams have been shown to succeed where buses fail. A short section of ramped pavement is all that is needed to give level access for push–chairs, wheel–chairs and disabled passengers.

Although tramways are expensive to construct, prices of vehicles and track have recently fallen rapidly with the application of modern technology. Once constructed, a tramway is the cheapest public transport system to operate and it has a life expectancy of at least fifty years, Segregated or 'reserved' tracks need be only slightly wider than the tram body, they can also be grassed–over to improve appearance.

We propose a circular route with one direction of travel utilising existing bus lanes to reduce the impact of construction and traffic. The route will service the Park and Ride at Willington Street, joining Oxford Road and following to Northumberland Road in Shepway and the heavily congested Sutton Road. The route will skirt the edge of Mote Park enabling the tram to travel at high speed, As well as servicing the proposed Mote Park train station to provide a link to National Rail.

This could be extended at a later date to serve more areas, or additional routes could be added in other areas.



7. Public Transport (cont.)

Trolley Buses

Maidstone was one of the last towns to withdraw its own trolleybus network in 1967, which ran to Barming (serving Maidstone Hospital), Loose and Parkwood. Unfortunately no town in the UK has a trolleybus network today, Leeds and Doncaster proposed to reintroduce them, but were refused government funding. Trolleybus networks operate in over 300 cities and towns across the world, mostly in mainland Europe. They are being constantly modernised and extended, and are generally popular.

Like Light Rail, carbon emissions at point of use are almost non–existent (except for tiny brake and tyre particles). It is now possible to have some sections of route with no wires at all, possibly up to three miles continuously, using onboard batteries instead, and recharging takes place when the buses pick up the wired sections again. This is a useful option in sensitive residential or woodland areas, or where the presence of poles and wires would be seen as intrusive. Although “traction” poles for the wires are usually needed unless there are suitably spaced lamp posts, it is possible in many streets to attach wires instead directly to the walls of adjacent properties. Often a small sum was paid to property owners for attaching the devices to hold the wires.

We propose that trolley buses should be considered to replace the existing fleet of Diesel–Electric Hybrid buses in use in Maidstone, ether in conjunction with Arriva or as a public venture.

Electric Buses

Alternatively, on routes which would not suit Trolley Buses we propose that battery run electric buses are used to replace the existing fleet. Electric buses are in use in many towns and cities in the UK including Nottingham, Guildford and Brighton. This would not only further reduce CO_2 and NO_2 tailpipe emissions at the roadside, electric buses are typically cheaper to run.

Payment

With all public transport options cost to the service user should be kept as low as possible, or made free. In addition we would like to see an integrated payment method similar to the “Oyster” card in London, or alternatively contactless payments, accepted on all public transport in the borough. With cooperation from other local authorities and Rail operators this could be extended to cover all of Kent.

8. Road and Traffic Management

20 mph residential speed limits

We recommend that all residential streets which are not primary A or B classified routes, have 20mph speed limits. Similar limits have become widespread in France, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland and elsewhere. Recently in Wales, the first minister has set up a task group to implement a 20mph national default for residential roads. Although some residential roads already have 20mph limits in place, the extension of these limits would improve the experience for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as making law enforcement on these routes easier and reducing road casualties.

Car Parking

An increase in council run car parking charges will work to increase the use of alternative forms of transport, including walking, cycling and public transport. In addition extra funds generated should be used to install electric vehicle charging points in these car parks. Criticisms include a perceived reduction in use which would impact local business, which are not credible due to the extra time and fuel involved. In addition we believe that privately owned car parking in the town centre would follow suit with increasing charges.

Buckland Hill/Maidstone Barracks station

We propose the pedestrianisation of the narrow bridge in Buckland Hill over the railway at Maidstone Barracks Station, closing the road to traffic to prevent the use of the road as a “rat–run” into the town centre and providing pedestrian link from Maidstone Barracks to Maidstone East stations without road crossings.

8. Road and Traffic Management (cont.)

Historic bridges at East Farleigh and Teston

Another core scheme we advocate for the borough concerns the narrow single–line traffic over the medieval bridges at East Farleigh and Teston, close to railway level crossings, and both notorious for traffic congestion, occasional accidents, and disputes over right of way. We propose that on East Farleigh bridge there should be only one way traffic southbound, and on Teston bridge, one way northbound. Traffic would still be two–way on either side of the bridges as far as points where it is already possible to turn, or change direction, ensuring continued access to and from a few adjacent homes and premises, East Farleigh station car park, and Teston country park. The few local residents affected will of course encounter a longer journey either to or from their homes. For through traffic there will be some extra mileage involved either on their outward or return journey, but the reduced conflict and congestion at the bridges, greater safety for all, and less risk of vehicle damage to the historic bridges themselves, would be a considerable improvement for the majority of users and the local environment. Additionally the removal of southbound traffic from Tonbridge Road at Teston bridge, (except for small volume going to Teston Country Park), will eliminate the present rush–hour phenomenon of right turning traffic blocking the junction, during the periods when the level crossing is closed to traffic awaiting train passage

9. Conclusion

Although this document proposes improvements which the Council may feel go beyond their capabilities, financial or technical, we believe they have a duty to examine all possible avenues for dealing effectively with the climate change threat, and to consider our proposed solutions.

The carbon emissions, pollution and traffic congestion in Maidstone are some of the worst in the UK, and a urgent change of approach is required to protect the health of Maidstones residents, and to ensure the future of the local economy. We believe that implementation of some or all of these measures would significantly improve the health and wellbeing, appearance and future sustainability of our County Town.