

Self-driving Vehicles for Tunbridge Wells

A report by Councillor David Scott (Tunbridge Wells Borough Council) to the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council on 15 February 2016

Introduction

1. The Report and the Background papers sets out the clear need to undertake a strategic review of Congestion in Tunbridge Wells in which the potential use of technological developments in transportation should be reviewed.
2. The report describes how self-driving vehicles could play a significant role in easing congestion within Tunbridge Wells. The Background Papers puts this into context with the damaging effects of Congestion to the town and surrounding areas impacting the health, wellbeing and economic vibrancy of the town. This report and background papers also sets out:
 - i) A possible detailed plan,
 - ii) The technical aspects of this form of technology, and
 - iii) How it could be designed to enhance the town.

Discussion

3. To ensure that Tunbridge Wells continues to thrive, its infrastructure must be fit for purpose. However, Tunbridge Wells is now widely known for its congested arterial and residential streets. This is a clear indication that without further significant action our infrastructure will continue to fail and be unable to support growth and prosperity of its residents.
4. Traditional bus Park and Ride systems have been rejected by this Committee on the grounds of cost, feasibility and impact on the existing main roads, the surrounding heritage and attractiveness of the town's arterial routes. New housing and schools continue to place ever greater strain on the existing road network.
5. Further highway improvements have limited ability to improve traffic flow and will only serve to deliver yet more cars to the centre of the town creating more congestion. The residential streets are already over filled with parked cars, most remaining stationary for very high percentages of their existence, occupying valuable road space and damaging pavements and other infrastructure.
6. A key component of maintaining a thriving town is that people and goods must be able to move around. Dealing with congestion needs to be a focal point for the town. New technology is fast developing with regards to self-driving vehicles. Increasing numbers of towns and cities in the UK, Europe and elsewhere are investigating and investing in this form of technology.
7. It is recognised that this technology can form part of a new approach to dealing with the Town's congestion problems, alongside enhanced pedestrian, cycle and other transportation methods.

8. The report proposes that Self-driving technology should be considered in three stages:
 - i) The Central Spine of the town from Grosvenor Road to the Pantiles;
 - ii) The arterial routes; and
 - iii) Around the periphery of the town.

Urgent consideration is needed to ensure the possible introduction of this technology is not inhibited by other actions which may block such systems in the future.

Recommendation

That the Board endorses the following recommendations to decision makers:

1. To note and include the possibility of self-driving technology within the planning of all changes to roads, pedestrian ways and transportation infrastructure - as a key requirement for the future.
2. To include the assessment of the need for improvements to all forms of movement of people, goods and vehicles as part of the fundamental infrastructure of the town. This should also be included in Planning Strategy documents currently being considered and/or developed.
3. To recommend to Kent County Council that full consideration of new technology be given to help solve transportation problems, particularly in relation to dealing with the severe congestion issues of Tunbridge Wells.
4. To recommend to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council that it leads a project, in the first instance, to fully consider a transportation strategy for the central spine of Tunbridge Wells. This study to include the use of self-driving technology. Thereafter TWBC should consider the possible use of new technology elsewhere in the town and surrounding areas.

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Appendices to the Report

Appendix A – Proposal
Appendix B – Background Information