Coastal ACTION

JULY 2025

IMPROVING ECONOMIC CONNECTIVITY FOR A COASTAL COMMUNITY

Better Infrastructure for Hastings & Rye

The projects that can most improve economic output for a deprived coastal community.

James Prentice

POLICY PAMPHLET



FINDING SOLUTIONS TO THE POLICY PROBLEM HARMING COASTAL COMMUNITIES

Contents:

Improving Infrastructure & connectivity in Hastings & Rye **1**

Rail Links 2

Rail Improvements: 6

Road Links: 10

Improving the A259: 10

Improving the A21: 13

Road improvements around Rye: 14

Connectivity inside the constituency 15

The problem: 15

If walking is so bad, why do people not use public transport? 18

Solutions: 20

What would grow this pool of bus customers? 20

Reducing reliance on cars: 21

Establishing LTN's (The long-term goal): 26

How to achieve all of this: 27

Chapter Endnotes: 31

Pamphlet – Coastal Action. Author: James Prentice
www.capture-politics.co.uk

Improving Infrastructure & connectivity in Hastings & Rye

Deprived coastal communities commonly suffer from poor transport links, with them often being geographically harder to access. Consequently, such places are more likely to be isolated. As a result, the places are often economically less developed, meaning they have become reliant on seasonal trade and specific economic sectors. This problem became compounded after holidaymakers increasingly went abroad, making coastal communities more reliant on links to economic hubs within the UK for economic opportunities. For coastal communities fortunate enough to possess favourable infrastructure links to economic city centres, this development produced limited negative impacts, as such communities had opportunities to commute. This allowed for higher incomes from elsewhere to flow inwards, limiting the damage from economic downturns. However, the coastal communities that were not able to access such opportunities found themselves unable to access economic gains, especially those that economic hubs have increasingly brought. This has meant that many coastal communities have found themselves left behind, stuck on low incomes and unable to attract those with the skills to run essential services and improve the town.

This lack of economic connectedness has not been addressed in infrastructure development, which often has been overly focused on already highly developed economic centres. Additionally, other research has shown that the UK has not invested as much in infrastructure spending, and the infrastructure projects that it does invest in often cost considerably more than those in other countries. This has resulted in deprived coastal communities often being overlooked in rounds of infrastructure spending, with them frequently not being seen as a priority due to fears around limited economic returns. Therefore, whilst other areas of the country have benefited from economic development, deprived coastal communities often

have been unable to access the economic gains, despite such areas being most in need of such benefits.

Consequently, improving coastal communities' economies will require investment in their ageing, limited infrastructure. This will require quicker rail links to central economic hubs and improved roads, giving better access to such towns, so visitors can more easily access these communities. Further, easier access will encourage investment and improve commuting times, incentivising those with skills to stay in the area. Such projects will also help to lower pollution levels, again making the town more attractive to visitors. Improving such connections will also encourage those with higher incomes to move into such areas, as the allure of living near the coast will be less restricted by other demands, such as work and increased commuting times.

In terms of Hastings & Rye, identifying the projects that can achieve this is relatively simple, as such infrastructure improvements have been promised for decades.

Rail Links

The most obvious infrastructure improvement project is faster rail links.

The problem: Hastings to London is only 63 miles away, but journeys to London Charing Cross take 1 hr 47 mins, and even the first London stop, London Bridge, takes 1 hr 38 mins - see Figure 4.1. In contrast, trains from London Paddington to Bristol, a journey of 117 miles (nearly double the distance), only take 1hr 35 mins. Further, Brighton to London Victoria is an additional two miles, 65 miles, and takes just over an hour. Therefore, it is clear that Hastings has poor rail connections in comparison to other urban areas, some of which have become economic hubs in their own right.



*Figure 4.1: Rail links to London from Hastings, with time estimations**[1]***

Indeed, the differences between the recent economic histories of Brighton and Hastings are stark. Brighton, which was also once a deprived seaside community, has received much greater investment than Hastings in recent times. The Brighton and Hove areas have seen major housing and economic developments within their economic centres and, as a result, have attracted much greater inward economic flows from London. In contrast, Hastings has not been able to attract as much investment, leading to its economic centres declining, with its high streets being much more susceptible to rows of empty shops. For instance, Hastings has a commercial vacancy rate (the proportion of empty shops) of 11.7%, above the national average of 10.8%[2]. Further, for every 100 people in Brighton, there were 0.83 businesses (the third highest density of SMEs in Britain[3]), whilst in Hastings, there were only 0.25[4], indicating Brighton is able to sustain higher levels of economic activity. Additionally, Brighton only has a shop vacancy rate of 7.7%[5]. In contrast, the one exception where Hastings & Rye has seen a decrease in empty outlets is St Leonards on Sea (a small shopping centre in the Hastings & Rye constituency). However, this is mostly due to Londoners being forced out of an ever-more expensive city and choosing to move and invest in a fashionable place on the coast. Crucially, what these case studies do show is

that attracting investment and people from London matters economically for deprived coastal communities in the South East. Indeed, the coastal communities that have secured favourable economic links to London are best placed to secure this investment.

Figure 4.2 demonstrates the returns that can be secured by such an investment. If you take the Hastings rail line up to London Charing Cross, you can see that the average income tends to increase as you travel towards London. According to ONS median pay data, an average individual earns £27,000 in Hastings (since figures were last recorded in 2022), whilst people in Battle earn on average £3,000 more. An individual in Tunbridge Wells earns £8,500 more, and someone in Sevenoaks earns £9,500 more[6]. Not only this, it is clear that economic centres in towns have greater investment when travelling up this line. For instance, the shopping centres in Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Battle have attracted a greater number of large shopping chains and appear to be able to sustain larger retail units than compared to economic centres within Hastings. Further, this is also the case for Brighton, with the average median wage being over £5,000 than that of Hastings[7], with it also clearly having a much larger, better-maintained and prosperous economic centre. The average economic output of an adult also shows stark economic divides. On average, one adult of working age in Brighton has an economic output of £34,855.18 per year, with this only being £25,784.74 in Hastings, a £9,000 difference[8]. The unemployment rate in Brighton is also significantly lower, and economic activity is recorded as higher[9]. Clearly, areas that are better connected to economic hubs like Brighton have been able to generate more economic output per person, and whilst this can't all be explained by infrastructure investment, it partly can.

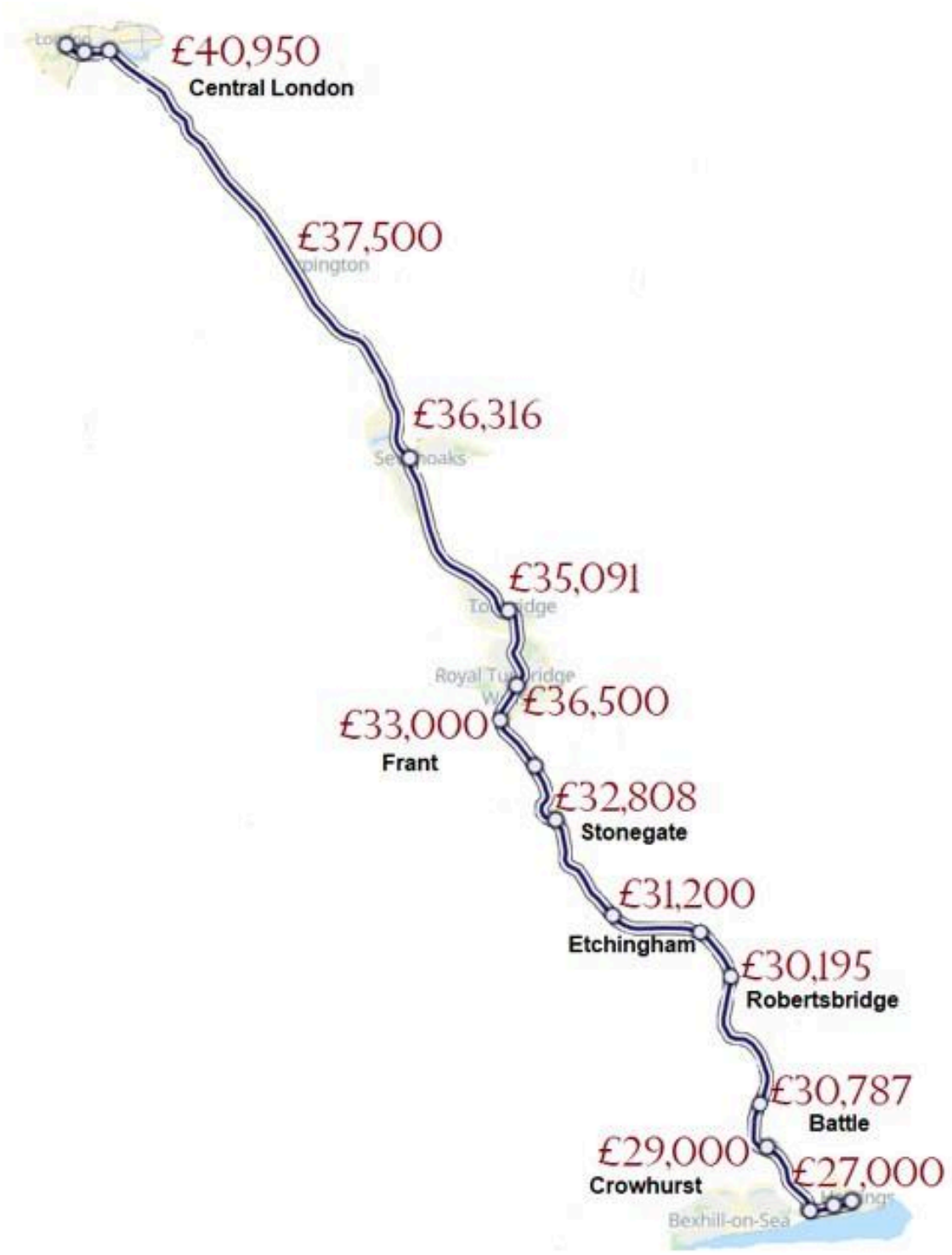


Figure 4.2: Commuting distance from Hastings and average early earnings for one individual.

These economic differences have been known for a long time, and consequently, plans to improve rail links to Hastings were developed long ago. The latest plans have become quite detailed and outline the work that

needs to be done to connect Hastings to London with High-Speed Rail. They show how much this would cost, give a cost-benefit analysis and have produced a timeline for how long it would take to complete.

Rail Improvements:

In summary, when Network Rail explored the high-speed rail possibilities between Hastings and London Charing Cross, they found that it would become very expensive. This was due to high-speed rail trains not being able to fit through some of the old Victorian, narrowly built tunnels. This means that some tunnels would need to be deconstructed and rebuilt to ensure two high-speed trains could fit through them, one factor that would drive the cost-benefit ratio below the desirable level[10]. However, as this finding caused Network Rail to further explore route improvement projects, it turns out there are more viable options available. Firstly, the investigation found improvements could be made to London Charing Cross without High-Speed Rail developments by simply prioritising one of the two services that run every hour, so it stops at fewer stations[11]. This could reduce the amount of standing time and make speed more consistent, allowing Hastings to be connected to central London in just over an hour[12]. It would require political will to change the train schedule in this way, but with the new Labour government pledging to renationalise rail, getting control back of the carriage stock could allow such changes to happen. Further, an exploration of possible work found that fixing signalling and flooding problems on the line could be a cheaper solution to improving travelling times and reliability on the line. Such work would be more viable and affordable.

Secondly, the difficulty in adapting the London Charing Cross line from Hastings encouraged Network Rail to explore routes through Kent towards London St Pancras. As High-Speed Rail services already travel through Ashford International to London St Pancras, Network Rail explored the possibility of improving the line from Hastings to Ashford International to improve travel times to central London[13]. This research found that this project was significantly more viable and could provide the added benefit of

electrifying the Hastings to Ashford line. Currently, this line can only take diesel-operated trains that are very slow, overcrowded and undesirable to travel on[14]. This would benefit the town by reducing pollution in the area and cutting travelling times from Ore to Ashford. As Figure 4.1 shows, travelling times from Ashford are very quick due to High-Speed Rail; therefore, connecting Hastings to Ashford via High-Speed Rail could significantly improve travelling times to London[15]. Further, another added benefit would be more trains with more carriages on the route, reducing overcrowding. Recently, the current train has been reduced to two carriages, producing overcrowding at key times, meaning greater capacity is now needed to avoid this problem.

The plan would involve three stages,

- Phase 1: Improving the track west of Ashford. Network Rail has a detailed plan for this phase and looks to be easy to implement at a low cost, with East Sussex County Council and Network Rail having, at the time, committed a combined £200,000 to deliver the project. This will help to give trains running on electric access to Ashford International on the Hastings line[16].
- Phase 2: Increasing line speed between Eastbourne and Ashford using high-speed rail. This requires electrification of parts of the line which currently operate on diesel-only trains. This will also require improvements to smaller stations to allow for higher speeds and High-Speed train access. For example, this will be needed at Rye and Ore stations. Due to the required building and the electrification of the line all the way from Ore to Ashford, this is where nearly all the costs will be incurred. In 2018, it was estimated that this stage would cost around £200m[17].
- Phase 3: Linking High-speed rail lines to the Hastings line at Ashford International. This requires some development around Ashford International to make the connection, which is estimated to cost around £15m[18].

Therefore, the project would cost between an estimated £200-£300m to complete. Although this is a lot of money, the anticipated returns of the project are much greater. Over a 30-year period, the report highlighted that an estimated return of £711m would be generated, with a further £85m to be gained through increased tourism[19].

Another gain would be much-reduced travelling times, with the report estimating that it would only take 68 minutes to travel to London from Hastings, dramatically down from the current 105. From Rye, it is estimated to take under 55 minutes, down from the current 85 minutes. Again, there would be more than one train an hour at such stops, reducing congestion and, due to electrification, reducing pollution. All this will still occur despite the increase in the number of train journeys. Further, such a plan would allow connections to Ebbsfleet International and, potentially, Eurostar journeys[20].

This potential is very significant as it would benefit the wider economy in Kent and surrounding areas, such as the Hastings & Rye constituency. According to the Good Growth Foundation, it would.

- Provide a significant Economic Boost: The return of services would be worth £3 to £4 billion annually to Kent alone. This is due to the popularity of the line and destination.
- Enhance Passenger Convenience and provide Cost Savings: It would eliminate the need for costly and time-consuming detours to London for passengers in the region, unlocking latent demand.
- Increase Competition and Choice: Ending the current reliance on a single operator will help lower high average prices and break the artificially suppressed demand caused by having only one UK departure point. This will be popular with people across Kent and Sussex.
- Produce greater Capacity and Connectivity: The project would utilise the significant spare capacity on both the HS1 rail line (currently running at less than 50% capacity) and the Channel Tunnel (at less than 40% capacity).

The barriers to better connecting Hastings to Ashford have so far been that line improvements have required other works to be completed before the link to Hastings can be made. The line between Ashford International and St Pancras International has required a great deal of work to connect City Centre high-speed services to the wider Kent area. Therefore, funding has been awarded to such projects, and Hastings has been overlooked[21]. Yet, now that such projects have been completed, the Hastings line may be seen as more desirable and competitive when the next round of funding is decided. Another barrier is local opposition to building a road that will eliminate level crossings, something which won't be compatible with such a high-speed service. Specifically, a small road will need to be built to stop the A259 from crossing the line twice as it leaves Rye[22].

Another advantage of this proposed development is that it does not have the opposition that other plans to improve the line would have. An alternative suggested improvement in the past has been the Willingdon Chord, which was closed in 1935[23]. This proposal involves adding an additional track between Pevensey and Polegate to speed up travel times to Lewes and from here, Gatwick[24]. This would add another train station around Stone Cross, and a shuttle service from Hampden Park and Eastbourne would be created to maintain access to the town. This would also reduce delays at Eastbourne as it would eliminate the old signalling system, subject to repeated failures. However, modern housing development means the rail track would have to be placed on new land to the original site, and this, amongst other things, has created Lib-Dem opposition at Eastbourne[25]. This means that there is unlikely to be a majority at the County Council for this project anytime soon. Yet, high-speed rail services could be extended to both Bexhill and Eastbourne via the Ashford International route. This would bring cross-party support such a project would currently run through Labour, Conservative, and Lib-Dem held constituencies.

Road Links:

Two roads serve as the main entrance to the town. The A259, which creates entrances to the east and west of the town and the A21, which gives access to the town via the north.

Improving the A259:

The one infrastructure project that finally delivered was the Hastings to Bexhill link road. A long-standing problem in the town was high levels of congestion on the main roads in the southern part of the town. This was caused by a combination of tourism, people living in the south of the town needing the road, people in the centre of the town using it as their main access road and travellers passing through to Bexhill, all using the road simultaneously. Proposals to solve this issue mostly focused on the Hastings to Bexhill link road. This bypass was designed in the 1980s and had even been proposed in the early 1990s. The designers of the scheme argued that it would take pressure off the A259 by giving cars an alternative route across to Bexhill. They also argued it would help create economic opportunities and incentivise tourism by making it easier for people to get in and out of the town. Due to a cross-party agreement on the economic and environmental benefits of the project, there had been a sustained effort to secure funding for this project. After being considered in many rounds of funding, the agreement to finally build the £120m bypass was secured in 2013, with the project being finished in 2015. So far, all the evidence from contractors hired out to assess the value of the scheme has found that the link road has reduced congestion and lowered emissions[26]. Such reports have also found that it has made more land available for economic development and likely has helped generate economic growth. This will likely have long-term benefits due to making it easier for tourists to visit the town.

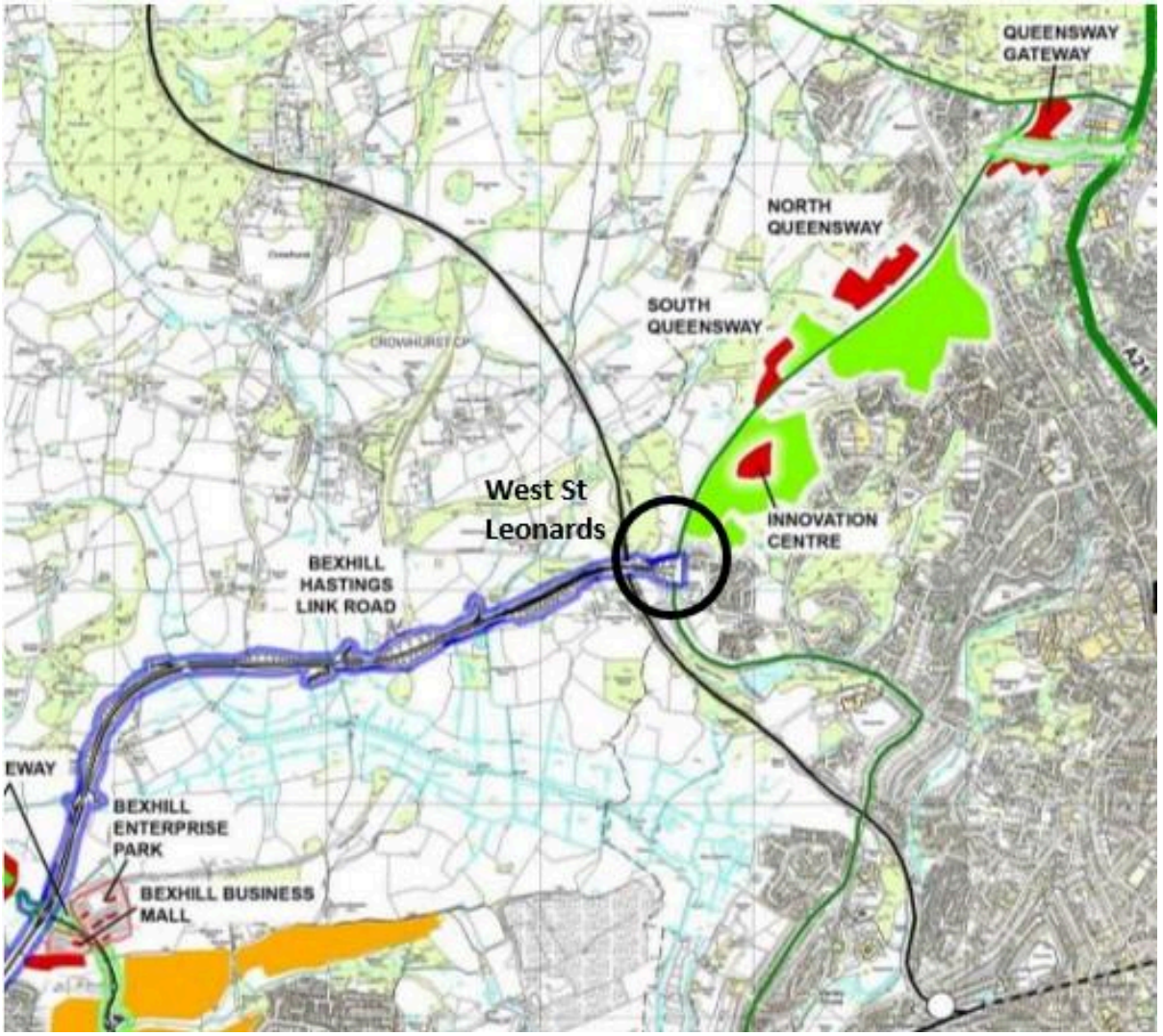


Figure 4.3: a map outlining the link road and Queensway Gateway connections.

However, one aspect of the project remains uncompleted. The Queensway Gateway Road, designed to connect the North of the town to the link road. - See Figure 4.3. This would give people who live in this part of the town better access to Bexhill and would ease congestion on roads, giving access to Hastings from Surrey, Kent and London areas. This will help people get into the town and reduce traffic, again helping to reduce pollution levels and improve economic access for the town.

This has not been built largely due to the money allocated to the project not being used efficiently, and delays being caused by ESCC and SeaChange (the company hired by ESCC to build the Queensway connection). Initially, out of

the £120m secured, £10m was diverted to pay for the building of this part of the link road. Specifically, the road is designed to connect The Ridge and the top of Sedlescombe Road North to the Queensway Road (which will take you to the link road). After the link road was completed in 2015, this final phase of the project was set to be completed in 2016. Initially, most of the road was built with limited delays. However, the stumbling block fell on the final part of the road, which required the road to be built on land that some didn't want to see developed. This meant that the road's pathway needed to be redesigned, causing delays and the money to run out before the road could be completed. 8 years later, the road is still uncompleted and locally has been dubbed the road to nowhere; see Figure 4.4. This means that the north of the town continues to experience heavy congestion[27], meaning that this problem continues to limit access to the town and economic opportunities.

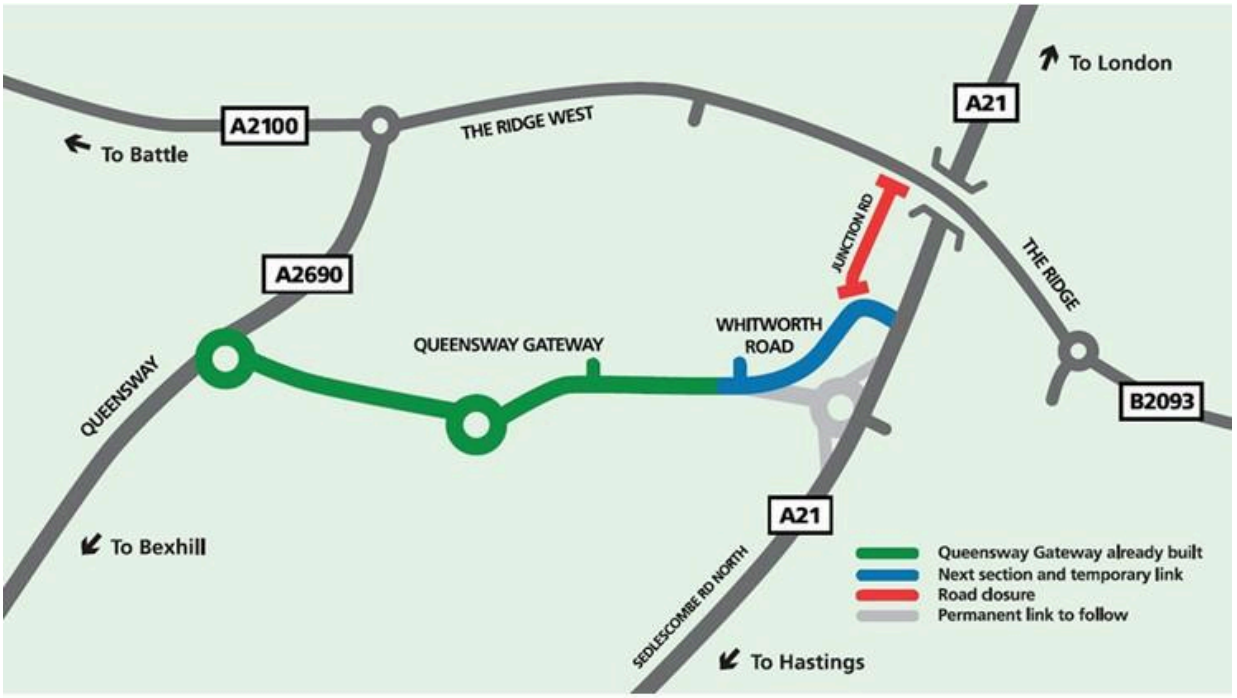


*Figure 4.4 Map of the proposed Queensway Gateway Road, outlining the part that is unfinished in blue**[28]**.*

Currently, the project has been assigned another £3m, and SeaChange has been replaced by new contractors[29]. The latest round of funding means the project continues to run millions of pounds over budget, with no guarantee it will be completed more than 8 years after its initial expected completion

date. Therefore, all local politicians will need to hold the County Council to account to ensure the project is completed. With the latest County Council elections due in May 2025, this presents the perfect opportunity to do this. Yet, as of writing this in July 2025, the road still appears to be facing major delays – with the local MP pressing for quicker action.

Improving the A21:

The main route into the town is through the north, where anyone travelling from Kent and London will likely flow through. The A21 is mostly a dual carriageway, but it becomes a single-lane road when approaching the coast, with most of the road south of Tunbridge Wells being single-lane. Anyone travelling down this road into Hastings on a frequent basis will have experienced the long delays and sitting in traffic, with the part of the A21 that connects to Queensway and Sedlescombe Road North being a particular chokepoint. Poor infrastructure here has long limited the ability for vehicles to enter the town smoothly, meaning this has historically deterred economic investment. Transport for the South East has described this part of the road as "the least developed in the South East, making it a core barrier for economic regeneration.[30]"

Due to the poor infrastructure locally, other smaller-scale projects have been prioritised. Therefore, plans for improving the A21 have been less developed and have not been considered for funding. Current plans mostly involve upgrading the stretches of the A21 between Kippings Cross and Lamberhurst, a bypass for Hurst Green (the last large village to remain bisected by the road). These plans also aim to give better access to Hastings near the Conquest Hospital. To do this, it would involve building exit points on some parts of the A21 and dualling the road when approaching Hastings to allow for larger volumes of traffic to flow through the town. This also aims to reduce congestion and pollution. As this would improve access to Hastings, it would also incentivise more people to visit and invest in Hastings. This development will also include improving the safety of the road. Currently, the road is recorded as being a persistent high-risk road by The Road Safety

Foundation[31]. It has also been identified as one of the most dangerous roads in the country[32]. Therefore, not only would the A21 project increase economic opportunity and reduce pollution for the town, it could also make roadways in the area safer. In 2022, politicians from across the political spectrum have formed the '*The A21 Reference Group*' to help promote the value of this project and move it towards applying for funding[33]. Yet, with the recent election, many of these politicians are no longer in office. Therefore, a renewed effort to build a political coalition across Sussex and Kent will be needed to give the development the momentum that is needed for it to one day be implemented.

Road improvements around Rye:

For heavy traffic approaching the constituency from the east, a bypass in the 1990s was considered. Specifically, there was concern around the increasing levels of traffic for both the Rye and Winchelsea villages, particularly with the increased number of large lorries not designed for such small idyllic places. To address this, a bypass was designed to take indirect heavy traffic away from the villages by building a tunnel under the River Rother, although specifics are hard to find due to the plans being dropped early on[34]. Yet, locals at the time were concerned this would take commerce and tourism away from the area, so the project was never pursued. Instead, road improvements from Ashford to Folkestone were later given approval from the New Labour government. However, as traffic problems and the number of heavy vehicles that pass through have grown, local opinion on this subject may have changed. Therefore, local representatives could be approached with a view to seeing if such projects could be submitted for consideration for later rounds of funding.

Overall, it is clear that infrastructure in Hastings & Rye has long been neglected and that there is a range of options local representatives and campaigners could support. However, even if these external developments can be secured, there are still internal transport problems in the

constituency, particularly within the Hastings area. It is this subject that the chapter now turns to.

Connectivity inside the constituency

This section of the chapter was written by Anna Sabin, a local transport campaigner.

The problem:

We are relying too much on the private car for transport and paying a terrible price for it. An average of 5 people every day are killed on UK roads, 82 are seriously injured, and we are being exposed to TRAP - Traffic Related Air Pollution. According to the UK government, it is estimated to cause between 29,000 and 43,000 deaths per year in the UK[35]. In Hastings, the most recent yearly data show that there were 238 car accidents, with 47 serious cases resulting in injury, and one of these being a fatality[36]. Longer-term, traffic-generated carbon dioxide constitutes more than 25% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions, which need to be halved by 2030 to meet the 2015 Paris agreement[37]. This is essential to keeping global temperature below 2 degrees, above pre-industrial levels.

Additionally, there is the problem of our local roads not being able to cope with the quantity of traffic. In Hastings, since 2016, the number of yearly potholes has increased by nearly 3,000[38]. Because of the rapidly rising number of potholes, the proportion of road defects in Hastings cleared on time has decreased by 20% since 2018[39]. Due to the damage these potholes cause to cars, ESCC is paying out over £28,000 a year in compensation, an increase of over £26,000 since 2018[40]. As the number and size of vehicles swell, so does the difficulty of finding a legitimate place to park. Consequently, increasingly, cars get parked on the pavement and paving is damaged. Last year, in Hastings, 796 pavements were recorded as damaged and in need of repair. There are now so many defective pavements that the County Council are struggling to repair them, with only 60% being repaired on time[41].

The evidence clearly shows us that we collectively need to walk, use public transport and cycle more than we do. 30% of all households in Hastings are there already, as they don't own a car[42]. Also, within the other households that own cars, people still walk. Children, people with sight impairment, and people who have aged out of driving must walk if they are to get about independently. Despite walkers being such a notable proportion of the town, they are not well served in everyday life. Our main centres (Silverhill, Old Hastings, Queens Road, Bexhill Road, Ore Village and London Road), where we'd like to shop locally, walking infrastructure is neglected. The pavements are narrow, there are few safe crossings, noise levels are high, there's nowhere to sit, and the paving stones are broken. These places, which used to be town hubs, feel like ruined remnants of a past era. Even the walk routes to and from any of Hastings' four train stations to the shops or sea are un-signposted obstacle courses over high-traffic roads. If you are a child or sight-impaired, this landscape has given you no thought at all. Indeed, the data confirms this, especially for the elderly, where 31% of those over 65 say they do not regularly walk due to safety concerns around paving [42b]. As keeping mobility is key to health in later life, this is something that only increases pressures on NHS services and their respective budgets (see chapter 6 for more details).

For episodes of walking glory, there is Alexandra Park, the West Hill, the Promenade and, in the mud-free summer months, the East Hill Country Park and Combe Valley Countryside Park. But there are lots of bad-for-walking streets between them - up to 3 miles-worth depending on where you live. There are also many hills, making long-distance walking too hard for too many people. Without an adequate public transport system, the car-less are literally isolated from economic centres, leaving them less able to access the town's economic opportunities and more vulnerable to unemployment. Partly because of these accessibility difficulties, there are young adults unable to get to college or work, as the place they need to get to is a lot further away than school used to be. They can't afford the bus, definitely can't afford the train, and walking feels full of unpleasantness and peril. This is particularly

the case in the West of the town, where both Bexhill College and Hastings College are far away, and public transport is expensive and of poor quality. Too many of these young people stay at home and are called NEETs[43].

Walking is not only difficult - it is seen to be dangerous. The reality about a car-privileging layout is that you can't in all conscience ask parents to encourage a ten-year-old to walk half a mile to school or go to the shops or park unaccompanied. When I was a girl, I walked a mile to school. I used that walking time to kick through leaves, be surprised by trees full of starlings and dawdle with friends - all very good for growing up. One girl in our class got driven, and we all considered the family mad. Now, school drop-off and pick-up have become a hideous motorised tussle for space, often taking up hours of parents' time and denying children their independence. Much worse, the generational cycle of family car use becomes the norm, and more and more cars are placed on ever busier roads.

The walker is not only marginalised, very literally, by the car, but when they want to cross a road, they can face danger. A zebra crossing, the most pedestrian-respecting of them all, is good, but even they can be dangerous, as not all drivers stop when they should. Then, to add to the disincentives, the road layout system often has pedestrians walk further, around barriers or through underpasses, so walking is made unnecessarily time-consuming. By a thousand slights, you are being encouraged not to walk. No wonder the people aren't tempted, and cars continue to clog up our roads and pollute the town.



Figure 4.5 Anna's vision for better connectivity throughout the Hastings Borough. This map of Hastings forms a full and coherent network of drive-through roads, bus and bike lanes. Blue streets = traditional shopping streets (bus and bike-only). The turquoise dots are suggested locations for traffic filters. The uncoloured roads are for everything they are used for now.

If walking is so bad, why do people not use public transport?

Trains aren't feasible for many:

People rely on their cars because public transport serves the town poorly. Few parts of the Borough are reached by trains, and the stations, all in the south, are not always frequently stopped at, meaning long waits. Once on board, for short distances, trains are fast and reliable enough when not delayed or cancelled. An advantage is you can take your bike on a train if it's not too crowded - though sometimes it is, meaning you and your bike can be left waiting for another train with room for you. Though at least with trains,

there's accurate real-time information and Wi-Fi, making you feel more in charge of your journey.

Buses aren't cutting it:

Buses, by contrast, do not accommodate bikes, often have poor Wi-Fi coverage and inaccurate real-time information. There are only a few short stretches of bus lane leading up to traffic lights on the A259 Bexhill Road. This is because on-street parking and a lack of political muscle to move it mean the bus lane sections are short, and buses are often stuck in traffic. Even when buses do move, due to the state of the roads in some parts of town, bus journeys can be rough and unpleasant. These issues create poor passenger numbers, hence low investment in the buses. The one company we have operating our bus network is a monopoly[44]. With no competition, they can run old buses which break down more than they should, don't reliably report their positions and frequently don't arrive on time, as they don't have to worry about other providers taking customers from them. Regulation and penalties for poor service might improve things, but it appears that ESCC are obliged to supply with only one supplier in town. Therefore, the town's level of service remains as it is – shoddy with a tiny pool of customers[45].

If you can afford a car and there is parking at your destination, why would you choose to ride the no-faster-than-a-car bus? This is the stasis we are in. Buses have no advantage over the car for getting about Hastings, so their customers consist predominantly of the young, the old, disabled, people who can't drive cars and people who have subsidised or free travel. This customer pool may shrink yet further when the Bus Service Improvement Plan subsidy capping fares at £2 ends at the end of this year[46]. Consequently, bus riding may become less economical again, forcing more people towards the car despite the state of the roads, which will only make the roads and pavements worse for everyone.

Solutions:

What would grow this pool of bus customers?

Firstly, recognising that bus passengers are foot passengers. They walk to the bus stop. So, encouraging more public transport (particularly bus) use will require improvements to conditions for its walking and wheeling customers. You, and the wobbliest stumbler to the most able-bodied strider, need your transport authority to focus on providing you with lovely, uncluttered, well-signposted and well-maintained walkways - then you'll walk more.

Secondly, redesign the town in a way that will aid people on foot. A mile takes 20 minutes to walk the full 3 miles, which would take you edge to edge through Hastings, and takes just an hour. But no one in Hastings lives more than half a mile from a bus route, so journeys could be sped up and access to economic centres improved by enabling walking and building better bus routes. This would help the buses become more frequent and reliable, and thus grow their pool of customers and their profitability. Then we'd have the basic infrastructure we need to provide a cheap and effective way of tackling isolation and increasing economic opportunity.

Thirdly, focus on bus speed. More subsidies for bus companies may increase ridership in the short term, but such funding is not a long-term prospect. Without ceaseless government subsidy or Stagecoach charity, the only way to increase bus appeal with better, more frequent and reliable buses would be to provide more dedicated road space for them. Bus lanes and, where roads are too narrow, bus-only roads to speed the buses up could greatly increase passenger numbers. More speed - more frequency for the same money. More speed and frequency - more use. More use - more profit. More profit - more investment in more and better buses. All this results in less need to rely on a car, helping those who mainly walk to reach their destinations.

Finally, after a sufficient customer base has been established, with possibly a degree of bus competition, then you would want to aim for a high service standard in the local public transport itself. That would mean good coverage

of the town, better connections to other towns and frequent and early-to-late services in clean buses or trains with Wi-Fi.

Reducing reliance on cars:

School Streets are a physical way to turn back our unhelpful evolution of car habits. With a few hundred metres of road closed to traffic on either side of the school gate (except for access for the people who live there), the school drop-off and pick up can be transformed back into scenes of play and chat rather than pavement parking and fumes. School Streets can be minimal, with the road closed to traffic for just an hour at drop-off and pick-up time, or can be double red lines for no stopping if the school gate is on a main road. The purpose of these initiatives is to reduce road danger near school streets, tackle congestion near school areas, improve air quality in built-up roads where children will frequently be walking by and encourage more children to walk to school by making it safer.

Transport for London (TfL) has analysed case studies of such initiatives and found that such schemes had increased cycling use, drivers observed slower speed limits, fewer cars on the pavements, fewer cars being used at peak times and a reduction in emissions near schools[47]. The report specifically noted a 6% reduction in collisions and a drop in nitrogen dioxide, the most potent pollutant emitted from cars. The report also monitored roads near schools and found an increased number of children walking to school with parents, with fewer cars blocking the pavement walkways to schools[48]. The report also found more pedestrians using the pavement, more cyclists using their designated part of the road, and more cars sticking to the road and not clogging up school gate access. Overall, the initiative has proven very popular with participants in places like Hackney, Walthamstow and Brighton[49] and was also very popular when trialled, all too briefly, in Hastings at All Saints and Blacklands Academies. Therefore, introducing more trials in Hastings with a view to establishing permanent schemes could help reduce reliance on cars in built-up school areas.

Tackling bad parking habits:

Firstly, we could invest in off-street parking hubs. On-street parking is always exactly where a potential bus or cycle lane would be. In recent times, the East Sussex Transport Authority has been reluctant to ask people to park somewhere in the neighbourhood off-street, maybe five minutes' walk away from a person's home or destination. However, there are things which could sweeten the pill of being asked to park your car a short walk away - like having carpool cars in the neighbourhood. They reduce car ownership, and therefore the overall number of cars, many times over. And why not walk to a carpool car instead of a car you own, if you can't keep your own car in front of your house anyway?

Secondly, Park and Ride initiatives could help reduce excessive car use and parking in key areas. The Borough Council owns land perfectly placed for Park and Rides on the edge of town at Norths Seat, Whitworth Road and Queensway, all of which could potentially spare people who are visiting Hastings by car the difficulty of finding a parking space. In-town parking causes two varieties of complaint. One is that it's very hard to find a parking space nearby when you need it. The other is that centre and seafront parking is ruinously expensive and is depriving local businesses of custom and local people of access to their own town and beach. Currently, we deter car use by making parking expensive, meaning it is only accessible to people with the means to pay for it. This may lessen car use but has obvious flaws, the biggest one being to push people away from the economic centres of our town. But investing in out-of-town parking with frequent shuttle running loops passing close to popular destinations, such as the hospital, college, offices, industry and economic centres, could increase access to everything for everyone. This could help develop a proper, popular public transport system for visitors and locals. Any freed space could then be used for more civic purposes, like housing and public gardens.

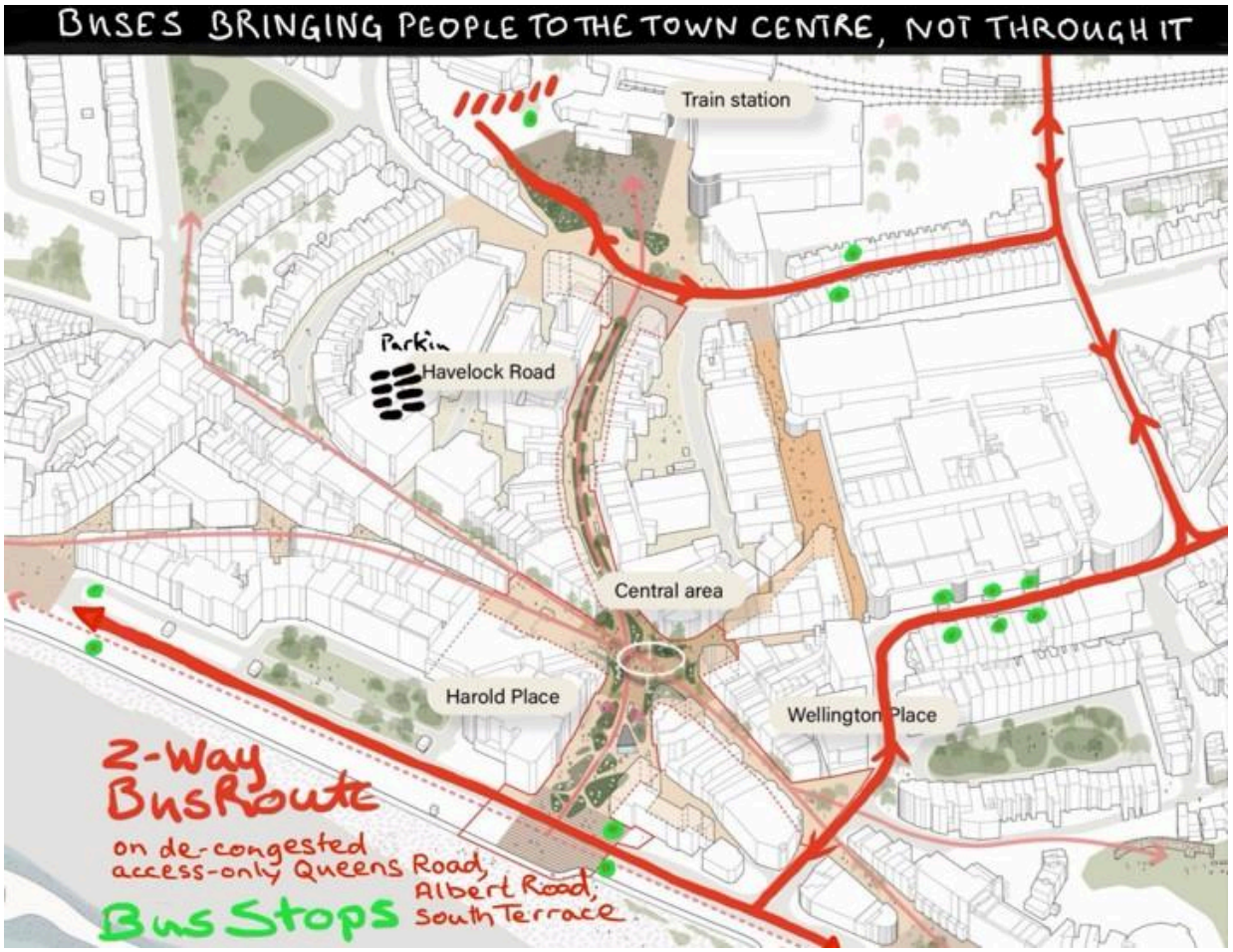


Figure 4.6 Anna's alternative view of how traffic could flow in the town centre, less space for vehicles in the centre, more room for pedestrians and cyclists. The pink routes represent Arup's view of Hastings Town Centre. The red roads are the suggested bus and access-only route around the Town Centre, but not through it. The green dots are bus stops. The town Centre could then be pedestrianised and act as a tourist magnet.

Thirdly, our current parking habits make cycle infrastructure hard to develop. In 2022, a grant of £800k was assigned to build part of the long-planned Hastings Greenway, but, at the eleventh hour, permission to cycle along it was voted down by the Borough Council and the money left town[50]. The plan had been to route the first leg of the Greenway through Alexandra Park, which would have made Park walkers budge up and share a busy path with cyclists. Now the Park route hasn't been built, and further plans to extend the Greenway to the hospital have been shelved[51]. The hospital as a destination is one of Hastings' most obvious transport failures. Its car park is full to overflowing, and there are long-lasting jams of cars and buses there

every day. Therefore, to encourage more cycle paths to be built in future, we must select a network of roads which can be configured to accommodate cycle lanes. For instance, putting parking on one side of the road or providing off-street parking in some places instead of on-street parking could achieve this. This is the only way to incentivise the greater cycle use we want. Electric bikes, cargo bikes, shopping bikes and sports bikes are all available, but without safe routes to ride on. Yet, cycling is four or five times faster than walking and could give a lot of people an ultimately affordable, quick and efficient alternative to the car.

However, to date, there's only one stretch of cycleway in Hastings, the Promenade, and there is nowhere to safely store a bike if you don't have a hall or a garage.

Improving access for cyclists:

The promise of a very nice, though hardly dense, network of traffic-free cycling has existed for the best part of two decades. The Hastings Greenway, has been written into successive Local Transport Plans, but the route along the sea is the only part of it to have been built.



Figure 4.7: The proposed Greenway cycling Route. It is designed to allow cyclists quicker and safer access across Hastings. Source: Hastings' Greenway's website https://hastingsgreenway.org/

As an outline plan, it's good but would need hard work and resilience to see it through. The leg from Hastings Station to Ore Station, depends on NetworkRail to find room for it, which current NetworkRail managers may not allow. Another leg depends on Hastings Borough Council allowing cycling in Alexandra Park. But, as stated earlier, last year, HBC councillors voted not to allow it, meaning there will need to be a huge political effort to bring this to another vote. The wide, traffic-lite road running parallel to the park could have been used for the cycle route instead, but the necessary tidying up of the parking there to make room for it would not be considered by either council. This stretch of cycle lane is also vital to improve safety in the area, as in 2023, there were 10 accidents on St Helens Road[52] (the main road adjacent to Alexandra Park). These failures caused the next failure - the next leg of the route not being built. This route is planned to continue northeastwards across traffic-heavy Silverhill and through Wishing Tree to

link up with the existing Link Road Greenway, which takes you to Bexhill (which would have given us a full town-to-town cycle route). Making cycling safer within small towns is key to encouraging greater uptake, as more than 50% of all cycling journeys are under 5 miles, and 62% of people in the UK currently say they won't cycle due to perceived safety problems. Again, this deters greater physical activity, as when the Sussex NHS Trust improved cycling schemes, they found this increased staff physical activity by 59%. [52b]. Increasing activity is something which is vital for improving public health and reducing strains on public sector bodies and their finances (see chapter 6 for more details).

Thus, because Hastings Borough Council wouldn't allow cycling in the Park and East Sussex County Council wouldn't implement a Traffic Regulation Order to clear a cycle lane on Lower Park Road, the £800k procured for it got absorbed back into ESCC funds[53]. New funds will have to be found if a full Greenway cycle route is to be established, which might not have force behind it at the county level due to historical political decisions made in Hastings. And possibly, if Hastings' potential cyclists cannot be provided with a Greenway, Low Traffic Neighbourhoods may be the best way to make cycling safer. We turn to this potential option now.

Establishing LTN's (The long-term goal):

By accidental design, we have built ourselves a transport system which prioritises the private car. The downsides of this for safety and child-friendly neighbourhoods have been recognised for decades. Hence, housing developments since the 70s have been built as collections of cul-de-sacs to prevent through traffic. They have one road in and the same road out. LTNs are a retrofit design to achieve the same quiet-street regime in older neighbourhoods originally built permeable for walkers, horse carriages and bicycles. The LTN treatment makes a neighbourhood accessible to cars but prevents them from being used as through routes. It takes neighbourhoods back to being through routes for walking and cycling[54]. Hackney and Walthamstow have implemented such designs and have deployed planters,

rain gardens, bollards and cameras to prevent residential streets from being used as through routes[55]. Bus Gates in such neighbourhoods can allow buses the same permeability as bikes, making their routes short and uncongested. Suddenly, walkers, cyclists and bus users would have more manoeuvrability than car users - just the conditions needed to incentivise people to use public transport and walkways more and to free up space, improve urban areas and reduce emissions.

Hackney mostly consists of LTNs. Its through-traffic is confined to just a few roads, which, due to 'traffic evaporation', are no more congested now than they were when cars could drive through everywhere. Walking, cycling, socialising and play have come back out into Hackney's public spaces[56]. For example, previously dreary, dangerous crossroads have been turned into little parks where people can freely walk, cycle and sit to chat. Hastings' model would be Hackney's, as both boroughs have no choice but to be driven through, and most roads aren't wide enough to segregate traffic modes. So, as in Hackney, to establish LTNs, we would need an improved, car-dedicated road network for motorised vehicles.

To limit disruption, LTNs could be created gradually after Park and Ride bus investments reduce town parking. Incrementally, some parking acreage could be repurposed for bus-only lanes, cycle lanes, car-pool car parking, on-street cycle storage, on-street bin hubs, street trees, widened pavements outside local shops and even, in the case of large off-street parking sites, new town housing. The end goal of this policy would be to make Hastings a more liveable, healthy, wealthy and tourist-attracting town.

How to achieve all of this:

It's political leadership that's needed to improve local transport infrastructure, and we would recommend local politicians support the following measures:

- Get transport officers who support the principle that public space is for people to live in, not just to move through in vehicles. Ask transport officers to design a transport system according to these principles –

Applies to: Hastings Borough Council (HBC) and East Sussex County Council (ESCC).

- Increase enforcement on illegal parking to deter poor parking practices – *HBC & ESCC.*
- Create safer and better-signposted walking routes between desirable places, like parks, economic centres and tourist destinations. This will help improve tourism, increase economic access and encourage walking across the town - *HBC & ESCC.*
- Prioritise the maintenance and repair of paving over residential roads to encourage more walking - *ESCC.*
- Create leafy, safe residential neighbourhoods with tree-planted chicanes to break up the long open roads. This will slow down cars, thus creating Slow Traffic Neighbourhoods. It will also improve the look of streets and provide shade and biodiversity. - *ESCC & HBC.*
- Trial a hub for parking and car-hire in a road group within the town where there are already too few parking spaces for residents' cars. Here, you could restrict on-street parking further to encourage use of the off-street hub. If the scheme is successful, then it could be widened across the Borough - *HBC & ESCC.*
- Support improving Wi-Fi coverage within public transport to make such travel more attractive.
- Improve public transport standards to increase its uptake. Also, give it a sustainable future through Local Authority regulation, which could bring in competition - *ESCC & HBC.*
- Trial a Park and Ride scheme alongside reduced parking in town to test its popularity and ability to reduce the number of cars on town centre roads – *HBC.*
- Apply for funding from Active Travel England to create new and improved walking, cycling and bus routes in Hastings, particularly to and from its

economic centres. Such investment could build the long-promised Hastings Greenway project to make walkers and cyclists connected to all parts of the Borough, no matter where they live. This could be done using Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) guidelines - *ESCC & HBC.*

- Make public realm improvements like bus-only roads, widened pavements, sociable street furniture and plants, as appropriate, to our main Shopping Streets. This will bring back their worth as local shopping centres and attract people to these economic centres. This can be supported by both Hastings Borough Council and a supportive East Sussex County Council.
- Use the Town Deal Fund to create the Hastings Garden Town as initially intended, with local residents being better consulted at all stages.



Figure 4.8:A graphical representation of what the greening of Hastings' Town centre could look like. Source: Hastings Town Deal https://www.hastingstowndeal.co.uk/town-centre-public-realm-green-connections

The proposal is designed to build a landscape of Sustainable Urban Drainage gardens from the seafront to the station to mitigate the inevitable future town flooding. It is also designed to create a large, completely traffic-free town centre public realm that connects the station to the sea with shops, cafes, pubs, restaurants and meeting places. This should be good for residents, businesses and holidaymakers.

Visitors arriving by train would be able to walk to the beach either through a vibrant shopping centre or down a garden road to the sea. Cafe tables could be spread out on the paving amid the greenery; people could come and go by bus, bike or foot, with bus stops and taxis being available at several points within the town centre. This layout would give pedestrian- and cyclist-privileged access in the town centre and the crossing over to the seafront.

Making Queens Road bus and access-only would be necessary to compensate for the time lost for being routed round, but they should not be allowed through the centre, as this will restrict west-to-east travel across the town centre. To see these plans built, the project must be taken back from the ESCC transport officers who have failed to implement it and given to local groups, politicians and freshly trained council officers to manage its delivery.

This process could include more sensitive and informed public consultation than has so far taken place to more coherently reflect Hastings residents' ambitions for the town centre.

Chapter Endnotes:

[1] Railway enthusiast Forum discussing the Willingdon curve and connections from Hastings to London
https://uk.railway.narkive.com/xzqfZ151/willingdon-chord:i.26.1.full

[2] Department of Levelling Up and Communities report – Hastings High Street and regeneration statistics.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6604196a91a320001a82b095/Hastings.pdf

[3] Brighton business density being reported as the third highest in the UK, according to a local newspaper, '*The Argus*'
https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/13886423.brighton-has-highest-proportion-of-creative-smes-in-uk/

[4] Brighton and Hastings Council's business reports divided by the adult population (per 100 people) according to the ONS.
https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/default/files/migrated/article/inline/key%20sectors.pdf

[5] A Brighton retail website outlining that shop vacancy rates in Brighton are below the national average
https://brilliantbrighton.com/news/brighton-bid-bucks-local-and-national-retail-vacancy-trends/

[6] ONS earnings data, median pay – Sussex and Kent counties.
https://ONS-earnings-data

[7] ONS earnings data, median pay – Sussex and Kent counties
https://ONS-earnings-data

[8] Total economic output per person: The Chamber of Commerce estimated economic output (Hastings and Brighton) divided by the total population according to the ONS (Hastings and Brighton).

[9] ONS constituency Labour market trends (Hastings and Brighton)
https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/labourmarketlocal/E06000043/

[10] Network Rail report into infrastructure development on Kent and East Sussex Routes
https://networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/South-East-Kent-route-study-print-version.pdf

[11] Network Rail report into infrastructure development on Kent and East Sussex Routes

https://networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/South-East-Kent-route-study-print-version.pdf

[12] Network Rail report into infrastructure development on Kent and East Sussex Routes – Improving times to London Charing Cross from Hastings https://networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/South-East-Kent-route-study-print-version.pdf

[13] Network Rail report into infrastructure development on Kent and East Sussex Routes https://networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/South-East-Kent-route-study-print-version.pdf

[14] Rail Forum commenting on an overcrowded, unclean service between Hastings and Ashford. https://www.railforums.co.uk/threads/overcrowding-ashford-brighton-service.102653/

[15] Railway enthusiast Forum discussing the Willingdon curve and connections from Hastings to London https://uk.railway.narkive.com/xzqfZ151/willingdon-chord:i.26.1.full

[16] Railway enthusiast Forum discussing the Willingdon curve and connections from Hastings to London https://uk.railway.narkive.com/xzqfZ151/willingdon-chord:i.26.1.full

[17] Cost estimation of improving the Ashford to Hastings line. https://networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/South-East-Kent-route-study-print-version.pdf

[18] Railway enthusiast Forum discussing the Willingdon curve and connections from Hastings to London https://uk.railway.narkive.com/xzqfZ151/willingdon-chord:i.26.1.full

[19] Railway enthusiast Forum discussing the Willingdon curve and connections from Hastings to London https://uk.railway.narkive.com/xzqfZ151/willingdon-chord:i.26.1.full

[20] Railway enthusiast Forum discussing the Willingdon curve and connections from Hastings to London https://uk.railway.narkive.com/xzqfZ151/willingdon-chord:i.26.1.full

[21] The MarshLink Action Group outlining the government preferring other projects at a rail summit held in Hastings. https://www.mlag.org.uk/hastings-rail-summit-hosted-by-amber-rudd-mp-6-october/

[22] A local newspaper, '*Rye News*' outlining the impact of High Speed Rail development https://www.ryenews.org.uk/news/real-facts-highspeed-rail

[23] An Eastbourne Council cabinet record outlining the plans, history and Lib-Dem opposition to the project.
https://democracy.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/Data/Eastbourne%20Borough%20Council%20Cabinet/20101215

[24] Network Rail outlining plans of the proposed Willingdon Chord improvement.
https://www.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/South-East-Route-Sussex-Area-Route-Study-FINAL.pdf

[25] A local news website, '*Sussex Express*', highlighting a County Council meeting where Lib-Dem opposition to the Willingdon Chord was announced.
https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/news/politics/calls-for-new-rail-chord-so-some-hastings-trains-can-bypass-eastbourne-3862865

[26] Consultants hired by ESCC to review works carried out from 2009 – 2016 (which includes the link road).
https://hochtief.co.uk/project/bexhill-to-hastings-link-road/

[27] A local newspaper, the '*Sussex Express*' highlighting the continued congestion Queensway faces.
https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/news/transport/hastings-drivers-fury-over-gridlock-after-start-of-queensway-gateway-road-work-utter-farce-4766656

[28] A local Newspaper, '*Hastings Independent Press*' outlines the road to nowhere.https://www.hastingsindependentpress.co.uk/articles/news/works-to-resume-on-queensway-link-road/

[29] A local Newspaper, *Hastings Independent Press,* reporting new contractors being hired.
https://www.hastingsindependentpress.co.uk/articles/news/county-council-hires-fresh-contractors-to-complete-link-road/

[30] A local news site *'Heathfield news'* reporting on the A21 and its problems
https://www.theheathfieldnews.co.uk/mps-and-local-councillors-push-for-a21-to-be-a-dual-carriageway/

[31] A Car website, '*Fleetworld*', quoting '*The Road Safety Foundation*', saying the A21 has long been a dangerous road.
https://fleetworld.co.uk/a21-in-east-sussex-is-most-persistent-high-risk-road-on-english-strategic-road-network/

[32] A local Newspaper, *The Sussex Express*, reporting that the A21 has been identified as a dangerous road based on road accident statistics.
https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/news/road-accident-statistics-2727977

[33] A local Newspaper, *The Sussex Express,* reporting the A21 project and the political support behind it.
https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/news/road-accident-statistics-2727977

[34] A local newspaper, *Rye News*, outlining historical plans for a bypass for the A259 near Rye
https://www.ryenews.org.uk/opinions/finally-time-for-a-bypass

[35] Reported road casualties, Great Britain, UK government annual report: 2022,
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-annual-report-2022/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-annual-report-2022

[36] Car accident data in East Sussex, Hastings figures 1999 – 2019, the data shows roughly 250 incidents a year, with around 45 serious injuries and 1-2 fatalities https://crashreport.co.uk/east-sussex/hastings/

[37] IPCC report on emissions targets
https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/04/ipcc-report-mitigation-climate-change

[38] Response to a FOI request to ESCC on the number of yearly potholes, 2016 – 2023.

[39] Response to a FOI request to ESCC on the number of yearly potholes, 2016 – 2023.

[40] Response to a FOI request to ESCC on the yearly damage and compensation from potholes, 2018 – 2023.

[41] Response to a FOI request to ESCC on the number of damaged potholes and repair times in 2023.

[42] Data from the 2021 National Census, car usage data – Hastings & Rye.

[42b] Information gathered by a presentation delivered by a surgeon from the Sussex NHS Trust who campaigns for better public health.

[43] An ONS article outlining the high level of unemployment among young people in Hastings & Rye
https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/labourmarketlocal/E07000062/

[44] A 1994 Parliament Hansard record debating the problem of bus monopolies in the South East of the UK.
https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199394/cmhansrd/1994-11-02/Writtens-2.html

[45] An ESCC report showing the low proportion of bus users within the County.
https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/roads-transport/transport-planning/local-transport-plan/local-transport-plan-4/evidence-base-report

[46] ESCC confirming the £2 bus cap will end on the 21st December 2024.
https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/roads-transport/public/buses/2-bus-fares

[47] TfL report of school street case studies:
https://content.tfl.gov.uk/getting-to-know-school-streets-case-studies-2022.pdf

[48] TfL report of school street case studies:
https://content.tfl.gov.uk/getting-to-know-school-streets-case-studies-2022.pdf

[49] TfL report of school street case studies:
https://content.tfl.gov.uk/getting-to-know-school-streets-case-studies-2022.pdf

[50] Hastings Borough Council webpage outlining the proposed route, its costs, funding sources and council voting record.
https://hastings.moderngov.co.uk/ieIssueDetails.aspx?IId=5700&PlanId=0&Opt=3

[51] An article from a local newspaper, '*The Hastings Independent Press*', outlining the cycle path plans that were rejected in March 2023
https://www.hastingsindependentpress.co.uk/articles/news/county-council-reviews-rejection-of-park-cycleway/

[52] A report outlining the most dangerous roads in East Sussex (in terms of the number of crashes) crash-sites-in-east-sussex-2023.pdf

[52b] Information gathered by a presentation delivered by a surgeon from the Sussex NHS Trust who campaigns for better public health.

[53] Hastings Borough Council webpage outlining the council's voting record and how the no vote resulted in funds returning back to ESCC.
https://hastings.moderngov.co.uk/ieIssueDetails.aspx?IId=5700&PlanId=0&Opt=3

[54] An article outlining what LTNs are and how they work.
https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/get-active/2020/in-your-community/what-is-a-low-traffic-neighbourhood

[55] Hackney Council outlining their LTN initiatives and how they work.
https://hackney.gov.uk/low-traffic-neighbourhoods

[56] Hackney Council outlining the recorded effects from their LTN trial, showing less pollution, more pedestrian spaces and fewer road accidents.
https://hackney.gov.uk/low-traffic-neighbourhoods