

Investment in Kent top of summit agenda



The future investment in Kent's roads, rail and skills and how to drive forward the county's economy, were top of the agenda at a packed meeting chaired by Dover and Deal MP Charlie Elphicke.

More than 75 businessmen and women, local council leaders and education providers attended the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership Summit*, the business-led partnership responsible for driving forward the area's economy, at Maidstone TV Studios on Friday.

Charlie was joined on the panel by Ashford MP, Damian Green; North Thanet MP, Sir Roger Gale; South Thanet, MP Craig Mackinlay; and Medway MP, Kelly Tolhurst.

The Kent and Medway MPs listened carefully to presentations on the future infrastructure that is vital to unlock economic growth, boost job creation and accelerate housing delivery.

Port of Dover chief executive, Tim Waggott, speaking on behalf of the business community and council leaders, highlighted the importance to the UK economy of keeping the traffic moving across the River Thames and along the M20/A20 and M2/A2 arteries of Kent - a gateway county connecting the UK with its largest trading partner.

Mr Waggott said the Port of Dover handles 17% of the UK's trade in goods, and if it were a separate country, it would have the 55th biggest economy in the world. Over 10,000 trucks travel through it every day. Together with Eurotunnel, the cross-Channel corridor handles a staggering £220 billion of UK trade in goods.

Over half of the HGVs coming from the Port and the Eurotunnel terminal travel to the Midlands and the North of England, often using the M2 and Dartford Tunnel. Hence, it is critically important to UK PLC to build a new Lower Thames Crossing, redesign Brenley Corner (Junction 7, M2)**, and dual the A2 from Lydden to Dover in order to achieve growth without gridlock. Alongside a permanent Dover TAP solution on the A20 and lorry park network for international freight, a moving Kent will support national economic growth.

Director of VA Rail Consulting, Vince Lucas, focused on the investment needed to meet capacity on the county's rail routes.

With the South Eastern rail franchise up for renewal shortly, certain requirements could be included in the new contract to give residents and businesses a better deal. Suggestions included extending the length of High Speed trains to 12 carriages to avoid overcrowding, and providing a new dedicated shuttle service between Ebbsfleet and London to support the development of the Garden City.

There was agreement from the MPs, businesses and councils that extending the Crossrail service to Ebbsfleet, and ideally Gravesend, would help grow the economy and regenerate North Kent.

Senior representatives from Mid-Kent College, Canterbury Christ Church University and the Kent and Medway Skills Commission focused on the skills needed to support the county's current and future jobs market.

After each presentation, the businesses, councils and education leaders had the opportunity to put their questions to the attending MPs.

Commenting on the event, Charlie Elphicke said: "This was an excellent meeting with a fantastic turnout. Huge credit must go to Geoff Miles and Chris Brodie from the South East Local Enterprise Partnership for organising the summit.

"It was great to hear from so many business and council leaders on their priorities over the next ten years.

"Everyone knows Brexit will present challenges – but there will also be real opportunities to build the sort of Britain we want.

"It's clear we need investment in Kent's roads and railways. The A2 must be dualled and we need to get on with building the Lower Thames Crossing.

“We must act now to prevent gridlock and delays which would affect the whole country, not just Kent.

“Meanwhile, we simply have to increase capacity on our train services to meet demand.

“And it’s vital we support Kent’s colleges and universities in providing the lifelong learning adults in Kent need to adapt to a dynamic digital economy.”

Geoff Miles, the KMEP Chairman said “The Kent and Medway Economic Partnership brings together senior business figures with the local council leaders (County, District and Unitary) and education providers – to give a collective view of what changes are needed to boost the local economy.

He said: “We are delighted that Kent and Medway MPs, chaired by Charlie Elphicke, have been so receptive to our request to lobby Government for this infrastructure, which will maximise our global competitiveness as a nation.”

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NOTES TO THE EDITOR

**The Kent and Medway Economic Partnership is a private-public body which aims to drive forward economic growth and prosperity in Kent and Medway. It considers and develops responses to new economic opportunities and challenges in Kent and Medway*

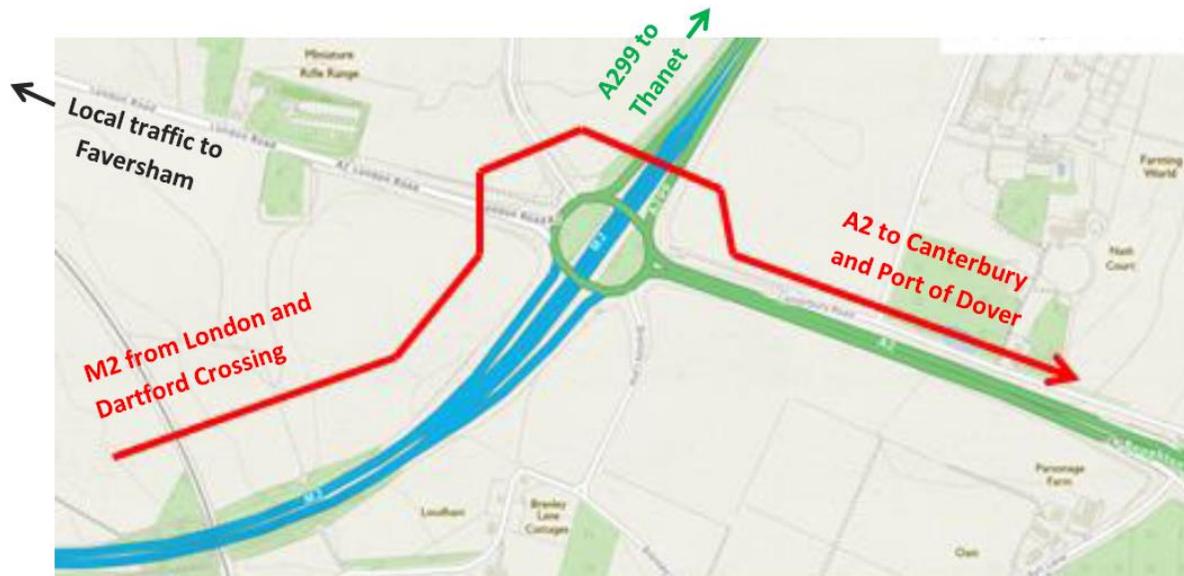
KMEP has 33 members, as follows:

- ***Business representatives (17)***
- ***The Leader of Kent County Council (1)***
- ***The Leader of Medway Council (1)***
- ***Leaders of Kent District Councils (12)***
- ***Higher education representative (1)*** – *Currently Canterbury Christ Church Vice-Chancellor*
- ***Further education representative (1)*** – *Currently East Kent College Principal*

*KMEP is supported by the **Kent and Medway Business Advisory Board**, which has 50 business members.*

*** Brenley Corner is the local name for the M2 Junction 7.*

Currently, people and freight drivers on the M2, who wish to continue onto Canterbury and Dover via the A2, are currently compelled to leave the M2, use the slip road, navigate the Brenley Corner roundabout, before turning right to join the A2. This current configuration of the junction creates peak hour congestion on a regular occurrence, as traffic on the strategic Highways England road network mixes with traffic on the local road network. The diagram below shows the traffic flow:



The individuals in the photograph are:

Front row:

Gerry Lewin (Deputy Leader, Swale BC), Chris Wells (Leader, Thanet DC), Paul Winter (Chairman, Wire Belt Company Limited), Mark Dance (Cabinet Member, KCC), Professor Rama Thirunamachandran (Vice-Chancellor, CCCU), Vince Lucas (Managing Director, VA Consultancy Ltd), Kelly Tolhurst MP (Rochester & Strood MP), Geoff Miles (KMEP Chairman, SELEP Vice-Chairman and Chairman of Maidstone TV Studios), Charlie Elphicke MP (Dover and Deal MP), Rt Hon Damian Green MP (Ashford MP), Sir Roger Gale MP (North Thanet MP), Mike Whiting (Representing Gordon Henderson MP), Miranda Chapman (Director, Pillory Barn Creative), Jo James (Chief Executive, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce), Natalie Chapman (Head of Policy, Freight Transport Association), Paul Barrett (Chairman & Managing Director, Canterbury 4 Business & Barretts Motor Group)

Back row:

Stephen Gasche (Principal Rail Planner, KCC), Sandra Matthews-Marsh (Visit Kent), Sarah Dance (Director, Sarah Dance Associates), Charles Buchanan (Aviation Consultant), Douglas Horner (Director & Member, Trenport Investments Ltd & CBI South East), Paul Thomas (Regional Land Manager, Orbit Homes), Andrew Metcalf (Director, Maxim PR), John Keefe (Director of Public Affairs, Eurotunnel UK), Chris Brodie (SELEP Chairman), Susannah Schofield (Editor-in-Chief for Kent Women in Business Magazine and Owner & Founder of Dice Matrix Consulting Ltd), Tim Waggott (Chief Executive, Port of Dover), Alison Palmer (FSB), Simon Cook (Canterbury CC Leader), Graham Galpin (Cabinet Member, Ashford BC).