

## **Draft Transport Strategy for Gravesham**

### **Introduction**

Residents and business regularly raise transport related issues as a key concern, and this is the Council's policy response which seeks to lobby and work with partners including the Government to achieve better outcomes. Whilst there is no statutory obligation on the Borough Council to have a transport strategy, as this responsibility rests with Kent County Council and others, this strategy aims to provide an overview of how the challenges and aspirations faced in planning transport to meet the needs of the Borough's residents and business, both now and in the future will be addressed and the actions we will seek to take as a lower tier (or tier 2) authority.

This strategy will also assist in ensuring transport interventions address the challenges and aspirations in order to realise the desired strategic outcomes for transport of local residents, businesses and visitors, thereby ensuring partners that hold the role for strategic transport such as Kent County Council are held to account and fully cognisant of matters important to Gravesham's residents and businesses.

Having a balanced mix of transport options ensuring better connectivity, is good for Gravesham and part of this is knowing that a poor walking and cycling environment, poor public transport networks, and highway congestion discourage people from walking and cycling and from using public transport, which can lead to further increased highway congestion and a poorer environment. This reduces residents' quality of life and makes the Borough unattractive for enterprise and tourism.

There is a wider benefit with increased levels of cycling, and walking can help to improve personal health, wellbeing and quality of life which in turn encourages more use of active travel modes. Congestion and safety issues can deter the use of active modes which can have a negative impact on the health of the population as well as increasing the impact on the environment as more time spent in traffic causes an increase in air pollution, contributing to climate change and worsening public health.

Access to employment opportunities and services affects well-being, social participation, education, healthcare, recreational facilities and employment. Accessibility is important to the quality of life of the Borough's residents, with certain groups, such as disabled and elderly residents, adversely impacted by poor accessibility.

Climate change is a very real challenge for our communities, businesses, and nature. This transport strategy must help to reduce the Borough's contribution to climate change and our impact on the natural environment. Increased take-up of low-carbon transport, including walking, cycling, and public transport, will be key to helping the Borough and the Council become carbon-neutral by 2030.

This is a strategy to ensure that in creating policies and making decisions locally our policies reflect the ongoing need for a high-quality, reliable and efficient transport network with links to a variety of destinations, would make the Borough a more attractive location for both residents, tourists and businesses.

The Council shall lobby for legislative changes to ensure that the Borough Council has more powers and resources devolved it, to deliver a safe and sustainable transport system. A key element of this should also include the means to hold transport infrastructure and service providers<sup>1</sup> to account, for the quality, reliability and availability of infrastructure and services.

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<sup>1</sup> Infrastructure Providers include: National Highways, Kent County Council (Highways, Public Rights of Way), Network Rail and HS1. Service Providers include: Southeastern, Thameslink, Arriva, Fastrack.

## Strategic Vision and Aim

The Council working with and listening to residents, businesses and visitors will work with transport partners including Kent County Council Highways, National Highways, the bus and rail companies, education establishments, businesses, sport, leisure and community groups to ensure that throughout our policies and decision making we ensure have a mix and balance of safe, excellent, cost-effective and time-efficient transport options for all our communities to ensure that our transport network is fit for purpose and ready to meet the challenges of both present and future generations.

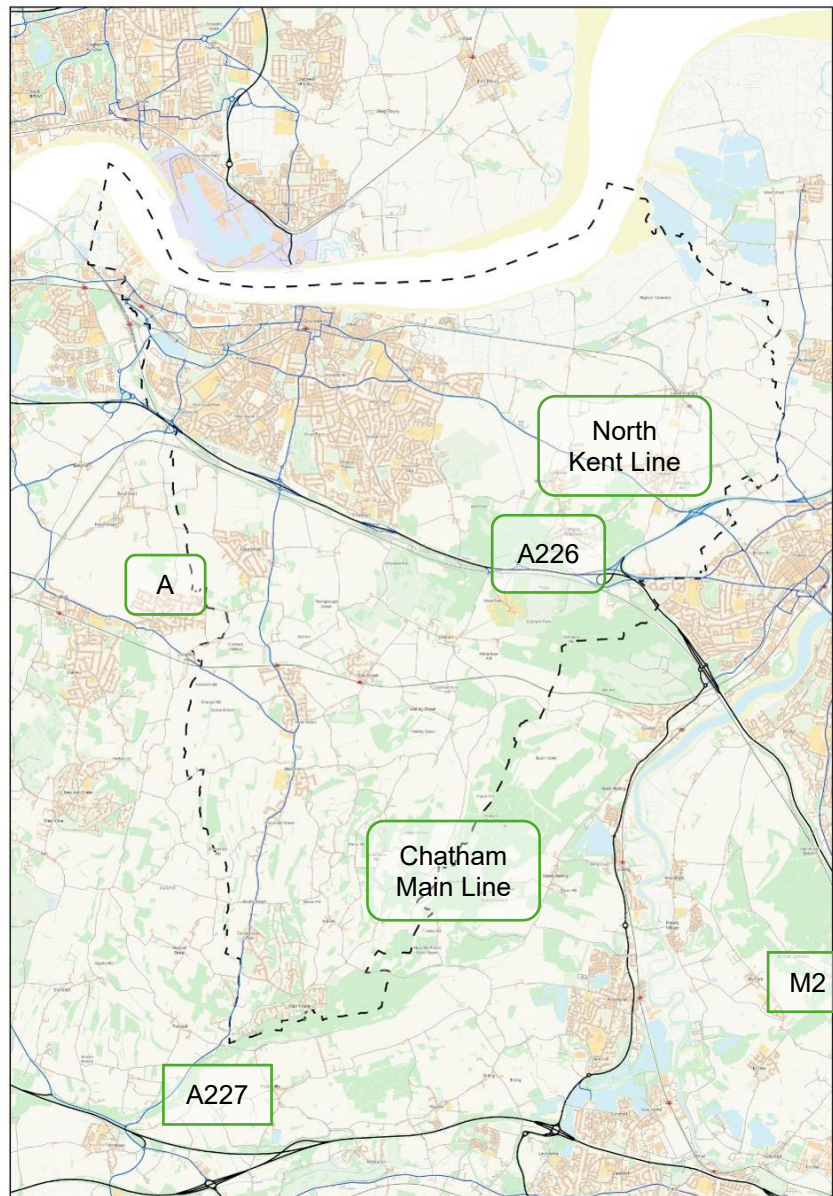


Figure 1: Plan of transport infrastructure in Gravesham

M20

## Gravesham's transport and travel challenges

Gravesham Borough is located on the south bank of the River Thames in the north of Kent. Gravesend and Northfleet comprise the main urban area. They lie to the north of the A2 alongside the River Thames. They are the principal settlements with the widest range of services and facilities and where the majority of residents reside. Outside Gravesend and Northfleet, the Borough is predominantly rural. 78% of the Borough is designated as part of the London Metropolitan Green Belt. 40% of the Green Belt is either a SSSI or Ramsar site or part of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Most of the larger rural settlements are excluded from the Green Belt due to their built-up nature, although the Green Belt does wash over some of the smaller hamlets.

The Borough is bisected from east to west by the A2/M2 trunk road and by the High Speed 1 railway line (formerly the Channel Tunnel Rail Link). The A2/M2 provides access to Greater London and the Channel Ports as well as the M25. The High Speed 1 line links Gravesend to London St Pancras via Ebbsfleet with journey times of approximately 25 minutes. High Speed 1 also links Ebbsfleet station, which lies just to the west of the Borough, to London St Pancras, and when fully operational to Paris, Lille and Brussels.

There are traditional rail services running on the North Kent and Chatham main lines from Gravesend, Northfleet, Higham, Sole Street and Meopham stations to London and other areas of Kent. The regular passenger ferry service commissioned by Thurrock Council and Kent County Council as the relevant strategic transport authorities, across the River Thames from Gravesend to Tilbury has ceased operation. However, it remains the Council's objective to work with the strategic transport authorities who are responsible for the service to see a passenger ferry service return to link Gravesend to Tilbury, at the earliest opportunity. Should Central Government provide the Borough Council with the power and financial resources to fully fund and run this service, the Council would look to do so.

Between the last two censuses (held in 2011 and 2021), the population of Borough increased by 5.1%, from around 101,700 in 2011 to around 106,900 in 2021. In 2021 51.1% of the Borough's population was female and 48.9 % male. The population increased by a smaller percentage than the overall population of the South East (7.5%) and the overall population of England (up 6.6% since the 2011 Census).

The number of households in Gravesham has risen by 3.2% since Census 2011 to 41,700 households, and population density has increased to 10.8 people per hectare in 2021 (area of Gravesham 9.902 hectares). This compared to a population density of 10.3 people per hectare in 2011.

At the 2021 Census, 26.2% of the Borough's residents (all usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment the week before the census) stated that they worked mainly at or from home, whilst 49.8% travelled to work in a car or a van. 6.6% travelled to work on foot, 5.3% travelled to work on a train, 5.2% travelled to work as a passenger in a car or van, and 3.3% travelled to work on a bus, minibus or coach.

The Borough transport connections, provide access to sub-regional and regional destinations. This is due to the Borough being served by the A2 trunk road and to a lesser degree the A20 which form part of National Highways Strategic Road Network (SRN), which connect the Borough to the M25, M2 and M20. The Borough also benefits from access to five rail stations (Northfleet, Gravesend, Higham, Meopham and Sole Street) and Ebbsfleet International which is just outside of the Borough boundary within Dartford. It should be noted that whilst the Borough may have these sub-regional links the accessibility to and reliability of these connections varies, due to lack of capacity and lack of investment.

The Borough also has bus links which in the main provide a more frequent east-to-west and vice-versa service with Arriva buses connecting the Borough to Dartford and Medway, with Fastrack B (run by Go Ahead) connecting Gravesend Town Centre to Bluewater and Darent Valley Hospital. The Borough also has a number of walking and cycling routes, such as the Thames Path and various Public Rights of Way, which connect the various settlements of the Borough together. However, again, investment in the bus service outside of Fastrack is lacking, with further investments needed in walking and cycling routes, especially with a view to making these routes safer and more visible.

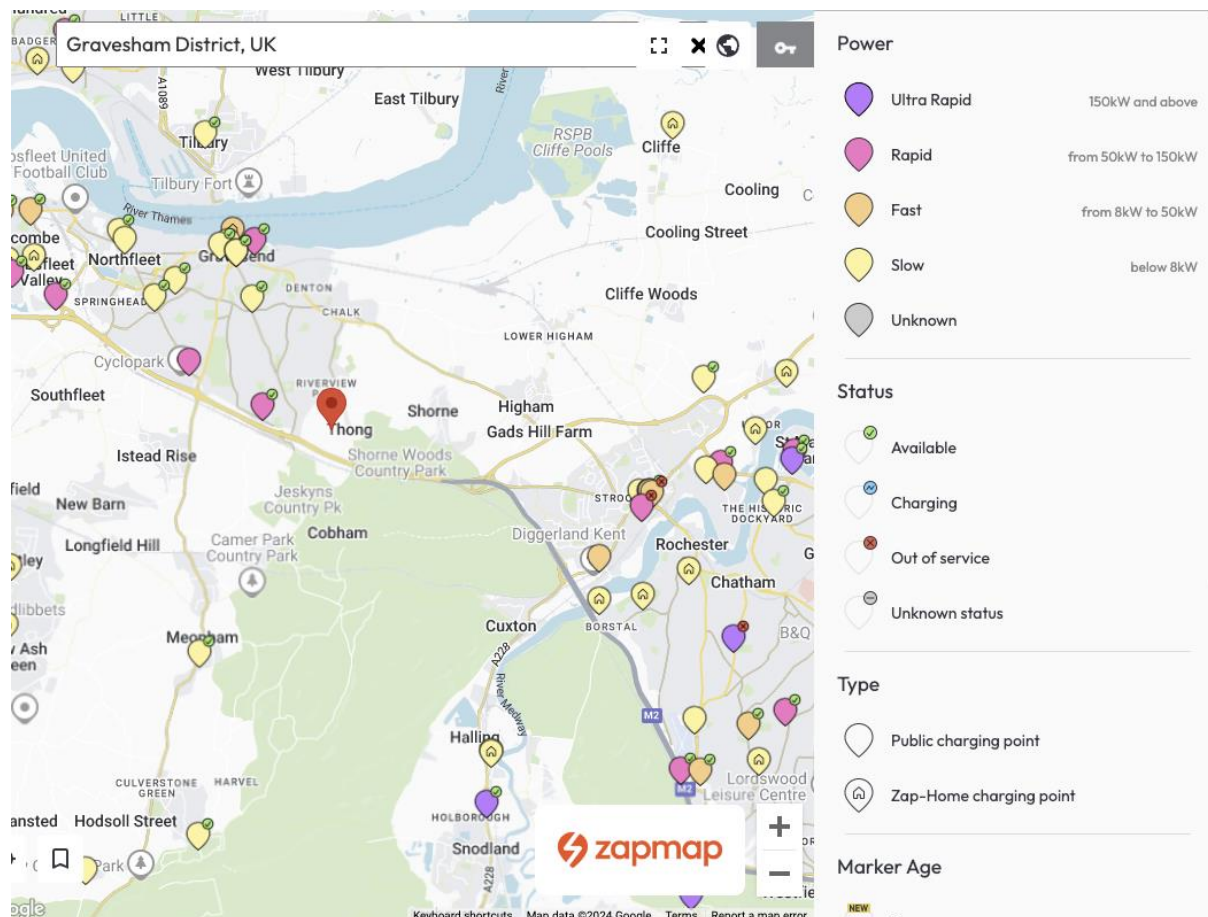
Due to the Borough's relationship with the Strategic Road Network, significant recurrent traffic congestion is experienced during peak hours on the A2 and associated junctions within the Borough. This is compounded by congestion and capacity issues outside of the Borough on the Strategic Road Network, such as Bluebell Hill and connectivity to the M20. Congestion on the Strategic Road Network within Gravesham frequently spreads to the Local Road Network, this traffic congestion has adverse impacts on the amenity of local communities, including in relation to road safety, severance, noise, air quality and the demand for parking, and it also leads to residents and workers being discouraged to walk and cycle.

Poor public transport provision and lack of investment in terms of the wider bus network and facilities outside of the Fastrack corridor reduces the accessibility to and usability of the public transport system by many residents and workers. This limits accessibility to services, jobs and educational opportunities for those living in both urban and rural settlements that do not have access to a car. There is growing rail overcrowding on some peak period rail services from stations in the borough e.g. High Speed from Gravesend, which requires greater investment and capacity e.g. the provision of the Elizabeth line to Gravesend and beyond.

A lack of available road space hinders the development of a high-quality walking and cycling infrastructure, as do historic river-related land uses, which have resulted in the Thames Path being disconnected from the River in parts. Demand for parking on roads due to increased ownership of vehicles within the Borough remains high, which impacts highway safety, and contributes to congestion.

Data provided by the Department for Transport (DfT), indicates that as of 1 July 2024, the Borough had 62 electric vehicle charging points, of these 7 charging points are above 50kW (i.e. rapid/ultra rapid chargers). DfT also provide data on the density of charging points per 100,000 residents by local authority area. This data (available

at <https://maps.dft.gov.uk/ev-charging-map/index.html> indicates that Gravesham is within the bottom 20-40% of local authorities in terms of provision of electric vehicle charging points. There is however ongoing investment into increasing provision across the Borough through both private and public sector initiatives. DfT's data is based on information gathered via the platform Zapmap, A snapshot of the location of charging points in Gravesham and neighbouring areas, is illustrated in the map below.



Source: <https://www.zap-map.com/live/>

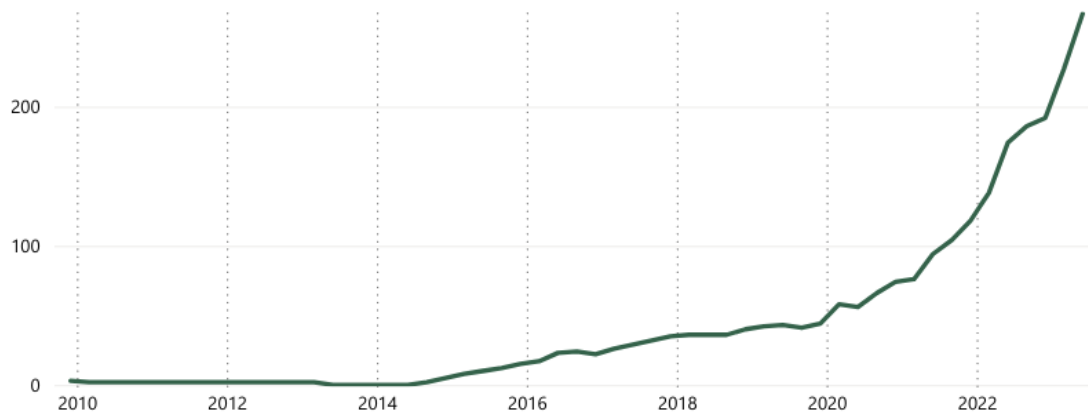
DfT also maintain data on electric and low-emission vehicles registered within local authority areas, this data is summarised in the table and diagram below. In January 2024, 1,119 electric and low-emission vehicles were registered in Gravesham. Of these 13 are motorcycles, 1,060 are cars, 18 light good vehicles and 28 other vehicles.

Fuel	No. of company vehicles	No. of private vehicles	Total no. of vehicles
Battery electric	197	415	612
Plug-in hybrid electric (diesel)	2	6	8
Plug-in hybrid electric (petrol)	67	391	458



Fuel	No. of company vehicles	No. of private vehicles	Total no. of vehicles
Range extended electric	1	40	41
<b>Total</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>852</b>	<b>1,119</b>

Registered plug-in vehicles in the local authority



Change in the number of plug-in vehicles in Gravesham over time

Source: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/local-authority-data-electric-vehicles-and-charging-points/>

Finally, the uncertainty surrounding the reopening of Galley Hill Road (in Dartford) and the Lower Thames Crossing, remain a concern to the Council. Whilst Galley Hill Road is within Dartford and the responsibility of Kent County Council, its closure has direct impacts on the Borough's residents, businesses and visitors and creates further congestion on both the local and strategic road network serving the Borough. The Council will continue to push for the reopening of Galley Hill Road and will continue to lobby the Government and Kent County Council to reopen the road as soon as possible.

In terms of Lower Thames Crossing its highway, economic, and environmental impacts on the Borough remain a concern to the Council, with cross-party agreement within the Borough Council on the opposition to the Lower Thames Crossing. National Highways have yet to evidence effectively that the Lower Thames Crossing can operate without causing further congestion and delays to the Borough's residents and businesses or that it will uplift the Borough's economy and adequately mitigate its detrimental impacts upon the Borough's residents and environment during both construction and operational phases.

### Aspirations

To meet the needs of the Borough's residents and businesses, the Council supports the principle of a transport system, which provides a mix and balance of excellent, cost-effective and time-efficient transport options with the aim of being sustainable for all our communities to ensure that our transport network is fit for purpose and ready to meet the challenges of the next generation.

Accommodating growth in demand for transport may necessitate the delivery of improved junctions and highways to accommodate capacity, as well as improvements to the Borough's public transport, cycling and walking networks which form a key part of this transport strategy to manage such growth. A more frequent, reliable and affordable public transport network will serve the Borough by ensuring all our residents and visitors can move around the Borough and access services, as well as employment and leisure opportunities in a safe and efficient manner, whilst improving health outcomes and air quality.

To achieve the above the Council has the following aims and objectives (these are to be set out in greater detail in the final version, with the action plan including key organisations and their responsibilities e.g. Network rail for Rail infrastructure, Kent County Council for bus stops, etc):

#### Transport Network Wide

- Ensuring that our emerging Local Plan has sustainable transport at its heart
- That planning obligations for improving transport infrastructure in Gravesham deliver the expected improvements within appropriate time frames, and in line with Government legislation and regulations
- Declare that transport policy in Gravesham is about having a choice and a mix of cost effective, reliable, accessible and safe transport options including the range of public transport, walking and cycling but also private transport including cars with the focus on safe journeys for all.
- Seek additional powers and resources from Government to bring this full transport vision, aims and objectives based on residents, businesses and visitors needs to life.

#### Rail

- Seek investment in railway stations to address existing issues e.g. flooding at Northfleet underpass and to ensure they are capable of meeting future demand
- Investment in rail services to reduce overcrowding and improve service provision for all railway uses across the Borough. This includes the reinstatement of pre-Covid services and increasing the frequency of trains stopping at the Borough's stations.
- Ensure fully accessibility at all rail stations in Gravesham
- Support the expansion of Crossrail to Gravesham
- Support the stopping of Eurostar services at Ebbsfleet International, and the reopening of Ebbsfleet International for international services.
- Work with partners to address issues experienced by residents on the rail, such as overcrowding.
- Explore some of the new emerging powers and resources from the Government in relation to rail services.

#### Bus

- Expansion of the bus service (vehicles, frequency and routes) to the wider urban area and rural settlements, to deliver more reliable journeys and to provide residents with an effective alternative mode of transport



- Improvements to the bus fleet serving all areas of the borough
- Ensuring parity of esteem outside the Fastrack network and ensuring resources
- Timetabling available to all through improving bus stops including up to the minute real time live data on bus availability. To be clear this does not just mean users gaining this information through a phone or the internet but ensuring Real Time Information is available to all at the point of use at bus stops.
- Explore some of the new emerging powers and resources from the Government in relation to bus services.

### Walking and Cycling

- An enhanced network of safe and welcoming cycling and walking routes linking communities to key services and employment and leisure opportunities
- Creating a fully integrated cycle network with links to transport hubs
- Improving the borough's public rights of way, including alleys and paths through parks and adjacent to the river
- Implementing safety improvements to reduce road traffic collisions involving pedestrians and cyclists
- Promote and educate users to increase walking and cycling, including actively encouraging and promoting walking and cycling to school initiatives
- Improve provision of secure cycle parking as part of new developments and at key transport hubs and locations within the Borough (e.g. railway stations, schools, health facilities, town and local centres)

### Road

- Reduced congestion on Strategic Road Network (SRN) and reduced delays on Local Road Network as a result of SRN congestion
- Reduce congestion / identify options for improving capacity on key routes/junctions within the Borough e.g. A226/A227/B261/Town Centre one way system
- Improved road safety, management and maintenance of the road network within the Borough. This includes potholes and road resurfacing and seek to end the 'managed decline' of our highways.
- Work with partners such as Kent Police and Kent County Council Highways to ensure a sound and safe parking offer is provided in the Borough, in line with Government requirements
- Clarity of enforcement on parking and road contraventions and seek powers and resources to ensure we can make enhance our parking and enforcement offer.
- Ensure accessibility to EV charging across the Borough and work with partners and the Government to look at and seek funding for public and on street infrastructure for EV.
- Creation of healthy streets and working with partners seek to look at school streets in areas of need with the support of residents.
- Continue to Oppose the Lower Thames Crossing and its detrimental impacts on the Borough

- Promote alternatively-powered vehicles and active travel options whilst recognising that the private car may remain the only realistic option in many instances
- Improving air quality, addressing climate change and facilitating the transition to a zero-carbon economy River
- Encourage partners to maintain and enhance river connections to Tilbury
- Work with Uber Boats (Thames Clipper) to deliver river connections to and from London
- Maintain and enhance commercial and leisure river connections

### **Outcomes**

To monitor the performance of this strategy, the Council has proposed a clear direction of travel using the aims above and an action plan will be created to progress the strategy with a regular report to the Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee outcomes, which are set out below. Monitoring will allow for regular checking of progress towards the outcomes being achieved, and it will enable the Council to ascertain whether or not the transport strategy is having the desired effects