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Sci-fi travel plan for town

Is this the way we will be travelling around the town in years to come?



By Sarah Ward

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A RADICAL new congestion-busting scheme could see Tunbridge Wells resembling a sci-fi metropolis with the introduction of a new method of public transport.

One Tunbridge Wells borough councillor is championing the introduction of futuristic 'pods' to transport people around the town, including along the busy Pembury Road and from Tunbridge Wells Hospital to the station.

The battery-powered vehicles have four seats and follow a pre-determined route along tracks the width of a cycle lane, similar to a driverless-car scheme which is being trialled in Milton Keynes.

Forefront

David Scott, spearheading the campaign, said the town could be at the forefront of a radical change in public transport if the scheme, which would cost about £30 million to build, goes ahead.

"If the future is this, which I believe it could be, Tunbridge Wells could be one of the first towns to embrace it - we were one of the first to switch from horses to cars.

"In 30 years' time people will be saying 'what? You used to drive cars. Didn't they kill people?'"

"Most people are going to be sceptical, but can Tunbridge Wells be one of these towns that leads this process? It would be a stepping stone towards the future."



SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME? A mock-up of the pod travel system in Crescent Road, Tunbridge Wells

The system would work as an updated version of a park-and-ride, with pods replacing buses to provide the service and car parks at Pembury and Crescent Road car park to reduce pressure on the A21. Mr Scott believes the system would also increase the efficiency of buses using the route.

"If this is to succeed, I want it to come from the people of Tunbridge Wells, whether this is next year or in ten years," he said.

"If we start thinking about this now we can say 'if we put the route

in here we can transform that piece of land - because this is one specific problem we can address it and expand from there."

Mr Scott anticipates that construction would take 18 months and, when completed, would be faster and cheaper than conventional methods to reduce congestion.

He estimated that a journey would cost £2, but the journey from Pembury to the station could take seven minutes and pods could complete the route three

times per hour, 22 hours per day.

He said the pods could become self-financing but if the plan was met with public support steps would be taken to find funds from Kent County Council and central government.

But Mr Scott said spread over a long-term period the cost would be affordable.

Pods have been in use at Heathrow Airport since 2011 and Mr Scott said they could be a solution to rat-runs and on-street parking in Tunbridge Wells.

How the pods work

- Pods are battery-powered and run on normal tyres along simple guideways.
- They are guided by lasers and a central computer.
- The average waiting time at Heathrow is under ten seconds.
- The pods then travel at speeds up to 25 mph to their destination.
- They are sent to each pick-up point using a passenger call button or by the computer anticipating demand.
- The passenger selects a destination and the computer controls the pod to take it directly there, by-passing other pod stops along the route.



RADICAL APPROACH: Borough councillor David Scott