

EQIA Submission – ID Number

Section A

EQIA Title

Electrification of the Fastrack Bus Services

Responsible Officer

Daniel Gillen - GT TRA

Type of Activity

Service Change

No

Service Redesign

No

Project/Programme

No

Commissioning/Procurement

Commissioning/Procurement

Strategy/Policy

No

Details of other Service Activity

No

Accountability and Responsibility

Directorate

Growth Environment and Transport

Responsible Service

Public Transport, Transportation

Responsible Head of Service

Philip Lightowler - GT TRA

Responsible Director

Philip Lightowler - GT TRA

Aims and Objectives

Project Objectives

To electrify the Fastrack Bus Rapid Transit services utilising opportunity charge electric vehicles and supporting infrastructure. This will allow Kent County Council to realise its ambition of Fastrack Kent Thameside going fully electric during late 2023/ early 2024 under a new operations contract, while resulting in the new Fastrack Dover to launch as an all-electric service. This will facilitate the expansion of the Fastrack network both through the new scheme in Dover, but also in Kent Thameside including the use of the Zero Emission Bean Road Tunnel.

Summary of equality impact

Overall the local consultation has evidenced that the positive impact of the proposed introduction of a zero emission fleet out-weighs the negative impacts related to the charging infrastructure and sound of the vehicle. Recommended actions to minimise the negative impacts where possible have been included in this report, with no change required beyond the recommended mitigations.

Adverse Equality Impact Rating: Low

Section B – Evidence

Do you have data related to the protected groups of the people impacted by this activity?

Yes

It is possible to get the data in a timely and cost effective way?
Yes
Is there national evidence/data that you can use?
Yes
Have you consulted with stakeholders?
Yes
Who have you involved, consulted and engaged with?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Our customers - The existing and new communities served by Fastrack - Bus Operators – including Arriva (incumbent Fastrack Thameside operator) and Stagecoach (Main operator in Dover) - Local Housing Developers – Henley Camland, Prologis - Ebbsfleet Development Corporation - District Councils + Councillors – Dartford Borough Council, Gravesham Borough Council, Dover District Council - Kent County Councillors - Compaid Kent (a charitable organisation which helps disabled, older and vulnerable people to live life to the full) - Kent Association for the Blind - Vehicle Manufacturers – including Volvo, Irizar, Renault, Pelican, Mercedes, - Charging /Infrastructure Suppliers – including Swarco eVolt, UKPNS and SSE - Kent Police
Has there been a previous Equality Analysis (EQIA) in the last 3 years?
No
Do you have evidence that can help you understand the potential impact of your activity?
Yes
Section C – Impact
Who may be impacted by the activity?
Service Users/clients Service users/clients
Staff No
Residents/Communities/Citizens Residents/communities/citizens
Are there any positive impacts for all or any of the protected groups as a result of the activity that you are doing?
Yes
Details of Positive Impacts
<p>Age:</p> <p>The 2021 Network Survey revealed that 44% of respondents were below the age of 34, compared to 33% 35-65 and 21% aged 65 and over. This suggests that changes to the Fastrack service disproportionately affects younger people. This is corroborated by the fact that in the same survey, 47% of those aged 16-24 used the service 5 or more times a week, compared to an average for all respondent groups of 37%.</p> <p>Within the Fastrack operations tender to be released in Autumn 2022, this will specify that the maintenance of the new fleet and charging infrastructure will be maintained close to the route. Investment in the new fleet and associated charging infrastructure will provide employment opportunities for young people within the County, including the opportunity to improve their skills and work towards qualifications. Based upon the consultation undertaken, 9 apprenticeships will be made directly from the scheme (3 per</p>

district), with the potential for further employment opportunities generated by the expansion of the network and increase in the fleet size.

The analysis of the impact of the transition to zero-emission vehicles does identify that the pollution benefits will mostly benefit the oldest and youngest people living along the Fastrack Route; groups who have the weakest respiratory systems. Particulate matter can cause premature mortality, while also contributing towards preventable respiratory diseases. Dartford has the second highest mortality rate per 100,00 attributable to particulate matter in Kent, while Dover has the third highest mortality rate attributable to respiratory diseases (Kent County Council 'Air Quality' (2018) P7/8). Reductions in air pollution resulting from Fastrack going zero-emission will reduce the risk of respiratory illnesses or breathing difficulties that can be traced directly to air quality. In Dartford and Gravesham, Fastrack going zero-emission is a strategic component of the air quality strategy to benefit the wellbeing of residents. Improvements to air quality will benefit children and young people, as studies by the World Health Organisation (2018) have provided evidence of the air quality impact on lung development (up to age 9) and long-term effect on health into adulthood.

An additional impact to different age groups living along the Fastrack routes are the health benefits resulting from the reduction in noise pollution linked to the vehicle sound. 30% of Europe's population are disturbed by traffic noise exceeding 55 decibels at night (WHO 2018). Notably the target for children and the elderly is lower at 40db. This can be directly attributable to conditions including sleep deprivation and stress caused by environmental noise. This can affect the nervous system and increase the risk of high blood pressure, conditions which people of an older age are already at a higher risk of having. The reduction in noise from the vehicles will improve sleep for those living along the route, leading to a wellbeing improvement. This is a particularly important consideration and benefit for Fastrack due to long term ambition to move to a 24-hour service across the network in line with the desires of our customers. Fastrack A has already become a 24 hour route in April 2022.

Kent has particular challenges with an ageing population, and the potential for life-limiting health conditions/disabilities increases with age.

Disability and Carers:

It has been identified that disabled people, such as those with mobility or visual impairments, are potentially more reliant on the Fastrack service than other protected groups or members of the wider public because their disability may mean they cannot drive. From our engagement with disabled Fastrack users, we understood that accessing the vehicle has both a physical and mental toll on this user group; something their able-bodied counterparts do not experience. The 2021 Fastrack Survey revealed 8% of users have a disability which affects the ease with which they can access the vehicle.

With Fastrack going zero-emission, the modern and fully accessible vehicles will help provide disabled users and their carers with improved access to education, employment and other social opportunities in a more user friendly manner. Kent County Council will be specifying that the zero-emission fleet must have an electric ramp. This will allow this user group to access the vehicles in an easy and stress free manner akin to their able bodied counterparts. We expect that this will generate greater confidence and reduce anxieties among this protected group about using the Fastrack service, although consultation with disabled users will only reveal the extent of this once the new fleet is place. This benefit is particularly important as it aligns with the aims of the Department for Transport's upcoming strategy to boost accessibility for disabled passengers.

Induction Loops will also be installed to assist those with hearing impairments. Further analysis is required

to understand the volume required.

The improvements which aid disabled users to access social and economic opportunities are particularly beneficial in Dover. This is because Dover is where the percentages of people with a long term health problem or disability that limits their activities is significantly higher than the averages for both Kent and the South East. Easing the access to the service will provide a wellbeing benefit for this protected group. In Dover, 20.8% of people have their day-to-day activities limited in some way compared to 17.6% in Kent and 15.7% in the South East (Kent County Council "Disability in Kent" Statistical Bulletin, 2020 P3).

Improvements to the air quality local to the Fastrack routes generated by the use of the zero-emission fleet will benefit disabled users in a similar manner to that described in the age section. Those in this protected characteristic will particularly benefit if their disability is respiratory based, or results in them having a weak immune system. For these residents, improvements to local air quality resulting from Fastrack will reduce the occurrence and the extent of illness, while encouraging them to spend more time outdoors to the benefit of wellbeing.

For our hard of hearing Fastrack users, it was identified that reductions in the sound of the vehicle will improve their ability to converse with others while on board the vehicle. This forms a wellbeing benefit to this group, as these users are able to more easily socially engage with other users.

Disabled users who live along the route will also benefit from the reduction in exterior noise pollution linked to the vehicles in a similar manner to that described in the age characteristic. For those with cardiovascular or sleep related conditions, the reduction in noise pollution could contribute to a reduction in the risk of flare ups and the severity of their condition.

These aspects all support the assumption these changes represent an improvement for these groups. However, new electric technology can cause negative impacts which are detailed in the next section.

In line with Fastrack being a premium service, the tender for the new fleet will consider enhanced PSVAR standards and ensure the new buses include: a second priority wheelchair space, marked space for assistance dogs, audible and visible route / next-stop announcements on board with loops, help/panic buttons for passengers. It is planned to have a new Fastrack mobile app, and we will seek to ensure it provides passengers with accessibility data about bus stations and stops so they can make informed travel choices regarding accessibility of services.

Sex:

In undertaking our market engagement, analysis of each of the surveys revealed each had a higher percentage of female respondents compared to male. This may indicate that there is a greater impact depending on one's sex which is also defined as a protected group.

Maternity & Pregnancy:

Poor air quality can impact upon foetal development in pregnant ladies, as per evidence from the British Medical Journal (2017). Due to the air quality benefits linked to the zero-emission fleet discussed previously, this group will benefit.

In a similar manner, poor noise pollution in during the child development phases (both before and after birth) can impact upon the hearing, speech and language, and learning capabilities of the baby. Due to the exterior noise reduction discussed previously, this group will benefit.

Race:

Those from minority ethnic groups will benefit disproportionately from improvements made to the Fastrack fleet. In the 2021 Fastrack Network Survey, 31% of respondents defined themselves as groups other than 'White British'. For those users that stated they used the service 5x or more a week, this figure rose to 42%. This illustrates that those from minority ethnic groups have a higher reliance on the Fastrack service than the dominant ethnicity 'White British'. With the new zero-emission fleet facilitating improvements to the vehicles alongside network expansion, improvements to the Fastrack service will improve access to education, employment and other opportunities for these minority groups which rely on the service.

Religion and Belief:

Intersectionality between race and religion/belief means the positive impact for "race" above (coming from a significant BAME population) can also transpose to "religion and belief" . in Kent, the largest religious groups after Christians are Muslims (13,932) and Sikhs (10,545).

Negative impacts and Mitigating Actions

19. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Age

Are there negative impacts for age?

Yes

Details of negative impacts for Age

Under the new Kent Thameside Fastrack Electric operation model, KCC plans to set fares in a manner to encourage people to walk and cycle for very short (one stop) journeys rather than use Fastrack. Based upon our consultation and review, it has been highlighted that this would disproportionately financially impact older users who may be unable to walk or cycle these short distances. This user group in particular relies on the bus for these very short journeys, and would lead to an increased financial outlay for these users. It was also noted that this could encourage this user group to use the car for these journeys, which goes against the design of the Fastrack project.

Mitigating Actions for Age

England National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) Pass – Those in this group above State Pension age will already have or be entitled to an ENCTS travel pass for use on the Fastrack service. This scheme will be publicised on the Fastrack Website. The use of an ENCTS pass on Fastrack allows the bearer free travel. This will result in older users who are more likely to use Fastrack for these one-stop very short journeys not being financially impacted by having to take these journeys.

Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions – Age

Shane Hymers

20. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Disability

Are there negative impacts for Disability?

Yes

Details of Negative Impacts for Disability

Based upon our consultation and review, disabled users are disproportionately negatively affected by the transition from diesel to opportunity charge electric vehicles compared to other groups.

Impact 1: While the quietness of the electric vehicles from the outside compared to the diesel counterparts reduces noise pollution, this forms a challenge for those who are blind, partially sighted, or hard of hearing. This is particularly the case when the vehicle is moving at low speed, making it difficult to detect the vehicle. Those with this protected characteristic are consequently more likely to be more likely to be involved in an accident with the vehicle. Mitigations will be required prior to the electric fleet operating to ensure this group are aware of the differences in sounds between the two vehicle types.

Impact 2: For those with learning difficulties we understand that the significant change in the vehicle sounds could create sensory challenges, as the vehicle will not sound as expected. This could be overwhelming, and could impact on the frequency of usage of the Fastrack service, particularly in the short term, as they learn to adapt to the change.

Impact 3: For visually impaired passengers, while the quietness of the vehicle benefits the ease of conversation as discussed, this user group also can also lose out in their enjoyment of the journey. This is because these users' hearing conditions enhances the reduction in noise produced by an electric vehicle compared to its diesel counterpart. From our engagement with Compaid, the operator of the Kent zero-emission accessible minibus project, we understand that one of the key feedbacks from this project is that some visually impaired users felt unsettled from the loss of the sounds of the vehicle. The enhanced reduction in journey sounds resulted can result in a wellbeing loss for this user group as their experience of the journey is suppressed due to the lack of noise compounding their visual impairment.

Impact 4: Furthermore, the assessment has recognised that on-street charging infrastructure for the opportunity charge vehicles will contribute towards increased pavement clutter. This could pose a disproportionate risk of collision for those suffering with a visual impairment. The need for mitigations is identified to ensure that the infrastructure is identifiable for those with limited or zero vision. For wheelchair users and those with reduced mobility, the charging infrastructure could reduce or prevent movement by thinning the pavement width available to pedestrians. It is identified that mitigations will be required within the design phase to consider the position of the charger and the means of making it apparent to people with reduced vision to protect the ease of navigation for this protected group.

Impact 5: Under the new Kent Thameside Fastrack Electric operation model, KCC plans to set fares in a manner to encourage people to walk and cycle for very short (one stop) journeys rather than use Fastrack. Based upon our consultation and review, it has been highlighted that this would disproportionately impact disabled users who may be unable to walk or cycle these distances. This user group can rely on the bus for these very short journeys and would be impacted by increased financial outlay for these short journeys for which they may be necessitated to take. It was also noted that this could encourage this user group to use the car for these journeys, which goes against the design of the Fastrack project.

Mitigating actions for Disability

Mitigation for Impact 1: Education campaign about the Electric Vehicles. Engagement with Kent Association for the Blind and other disability groups to create and rollout electric vehicle awareness programme for this protected group and their assistance tools. Induction Loops also to be added to the vehicles – survey required to understand volumes and best practice. These mitigations will lead to improved awareness among visually impaired / those with a hearing loss about the vehicles and how to detect them. Engagement with Charitable Organisations may lead to additional mitigation ideas being developed.

Mitigation for Impact 2: Fastrack Tender to specify Fastrack App must include options to play recordings of current Fastrack vehicle. This will allow those who desire to easily access and listen to familiar journey sounds, reducing the sensory changes which otherwise can be overwhelming.

Mitigation for Impact 3: Chargers to be installed to be compliant with the Equality Act 2010. Chargers to be

located as close as possible to the curb boundary to reduce conflict with walking routes. Taking account heritage issues, chargers to have contrasting colour / luminance compared to the background against which they will be seen. Reflective strips / colour bands to be considered. Update 'Kent design Guidance' with any new findings/improvements. This will reduce the risk of collision by visually impaired users with the charging infrastructure. Engagement with the Kent Association for the Blind may lead to further mitigations being adopted.

Mitigation for Impact 4: Charger infrastructure design to incorporate Kent Design Guidance. As a minimum, the mandatory 1.8m footway width will be maintained next to the chargers. This will ensure those with reduced mobility have enough space to pass the chargers at ease at all times.

Mitigation for Impact 5: England National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) Pass – Those with a registered disability will already have or be entitled to a disabled person's bus pass under the ENCTS travel scheme for use on the Fastrack service. This scheme will be publicised on the Fastrack Website. The use of an ENCTS pass on Fastrack allows the bearer free travel. This will result in older users who are more likely to use Fastrack for these one-stop very short journeys not being financially impacted by having to take these journeys.

Responsible Officer for Disability

Shane Hymers Fastrack Development Manager (Impacts 1,2 and 5), Graham Killick Major Capital Programme Senior Project Manager (Impacts 3/4)

21. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Sex

Are there negative impacts for Sex

No

Details of negative impacts for Sex

Not Applicable

Mitigating actions for Sex

Not Applicable

Responsible Officer for Sex

Not Applicable

22. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender

Are there negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender

No

Negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender

Not Applicable

Mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender

Not Applicable

Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender

Not Applicable

23. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Race

Are there negative impacts for Race

No

Negative impacts for Race

Not Applicable

Mitigating actions for Race

Not Applicable

Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Race

Not Applicable

24. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Religion and belief

Are there negative impacts for Religion and belief

No

Negative impacts for Religion and belief
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Religion and belief
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Religion and Belief
Not Applicable
25. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation
Are there negative impacts for Sexual Orientation
No
Negative impacts for Sexual Orientation
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation
Not Applicable
26. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity
Are there negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity
No
Negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity
Not Applicable
27. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Are there negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
No
Negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Not Applicable
28. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Carer's responsibilities
Are there negative impacts for Carer's responsibilities
No
Negative impacts for Carer's responsibilities
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Carer's responsibilities
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for Carer's responsibilities
Not Applicable