

2. "Freedom Pass" (Assisted Travel for 11-16 Year Olds) – Detailed Costings for Pilot Scheme
(Item 2)

(1) In answer to a question from Dr Eddy, Mr Hall explained that the scheme had been re-named "Freedom Pass" because officers were concerned that use of the term "Assisted Travel Pass", as suggested by the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee, could cause confusion with the existing statutory free school transport arrangements which were also known as assisted travel.

(2) Mr Hall updated the IMG on progress with the introduction of the pilot schemes in Tonbridge/Tunbridge Wells and Canterbury which were budgeted to cost £1m each. The pilot schemes would now be launched in June which would allow them to bed in during the quietest part of the school year so that any teething troubles could be resolved prior to the start of the new school year in September.

(3) All the bus operators in Tonbridge/Tunbridge Wells and Canterbury had volunteered to include all their registered stage carriage services in the pilot schemes and negotiations were currently taking place with them on reimbursement arrangements. Because the pilot schemes were being run under the Transport Act 1985 the scheme had to leave operators no better or worse off than before its introduction. As a result, operators were having to provide KCC with a great deal of commercially-sensitive information to allow reimbursement levels to be calculated. Mr Hall circulated a paper setting out the principles of the scheme and the reimbursement arrangements.

(4) Cost effective agreements had been reached with the principal operators in Tonbridge/Tunbridge Wells and Canterbury for the provision of additional capacity to cope with the extra demand expected to be generated in the morning peak. This additional demand, and where it was likely to occur, had been estimated by using postcode data. Part of the purpose of the pilots was to establish exactly where additional capacity was needed.

(5) Although rail services were not currently included in the pilot schemes, Mr Hall was pursuing the possibility of including them in the future.

(6) In answer to questions from Dr Eddy, Mr Hall said that not allowing children attending independent schools to participate in the Freedom Pass scheme would reduce the cost but the size of the reduction could not be quantified at present. However, the pilot schemes would show the relative take-up, and thus the costs, of the scheme from children attending different types of school.

(7) Mr Hall offered to provide a detailed analysis on the operation of the pilot schemes to the IMG in 12 months time, in addition to the previously agreed half-yearly reports to Members of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee on costs and take-up of the pilot schemes.

(8) In answer to a question from Mrs Stockell, Mr Hall said that, although the pilot schemes did not include Park and Ride services, the possibility of using Park and Ride sites as drop-off points where children could catch dedicated buses to take them on to their schools was being explored.