

By: Keith Ferrin, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste
Pete Raine, Managing Director – Environment and Regeneration

To: Cabinet – 8 February 2007

Subject: Free Travel for 11-16 Year Olds

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report seeks approval from Cabinet to establish free travel pilot schemes in Tonbridge/Tunbridge Wells and Canterbury using the criteria set out in Appendix 1. If these are successful and affordable, a countywide roll-out will take place from 2009/10.

FOR DECISION

1. Background

1.1 In September 2006, Kent County Council published “Towards 2010” (T2010) with an aspiration to introduce free travel for school children in secondary education aged 11-16.

1.2 In order to test the feasibility of introducing free travel, two pilot schemes are being established in Tonbridge/Tunbridge Wells and Canterbury. It is hoped to commence the pilots in June 2007.

1.3 The key policy aspirations of free travel for 11-16 year olds are:

- A reduction in peak hour congestion.
- Improved social inclusion through improved mobility for young people outside school hours.
- Encouraging longer term use of public transport by young people.

2. Pilot Schemes

2.1 Negotiations are well underway with bus service providers across Kent for the establishment of free travel trials in areas covered by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Canterbury City Council, and Tonbridge town. All secondary schools in these areas will be included and as set out in Appendix 2. There has been a lukewarm response to participation in the scheme by Kent rail operator Go Via and it is not proposed to include this mode of travel in the pilot schemes. We will continue to work with Go Via so that free rail travel will be included in the countywide scheme from 2009/10.

2.2 Given the significant level of investment in extra buses to be committed by the operators, the pilot schemes will need to run for a minimum of two years to ensure that they recoup this investment.

3. Financial Implications

3.1 The County Council has commissioned MCL Transport Consultants, the UK's leading consultancy on concessionary travel, to assess bus capacity in the Canterbury area and to calculate the likely cost of a countywide free scheme. This work is now in final draft form.

3.2 MCL have estimated that around 12 additional buses will be required on existing corridors to cater for the new demand generated by free travel in Canterbury. It is likely that a scheme in Tonbridge / Tunbridge Wells will be broadly comparable.

3.3 The difficulty of establishing an accurate level of funding for the pilot schemes at this stage is based upon housing 12 estimated additional buses per pilot area, exactly how many new students will take up the pass and how many are currently not entitled to free school travel but are paying their own fare for bus travel.

3.4 However, based upon the MCL work, Officer's judgement is that each pilot scheme will cost in the region of £1 million per annum based upon a pass charge of £50 for peak and off-peak travel for non-entitled children and £50 for off-peak travel for those entitled to free school travel.

3.5 Appendix 3 details the cost (at 2006/07 prices) of introducing a countywide free scheme. The proposed cost of £50 for both types of card may dampen some demand although a cautious approach at this stage is recommended due to the potential high overall cost of free transport and the levels of uncertainty. The relatively high cost of providing free travel in the pilot areas (£2 million out of a total of £8.3 million) reflects the concentrated nature of school travel demands in these towns and the lack of spare bus capacity currently available. In other words, the pilot areas are the most difficult and expensive to provide because of the complex and busy nature of school travel in these towns. On the other hand, if the scheme is successful in these areas, this would offer considerable re-assurance about the feasibility of a countywide roll out.

3.6 Discussion with bus operators has taken place on the introduction date for the pilot free travel schemes. Both Arriva and Stagecoach are concerned that a start in September 2007 will prove difficult due to the very busy nature of this month. It is therefore proposed to commence the pilot schemes after the summer half-term 2007. This is the quietest time for school travel and will provide a good test of the use of off-peak travel for cultural activities during the summer holidays.

3.7 A budget of £1.5 million per annum has been allocated for both pilot schemes in 2007/08 which does not reflect the full cost but should be adequate for this financial year. There is a further £3.5 million available in 2008/09 and a further £3 million in 2009/10 for a countywide roll-out.

4. Risk

4.1 MCL has established that a net £8.3 million will be required at present day prices to offer a countywide free scheme for 11-16 year olds. There is a risk that costs will be in excess of this as take-up and usage are simply that – estimates only.

5. Administration

5.1 It is very important that all administrative arrangements relating to the pilot scheme operation are effective. This includes pass issuing, reimbursement to all bus operators and general monitoring of usage. It is therefore proposed to ask MCL Transport Consultants to assist with the reimbursement to bus operators and Commercial Services to handle the general administration, queries and pass issuing alongside the administration of the existing home to school transport arrangements. Application forms will require a declaration from parents that their daughter/son will use the pass on a regular basis.

6. Recommendation

6.1 It is recommended that Cabinet give approval to:

- i) the introduction of pilot free travel schemes as detailed in appendix 1 for a minimum of two years
- ii) the Director of Environment and Regeneration be given delegated authority, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste, to approve detailed elements of the scheme and to enter into any necessary agreements or contracts as appropriate with the transport operators.

Contact:

David Hall: 01622 221982

Background Documents: Canterbury Bus Capacity Study by MCL Consultants

Appendix 1

Pilot Scheme Statement

The pilot scheme includes:-

- All children living in Kent aged 11-16 in secondary school education in years 7 to 11. Year 11 students will not be included between June and September 2007.
- All secondary (including private) schools in the Boroughs of Tunbridge Wells, Canterbury and Tonbridge town.
- The pass is valid on all registered local bus services in Kent. Private bus services of any description are excluded. Rail is excluded.
- Existing entitlement to free school travel arrangements will be unchanged. A pupil meeting the above criteria may purchase a pass giving off peak bus travel for £50 (after 0930 Monday to Friday and all day on Saturday and Sunday).
- Children not currently entitled to free school travel may purchase a pass giving free peak and off-peak for £50.
- All passes will require photo-card identity.
- Passes may be issued at any time during the year but the full charge of £50 will apply at all times.
- Passes will be renewed annually from September 2008.

Free Travel Pilots – Participating Secondary Schools

Canterbury

The Archbishops School
Barton Court Grammar School
Canterbury High School
Chaucer Technology College
The Community College, Whitstable
Herne Bay High School
Montgomery School
Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys
Simon Langton Grammar School for Girls
St Anselm's Catholic School

Independent Schools

The Kings School (12 – 18)
St Edmund's School (13 – 18)
Canterbury Steiner School (Cross phase)
Kent College (Canterbury) (11 – 18)
Junior King's School (8 – 13)
Stafford House College (Cross phase)

Special Schools/Pupil Referral Units

Chartham LR Centre
Grosvenor House – Herne Bay
East Kent Hospital School
Orchard School
St Nicholas' School

Tonbridge

The Hayesbrook School
Hillview School for Girls
Hugh Christie Technology College
The Judd School
Tonbridge Grammar School
Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls

Independent Schools

Tonbridge School (13 – 18)
Hilden Grange School (3 – 13)
Sackville School (11 – 18)

Special Schools/Pupil Referral Units

Ridge View School

Tunbridge Wells

Angley School – A Sports College
Bennett Memorial Diocesan School
Cranbrook School
Mascalls School
St Gregory's Catholic Comprehensive School
The Skinners' School
Tunbridge Wells Girls' Grammar School
Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys
Tunbridge Wells High School

Independent Schools

Benenden School (11 – 18)
Marlborough House School (3 – 13)
St Ronan's School (3 – 13)
Kent College Pembury (11 – 18)
Beechwood Sacred Heart School (9 – 18)
Holmewood House School (9 – 18)
Rose Hill School (3 – 13)
Yardley Court (3 – 13)
Bethany School (11 – 18)
Dulwich Preparatory School (8 – 13)
Bedgebury School (3 – 18)

Special Schools/Pupil Referral Units

Broomhill Bank School
Oakley School
Charles Street Centre

The Free Travel Proposal - Summary

	Free Travel Proposal
Total in Age Group	87060
Number taking up Pass	32930
“Home to School” Travel:	
Journeys	10352590
Growth	21%
Leisure/Other Travel:	
Journeys	2530089
Growth	53%
All Travel	
Journeys	12882679
Growth	25.8%
Total Net Cost (at 2006/07 prices)	£8,337,538