

Bus Roadside Publicity & Infrastructure Unit

A report by the County Transportation Manager to the Highway Advisory Board on 10th July 2007

Introduction

1. This report outlines the current arrangements for providing bus timetable information and infrastructure at bus stops in Kent.

Background

2. The Transport Act 2000 provides a duty for each Local Transport Authority in England and Wales to ensure that adequate information is provided by local bus operators. It also empowers them to make arrangements as necessary to plug any gaps in the provision of information, recharging the costs to the appropriate bus operator. Transport Authorities set out their proposals in an Information Strategy which formally came into effect in April 2002.
3. Kent County Council's Public Transport Information Strategy was first published in 2001 and reviewed by a specialist independent consultant in 2006. The consultants report recommended that greater attention was given to the arrangements for and funding of the provision of information at bus stops.

4. Kent's Public Transport Information Strategy (2001) concluded that:

"Roadside information for bus service users is poor in many parts of Kent and the County Council in partnership with Arriva has developed a Roadside Infrastructure Unit which is responsible for the display of up-to-date information on bus services throughout the County. This scheme was initially introduced on a trial basis during 1999 and the County Council has agreed a formal two-year arrangement with Arriva."

5. The consultants review in 2006 concluded that:

"These arrangements are still in place today, but the procedures and resources for providing roadside information must be reviewed if it is to meet the desired target level of 75% of bus stops in the County. Also improvements must be made to the design standards to ensure the public find the publicity easy to understand and it improves the image of public transport services in the County."

Roadside Infrastructure Unit

6. The Roadside Infrastructure Unit was formed in 1999 through a fixed cost contract with the main bus operator in West and Mid Kent, Arriva, to provide timetable publicity and information at bus stops and interchanges. Arriva post timetables and other relevant information at bus stops giving information on all bus services in Kent run either on a commercial basis or under contract to Kent County Council. KCC currently spends £7 million per annum on procuring "socially necessary" bus services across Kent. Approximately £200,000 of this budget is spent on promoting and advertising these services.

Bus Roadside Publicity & Infrastructure Unit

7. The only exception to this arrangement is that Stagecoach, who opted out of the countywide scheme, maintains all stops in areas where they were the sole or principal bus operator. This covers most Districts of East Kent and some areas of Mid Kent such as Ashford town.
8. The Roadside Infrastructure Unit officers carry out a number of functions:
 - they seek to ensure that timetables for all commercial and Kent County Council funded bus services are accurate, up-to-date and readable;
 - they resolve or report to the relevant authority, cases of vandalism, graffiti and traffic damage to bus stops;
 - they deal with a large number of enquiries from members of the public acting as the agent of Kent Highway Services, aiming to respond to reports of dangerous bus stops within 24 hours and 48 hours for less urgent enquiries;
 - they help to distribute timetables to outlets across Kent;
 - they provide roadside information about short term changes to bus services caused by roadworks;
9. There is now a need to review the arrangements currently provided by Arriva under contract to Kent County Council. Between 1999/2000 and 2005/2006 the Roadside Infrastructure agreement remained virtually unchanged with only minimal inflationary price rises to cover the bus operators cost increases.
10. However the value of the contract increased from £30,000 in 2005/06 to £40,000 in 2006/07 to reflect Arriva's proposal to expand the team from two to three officers, with the aim of providing a more responsive service to the public and higher quality information at bus stops and interchanges.
11. To maintain consistency with the procurement of local bus services, the current arrangements need to be put out to tender from April 2008. This will give all interested bus operators and other organisations such as Kent County Council's Commercial Services Department the opportunity to tender for this work, thereby ensuring best value for the County Council and the highest possible level of service to the public.

Recommendations

12. Subject to the views of this Board, it is proposed to recommend to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste that approval is given to putting the Roadside Infrastructure agreement out to tender with the new contract starting in April 2008.

Accountable Officer - David Eaton (01622) 696845