

A20 Corridor Statutory Quality Bus Partnership Scheme Consultation Report

Executive Summary: The Consultation showed broad support for the Scheme, especially from bus user representative organisations. A number of comments relating to people with visual impairments and other protected characteristics have led to further improvements being incorporated into the Scheme. The only negative comments received were queries about the impacts of the Scheme on other local bus operators.

1. Introduction:

- It is a statutory requirement to conduct a Consultation on any proposed Statutory Quality Partnership Scheme (SQPS).
- The Quality Partnership Scheme model was introduced by the 2000 Transport Act, and amended by the 2008 Act. Under such a scheme a local transport authority agrees to invest in improved facilities at specific locations along bus routes (e.g. bus stops or bus lanes) and operators who wish to use those facilities undertake to provide services of a particular standard (e.g. new buses, or driver training standards). Any local authority wishing to implement such a scheme must conduct a Consultation and publish Notices in the Press.
- Cabinet Committee are required to make a decision to publish the SQPS, following the Consultation. If the decision is to publish the SQPS, Notices will be placed in the Press and sent to all appropriate operators and the Traffic Commissioner.

2. Consultation process

- 12 week Consultation 22nd April – 15th July 2013
- Total = 100 consultees directly invited to participate in consultation
- Bus Operators, Community Transport Operators, User Representatives (Passenger Focus, Campaign for Better Transport etc.), Disability Forums, Older People's Forums and Youth Forum, Kent Police, Parish Councils, Local Members, Traffic Commissioner, Local Schools, Children Centres, Gateways and Citizen Advice Bureaus, Libraries.
- Statutory Notice published in Kent Messenger (19th April) and Kent on Sunday (28th April)
- Posters displayed on route no.71 buses (22nd April)
- Information page on kent.gov.uk with online consultation form (22nd April)
- Tweets were made on Twitter Social Media Site (23rd April)
- Press Release resulted in KM article published (26th April)
- Posters displayed at bus stops (2nd May)
- An email was sent to all consultees as the basic method of communication (8th May)
- A letter with poster to display were sent to schools, gateways, libraries and children's centres (8th May)

- Community Engagement Officer visited local Forums
- On-going communication (email and telephone) to seek advice from Kent Association for the Blind
- Level Playing Field Staff Group bulletin (KCC)
- Easy Read version of the Scheme document
- Text Relay telephone line set up
- Summary version of the Scheme document

3. Respondents

- 10 responses received
- (4 via Online form on kent.gov.uk/A20; 1 via GovMetrics; 5 via email)
- (3 from members of the public; 2 from User Representative Organisations; 1 from local bus operator; 1 from Police; 1 from local school; 2 from Disability Forums)

4. Consultation responses:

- Public
 - Dissatisfied with high bus fares charged by Arriva
 - Support proposed improvements
 - Calls for higher cyclist priority on roads
- Disability Forum
 - Request Consultation be aimed at parents of certain local schools
 - Asked if smartcards will be easily distinguishable for the visually impaired
 - Asked if Real Time Information screens will be easy to read for the partially sighted
 - Asked if timetables can be made audible
 - Asked if lighting will be anti-glare
 - Kent Association for the Blind has received no complaints from their members regarding bus travel on A20 London Road, but welcomes any improvements
 - Importance of driver training in multiple aspects of protected characteristics (English as a second language, learning and hearing difficulties, visual impairment)
- School
 - Request to extend the Scheme eastwards to include the Somerfield Hospital bus stop
 - Request for children's fares on buses before 9am
 - Request to make Somerfield bus stop safer e.g. widen pavement/ erect barriers
 - Asked if more buses will be provided

- Asked why the Scheme is not extended into Leybourne or Leybourne Chase
- Police
 - No specific observations
 - Request the Scheme meets all necessary criteria, legislation and guidance and does not compromise other road users or create extra enforcement work for the Police
 - Request further information on any traffic signal priorities or changes to bus lanes
- User Representative
 - Support for the proposals
 - Passenger Focus research confirms many elements of the Scheme are core priorities for passengers (reliability, punctuality, information, real-time information, fares, multi-operator ticket, frequency, driver attitude).
 - Importance of publicising the Customer Charter for passengers to realise the benefits
 - Request for operators to publish more performance data
 - Request to include “soft” monitoring of Scheme i.e. what passengers think of the services
- Bus Operator
 - Asked if revenue support would be necessary for operators under fares capping
 - Unfair that main operator was financially assisted in purchasing hybrid bus fleet, which allows them to meet the emissions standards within the Scheme
 - Asked if would not be better to put out to contract the bus route along A20 London Road with expected services levels included in the Scheme, rather than ask these levels of any operator running on the route
 - Eager to participate in a multi-operator ticketing scheme
 - Fear that fares caps will reduce or suppress income

5. How Responses have been taken into account

- Existing high bus fares will be managed by setting maximum fares that operators can charge
- Consultees included local schools, who were provided with a poster to display on their premises
- The Scheme area was carefully devised according to where most investment has taken place and with such investment which bus services could reasonably meet the requirements. The Scheme area is limited so that investments are not spread too thinly and deliver maximum return on investment.

- Reduced fares are available for children through the Kent Freedom Pass and 16+ travelcard. The opportunity to provide reduced fares for children without the above before 9am is being explored separately with the main operator.
- The Somerfield bus stop is outside of the Scheme area but the possibility of conducting improvement works is being explored separately.
- The Scheme does not mandate more buses than existing to be provided, but sets a minimum number of buses to be provided per hour which guarantees this high level of service. Monday to Saturday 9am-5pm there will be a minimum of 8 buses an hour, which equates to roughly one bus every 8 minutes.
- Punctuality data (as part of performance data) is subject to a separate agreement with operators (Punctuality Improvement Project).
- Attitudinal surveys (i.e. asking what passengers actually think) will be carried out at least once a year.
- It is not expected that the fares caps included within the SQPS scheme will mean that the existing services on the corridor will require financial support from the KCC in the future. On the contrary, the objective of the scheme is to improve the quality of services on the corridor to attract new passengers, which should more than compensate for the impacts of inflation of costs.
- The main operator successfully bid to the Government's Green Bus Fund for the majority of their funding. The funding provided the surplus necessary to purchase hybrid vehicles rather than the equivalent non-hybrid Euro IV emissions vehicles.

6. Equality Analysis

- As a result of the Consultation several action points have been added to the EqIA:
 - On-going communication with Kent Association for the Blind, to ensure that displayed information has good colour contrast and take advice about other aspects of accessible presentation.
 - Amend Scheme to include requirement for bus operators to deliver greater Awareness Training to all drivers.
 - New Real Time Information displays at bus stops will have audible announcements built in. These will be triggered by visually impaired people carrying an appropriate key fob.
 - The possibility to produce tactile cards for passengers requiring them (visually impaired) will be explored.

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