

Young Person's Travel Pass

Consultation Report

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Introduction:

KCC developed a proposed replacement for the Freedom Pass that continues to meet the needs of service users while also representing a sustainable and affordable scheme for the authority.

Mr Brazier took the decision to approve the proposed Young Persons Travel Pass which will now be implemented to launch at the beginning of the 2014-15 academic year in September.

The consultation on the proposal ran from February 24th until March 24th, hosted on Kent.gov to ensure the majority of those interested in changes to the Freedom Pass would be made aware of it. Extensive media coverage in the run up to the consultation had already raised the level of public interest and high response numbers were expected. KCC welcomed this as all of its consultations seek to encourage public involvement in the decision making process.

The proposal was to alter the scheme to provide unlimited weekday travel between 06:00 & 19:00 for 11-16 year olds at a cost of £200. While this would remove the provision of weekend leisure travel, it represented excellent value for school travel for families who have children attending selective or distant educational venues. This has been a key consideration for KCC in developing a suitable system to meet the needs of Kent students and their families. It is acknowledged that any increase in price may have a detrimental effect on those who rely on the original Freedom Pass but the proposed scheme will allow KCC to maintain access to the bus network for young people that would still be the most generous of its kind outside London.

The consultation sought to identify whether the proposal would have a significant or unacceptable negative impact on the service users or if the impact would be disproportionate with regard to Equalities legislation. The proposal itself represented the result of significant internal work by KCC to develop the most appropriate and sustainable scheme that would remain within the new budget and be practical to implement. Therefore the consultation was not seeking approval of the scheme but rather providing an opportunity for respondents to highlight concerns or serious issues that KCC may have not already considered.

The consultation feedback, as well as the updated Equality Impact Assessment, were reviewed by David Brazier and conscientiously considered when making his decision.

Consultation process

Stakeholders:

As transport for young people is a significant issue that impacts on a broad spectrum of people, the stakeholder group is a very big one. Young people and parents were the primary stakeholder group for the consultation but KCC was aware that the issue would be of interest to bus companies, schools, colleges, other road users and the wider public in general.

The level of media coverage in the run up to the consultation assisted in the advertising and awareness raising for the consultation, helping to ensure that all relevant stakeholders were informed in plenty of time.

Digital communications was the primary method of engagement and advertising, as per KCC's policies. This entailed using social media site Twitter and emails being sent out to community groups via the Community Engagement Team and Highways.

Paper versions of the consultation and questionnaire were not produced as standard to limit unnecessary printing and distribution costs that would have been disproportionate. However, as with all formal consultations, KCC has the capacity to provide documentation or support in alternative formats upon request through the Contact Centre. This was highlighted on the consultation page for potential respondents.

Process:

The online public consultation ran from the 24th of February 2013 to 24th March 2014, featuring a detailed questionnaire (copy attached) and two supporting documents provided by KCC Highways; an Equality Impact Assessment and a Frequently Asked Questions paper. These documents were downloaded a combined 714 times.

As well as digital communication the consultation was highlighted on Kent.gov's homepage and email invitations were sent out to all registered users of the current Freedom Pass.

Responses:

Numbers

The total responses received were 3563 online.

Key points:

This section includes a summary of the main themes and questions that emerged in the feedback, each with a KCC response included beneath. This list is not exhaustive but seeks to address the primary concerns raised by those that responded to the consultation.

- Request to pay fee in instalments
 - KCC appreciates the pressures on local families and to ease the financial impact, the new Young Person's Travel Pass can be paid for by two £100 instalments.
- People want the option to 'upgrade' their Pass to include weekend usage.
 - While KCC understands the benefits users enjoyed from weekend leisure travel, it is no longer financially viable for KCC to afford this. Pre-consultation and media engagement showed that School travel was the priority issue for the majority of Freedom Pass users.
- People would be keen to see a multiple child discount for larger families.
 - KCC has negotiated the best deal for users already in its engagement with the transport providers and is unable to provide further cost reductions to the users.
- People would prefer a phased increase in price rather than an immediate 100% increase.
 - Given the financial investment KCC is already making to the YPTP which will still cost the authority over £10 million, the need to offset this through greater user contributions cannot be delayed.
- Numerous comments indicating that respondents feel that KCC is not supporting its own environmental policies by increasing bus access prices which respondents claim will force more people to drive rather than use public transport.
 - KCC appreciates that any additional costs at this time of financial constraint will place extra pressure on family budgets. However YPTP still represents excellent value for money, remaining cheaper than driving in the majority of cases. It should also be noted that opting for car use is a personal choice and the environmental impact is the driver's responsibility rather than the authority which continues to try its best to make public transport an affordable and viable alternative.
- Some respondents were confused regarding the proposed start of the new scheme.
 - The Young Person's Travel Pass will come into effect for September 2014 to coincide with the new academic year.

Equality Analysis:

The consultation responses were analysed for Equality relevant feedback using the 'About You' demographic elements of the questionnaire in addition to considering details from the free text comments. This was particularly important for this consultation as the main purpose was to investigate whether the proposal would result in unintentional

discrimination or unacceptably disproportionate impact on any combination of the nine protected characteristics.

There were 3563 responses, of these 6% related to equality issues, an equal amount relating to parents with disabilities and young carers. Parents who may be on a low income due to disability could access a reduced price, if their children were eligible for free school meals. Young carers are given the pass for free.

There was considerable comment in regard to the fairness of discriminating against families with young people over 16 who must pay a greater fee for a similar service despite being legally required to attend education. KCC appreciates that this is seen by the public as unfair but the requirement to attend is a central government policy which has not been supported by additional funding. It should also be noted that legally, it is permissible to discriminate on age grounds below the age of 18 provided there is reasonable justification. The freedom of choice allowed by the continuation of supported access to bus transport via the new Young Person's Travel Pass also minimises the negative impact on those preferring to use faith or selective schools as the flat price of a Pass makes distances irrelevant in terms of cost.

Full details of KCC's current understanding of the relevant Equality issues can be found in the Equality Impact Assessment which breaks down the potential impact by the nine Protected Characteristics. Details of both positive and negative impact are included along with appropriate response plans or policy references.

Next Steps:

KCC is grateful to those who responded to the consultation and assisted in the development of the Young Persons Travel Pass.

All those who plan to take up the new Pass can apply by following this link:
www.kent.gov.uk/youngpersonstravelpass

The authority is committed to ensuring all significant council decisions are subject to appropriate consultation processes and that the people of Kent are involved in the decision making process, as per KCC's Bold Steps for Kent policy.