

Executive Decision

From: John Burr, Director – Highways, Transportation & Waste

To: David Brazier, Cabinet Member – Environment & Transport
30 April 2014

Decision No: 13/00095/2

Subject: **YOUNG PERSON'S TRAVEL PASS**

Classification: Unrestricted

Past pathway of paper: This matter was discussed at the Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee on 24 April 2014. The report also builds upon discussions held at the full County Council budget debate in February 2014 and the Environment, Highways & Waste Cabinet Committee in December 2013.

Future pathway of paper: For Cabinet Member decision

Summary: To seek Cabinet Member approval to introduce a Young Person's Travel Pass for 11-16 year olds from the academic year 2014/15 which provides free bus travel in Kent from 6am to 7pm on Monday to Friday. The pass will cost £200 to recipients, £100 to those entitled to free school meals and free to young carers and looked after children. The Young Person's Travel Pass will replace the existing Kent Freedom Pass scheme.

The cost of the Kent 16+ Travel Card will be reduced from £520 to £400, this is the only proposed change to this scheme.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Member is asked to approve the introduction of a Young Person's Travel Pass for 11-16 year olds providing free bus travel from 6am to 7pm on Monday to Friday commencing at the start of the academic year through to 31st July.

- The pass will cost £200 but charged at £100 for those entitled to free school meals and free to young carers and looked after children.
- An option of two six monthly payments will be offered.
- The 16+ Pass will be reduced from £520 to £400 and will continue to offer unlimited bus travel in Kent.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The County Council considered a petition signed by around 16,000 people last year seeking a similar travel benefit for post 16 students to that provided through the Freedom scheme for 11-16 year olds. Simply to extend the current Freedom Pass arrangement is not sustainable financially as it would add an estimated £6m to the budget. Therefore, to provide an equitable way forward, a review of concessionary travel for all academic year groups was carried out. This decision recognises the distinction between the two schemes.
- 1.2 Additionally, against a background of savings required through the Medium Term Financial Plan, officers designed a stored value smart card scheme to enable a capped level of benefit to be issued to recipients. It was proposed to introduce £350 for 11-16 year olds and £250 for 16+. Opposition from holders of the current Freedom Pass to the stored value card and discussions with bus companies led to a new scheme for 11-16 year olds called the Young Person's Travel Pass. The 16+ scheme is retained but offered at a reduced financial cost to the recipient.

2 Financial Implications

- 2.1 Savings required through the Medium Term Financial Plan are £3.9m for 14/15 and a further £2.1m in 15/16.
- 2.2 The revised schemes reflect these savings although some risks have been identified in the financial out-turn of the Young Person's Travel pass.

3 Policy Framework

- 3.1 Assisted bus travel supports the principle of Growth Without Gridlock through reducing traffic congestion at peak times.

4 The Report

- 4.1 At the meeting of the Environment, Highways and Waste Cabinet Committee on 13th December, against a background of savings required through the Medium Term Financial Plan, Members endorsed the principle of a revised Freedom Pass scheme based on a stored value e-purse to be used on bus services in Kent. This would enable the County Council to cap the value of a pass to £350. During subsequent discussions and engagement with pass users, bus companies and Members the proposed scheme was revised to overcome a number of operational risks and to ensure that access to school was available to all.

- 4.2 Given the feedback we received on a stored value scheme, the County Council listened carefully and devised a revised scheme called the Young Person's Travel Pass for 11-16 year olds. This scheme retains the basic principle of the Freedom Pass providing free travel during the academic year on Kent bus services but limited to Monday to Friday 6am to 7pm.
- 4.3 The initial cost to the recipient has been raised to £200 and this may be paid in two instalments. In order to assist those in receipt of free school meals, a reduced price of £100 will be made. Young carers and looked after children will receive the pass free of charge.
- 4.4 Whilst the County Council's scheme for 11-16 year olds, not entitled to free home to school transport, is the most generous outside London, it was important that we undertook an Equality Impact Assessment to ensure no major disadvantage for any particular group of students. This Assessment has been completed and approved. The County Council also undertook an extensive consultation exercise via the web site and by writing direct to recipients. The Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport considered the results of the consultation very carefully prior to agreeing the final detail of the proposed scheme.

5. Cabinet Committee Comments

The Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee considered the proposed decision at its meeting of 24 April 2014.

The Committee held a lengthy discussion, which included consideration of a petition received and one ongoing, the proposals of the Cabinet Member and a proposed amendment to the original recommendations, as follows:

'Replace bullet point 4 of the proposed decision with "An urgent review of the proposed 16+ Pass be undertaken to examine the cost variance between the proposal to continue with unlimited bus travel in Kent and the alternative proposal suggested by petitioners to extend the Young Person's Travel Pass scheme to 16 – 19 year olds.'

The amendment was voted upon and fell. Voting was as follows: For (6) Against (7)

The substantive motion, to endorse the recommendations as included in the report, was voted upon and carried. Voting was as follows: For (7) Against (3) Abstentions (3)

6. Conclusions

6.1 A balance has been achieved between meeting the savings required through the Medium Term Financial Plan and aspirations for 16+ bus pass holders to have parity with 11-16 year olds. In order to ensure value for money in a time of financial constraint, it is recognised that some recipients of the two schemes would like the County Council to provide more.

7. Recommendation(s)

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8. Background documents

Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment – Young Person's Travel Pass

Appendix 2 – Young Person's Travel Pass Consultation Report

Appendix 3 - Kent Freedom Pass and Kent 16+ Travel Card Review – Information for parents & students

Appendix 4 – Freedom Pass questions

9. Contact Details

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