
By: Head of Transport and Development, Kent Highway Services
To: Highways Advisory Board - 3 March 2009
Subject: Public Transport Developments, Funding and Initiatives
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report informs members of the principal developments, funding arrangements and initiatives undertaken in the provision of public transport in Kent during 2008/09 and planned for implementation during 2009/10.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Public Transport is experiencing growth in Kent. The County Council has been at the forefront of developing and implementing new partnership initiatives in recent years through Kickstart funding, and has continued to work closely through its Quality Bus Partnerships (QBPs) with operators and district councils to improve local bus services. Passenger numbers have increased by some 20% over the past 5 years. In 2005/06 some 45.7 million trips were recorded, in 2006/07 48.6m trips were recorded and in 2007/08 51.7m trips.
- 1.2 During 2008/09 a number of key initiatives have been delivered and further initiatives are planned for 2009/10. This report updates Members on progress.

2. Principal Developments

2.1 Quality Bus Partnerships

The Transport Act 2000 and the Local Transport Act 2008 provide for the establishment of Voluntary Partnership Agreements between bus operators, district councils and county councils. These are generally known as Quality Bus Partnerships (QBPs) and by the end of 2008 there were four in existence in Kent – Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells, Canterbury and Thanet. On 9 February 2009 an Ashford QBP was signed, a four-party agreement which also included the Ashford's Future Partnership Board. It is also intended to reach agreement for the signing of a Dover QBP by the end of April 2009. QBPs establish close working relationships between the parties to each agreement, and aim to improve the quality and reliability of bus services through the attainment of targets for punctuality, reliability, bus stop access and other improvements. Kent has been particularly successful at establishing QBPs and encouraging investment in Kent which has brought significant improvements in local bus services.

2.2 Bus Stop Improvements

Kent Highway Services, in partnership with Arriva Southern Counties and Stagecoach East Kent, is implementing a programme of improvements to bus stops throughout the county. This will eventually result in every urban bus stop being provided with a 24/7 bus stop clearway (to prevent unlawful parking), a raised kerb (wherever possible) to assist the mobility impaired, a clearly branded bus stop flag, and clear tailored timetable information for the routes

serving the stop. It is planned to launch a new roadside infrastructure unit contract to upgrade and maintain timetable information during 2009.

2.3 Kent Freedom Pass

The Kent Freedom Pass scheme enabling free travel for £50 annual pass for young people living in Kent and schooled in Kent in academic years 7-11 has been expanded, with Swale and Thanet districts being added in January 2009. The final four districts – Dartford, Gravesham, Sevenoaks and Ashford – will complete the scheme in June 2009. This innovative approach has seen a significant increase in bus passenger journeys by young people. There are currently over 12,000 passes on issue and on average some 250,000 trips are made per school term month.

2.4 KCC Kickstart

The principle of pump-priming existing bus services to improve the quality of service has been adopted by KCC, with over £1 million of capital funding for the provision of new vehicles. The main funding was awarded to Stagecoach in East Kent for their 'A-line' route in Ashford, which was launched together with other improvements and the signing of their QBP on 9 February 2009. The Ashford A line provides a 10 minute frequency service linking Stanhope and Singlewell with Ashford Station and the Town Centre. Other areas of the County are also to benefit from this initiative, which is funding new low floor easy access vehicles with other bus operators in Swale, Thanet and Sevenoaks.

2.5 DfT Kickstart

- (a) The Department for Transport (DfT) has recently announced that it is ready to receive bids for its new Kickstart funding scheme. The DfT is looking to pump-prime bus services which will contribute to its overall objectives of increasing bus patronage, and in particular developing bus services as an alternative to car use, bringing with it a reduction in congestion and benefits to the environment. The DfT will give consideration to bids which demonstrate improved accessibility and social inclusion, and especially schemes which make use of the new bus powers in the Local Transport Act 2008.
- (b) Bus operators in Kent have been approached by KCC with a view to submitting bids which meet the DfT criteria. The two principal operators, as well as the smaller operators, have been invited to participate in the bidding process, which must be completed by 3 July 2009. We intend to demonstrate good partnership working by submitting proposals for complimentary capital expenditure through the Transportation and Safety Package programme on roadside infrastructure improvements and, in some cases, match-funding for vehicle procurement.

2.6 Smartcards

KCC is working in partnership with the Kent bus operators to roll out new Electronic Ticket Machines (ETMs) with Smartcard readers and GPS/GPRS transmitters on all service vehicles. This project will generate significant benefits to passengers and bus operators, including reduced bus stop dwell times, more effective delivery and administration of concessionary travel schemes including those for senior citizens and Freedom pass holders, and enhanced information on patronage, network performance and the identification of incidents and congestion. It is hoped that a pilot scheme will be launched in partnership with Stagecoach in Thanet from September 2009 for Freedom pass holders attending Thanet schools.

2.7 High Speed Rail Services

KCC's Select Committee on Future Passenger Rail Services in Kent reported in October 2008 on the likely impact of the introduction of High Speed Rail, and other rail service changes, due in December 2009. The select committee made a number of recommendations, including the need for improved access at the stations to be served by the High Speed service. Since then, members of the KHS Transport & Development teams have met with Southeastern, the rail operator, and plans are in place for modest improvements to walking, cycling and bus access and information at these stations. A Station Travel Plan has been developed for Ashford and is due to be launched this summer. It is hoped that this will be a model for promoting sustainable travel to other stations in Kent.

2.8 The Kent & Medway Concessionary Travel Scheme

KCC has provided additional funding to sustain the Kent & Medway Concessionary Travel scheme for over 60 year olds and disabled people. This has enabled pass holders to travel from 9.00 am instead of from 9.30am.

3. Sustaining Kent's Supported Services

3.1 Tendered Network

(a) KCC has a clearly established member approved policy to determine the provision of financial support for socially necessary public transport services. This states that the cost of any such service should not exceed £3 per passenger journey, and that the journey should provide access to one of the following services which could not otherwise be attained: education, employment, health care, or essential food shopping.

(b) About 20% of the scheduled bus routes in the county are provided with revenue support. Tenders for these services, are awarded in accordance with Best Value principles. The revenue funding for these is provided by a combination of KCC funding (£5.6 million) and by the DfT's Rural Bus Subsidy Grant (£2.3 million). Services have been sustained during 2008/09. Passenger numbers on these services are currently running at 4,149,576 trips, slightly up on last year. The County Council also now supports 9 Kent Karrier services. These services provide a combination of dial a ride and fixed routes for disabled people and for people living in rural areas away from the main bus routes.

4. Funding

4.1 The total revenue budget allocated for supporting bus services in 2009/10 has been set at £8.381 million. £9.3 million has been allocated to fund the Kent Freedom Pass and a £0.650 million contribution is to be made to the Kent & Medway Concessionary Travel Scheme. The Kent Kickstart initiative, smartcards and bus stop improvements are covered by capital funding through the Transportation and Safety Package Programme in the Local Transport Plan which is reported to this Board separately.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 KCC continues to make significant investment, through both funding and personnel, in the creation of good quality public transport services throughout the county. The Council is committed to attaining modal shift from car to public transport, by enhancing the provision of bus services and by improving access for all. Recent initiatives such as Kickstart funding and the Freedom Pass, and new ones such as Smartcard, will continue to encourage sustainable transport options throughout Kent, thus improving the quality of life and ensuring a first-class public transport service for the residents of, and visitors to, the county of Kent.

6. Members are requested to note the report.

Background Documents: The following background documents have been used in the preparation of this report:
Select Committee on Future Passenger Rail Services in Kent, Kent County Council, October 2008
Kickstart Bus Funding Competition 2009 – Guidance on the application process, Department for Transport, January 2009

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