

**From:** Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste

Roger Wilkin, Director of Highways, Transportation and Waste

**To:** Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee – 20 March 2018

**Subject:** Rural Bus Services – “Big Conversation” Programme

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past Pathway of Paper:** N/A

**Future Pathway of Paper:** Environment & Transport Committee

**Electoral Division:** Countywide

**Summary:**

To continue to provide sustainable rural bus services that potentially could improve rural access and be delivered at a lower cost, it is necessary to review, develop and test alternative delivery models.

It is proposed that a “Big Conversation” programme of engagement involving transport providers, community transport providers, parish councils and the public be rolled out across the county to identify possible alternative delivery models which could then be developed as a number of pilots.

**Recommendation:**

It is recommended that the Cabinet Committee endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste for the proposed programme for the “Big Conversation”, its aims and proposed approach.

**1. Introduction**

1.1 In November 2017 proposals were brought forward which would reduce the budget for subsidised bus services by £4M over a two-year period.

1.2 If they had been implemented, the impact of those proposals on rural communities would have been significant. The proposals were not enacted, as the Government settlement allowed a greater budget allocation resulting in a reduced budget saving.

1.3 However, budget pressures continue within public transport, especially in funding statutory services such as the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) and the very popular Young Persons Travel Pass.

1.4 Therefore, new models for the delivery of rural bus services are needed, which maintain services, improve rural access and, potentially, can be delivered at lower cost.

1.5 To identify and develop these potential models of delivery, we need to understand the 'art of the possible', the models of delivery and gain the input of the public/stakeholders.

## **2 A 'Big Conversation'**

2.1 A 'Big Conversation' is proposed which in simple terms, is about talking to the residents of Kent and key stakeholders, gaining their views and input on future models for the delivery of rural bus services and improved rural connectivity.

2.2 The key aims of the programme are to inform what a transport model for rural services could look like and to seek views about how best to:

- Improve rural accessibility for those without alternative means of travel
- Help tackle social isolation
- Improve the use of existing transport resources including Community Transport
- Contribute to increasing resilience and continuity of service delivery
- Potentially save money through innovative coordination and integration with partners
- Provide the "right transport solution for the right client need for the right price"

2.3 The programme will invite ideas about the possible alternative delivery models for rural bus services, models which could replace conventional subsidised bus services, provide greater access and be more financially sustainable.

2.4 From practice elsewhere, potential alternative models include:

- Demand responsive transport – either as part of a wider KCC project or commercially led.
- Taxi bus style feeder services – linking rural communities to main line commercial bus services but with guaranteed connections.
- Community led transport services – either a community bus or contracted service.

However, the list is not exhaustive and other ideas will be welcomed.

2.5 The programme will include engagement with:

- Parish Councils through the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC)
- Commercial transport providers on alternative models
- Community transport on the art of the possible
- Technology providers on total transport and Mobility as a Service (MaaS)
- The public and other stakeholders

- 2.6 This engagement programme will then culminate in a Rural Bus Summit bringing ideas and people together.
- 2.7 A Programme Manager will oversee the delivery of the programme. The programme manager will work with KCC Communications Team, Consultation & Engagement Team, and Public Transport on delivery of the programme.
- 2.8 The engagement sessions with commercial transport, community transport and technology providers will be centred at Maidstone. However, sessions for the public and other key stakeholders will be spread across the county, will not be confined to weekdays during office hours, but will also take place in the evenings and on Saturdays, ensuring that the programme reaches all parts of the county.
- 2.9 The proposals and views expressed at all sessions will be collected, collated and distilled into a report by external consultants.
- 2.10 The report findings will be used to develop appropriate pilots, which enable alternative delivery models to be tested, their use analysed and the user experience to be defined.
- 2.11 The findings will be reported to ETCC, alongside proposals for pilot schemes to be shaped and delivered.
- 2.12 The proposed timetable for the delivery of the programme is as follows:
- 20 March 2018 - Paper to Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee
  - April 2018 – Commence focus groups and engagement with Parish Councils, outlining the art of the possible, understand barriers to travel, gaining ideas and support for potential pilots
  - May 2018 – Engagement with commercial operators on the barriers and opportunities for delivering rural services and reviewing idea
  - May 2018 – Engagement with the Community Transport providers on the art of the possible.
  - June 2018 - Bus Summit
  - July-September 2018 – Review big conversation inputs and develop appropriate pilots

### **3 Financial Implications**

- 3.1 The programme will make use of external consultants, venues and other support facilities, which will be funded from the budget of £500k which has been allocated for community transport innovations.
- 3.2 A detailed cost plan will be drawn up and overseen by the Programme Manager.

### **4 Legal implications**

- 4.1 No legal implications identified.

## 5 Equalities implications

5.1 No equalities issues identified.

## 6 Other corporate implications

6.1 None.

## 7 Conclusions

7.1 Pressures on budgets remain. Therefore, alternative forms of delivery need to be explored in order to improve sustainability, offer better access and potentially save money.

7.2 Through engagement with transport providers, technology providers, parishes, other key stakeholders and the public, the “Big Conversation” programme will allow such models to be identified, gain feedback and support from users and key stakeholders.

## 8 Recommendation(s):

8.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet Committee endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste for the proposed programme for the “Big Conversation”, its aims and proposed approach.

## 9 Background Documents

10.1 None.

## 10 Contact details

Report Author:  <b>Phil Lightowler</b> Head of Public Transport 03000 414073 <a href="mailto:philip.lightowler@kent.gov.uk">philip.lightowler@kent.gov.uk</a>	Relevant Director:  <b>Roger Wilkin</b> Director of Highways, Transportation and Waste 03000 413479 <a href="mailto:roger.wilkin@kent.gov.uk">roger.wilkin@kent.gov.uk</a>
--	---