

From: David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport
Phil Lightowler, Interim Director Transportation

To: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 3 November 2021

Subject: **KCC Bus Feedback Portal – Status Update and Summary of Feedback received December 2019 – September 2021.**

Key decision: **N/A (for information and consideration only)**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of Paper: N/A

Future Pathway of Paper: N/A

Electoral Division: Countywide

Summary: This report summarises use made of the bus feedback portal since the last formal report in December 2019 until end of September 2021. It provides comments on the value of the portal and makes recommendations for its future application.

Recommendation: Cabinet Committee is asked to note the contents of the report and to suggest any further actions to be taken.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Bus Feedback Portal was introduced in January 2019 as a response to feedback received during KCC's countywide consultation on the future of rural transport conducted in 2018.
- 1.2 The [Bus service feedback](#) portal is hosted on the Kent.gov. website and has been designed to enable bus users to tell KCC about their experiences of using services and allows KCC to capture data and identify trends. Although the Council does not contract, control or regulate the operators nor fund the majority of their services, understanding these trends enables KCC to seek to address issues on behalf of Kent's bus users with operators.
- 1.3 Owing to the impact of the pandemic, a summary of feedback has not been provided to ETCC since November 2019. This report therefore provides an overview of the feedback received in this period and more importantly makes some suggestions about the future applications for the portal in light of the changing bus operating environment, brought about by the new National Bus Strategy.

2. Summary of Feedback

- 2.1 The last detailed report on output from the feedback portal was submitted in November 2019. The period from then until end of September 2021, represents a period of 22 months. In that time only 221 comments have been lodged.
- 2.2 This represents an average of 10 per month which is clearly very low against previous use of the portal, which was identified as being, on average 49 comments per month across the first 11 months. Analysis by date shows that 66 comments related to the pre-pandemic period (up to and including March 2020); an average of 16 per month whereas in the period during and post pandemic only 9 comments per month on average have been recorded.
- 2.4 13 comments received related to compliments. The remaining 208 were complaints about an operator or a service. Reports of reliability and capacity problems account for 49% and 20% of all comments respectively with complaints about vehicles, drivers and customer service also featuring.
- 2.5 3 operators account for 80% of comments. Not surprisingly given the proportion of the network that they provide Arriva (37%) and Stagecoach (29%) have attracted the largest amount. Go Coach who are the biggest operator in the Sevenoaks and outlying area have also attracted 14% of comments with 11 other operators accounting for the remaining 20%.
- 2.6 Comments in Ashford, Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, and Tunbridge Wells account for over 70% of the overall total. Maidstone has attracted by far the largest proportion and accounts for 26% of all feedback received. It is considered that this probably relates to the large volume of lengthy and complex schools travel which can be prone to experiencing capacity and other problems, particularly around the start of the new school year.

3. Analysis and Future Role of the Portal

- 3.1 The low and declining use of the portal is disappointing but can be explained in part due to the impacts of the pandemic. This resulted in a period of extremely limited bus use and, to this date, patronage levels remain lower than pre-pandemic. In addition, during the pandemic the priorities of users and of the Council were re-focused. From a KCC perspective this has resulted in there being no publicising of the portal and the role that it plays.
- 3.2 Despite the lack of volume the feedback continues to provide a consistent message about the priorities of users and related complaint types which are largely focused on the service itself in terms of reliability, vehicles, and driver conduct.
- 3.3. Similarly, the areas attracting feedback also support officers own understanding of the network, of usage and perennial issues. The focus on complaints relating to schools' movement to establishments in Maidstone, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells is already well understood.

- 3.4 The new National Bus Strategy and the resulting need for KCC to publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan and form Enhanced Partnership schemes changes the organisation of bus services and the role of the County Council.
- 3.5 Specifically, the Enhanced Partnership Schemes need to include a Passenger Charter and make additional provision for increased dialogue between service users and providers as well as requiring a need to monitor passenger satisfaction. The bus feedback portal can form part of the strategy in this area and it is therefore proposed to review and re-launch the Portal from April 2022 alongside Kent's EP schemes.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The bus portal was launched in January 2019 following feedback on the 'Big Conversation.' In the first 11 months, there were an average of 49 contacts per month but this has fallen and currently the portal is attracting on average only 10 contacts per month.
- 4.2 It is considered that the portal has an increasing role to play in supporting the passenger charter element of developing EP schemes and should therefore be maintained, reviewed, and relaunched.

5. Recommendation:

- 5.1 Cabinet Committee is asked to note the contents of the report and comment on the actions taken.

6. Background Documents

- None

7. Lead Officers

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