

From: David Brazier, Cabinet Member – Environment & Transport
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To: Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee – 24 April 2014

Subject: Petitions to extend the Young Person’s Travel Pass to 16-19 year olds and reduce the cost from £100 to £50 for pupils entitled to free school meals

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report gives consideration to two petitions that request the inclusion of 16-19 year olds in the new Young Person’s Travel Pass scheme which will replace the Kent Freedom Pass in September 2014. The Young Person’s Travel Pass will cost £200 per annum and pass usage will be limited to Monday to Friday between the hours of 6am to 7pm from the start of the academic year to 31st July.

The cost of the existing Kent 16+ Card is being reduced by KCC in 2014/15 to £400. This will be a 23% reduction on last year’s pass cost, unlimited travel is retained.

This report also gives consideration to the additional request from petitioners to reduce the cost of the Young Person’s Travel Pass from £100 to £50 to pupils who are entitled to free school meals.

Recommendation(s):

Members are asked to note and comment on the issues raised in the petitions.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Kent 16+ Travel Scheme has been in place since September 2012, providing for unlimited travel on public bus services to Kent students attending educational provision or apprenticeships. This discretionary scheme is in addition to transport provided to post 16 learners where the Local Authority has a statutory duty to support access to education.
- 1.2 Over the past year, the Kent Freedom Pass and Kent 16+ Travel Scheme have been reviewed in response to budgetary pressures. The following changes have been worked up as part of the County Council’s budget setting process for 2014/15:
 - in order to meet the budget agreed for this service by full County Council in February 2014, the Kent Freedom Pass will be replaced by a new Young Person’s Travel Pass for pupils aged 11-16 at a cost of £200 per year with travel limited to weekdays 6am-7pm from the start of the academic year to 31st July, with a cost of £100 per year for pupils entitled to free school meals.

Looked After Children and Young Carers will continue not to be required to pay for their passes.

- the cost of the Kent 16+ Travel Card will be reduced from £520 to £400 and unlimited bus travel retained.

1.3 Since the County Council budget debate two petitions have been launched requesting that:

- the new proposed Young Person's Travel Pass costing £200 per annum is extended to 16-19 year olds.
- the Young Person's Travel Pass should be reduced from £100 to £50 for pupils who are entitled to free school meals.

1.4 This report considers the proposals presented in the petitions.

2. Financial Implications

2.1 If the County Council were to further halve the cost of the Kent 16+ Travel Card to £200 this would require the authority having to find an additional c£1,500,000 to cover lost income. There would also be greater additional costs associated with an anticipated increase in pass holders, journeys made and therefore the reimbursement due to bus companies. A halving in the cost of the Young Persons' Travel Pass to £50 for those entitled to free school meals would require an additional £100,000. There is no provision for these additional costs within the budgets allocated for these schemes.

3. The Proposal to Reduce the Cost of Kent 16+ Travel Scheme

3.1 Following discussions at County Council, at which it was proposed to introduce a new Young Person's Travel Pass and to reduce the cost of the 16+ Travel Card, a further petition was launched requesting that the Young Person's Travel Pass should be extended to include 16-19 year olds at a cost of £200 and that the cost of the pass for pupils with free school meals should be reduced to £50. The petition states:

"With the raising of the school participation age, young people will be obliged to remain in school, college training or apprenticeships until they are 19. They often have to travel significant distances to get to the school or college with the most appropriate course for their needs, but the proposed annual charge of £400 for the Kent 16+Travel Card is simply unaffordable for many. We therefore call upon Kent County Council to extend the proposed Young Person's Travel Pass scheme to include 16-19 year-olds for the same annual cost of £200. We also request that the annual charge for under16s entitled to free school meals remains at £50."

This petition, hosted on the KCC website until 29/05/14, has resulted in 1976 responses between 28/01/14 and 31/03/14.

3.2 A further linked petition, which was hosted on the 38 Degrees petition site has resulted in 3114 responses.

The petition states:

“As the school leaving age is being extended to 18, please can the Bus Freedom Pass also be extended to cover from 16 to 18 (19 would be better) so that parents do not have to pay through the nose to get their child to school?”

This report considers the proposal to offer 16+ travel at the cost of £200 and the request not to increase the cost of the Young Person’s Travel Pass for pupils entitled to free school meals to £100.

At the full County Council’s budget setting meeting on 13th February 2014 the proposal to replace the Kent Freedom Pass with a new Young Person’s Travel Pass at a cost of £200 and £100 for pupils entitled to free school meals was debated. The use of the pass was limited to Monday to Friday and from the start of the academic year to 31st July.

It was also recommended that the cost of the Kent 16+ Travel pass should be reduced to £400 with no limit on its use.

The Young Person’s Travel Pass is for pupils aged 11 -16 to access the local bus network in order to travel to school. The Kent 16+ Travel scheme is for the use of young people accessing further education or apprenticeships, for which they may receive some payment. Furthermore, at the age of 16, people travelling on public transport are classed as adults and consequently the County Council must reimburse bus operators for journeys made at a higher rate than for under-16 year olds. The government made no changes to transport legislation that would enable funding to be made available for this group by the Local Authority when it raised the participation age, and those learners facing genuine hardship can seek bursary funding support from their learning providers to help with the cost of the card. This funding replaced the Education Maintenance Allowance and sits with schools and colleges to support their learners in a range of ways including, where appropriate, with transport.

3.3 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) on the new Young Person’s Travel Pass has been undertaken.

4. Conclusions

4.1 The petitions outlined in the report request that the County Council extend the Young Person’s Travel Pass to 16-19 year olds and reduce the cost of passes issued for those entitled to free school meals. Kent County Council is already reducing the cost of passes issued through the Kent 16+ Travel scheme in 2014/15 to £400, a 23% reduction on the previous pass; at the same time unlimited use on public bus services is to be retained. Additionally, learning providers have bursary funding they can use to help their students but which the Local Education Authority cannot access.

4.2 The cost of the Young Persons’ Travel Pass for pupils entitled to free school meals is planned to remain at £100, retaining the 50% reduction from the cost of the full pass. Two six monthly payments will be offered. Any further changes to this concession will result in further costs to the County Council at a time when budgets are being cut as funding from central Government is reduced.

5. Recommendation(s):

Members are asked to note and comment on the issues raised in the petitions.

6. Background Documents

6.1 This report refers to the e-petition hosted on the KCC website - '**Bring down the cost of the proposed Young Person's Travel pass for those aged 16-19 to the same level as the proposed Travel Pass for 11-16 year olds**' and the e-petition hosted on the 38 Degrees website – '**Freedom Pass for ages 16–19**' and received electronically by KCC Legal & Democratic Services (available on request).

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/mgEPetitionDisplay.aspx?ID=266&RPID=6774887&HPID=6774887>

7. Contact details

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