

## **Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 4 May 2016**

### **Petition – Stop the Increases to the Young Person’s Travel Pass**

#### **Briefing note from Kent County Council’s Public Transport Department**

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Kent County Council’s Public Transport Department has considered the issues raised in the petition “Stop the Increases to the Young Person’s Travel Pass” and provides the following responses to support discussions at the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee meeting on 4 May 2016:

#### **Petition Text:**

I have set up this petition on behalf of all of the parents across Kent whose children use the young person's travel pass and have to use the bus to get to school.

I ask the council to reconsider their decision to review the increase to the price of the pass. In recent years the price of the pass has increased from £100 to £200, followed by a further increase to £250. A total increase of 150%!

This has caused extreme hardship for many families all across Kent whom work extremely hard in an already tough economy. Many of these children go to their most suitable school for them and every child deserves the best education that they can achieve. Many of the children sacrifice extremely early mornings and late evenings, tackling an incompetent, unreliable failing bus service for their right to a high standard of education.

The budget is unfairly distributed with the last rise only applicable to those already paying the higher amount whilst the subsidised passes remain unaffected. It was recently confirmed by a local member of parliament that there were no imminent plans to increase the pass further. I ask the council, on behalf of myself and every other member of the community signing this petition to reconsider their plans for the increase.

#### **Response:**

The Young Persons Travel Pass (YPTP) is a discretionary concessionary travel product, aimed at students in the year 7-11 age group. The product is discretionary, in that national transport policy places no requirement on transport co-ordinating authorities to provide concessionary travel for under 16’s. It is for each transport co-ordinating authority, of which Kent is one, to determine if they have the funds and desire to provide such a concession.

From 2009 to 2014, Kent provided the Freedom Pass for year 7 to 11 students, which provided discounted travel at all times, including weekends. Given the continuing reductions in funding to Kent, the cost of the scheme was prohibitive and not sustainable in future years given funding forecasts. The decision was therefore taken to replace the scheme with a scheme, target

On 1 June 2015, a paper was presented to Cabinet, requesting a Cabinet decision to address the budgetary challenges facing the YPTP. The paper requested the following decisions;

- A reduction in subsidy of £50 to the YPTP full cost pass, raising the price to the user by £50 for September 2015.
- To maintain the price of low income YPTP at £100.
- To maintain the current arrangement for carers and those in local authority care of a free pass.
- On an annual basis, the cost of the standard pass will increase in line with operator fare increases and will be capped at 5% of the gross cost of the scheme divided by the number of standard passes in circulation.
- To maintain all current YPTP terms and conditions for users.

These were approved by Cabinet.

Accordingly on the 15 June 2015, the YPTP full cost pass price rose from £200 to £250 for the 2015/16 academic year and the price of low income passes remained the same. All other YPTP conditions were retained as is, except that Cabinet, in approving these decisions asked Public Transport to implement a system for families with more than two pass holders, to introduce a process where the additional passes were free.

Authority is in place to enable the cost of the YPTP to the user to be raised in line with expected operator fare increases, capped at 5% of the gross cost of the scheme.

It is the belief of KCC Public Transport that in the coming financial year 2016/17, that bus operators will raise commercial bus fares by an average of 3% and that this increase in fares will impact on YPTP, as the re-imbursment of pass travel costs are linked to operator fares. On this basis, Public Transport has recommended that the cost of the standard YPTP pass should rise by £20, from £250 to £270 per annum. No change is proposed for the reduced cost pass, which will remain at £100 per pass.

This would be an increase of 3%, based on the gross cost of the scheme.

This recommendation has been accepted by the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment and will take effect from the 2016/17 academic year (therefore applications for YPTP received for 2016/17).

Public Transport understand that any rise in the cost of bus travel is unwelcome and hence they have limited the increase in pass cost, to purely cover the anticipated increase in scheme costs attributable to operator fare increases.

The increase is focused on the standard pass, as 85% of all passes issued of this type. Only 5 % of passes are those issued to families on low income and the remainder are issued free of charge for those in care or carers. Therefore increasing the cost of the standard pass is the only way to generate the revenue to meet the anticipated increase in scheme costs.

However it should be noted that the YPTP still provides excellent value for money travel, for those using the bus for travel to school. Assuming a student attends every academic day, then the YPTP provides bus travel for £1.42 per day or £0.71 per single trip. When compared to the commercial bus fares charged this is a major discount and a discount that is provided through subsidy from Kent County Council.

The increase in the cost of the YPTP is purely to provide the necessary income to cover anticipated operator fare increases. With an increase in cost, the level of subsidy per pass from Kent County Council will continue to be in the range £220-£240 per pass

It should also be noted that the cost of the pass can be split into two convenient parts and there is the ability to pay for the pass through a credit card.