

**From:** Michael Payne, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport  
Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport

**To:** Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 23 January 2020

**Subject:** KCC Bus Feedback Portal – Summary of Feedback received January to November 2019

**Key decision:** N/A

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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

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

**Electoral Division:** Countywide

**Summary:** This report presents results from the bus feedback portal received from its launch in January through to the end of November 2019.

**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 last year's Big Conversation on rural transport.
- 1.2 The portal is 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 This report and the more detailed summary (Appendix A) provides information on the feedback received from residents and bus users in the period since it started and also includes more particular analysis of feedback relating to the return of schools in September. It is provided for information but requests feedback from Cabinet Committee to the outputs presented and any actions that members would like to suggest.

## **2. Summary of Report**

- 2.1 Appendix A provides a summary of the feedback received broken down as totals, by month, by area, by operator and by complaint type. Due to the trend

observed, more detailed analysis of the feedback received in relation to Arriva, Go Coach and Stagecoach in September is also included.

- 2.2 Feedback volumes show a particular focus on school bus services. 165 contacts were received in September against a total of 20 during the summer holidays and against a normal monthly average of 49. The September volume is the highest month to date since the launch of the portal and reflects the peak in teething problems when schools return after the holidays and the promotion of the portal through the Schools Kelsi bulletin at the end of August.
- 2.3 Unsurprisingly, the majority of feedback relates to complaints. Since the return of schools (the period from September to end of November) 44% of feedback related to capacity and 37% related to reliability. Capacity complaints in September are expected as even marginal changes to numbers and flows unsettle the network and demand that operators respond through service changes or the provision of larger vehicles. The reduction in complaints in October and November, particularly those relating to capacity reflects the efforts of Bus operators and KCC officers to respond to issues. It also needs to be acknowledged that these can also be dissatisfaction with busy vehicles which are licensed to carry standing passengers as opposed to genuine overloading issues.
- 2.4 Ashford, Dover, Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells attracted the highest volumes of feedback in this period reflecting known issues experienced with the return of schools in these areas. When the portal was first launched, the Maidstone area received the highest number of complaints, however this most recent data suggests that previous focus on these services has had a positive effect on performance and this is consistent with more recent feedback from schools in this area which has indicated a reduction in problems.
- 2.5 Understandably, given the proportion of the network that they operate, Arriva and Stagecoach account for 71% of all feedback received since the portal was launched and this remains consistent in September. Go Coach, who operate in west Kent, has also attracted a significant volume of feedback in September. As a result more granular analysis of the feedback for these operators in September has been completed.
- 2.6 Arriva's feedback related largely to capacity and reliability. Four services; number 6 (Maidstone - Tunbridge Wells), number 7 (Maidstone – Tunbridge Wells), number 402 (Sevenoaks to Tunbridge Wells) and number 403 (Sevenoaks to Tonbridge) attracted multiple feedback though the number for each service is minimal. These items will be raised with Arriva through Quality Bus Partnerships and less formally through periodic management meetings.
- 2.7 75% of Go Coach feedback related to capacity and these were focussed on 5 services operating to schools in Tunbridge Wells and 2 services to schools in Sevenoaks which attracted 16 and 6 complaints respectively. This is due in part to Go Coach needing to absorb other services cancelled by other operators in the area at the end of the previous school year. Capacity issues on all of the services identified were known to officers and to Go Coach and are largely resolved. In some instances, occasional capacity problems are

still being experienced but this is thought to be a result of uneven distribution of children between vehicles as opposed to a lack of overall capacity.

- 2.8 37% of all feedback in September related to Stagecoach services and around half were concerned with capacity. Services; 80 / 80A (Sandwich to Dover) and the G-Line (Godinton Park to Ashford) attracted 22 and 14 complaints respectively. The issue on service 80 / 80A relates to a known and high profile capacity issue linked to school opening times in the Dover resolved through some adjustments to routes and timetables. Feedbacks regarding the G-Line service relate largely to reliability and have been raised directly with Stagecoach. They have confirmed that reliability was impacted by a road closure directly on the line of route and compounded by the impact of M20 junction 10A works but that the allocation of additional vehicles over the period has improved this position.

### **3. Feedback and Actions**

- 3.1 Public Transport officers have established portal results as a standing item on the agenda of all Quality Bus Partnership meetings which provides a more formal setting to highlight these trends with the operators concerned and to work with the operators and District Councils to improve performance.
- 3.2 Less formally, feedback has and will continue to be shared by Public Transport Officers with other operators by Public Transport as part of periodic management meetings and particular trends will be raised more directly.

### **4. Conclusion**

- 4.1 The bus portal was launched in January 2019 following feedback on the 'Big Conversation.' In the first 11 months, there has been an average of 49 contacts per month although monthly contact can vary especially during school term times.
- 4.2 Particular trends have been identified relating to specific services and complaint types. Whilst these are largely issues that were already known, the ability to quantify such trends is proving to be a helpful tool to inform officers conversations with operators.

### **5. Recommendation:**

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

### **6. Background Documents**

- Appendix A – Summary of results

## 7. Lead Officers

Report Author:

Steve Pay, Public Transport Planning  
and Operations Manager

Telephone number : 03000 413754

Email : [Stephen.pay@kent.gov.uk](mailto:Stephen.pay@kent.gov.uk)

Relevant Director:

Simon Jones, Director of Highways  
Transportation and Waste

Telephone number : 03000 411683

Emai : [simon.jones@kent.gov.uk](mailto:simon.jones@kent.gov.uk)