

National Bus Strategy

Kent Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

July 2024



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Foreword

Neil Baker, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport



Buses are a critical part of our infrastructure. They are vital for the communities and users they serve, and to our schools, towns, local economy and the environment. Having used buses to get to school myself, and through my role as a Kent Constituency Member I knew this already, but my time as Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport has brought home to me just how important buses are. Our residents and my local government colleagues also tell me this frequently.

The bus industry was privatised in the 1980s, so as a Council, we do not run most services. Instead, we support and influence the commercial network as far as we can for the benefit of our residents. When the Government launched the National Bus Strategy (NBS) in 2021, it provided new opportunities to work with our commercial partners. I believe we have done so successfully, using our Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and Enhanced Partnership Schemes (EPSs) to strengthen relationships with operators, protect

the network and deliver a range of NBS-funded initiatives. I am now very excited to look further to the future with this, our 2024 BSIP.

The bus industry continues to face serious challenges in the form of rising costs, reduced usage and lower passenger revenue since the pandemic. Our network in Kent, and elsewhere in the UK, has been seriously compromised, and our commercial operators have had to make some really difficult decisions to reduce and even cancel some services. This is a significant concern for me and my KCC colleagues, which is why we have been so enthusiastic about the NBS and what it sets out to achieve. Like many Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) KCC is facing a significant financial challenge and we recently set out our plans for Securing Kent's Future as we seek to ensure we can continue to deliver the most vital services for our communities. We want to support Kent's bus offer as far as sustainably possible, but additional external funding through the NBS has been and will continue to be vital to do so.

The NBS has provided much-needed focus and some vital funding to support our bus network. In our initial BSIP we set out a clear plan for how, in conjunction with our operators and supported by Government, we wanted to sustain the network in Kent in the face of the challenges we face, and how we would like to subsequently improve all aspects of Kent's bus offer, should external funding through BSIP come forward.

Our first BSIP was well received and resulted in the award of £35m from Government, recognising the strength of our vision and our commitment to buses in Kent. Through our EPSs, this funding has enabled us to protect services at risk of withdrawal, and work on delivering a range of positive initiatives across the County including freezing the cost of our student bus passes, a number of fare and ticketing offers and promotions, improved bus information, better infrastructure and delivering numerous large and smaller scale bus priority and highway schemes to make it easier for buses to move around. Delivering BSIP funded initiatives will continue into 2024 and 2025.

NBS funding has also enabled us to protect the most critical commercial bus services that were at risk of withdrawal, ensuring thousands of children can carry on using them to get to school. Continuation of this funding beyond March 2025 is vital if these services are to keep operating.

With the same challenges still affecting the industry, our 2024 BSIP reviews our previous plan, considers its successes and the current bus offering, and what is needed to support the network. It also looks to the future and identifies what else we would like to be able to do to improve Kent's buses for our residents in the longer term, should we be awarded additional Government funding through the NBS process.

Neil Baker,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

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1 Introduction, Context & Our Bus Vision

Introduction

Buses are important. We use them to get to work and to school, to go the shops and the doctor's. They help to improve air quality and ease traffic congestion – and unlike cars, they're accessible to everyone. But these are challenging times for buses, both here in Kent and across England, with fewer people using them since the pandemic, together with increased operational costs and a widespread shortage of drivers. As most bus services in Kent are commercial, they have to overcome these challenges and be profitable for operators to keep running them.

So we were pleased when in March 2021, the Government launched its National Bus Strategy (NBS) for England. Called "Bus Back Better" this included proposals to help the bus industry to recover and grow. At Kent County Council (KCC), we continue to support the NBS, working with the county's bus operators to deliver the best, most commercially viable service we can for Kent residents given the current difficult financial climate.

The NBS set out an ambitious vision for improving all aspects of bus services across the country, backed by significant national funding. In



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October 2021, KCC and Kent’s bus operators published our own Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) for the county, which we submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT). The BSIP was our local response to the NBS, setting out the current state of Kent bus services and our successes to date, the challenges facing local bus operators, our vision for future recovery and growth, and bold ideas to support and increase bus usage and performance in Kent, based on the funding we receive from central government.

We asked the DfT for £213m to fully deliver our BSIP. The Government responded in April 2022 with an outline funding allocation of £35.1m. This was a positive result for Kent – and the ninth-highest award in the whole of England – but was of course a lot less than we needed to deliver the full plan and solve all the significant operational and financial challenges affecting Kent’s bus services. The nature of the funding, the majority of which needed to be allocated to physical measures, such as bus priority lanes, meant that it could not be utilised fully to react to the challenges facing the industry with respect to service viability. The Government also initially put restrictions on funding, preventing its use for sustaining any existing services that, although still useful to people, were not viable long-term.

The good news is that we’ve now been able to use other support funding in the form of Local Transport Fund and BSIP+ funding to protect around 50 services that would otherwise have been withdrawn by operators.



In March 2023, we received the first £18.9m of our allocated funding to support the rollout of an accelerated delivery programme in 2023/24. This funding came with a number of terms, conditions and restrictions on its use, but KCC has sought to utilise it to deliver measures in line with our initial BSIP and later DfT instructions. These measures support the Government’s aims and policies, while striking a balance between reacting where possible to the industry’s immediate pressures whilst building for the future. We also managed to negotiate some flexibility with the Government around network funding, allowing us to use £2.5m to sustain 49 bus services, mainly serving schools on the network, which would have otherwise faced withdrawal by operators. We expect to receive the rest of our £35.1m allocation shortly, for the delivery of a further set of initiatives during 2024/25.

This 2024 update to our BSIP sets out the current offer to bus passengers and the continuing challenges facing the industry. It also provides detail on our programme for 2023/24, plans for 2024/25 and how, depending on the funding we receive from the Government, we would like to grow Kent’s bus offer in the years 2025-2029 and beyond.

Introduction

Context

The Government published the NBS on 15 March 2021, setting out an ambitious vision to improve bus services across England. The strategy aimed to provide greater opportunities for local leadership and looked to reverse the shift away from public transport and encourage people back onto the bus.

The NBS covered a range of key areas which are integral to a positive experience of bus travel for passengers. This included network development, fares and ticketing, service integration, infrastructure, accessibility, innovation, service information, customer service standards and highway management. The Government called for improvements in all these areas to a) support the bus industry's recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic, and b) grow bus usage across England to encourage more sustainable travel.

The Government initially committed £3 billion of new funding, although this was later reduced to £1.2 billion. Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) and bus operators had to commit to the requirements of the NBS to obtain a share of the pot.

Delivering the National Bus Strategy

The two main NBS requirements for LTAs and bus operators were:

- 1) To produce and publish a BSIP by 31 October 2021.
- 2) To introduce a new statutory system for setting up and regulating bus services in the county by April 2022. This included using franchising or Enhanced Partnerships (EPs), as made possible under the 2017 Bus Services Act.

KCC and bus operators met both these requirements, submitting a BSIP in October 2021 and establishing an EP for the county in April 2022. Like most LTAs, Kent chose the route of EPs to build on existing relationships with commercial operators and to seek to improve bus provision in the county using a partnership approach.

Kent's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

The Government described BSIPs as strategic documents setting out how LTAs and operators could achieve the goals of the NBS. In 2021, BSIPs were also partly bidding documents setting out the Government funding required to deliver the programme.

In October 2021, KCC, and the county's bus operators produced the first BSIP covering the whole of Kent. Through significant data led analysis of the network, the plan described Kent's existing bus offer and highlighted the barriers and challenges that may have been restricting greater bus use. Based on feedback from bus operators, Kent residents and other key stakeholders, the plan also considered potential areas for improvement and future development, laid out in a set of key principles and more detailed initiatives. You can read our 2021 BSIP here – [Bus Service Improvement Plan – Kent County Council](#).

The 2021 BSIP included commitments we could deliver without additional funding. Where appropriate, these were reflected in our EPs, alongside a number of ambitious plans for other improvements that would require funding through the Government's NBS programme. We were determined that our BSIP would reflect local needs and circumstances, so we produced it in-house, with our public transport officers supported by external specialists where necessary. Although the timescales were tight, we were also determined that our BSIP would be based on high levels of engagement. Our public engagement platform generated almost 3,500

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responses, which we combined with comments from stakeholder groups including Kent's Districts, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Chamber of Commerce and Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC), as well as findings from seminars with KCC's elected Members.

We also held workshops and surveys with operators, and more detailed discussions with nominated operator representatives. You can see our market engagement report in Appendix A.

We used this engagement activity to develop key principles to support our vision for Kent's BSIP. Further engagement activity was utilised to develop a set of specific initiatives to support enhancements across all areas of bus service provision, and the funding required to deliver them.

Details of our funding allocation in response to the 2021 BSIP, how this funding was subsequently awarded and the initiatives we delivered in the 2023/24 financial year can be found in Chapter 2 – *Current Offer to Bus Passengers* and Chapter 3 – *Improvements Programme to 2025*.

Our 2024 BSIP brings the original 2021 document up to date, providing information on the current bus offer and challenges facing the industry, initiatives introduced in 2023/24, and our programme for 2024/25. It also sets out our vision for 2025-29 and beyond. This is ambitious (depending on the external Government funding we receive) but also pragmatic, given the continued financial challenges facing the bus industry and Local Authorities, including KCC.

Neighbouring authorities

Kent has borders with four other LTAs: East Sussex, London, Medway (Unitary Authority) and Surrey. In 2021, we held conversations with all of them about our overall approach to our BSIP, issues we had in common and where we could work together on cross-boundary matters. We agreed that the different characteristics and circumstances of each authority meant a joint BSIP was not appropriate. Kent's bus operators support this approach. There was, however, a genuine willingness to work together with our neighbours on areas like ticketing, cross-boundary implications of passenger charters, planning and parking. We have worked with our partners since the start of our EP: in Medway, for instance, we held a BSIP funded free weekend travel promotion in June 2023.

Kent's Enhanced Partnership (EP)

The Government describes EPs as statutory agreements between LTAs and local bus operators in their operating area. They are designed to set out how the partners will work together to deliver the objectives of the NBS, and detail any commitments funded externally through the NBS agenda. EPs are designed to enable strong partnership working on areas such as highway improvements, customer service, vehicles, and fares & ticketing.

However, they do not fundamentally change the commercial nature of the bus industry. In Kent, the majority of bus journeys are not covered by any contractual relationship with KCC. Instead, EPs are about providing a governance set up designed to promote bus service provision through close partnership working and high levels of engagement. They consist of an EP Plan, which sets out the strategic approach and ambition for development that depends on the availability of additional external funding, and EP Schemes, which include initiatives that are viable with existing funding. Kent's EP was formally "made" in April 2022: you can view the documents at [Kent Enhanced Partnerships](#).

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Kent's Enhanced Partnership Approach

Kent is the most heavily populated non-metropolitan authority in the UK. The county has a mixture of larger urban centres, such as Canterbury and Maidstone, smaller towns and villages and more rural areas, with 12 Borough and District authorities operating in a two-tier administrative structure. Certain locations have unique characteristics: the Gravesham and Dartford areas are close to London and the Dover and Folkestone & Hythe areas are heavily affected by cross-channel traffic. There are also wide variations in key indices such as employment, levels of deprivation and education. Bus services and operators also vary, with Stagecoach the major national group operator in the east and Arriva and Go-Ahead operating in the west of the county.

This diversity and complexity meant a single EP arrangement for the whole county was not practical. Therefore in 2022, KCC produced an EP Plan covering its entire geographical area (see figure 1) but with three separate EP Schemes tailored for different local circumstances, needs and operating territories.

Kent's EP Plan is essentially a supplementary version of the BSIP, outlining the strategy and

initiatives which would be delivered if significant external funding was available. The individual EP schemes contain commitments achievable within existing budgets, and with the BSIP funding awarded to Kent.

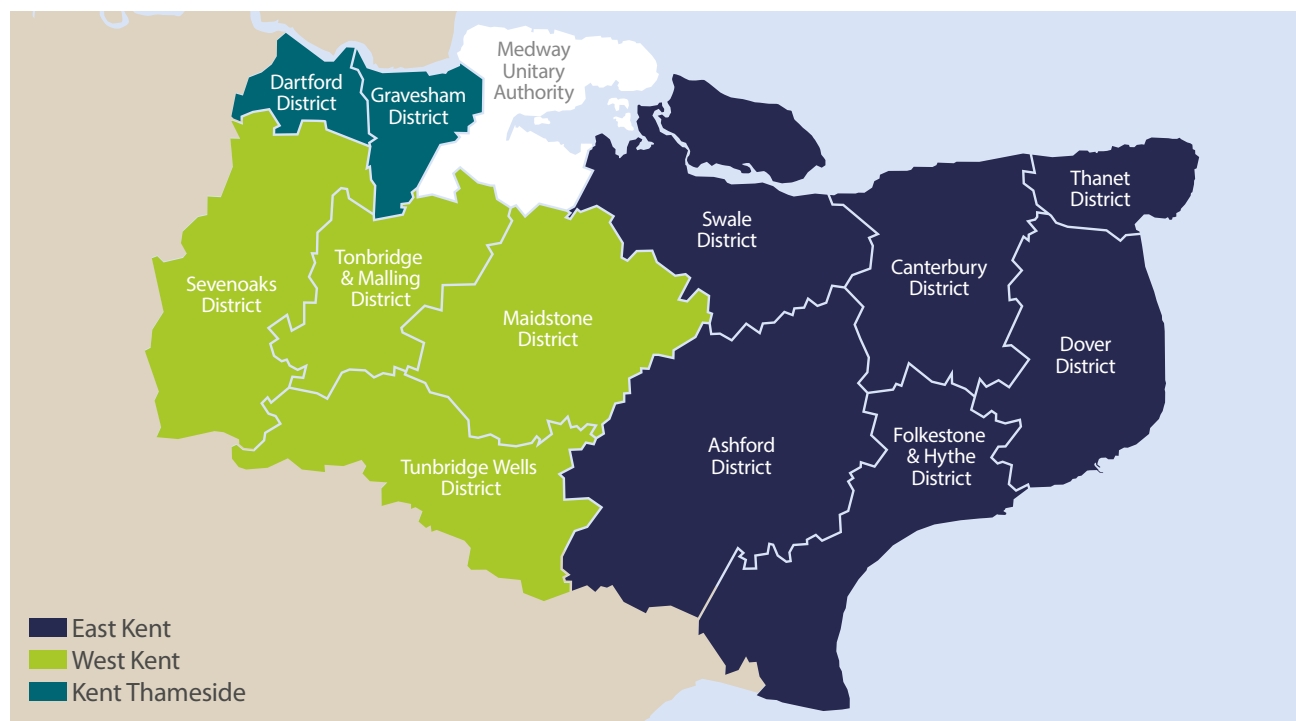
The EP Scheme areas are:

East Kent: Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone and Hythe, Swale, Thanet

West Kent: Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells

Kent Thameside: Dartford, Gravesham

Figure 1. Kent's BSIP area and EP Schemes



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Establishing Kent’s Enhanced Partnership

Kent established its EP in line with national guidance supporting the NBS. This process began in 2021 through an informal discussion between KCC and local bus operators, with a Notice of Intention to prepare an EP published on 28 June 2021. Once we had submitted our BSIP, we held a full statutory consultation which concluded on 1 April 2022 with advice sent to all operators and statutory consultees that our EPs had been formed.

The April 2022 version of Kent’s EPs included an EP Plan, aligning with the 2021 Kent BSIP, and the three Kent EP Schemes. When we published it, we did not know how much funding we would be allocated. We therefore included commitments and initiatives that, whilst ambitious, could be delivered within existing Council and operator budgets.

We published a further version of our EPs in April 2023 with changes made to reflect Kent’s BSIP allocation for 2023-24.

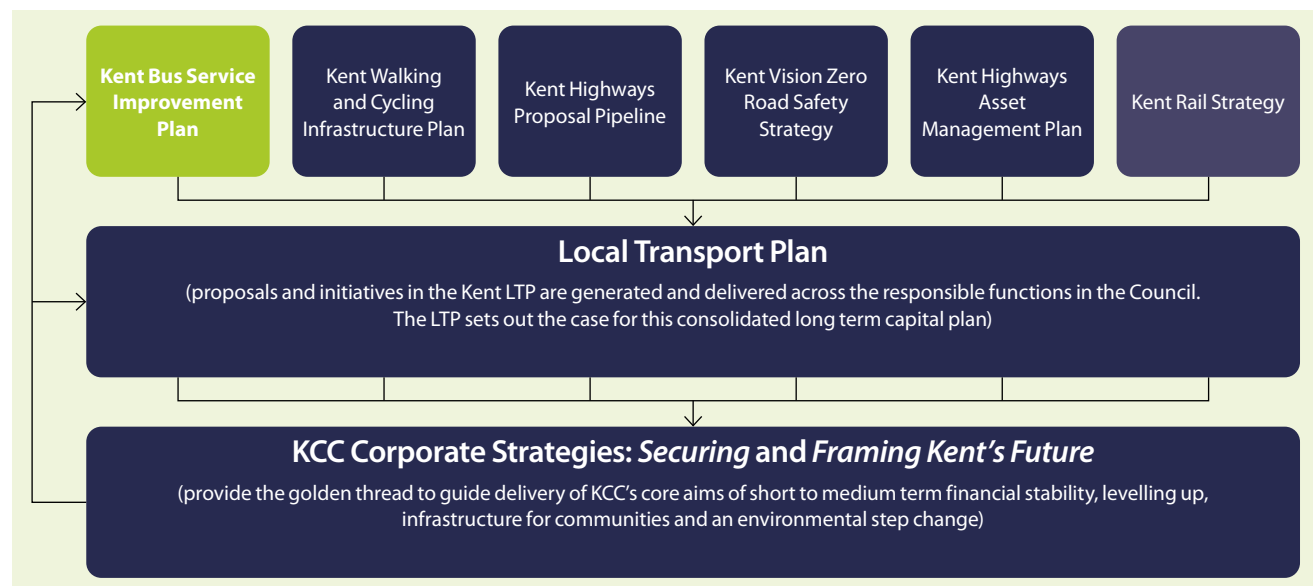
We have a meeting hierarchy to support the running of Kent’s EPs, as described in our 2021 BSIP. You can find further information on this hierarchy in Chapter – 5 *Targets, Monitoring and Reporting*.

Strategic Position at Kent County Council

KCC has a number of strategic and operational plans in place relating to this BSIP and its EPs. The most important is our Local Transport Plan (LTP) which sets out policies to promote and encourage safe, integrated, efficient and economic transport to, from and within our area. Kent’s current plan – LTP4 Delivering Growth without Gridlock 2016-2031 – identified buses as a key strategic priority. KCC is currently producing its next plan – LTP5 – and consulted

on its development in winter 2023. This updated LTP will align with and complement the BSIP, ensuring a consistent bus vision in the context of wider strategic transport priorities. Alongside the BSIP and LTP are other Highways plans and strategies, such as the Kent Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan and the Kent Rail Strategy. All are shaped by Kent’s overall corporate strategy, Framing Kent’s Future. The relationship between them is shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. The relationship between Kent’s plans/strategies

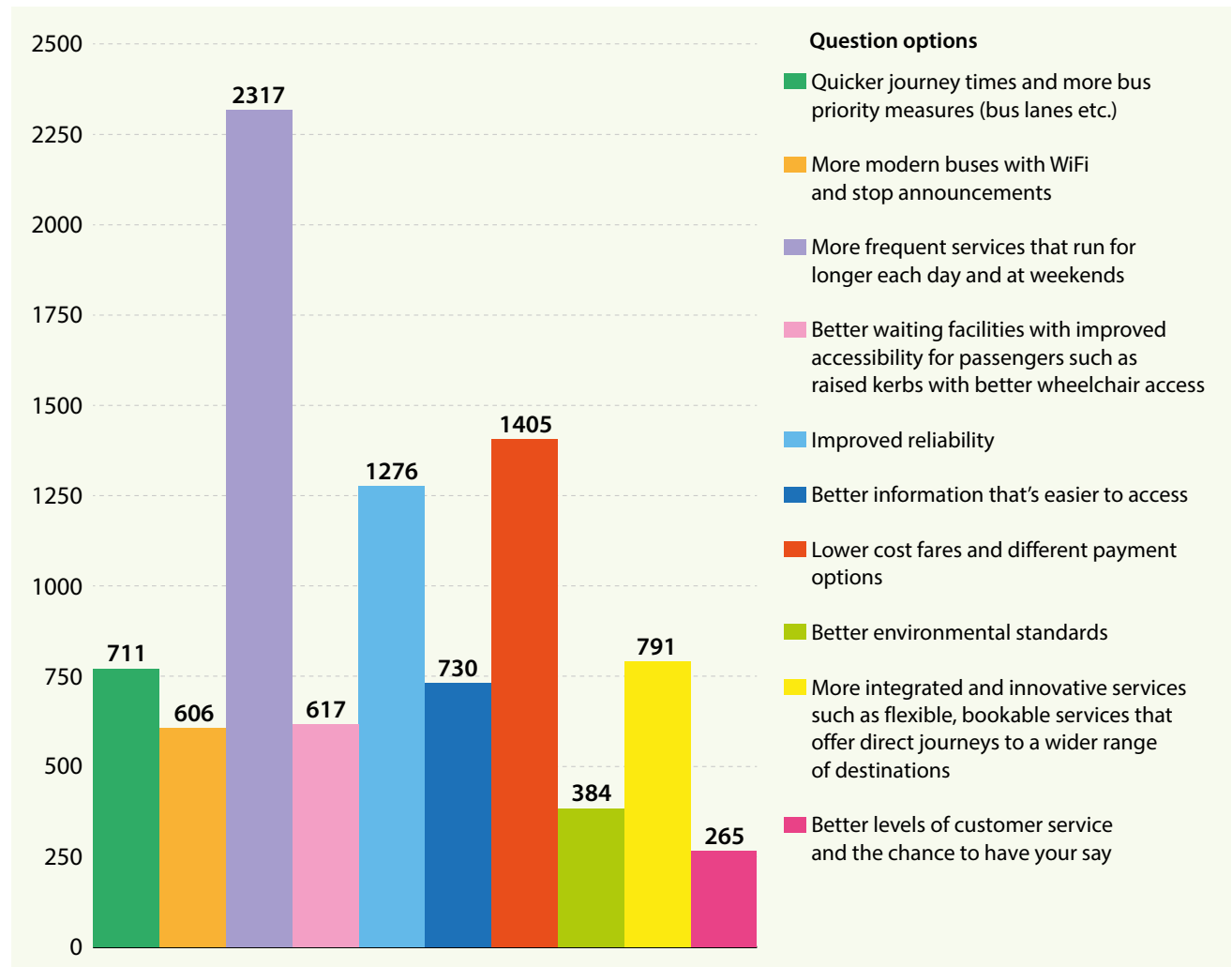


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Engagement Activity

Although we were not formally required to consult on our 2021 BSIP – partly because the timescales were very tight – we wanted to ensure it was as locally driven and informed as possible. We undertook large-scale public engagement in summer 2021, which attracted over 3,500 respondents, together with wider engagement activities, including stakeholder events and forums with bus operators. You can see our market engagement report summarising this activity in Appendix A. The results clearly showed that service levels, reliability and cost were most important to Kent residents. We used the feedback from this engagement activity to inform the 2021 BSIP’s Key Principles and subsequent initiatives.

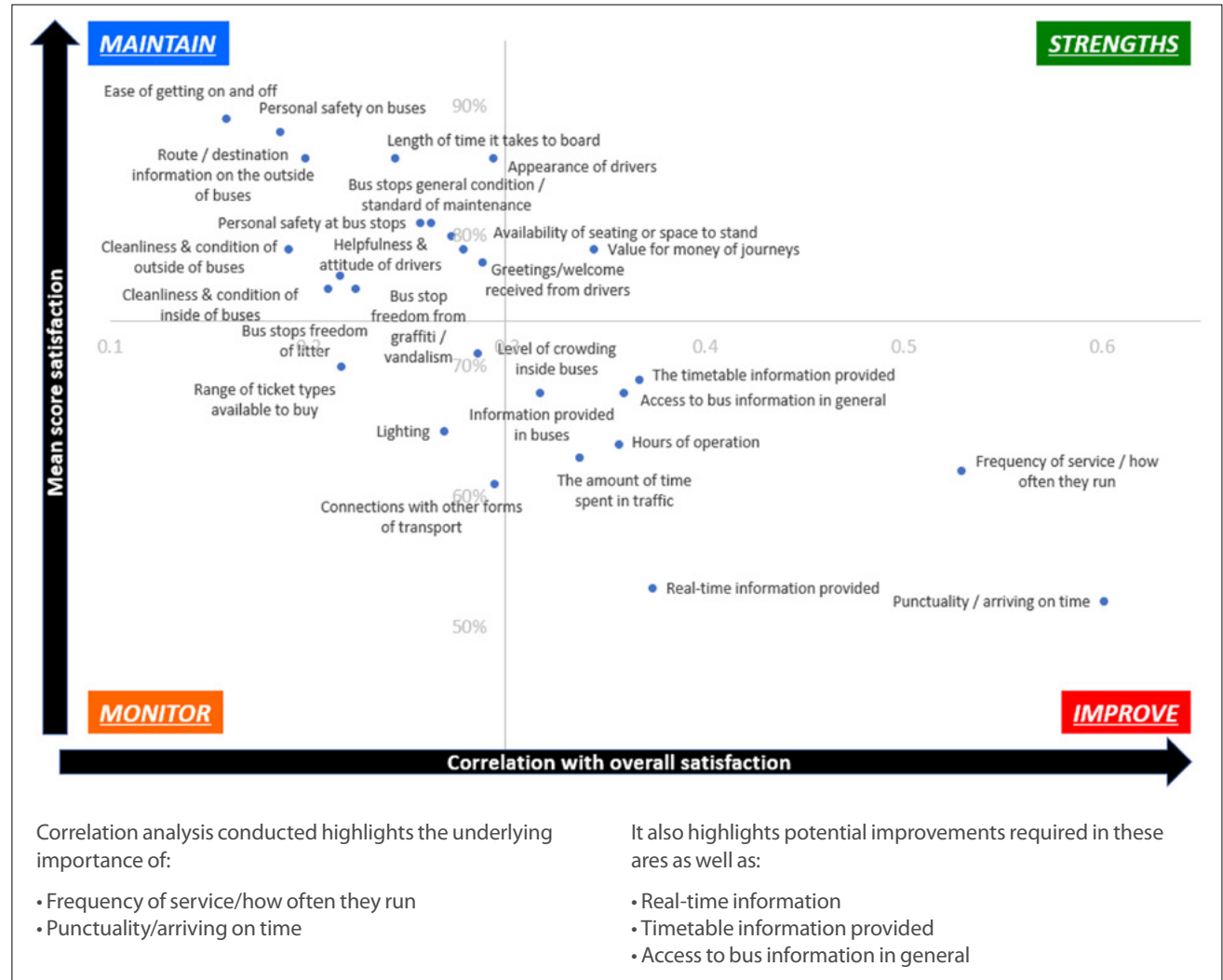
Figure 3. Summary of 2021 BSIP Engagement Results



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Kent’s 2024 BSIP, and particularly Chapter 4 – *Ambitions and Proposals for 2025 and Beyond* again draws heavily on this engagement work, and has also used Kent’s EP meeting structure – see Chapter 5 – *Targets, Performance, Monitoring and Reporting* to inform its content. As before, the timescales were tight, but KCC has engaged with its partners as far as possible to produce the initiatives in Chapter 4 – *Ambitions and Proposals for 2025 and Beyond*. This has included engagement with Kent’s 12 Borough and District Councils and Kent’s bus operators through Enhanced Partnership Scheme Monitoring Groups (EPSMGs). We also used Kent’s Passenger satisfaction survey, conducted in summer 2023, taking into account the correlation analysis shown opposite in figure 4 for the 2025-2029 initiative pipeline.

Figure 4. Correlation analysis from 2023 Bus Satisfaction Survey



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Duration and Arrangements for Review

This is the second version of Kent’s BSIP following its initial publication in 2021. To inform this review and future proposals, in line with Government guidance, we have used our EP meeting structure – see Chapter 5 – *Targets, Performance, Monitoring and Reporting* – to collect feedback from key stakeholders, District and Borough councils and operators. We also used stakeholder feedback gathered for the 2021 BSIP, and results from KCC’s bus satisfaction survey run during summer 2023.

A further review of Kent’s BSIP is likely in 2025, after which we will seek to align updates with our emerging LTP5. We may also make intermediate updates should circumstances in the county change, or there are any new or changing policy and national requirements.

Once published, Kent’s 2024 BSIP will be reflected in our EP Plan and Schemes, with progress and performance monitored through the EP meeting structure.

Our Bus Vision

This new version of the BSIP includes a joint vision for buses formed through Kent’s Enhanced Partnership Board (EPB) between KCC and its operators:

To protect existing bus services and to develop a core network that is sustainable, fast & frequent, innovative, reliable and fully accessible, complemented by a range of rural transport solutions – connecting our communities with essential services. Our passengers and residents will travel on modern, environmentally friendly vehicles accessed using dynamic and readily available information, high quality bus stops and infrastructure and using flexible, economic tickets that are easy to pay for.

We will seek to achieve this by working collaboratively through Kent’s Enhanced Partnership and by utilising any emerging National Bus Strategy funding or other external funding sources.

This vision recognises that Kent is keen to recover and grow its bus offering in line with the NBS. We will seek to do so while being pragmatic about the funding available to KCC and bus operators. The vision ultimately becomes achievable with a long-term national funding settlement for buses.



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Key Principles:

1. Regulation

Use Kent's EPs to work collaboratively to deliver the best bus offer possible with available funding. We will monitor all parties' EP Scheme commitments through the EP meeting hierarchy to help meet EP targets.

2. Customer

Put the customer at the heart of everything we do by developing a passenger charter agreed through the EP and by reviewing opportunities for stakeholder feedback.

3. Network developments

Work collaboratively to use any available funding sensibly and sustainably to ensure Kent's bus offer is as comprehensive as possible in the current financial climate.

Use outputs from the DfT's Bus Connectivity Assessment to inform enhancements to the core network whilst developing transport solutions for rural areas with the overall intention of improving levels of connectivity for all Kent residents.

4. Innovation and digital accessibility

Examine and embrace innovative transport solutions as potential alternatives to the private car and alongside other travel modes, including expanding bus rapid transport (BRT) services where appropriate.

5. Fares and ticketing

Work collaboratively to use any available funding sensibly and sustainably to deliver flexible, value-for-money ticketing options. Provide smart, cashless and ticketless solutions across Kent's network.

6. Public transport information

Provide easy to find, good quality and accessible public transport information, including a single source for live bus times and other new technology e.g. for voice announcements.

7. Accessibility

Strive to improve physical and digital provision both on board buses and within infrastructure to ensure the network is fully accessible to disabled passengers.

8. Environment and air quality

Promote the role of buses in addressing air quality issues and work with operators and other stakeholders to seek and use any available funding to make improvements on key transport corridors.

9. Infrastructure, network management and bus priority

Put buses at the centre of decision-making on new road schemes and planning developments, and support bus reliability and priority under KCC's role as the highway authority. Where external funding permits, seek to improve bus journey times on key congestion corridors to deliver related air quality, reliability, passenger usage and other benefits.

10. Schools transport

Continue to promote the bus network as a convenient, cost-effective and sustainable means for travel to School and College. Work collaboratively to provide suitable and reliable journeys for all significant demands wherever possible. As funding allows, look to support the costs of travelling to school.

2 Current Offer to Bus Passengers

This chapter sets out Kent’s current offer for bus passengers, providing an update since the original 2021 BSIP. It considers the general status of buses in Kent, the challenges facing the industry and the complex financial considerations. It then examines the BSIP’s initiative areas in turn, based on the key principles and discusses the current offering for each, outlining progress made since 2021.

Buses in Kent

In a large rural county like Kent, the bus network plays a major role not just in urban areas but in connecting less populated locations with key services. KCC acknowledges this important role that buses play in the county’s overall transport offer which is why we have sought to support Kent’s buses as far as possible, often under difficult circumstances, over many years. This support has included significant discretionary financial support – such as the popular Kent Travel Saver scheme and subsidised bus services etc- working with the county’s numerous commercial bus operators.

Since the bus industry was deregulated in the 1980s, most core bus services in Kent have been provided on a commercial basis by operators,

who run routes because of the revenue they generate from passenger usage. This means that most bus provision is provided outside of KCC’s direct control. Operators can provide services at their own discretion and make commercial decisions on issues such as routes, timetables, frequencies and fares, with operators and their services licensed by the Department for Transport (DfT).

Kent has traditionally had a relatively strong bus offer. It combines a significant commercial urban and inter-urban network with services to rural areas as geography and finances permit, supported by effective concessionary ticketing arrangements and good levels of infrastructure. The county is also home to one of England’s most successful Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) schemes –



Buses in Kent

Fastrack, which is due to become zero-emission in 2024. The brand will shortly be applied to a new BRT service in Dover.

Kent's bus offer has also faced substantial challenges in recent years. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a major impact, with reduced usage partly driven by changes in travel patterns causing lower revenue alongside increased operating costs (e.g. fuel, parts, insurance etc)

and driver shortages. Although the Government and KCC have supported buses through these difficult times (e.g. through sustaining ENCTS reimbursement at pre-Covid levels for a significant period), commercial operators have had to make tough decisions on the services and frequencies they can operate. KCC has also had to review its support for buses due to its own difficult financial position in which it continues to operate.

Kent's Bus Network

Kent's bus network (excluding cross-boundary services operating mostly outside Kent and Transport for London (TfL) services) currently consists of 426 services provided by 23 different operators, including large national companies and small to medium-sized local operators. National group operators provide 47% of all services and 83% of all kilometres: Stagecoach dominates in the east of the county, with Arriva and Go-Ahead running many of the services in the west. Most core bus services operate on a commercial basis with the remainder requiring financial support. Commercial services tend to operate six or seven days a week: while KCC-supported services operate mainly on weekdays only and are predominantly focused on school provision. A few of these supported services cross the county boundary and are jointly funded by KCC and the relevant neighbouring authority. Kent also has regular train services to London and sees some commuter coach operations.

The West Kent area of Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells is semi-rural with several small to medium-sized towns. It is bordered by the remainder of Kent, Medway, East Sussex, Surrey and the London Boroughs of Bromley and Bexley. Its population



Buses in Kent

of over 500,000 is slightly older than the national average and relatively affluent compared with the rest of the country.

The largest local bus provider in this part of Kent is Arriva Kent & Surrey, which provides services from its depots in Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells: most other services are provided by locally based independent companies. Buses used include minibuses and full-sized single- and double-deck vehicles, with a number of Euro V and Euro VI specification vehicles now in everyday use.

A large proportion of bus users are students attending the area's numerous secondary schools, many making longer, more complex journeys to grammar schools which attract students from across the county and from neighbouring authorities, including London. In Sevenoaks District, a popular Demand Responsive Transport scheme operates with KCC support alongside conventional registered local bus services.

The Kent Thameside area covers the urban Dartford and Gravesham Boroughs including the riverside market towns of Dartford and Gravesend, and rural areas to the south.

The urban area is part of the Thames Gateway regeneration project with substantial new housing and business developments underway including The Bridge, Eastern Quarry, Northfleet Embankment and the Ebbsfleet Valley. To ensure that the new populations do not cause the road network to become highly congested, the popular Fastrack bus rapid transit (BRT) system is in place and demonstrates how truly public transport-orientated development can be planned and built around an efficient transport network. The area's bus network is largely operated by Arriva, with TfL buses linking in from the London Boroughs of Bexley and Bromley. Services here are amongst the most frequent in the county with largely commercial evening and Sunday services operated. However, the rural area is more challenging to serve. In 2023, it was announced that Go-Ahead London won the contract to operate the Kent Thameside Fastrack network from 2024. The service will be operated with a fleet of Zero-Emission electric buses, extending services to more of the area's new development sites.

The East Kent area comprises the Districts of Ashford, Folkestone & Hythe, Dover, Canterbury, Thanet and Swale. Here, most bus services are provided by group operator Stagecoach. In

contrast to West Kent, there tends to be less commercial competition, particularly for off-peak services, with only a handful of independent operators running largely tendered or peak school routes. The exception is in Swale, where independent operator Chalkwell provides most of the local network, partly on a commercial basis. East Kent is dominated by several large towns with their own well-established bus networks connected by numerous inter-urban services. Of note is the city of Canterbury, which is a focal point of the East Kent network, with its central bus station acting as an interchange where passengers can connect to an array of services serving the area. The Thanet area towns of Ramsgate, Margate and Broadstairs have their own comprehensive network including The Loop, Kent's single most-used bus service. However, coverage in rural areas is more limited and there is little commercial service outside the inter-urban corridors.

In both West and East Kent there are a number of cross-boundary services, which we monitor and manage with neighbouring authorities.

The Challenge Facing the Industry

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the bus industry has faced significant issues both nationally and

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here in Kent. Commercial bus operators are working in an environment where usage and therefore revenue have fallen, while the costs of fuel, parts and insurance have all increased. A nationwide shortage of bus drivers and mechanical engineers has meant that operators have sometimes struggled to provide the services they are registered to run. As a result of this, a number of commercial operators across the county have had to make difficult decisions about which services to keep running at existing levels, and which to reduce or withdraw entirely. The Confederation for Passenger Transport (CPT), which represents UK bus and coach operators, vehicle manufacturers and other suppliers to the industry, has outlined the challenges and future priorities in its 2024 CPT bus manifesto. See: www.cpt-uk.org

Likewise, many Local Authorities across the country are facing significant financial challenges. KCC is no exception. Rising demands in areas such as Adult & Children's Social Care and Home to School Transport mean we have had to focus on meeting our statutory responsibilities and protecting and prioritising our most vital services. In February 2024, KCC approved its 2024-25 budget proposals, which included protecting current funding for bus support. However,

support for buses remains discretionary spend activity in a number of areas, so we must ensure our support for buses, alongside spending in other Council areas, provides best value for Kent residents and ultimately works towards the Council's policy of "Securing Kent's Future".

During and after the pandemic, KCC has worked closely with operators to build and sustain strong partnerships. From a financial perspective, we have aimed to make best use of all Government Covid support funding, LTF, BSIP and other sources to support the bus network as far as possible. Through the pandemic, we maintained payments to operators for contracted bus services, and concessionary fares scheme reimbursement at pre-Covid levels, in line with Government guidance. Together with other Government support, this ensured buses continued to operate, avoiding any significant reduction to service levels in Kent for a significant period. As post-pandemic bus usage patterns are becoming clearer, operators have had to make tough decisions about their services, even with some government support funding still in place.

BSIP and wider Government Covid-19 support funding has been crucial in sustaining as much of Kent's bus network as possible. In 2023/24, we

used BSIP funding to support 49 bus services, predominantly catering for school movements on the commercial bus network, which would have otherwise been withdrawn by the commercial operators. These services are planned to continue in 2024/25, again with BSIP funding secured from Government through the NBS process. There is still uncertainty around funding for these services beyond March 2025: this will be an important part of our NBS funding request for 2025-29.

Looking ahead, KCC has outlined its aspirations for its bus network and wider areas such as fares, infrastructure and passenger information in Chapter 4 – *Ambitions and Proposals for 2025 and Beyond*. Delivering these aspirations, which show how important buses are for our county, will depend on securing significant, long-term external funding. We also need clarity on the future of national initiatives such as the £2 fare cap and Project Coral, the DfT's support for multi-operator ticketing.

In 2021, we noted that we wished to use the NBS and BSIP process first to maintain Kent's bus offer as far as possible, with any additional funding used to grow it through initiatives in areas such as public transport information, ticketing and innovation. This remains the case

Buses in Kent

for our 2024 BSIP. Wherever possible, we have used, and will continue to use, 2023/24 and 2024/25 BSIP funding to sustain services and support the ticketing offer, and deliver some longer-term benefits to support growth, subject to funding confirmation and award conditions. For 2025-29 we have proposed a set of further positive initiatives to grow Kent's bus provision, but again, this will depend on securing external Government funding.

Council Involvement

While much of the bus network in Kent is commercial, KCC still provides significant discretionary support for buses, and currently employs around 25 people to deliver its bus-related services.

Unlike many other authorities, KCC continues to spend approximately £5m per year on supporting services which are not profitable but are socially necessary.

Alongside this direct funding, KCC has fostered strong, positive working relationships with its bus operators over many years. Before the NBS was published in March 2021, these relationships were often formalised in voluntary Quality Bus Partnership (QBP) agreements. QBPs brought

together KCC, the local District or Borough council and the primary commercial bus operators, focusing on and setting targets in areas such as new planning developments, parking policy, service delivery and scheme identification. The NBS and EP introduced a new meeting structure that maintains these existing local relationships alongside more formal meetings, such as Kent's Enhanced Partnership Board (EPB). Please see Chapter 5 – *Targets, Performance, Monitoring and Reporting* for more information on the meeting structure.

KCC also supports the bus network by providing and maintaining bus stop infrastructure, competing for funding and priority for highway and other schemes, and supporting operators to improve their environmental standards and innovation.

Our most significant direct financial support, though, is to passengers, mainly by subsidising fares through our concessionary travel and school travel schemes. This includes the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) scheme, a statutory national initiative offering free transport to around 235,000 elderly and disabled passholders. On top of this, KCC also offers discretionary free passes for qualifying companions.

For many years KCC has provided its Kent Travel Saver Schemes on an entirely discretionary basis to help parents and young people with the cost of travel to and from school. The £5.7m subsidy KCC allocates to the schemes, complemented by BSIP funding that has enabled KCC to limit the cost to pass holders is estimated to reduce the cost of bus journeys by about half compared to the cost of season tickets purchased from bus passengers. Although effectively a passenger subsidy, the scheme is acknowledged by bus operators as being positive since it encourages bus use for journeys to and from school that can become a lifelong habit.

KCC also provides free bus travel to around 4,100 children entitled to free travel to school on the bus network. This is a statutory responsibility placed on Local Authorities under the Education Act. KCC has a policy of making use of the existing public transport network whether possible. As well as benefitting the pass holders themselves, it is considered that this policy and the funding it represents helps to sustain the network in a number of ways. One example is that it enables some vehicles to provide cost-effective off-peak services, supporting the wider bus network and the communities it serves.

Buses in Kent

Taken together, these schemes help underpin a strong peak-time offer, which in turn supports a greater-than-usual number of services operating throughout the day by commercial operators, resulting in increased competition for tendered and commercial bus work.

KCC has also developed an active working relationship with the community transport sector and has formed a Community Transport Toolkit to help organisations introduce and operate small transport schemes in their communities. Over the last two years, we have provided just under £1m in grants to 19 different organisations, almost all in the form of one-off funding to launch very localised schemes, followed by ongoing support and advice to sustain them. KCC remains committed to this approach and will continue to support the sector where viable.

Funding for Buses

Although most bus journeys in Kent operate on an entirely commercial (i.e. unsubsidised) basis, some services, infrastructure and financial support for bus users is heavily funded through KCC and Government. We have to consider our spending carefully to prioritise our most vital and statutory services, but we continue to put as much support into buses as possible. We

currently inject approximately £35m per year into the Kent bus network, both directly through subsidies for unprofitable but socially necessary bus services, and indirectly through subsidies to passholders and fare reimbursement to operators.

Our funding comprises both statutory and discretionary spending and includes subsidies to operators and passengers and other financial support for schemes and projects. Capital budgets can vary significantly each year and ultimately tend to be reliant on external funding streams.

Despite this funding, the bus network in Kent and across the UK still faces significant challenges as it recovers from the pandemic, both to attract the passenger numbers required to sustain services and deal with rising operational costs. Government support during and since the pandemic, together with keeping concessionary travel payments at pre-Covid levels – and, more recently, BSIP network funding – has enabled much of the bus network to be maintained. However, there continues to be concern across the bus industry about what happens when this current external funding period ends in March 2025. This presents a significant risk to the

industry and the travelling public. KCC's 2025-29 initiative proposals emphasise that continued external funding is vital to support the bus network and deliver any more progressive service enhancements.



Buses in Kent

KCC's budgets and spend for supporting buses in Kent in 2022/23 and 2023/24 are detailed below.

Baseline Budget Category	Funding Source	2022/23		2023/24	
		Revenue	Capital	Revenue	Capital
Supported Bus Services & Kent Karrier	KCC	£4.84m	£0	£5.33m	£0
ENCTS Concessions Budget dictated by demand and re-imbursement	KCC	£13.84m	£0	£12.97m	£0
Kent Travel Saver Concessionary Ticketing Scheme Payment to operators	KCC	£11.35m	£0	£14.56m	£0
Bus Stop Infrastructure Maintenance Contract	KCC	£100k	£0	£100k	£0
Fastrack Infrastructure	KCC	£0	£243k	£0	£243k
Bus Service Policy, Community Transport and New Bus Stop Infrastructure	KCC	£329k	£0	£329k	£0
BSIP Funding	Dft	£0	£0	£6.53m	£12.46m
LTF/BSIP+	Dft	£0	£0	£2.3m	£0
Local Authority BSOG	Dft	£1.08m	£0	£1.08m	£0
Zero Emission Bus Grant (ZEBRA)	Dft	£0	£0	£7m	£0
Housing Infrastructure Fund (for bus projects) Funding to DDC for Dover Fastrack – KCC Delivery Partner	Dft	£0	£7.63m	£7m	£7.63m

The table above shows the total original BSIP allocation for 2023/24. Some initiatives have completion dates extending into 2024/25 but have seen some spend in 2023/24: these therefore appear within Chapter 3 – *Improvements Programme to 2025* initiative areas as '2023/24' projects. For some other initiatives full expenditure will be in 2024/25 due to programme changes agreed with the DfT and as such are now shown as '2024/25' spend in each initiative area.

Buses in Kent

Funding for Kent's BSIP

In 2021, KCC and operators submitted an ambitious BSIP containing a range of initiatives aimed firstly at making Kent's bus offering as sustainable as possible, and secondly at moving forwards with measures to grow overall bus use. The submission highlighted that KCC and operators were focused on protecting the existing network as far as possible; accordingly, the ability to support anything other than fairly modest initiatives was very limited without additional external funding.

For these reasons, and in line with initial BSIP guidance, KCC and operators actively looked for initiatives we could deliver using existing funds and dependent entirely on new funding delivered through the NBS process. Our 2021 BSIP funding requirement, based on revenue support and capital costs, totalled £213m.

Indicative BSIP Allocation & Subsequent 23/24 BSIP Award

We published Kent's BSIP in October 2021. The Government assessed submissions from LTAs across England before making indicative funding allocations. On 4 April 2022, we learnt we had been allocated £35.1m, consisting of £12,454,840 capital and £6,530,895 revenue funding. This

was significantly less than the £213m we had requested and would not deliver our ambitions in full. That said, only 31 out of 79 LTAs received any allocation at all, and ours was the ninth highest in England. The DfT also praised the quality and ambition of our BSIP.

The DfT was clear that funding came with conditions. Firstly, it had to be used on initiatives supporting Government priorities – bus priority schemes for capital funding, and fares and ticketing schemes and service initiatives for revenue funding. Secondly it was noted at the time that funding could not be used to sustain unprofitable services facing reduction or withdrawal.

Following the announcement in April 2022 a formal funding offer was not subsequently made to KCC until February 2023. Following a Key Decision from the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport KCC accepted £18.9m of funding in March 2023. This represented two years' funding in one (BSIP tranche 1) with the DfT seeking an accelerated initiative programme across the 2023/24 financial year. We therefore needed to identify works that met the grant's terms and that were deliverable in the reduced timescale available. You can find details of the initiatives

delivered and their current status later in this chapter.

As part of the award process, we managed to negotiate the flexibility to use revenue funding to sustain existing unprofitable services if necessary. This allowed 49 registered bus services, mainly serving school movements, to continue for the 2023/24 financial year. They would have otherwise faced withdrawal by commercial operators.

On receipt of its 2023/24 BSIP funding award, we worked hard to roll out the agreed initiative programme. Details of the initiatives delivered and their current status, can be found later in this chapter. In June 2023, the Government announced that KCC should expect to receive the balance of its indicative allocation totalling £4,379,500 revenue and £11,707,904 capital for the delivery of further initiatives in 2024/25. The DfT have advised that this funding should be released in June 2024. The initiatives we will deliver in 2024/25 are detailed in Chapter 3 – *Improvements Programme to 2025*.

KCC has also been able to use £2.3m in BSIP+ funding provided by Government through this process which recognised the challenges faced by

Buses in Kent

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Initiative Specific Updates

Initiative Specific Updates

In our 2021 BSIP, we developed a number of initiative areas based on our Key Principles. This 2024 update considers the Government's revised list of initiative areas. This section considers each of these initiative areas in turn and explains Kent's current position. It includes information on progress since the 2021 BSIP, detail on how we have used 2023/24 BSIP funding where appropriate to deliver improvements, and any EP commitments introduced to support the initiative area concerned. Details of our 2024/25 programme follow in Chapter 3 – *Improvements Programme to 2025*.

Longer-term proposals for further improving the offer across all initiative areas, should we secure additional external funding, appear in Chapter 4 – *Ambitions and Proposals for 2025 and Beyond*.



Network Development

Network Development

Introduction:

Kent’s buses are essential for connecting communities, providing links between and within 15 major Towns and 40 Town Centre locations, and giving people access to reach local healthcare, employment and education.

School bus services are particularly important, supporting Kent’s student Travel Saver schemes, reducing ‘school run’ congestion and promoting sustainable transport to secondary schools including Grammar and Faith Schools and Further Education establishments in the County.

Although the network’s sustainability has been compromised in recent years, the current bus offer continues to provide services all-day, five-, six- or seven-day-a-week operations on key corridors. Schooltime-only services, off-peak shopper buses and Dial-a-Ride and Community Transport ensure all parts Kent have access to key facilities, albeit limited for some more rural areas. In FY 2023/24, the network recorded over 44 million bus passenger journeys, underlining its importance and indicating that despite some reductions and cancellations it continues to cater effectively for residents’ needs. Kent also has

regular train services to London and supports a commuter coach network.

Supported by BSIP funding and KCC grants, the Community Transport Sector has played an increasing role in local, particularly rural, provision. The KCC-funded Kent Karrier network also provides bookable transport at least one day a week for all parts of the county.

Challenges and Barriers:

During and since the pandemic, commercial bus usage has been compromised by reduced off-peak usage and passenger revenue, increased fuel, maintenance and salary costs and shortages of skilled and licensed staff. The 44.8 m bus journeys completed in Kent in FY2023/24 represents around 85% of pre-Covid levels: in the same period, operators’ overheads increased by around 30%.

These factors have resulted in over 77 net service withdrawals and further reductions in mileage since the start of 2022. Despite this, direct and indirect Government support has helped KCC and bus operators to sustain the core network.



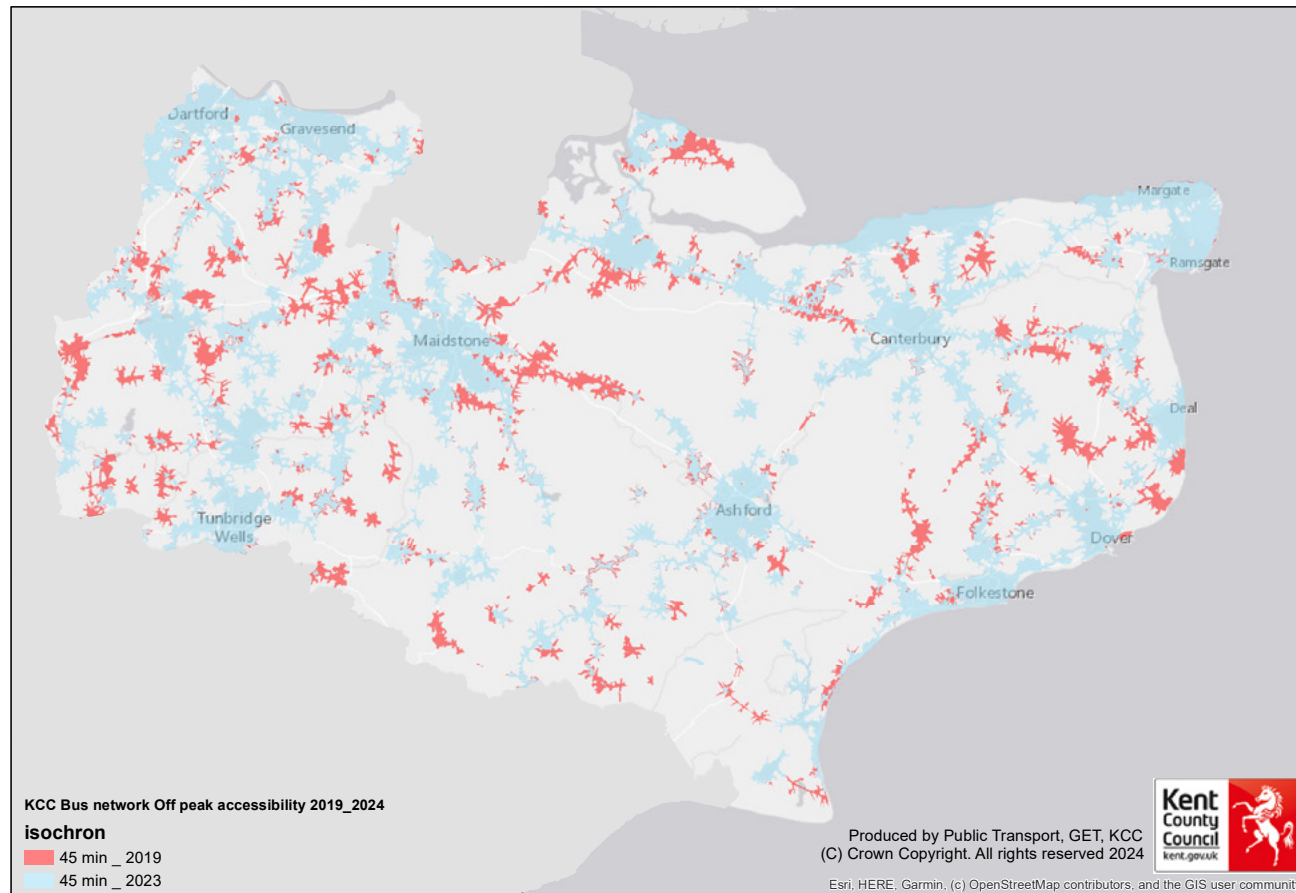
Network Development

However, the challenges persist. In Kent, 49 services are currently operating only with financial support from KCC through DfT (BSIP and

BSIP+) funding, which is assured only until March 2025. The priority for us and our bus operators, as reflected in this BSIP, remains to stabilise the

current network beyond March 2025. At the same time, we are establishing a clear vision to expand the core bus network and compliment this with solutions for rural communities using a combination of off-peak shopper services, Community Transport Schemes and DRT services that collectively offer greater connectivity through faster, more reliable services that are easier to use, well publicised and use greener, more accessible vehicles and infrastructure. However, doing so will require assured, longer-term funding.

Figure 5. Impacts of changes to the Kent Bus Network 2019-2024



Kent’s buses provided around 32.5m kilometres of bus network in FY23/24, about 80% of the total operated in 2019. Despite this contraction, further analysis shows the inter-urban network on Kent’s better-used strategic bus routes remains comprehensive, validating the National Bus Strategy’s focus on investing in these strongest parts of the network. The school bus network is also robust, showing we were right to use available funding to protect these services where they were at risk of withdrawal by operators.

Analysis of the current network against the pre-pandemic network demonstrates that the areas most adversely affected by the 20% contraction of the network are rural communities and others

Network Development

that are located outside of urban areas and away from the most core parts of the network. The areas highlighted in red in figure 5 suffer from reduced off-peak (midday) bus accessibility to Town Centres and this intelligence will be used to inform the use of future funding in seeking to improve connectivity for areas that have been adversely affected by the industry challenge and recent changes to the network.

Overall, the proportion of urban populations within 45 minutes of a town centre by bus has not significantly decreased. However, bus accessibility for short journey (less than 15 minutes) has fallen for 20% of the urban population in this same midday period. Clearly, while these stronger parts of the network have been maintained, some now offer reduced frequency and service levels. We need to recognise that the

most compromised parts of our network and services are outlying rural areas off the main bus corridors. Serving these smaller, rural communities sustainably is a challenge for this BSIP, since limited or non-existent services for these communities is clearly a barrier to greater bus use in Kent.

Public/Stakeholder Feedback Summary:

Public and stakeholder engagement used to inform our 2021 BSIP identified improvements to the network itself as the main priority for existing and potential bus users. Of 10 areas identified, including cost, reliability, accessibility, environmental considerations and information, what responders wanted most was more frequent services that run longer each day and at weekends.

In 2021, 68% of responders identified the services available as their priority for improvement. More detailed suggestions included new services, reduced journey distances, better integration, better rural services, earlier and later buses, more weekend services and improved frequencies.

Our 2023 BSIP passenger satisfaction survey also highlighted network and service improvements, with 40% of interviewees wanting to see improved routes, services, journey opportunities or frequencies.



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The feedback from surveys completed two years apart and for different reasons provides a consistent message: while passengers welcome improvements to information, fares, infrastructure and bus priority, it is improvements to services themselves they most want to see.

Current Offer to Bus Passengers:

Despite its recent contraction, Kent's bus network currently consists of 426 services, excluding

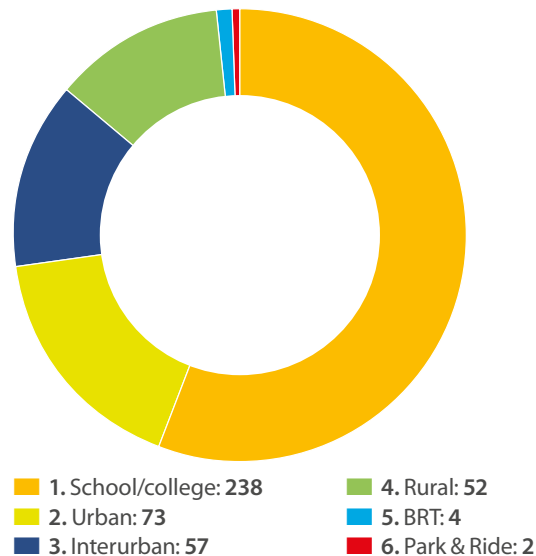
TFL service and cross boundary services mostly outside Kent, DRT and Community services. The bus network is delivered by 23 different operators, including large national companies and small to medium-sized local companies. Two national group operators provide 47% of all services and 83% of all kilometres: Stagecoach dominates in the east of the county, with Arriva running many of the services in the west.

Over half of bus services in Kent are school routes operating 8% of the mileage in Kent. The rest of the network consists of strong urban and interurban routes and account for the majority of the mileage in Kent. There also a very successful BRT service, a number of rural services and 3 DRT operations.

Total scheduled bus mileage in FY2023/24 was over 32.5m kilometres. 44.8 million passenger trips have been made in the Kent Bus services in FY23/24.

Figure 6. Kent bus mileage by service type

Number of services by type



Kilometer by Bus service type

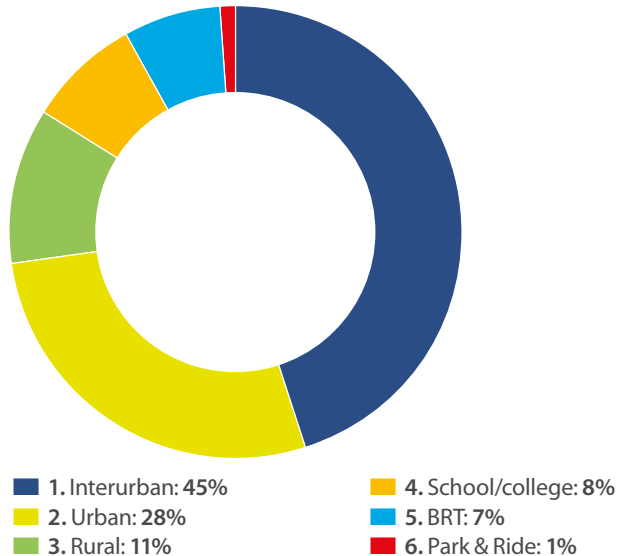
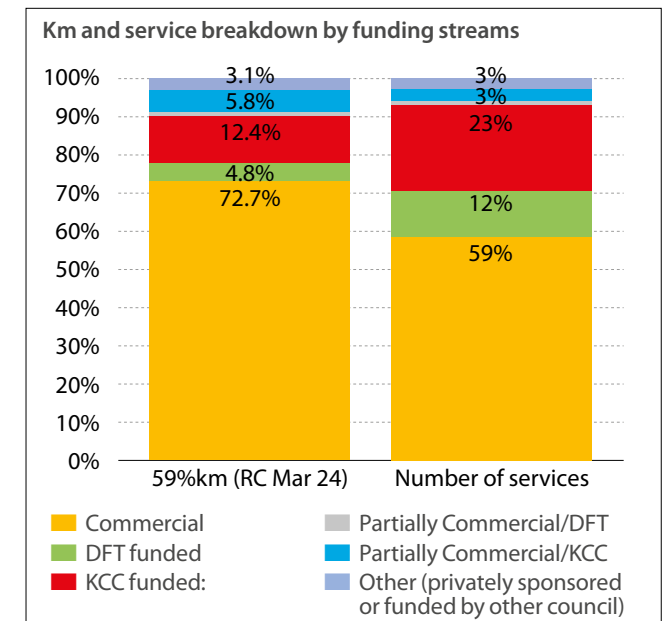


Figure 7. Proportion of network by funding type



Network Development

The majority of bus mileage and bus routes are operated commercially, but around 20% of the network mileage is currently subsidised, predominantly supporting school routes. There is a minority of routes funded privately or by other local bodies.

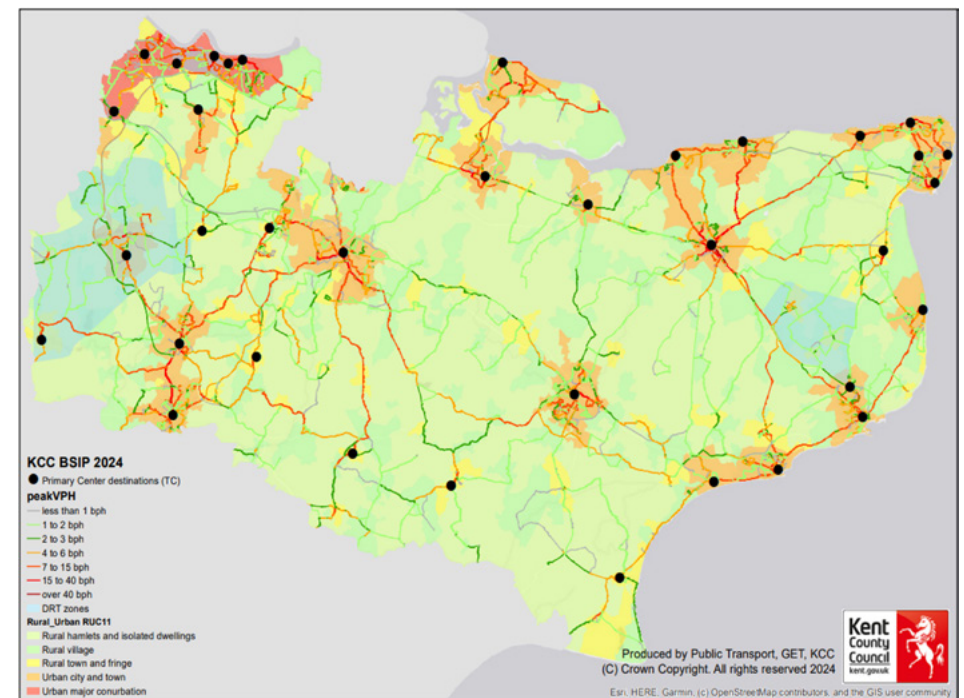
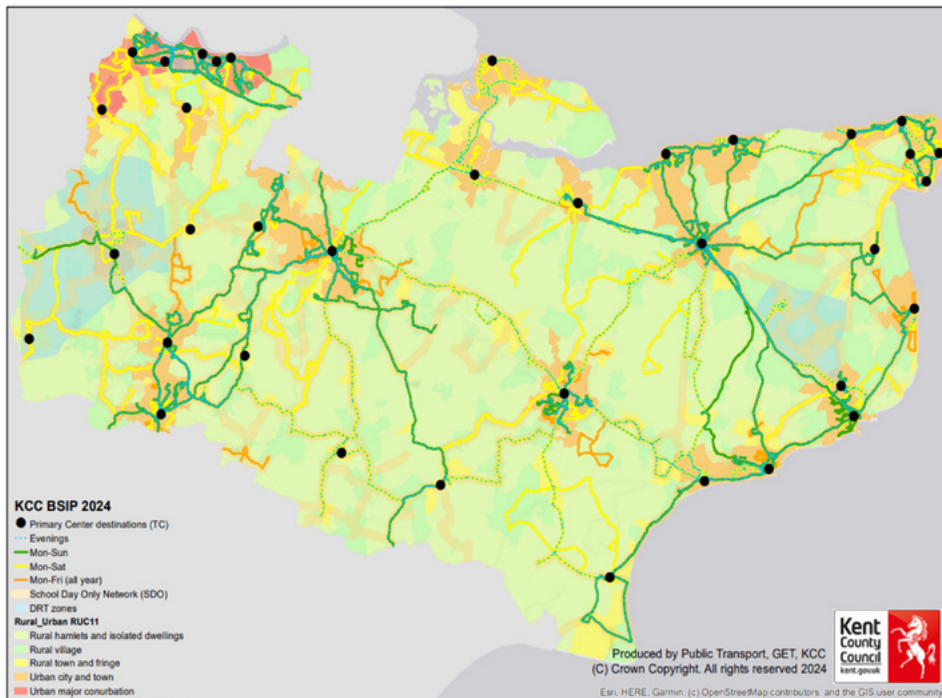
Spatially, the subsidised services are mostly supporting rural connectivity and predominantly focusing on school transport, mostly operating on weekdays only.

Analysis of March 2024 passenger data shows fully subsidised services represent almost 10% of bus usage in Kent, with the partially subsidised

network accounting for another 5%. The rest of the Kent bus patronage is generated by the commercial services.

Combined bus frequencies across Kent vary significantly between urban and rural areas. The illustrative maps below demonstrate that strategic corridors have stronger frequency and

Figure 8. Spatial Analysis Data



Network Development

more comprehensive services operating 6 to 7 days a week, and not surprisingly sensibly less frequent bus services in rural areas.

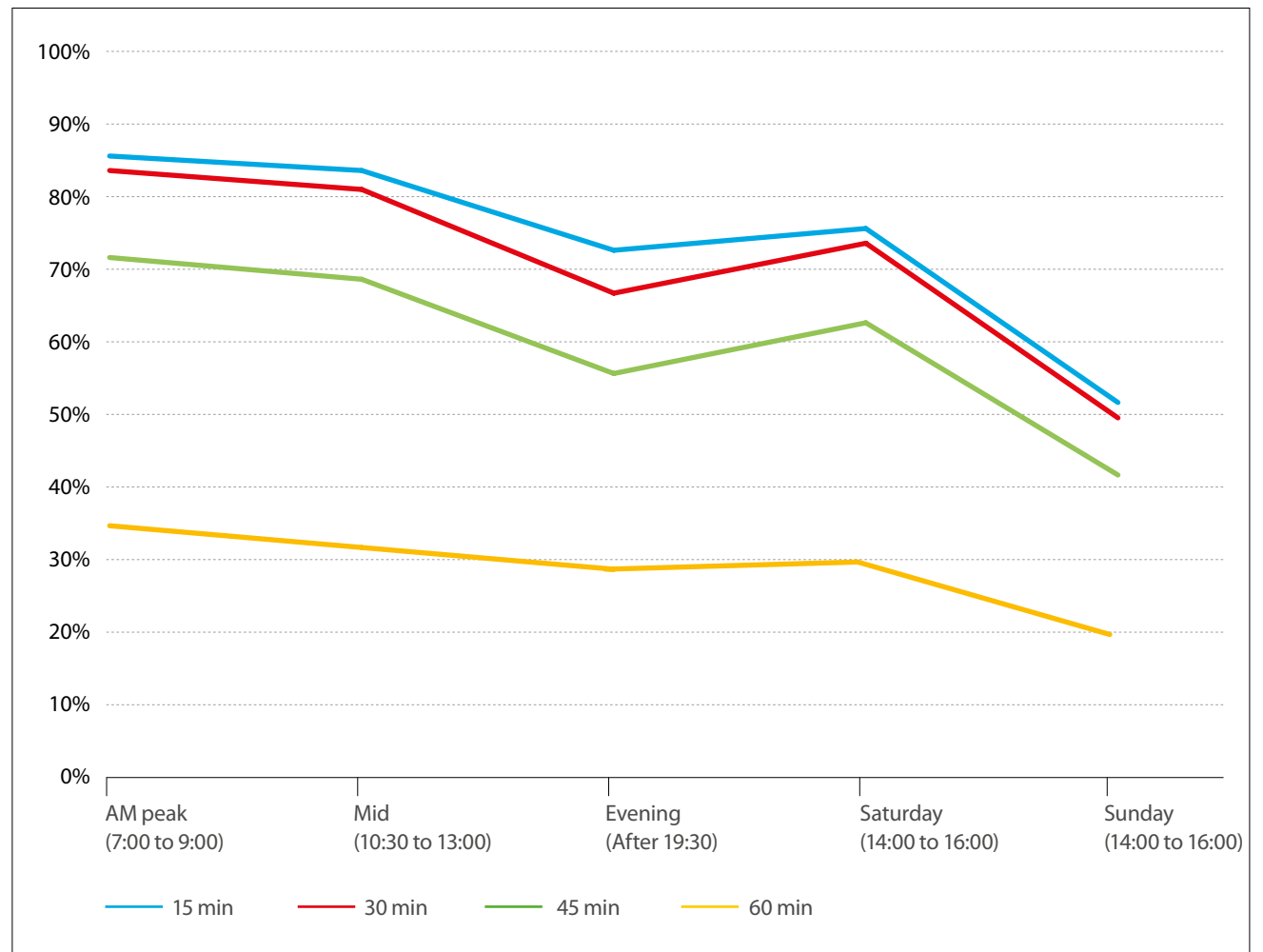
The spatial analysis demonstrates some gaps/inconsistencies with the provision of Sundays and evening services – figure 8 and Appendix C.

A table categorising bus services operating in the county as at March 2024 by Route number, Operator, Service Type, Operating Period and Funding source is shown in Appendix B. Appendix C provides a series of maps presenting the same information geographically as well as wider supportive data.

The current network provides 82% of Kent’s population with public transport access to a main Town Centre within 45 minutes in weekday peak hours. This falls to 48% on Sundays.

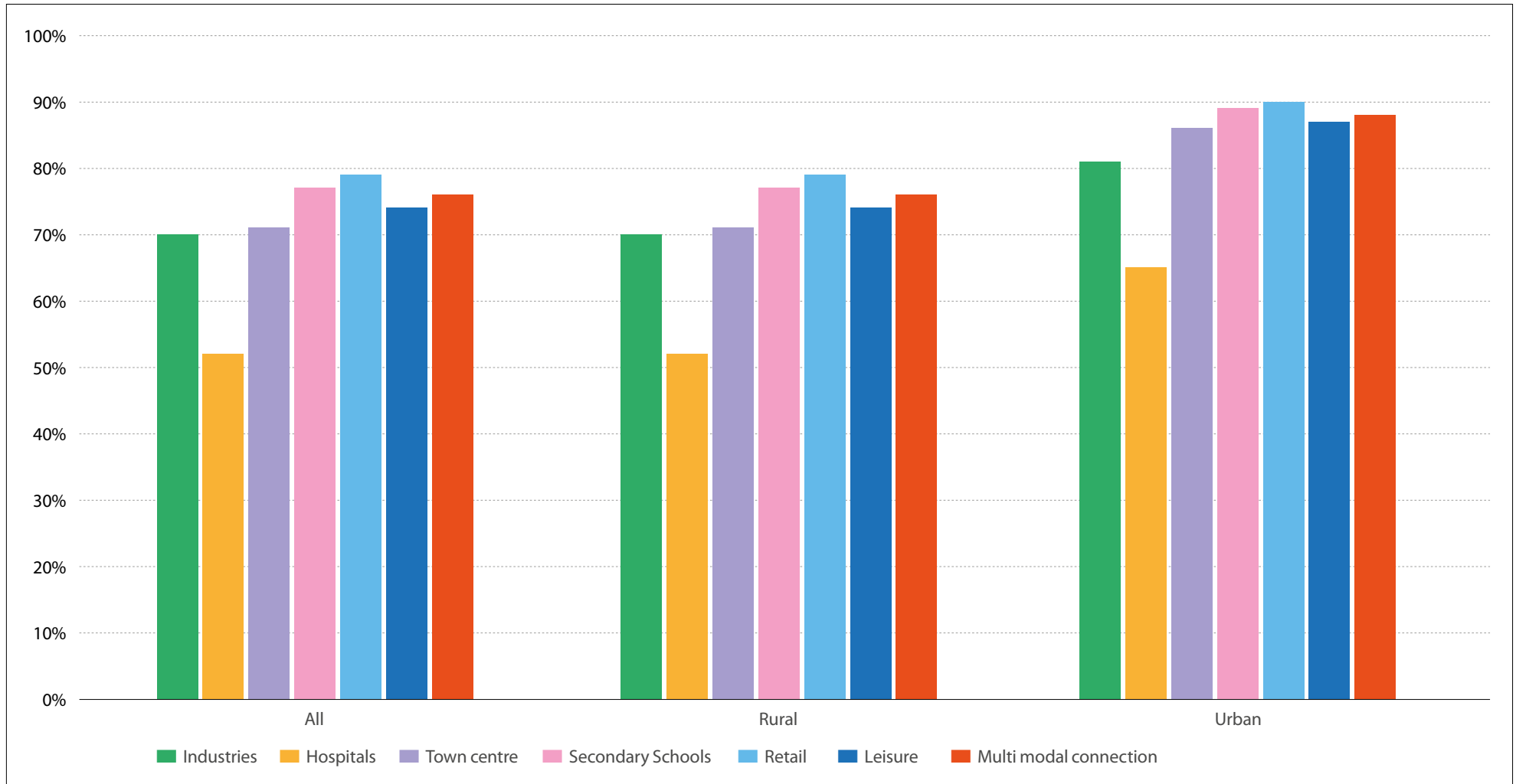
Early assessment of the outputs from the DfT Connectivity Assessment shows that, while the commercial network has clearly been compromised by service reductions and cancellations, core services have been sustained and protected. This means around 80% of residents in urban areas or with access to inter-urban parts

Figure 9. Percentage of population with access to town centre by bus within 60 mins



Network Development

Figure 9. Percentage of population with access to destination by bus within 30 min – AM Peak. (This aligns with outputs from Kent’s BCA)



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of the network have good access to all destination types within 30 minutes, except for access to major hospitals which are identified as having poorer levels of connectivity for both urban and rural areas. Further details are included in Appendix C.

Protecting the current network and supporting services at risk of withdrawal has been the main focus of BSIP funding support in 23/24; this will continue into 24/25. Clearly, while shortcomings remain in certain parts of the county and at

particular times of the day, overall accessibility to key destinations supports this approach. Connectivity for rural communities is significantly lower, with fewer than 50% of residents having access to the same destination types within the same journey parameters.

Unsurprisingly, connectivity for all areas diminishes at evenings and weekends. Providing sustainable solutions at these times is a challenge. It is also clear that access to local hospitals is particularly problematic for both urban and rural communities. While this can be partly explained by increasingly centralised provision, this will be a focus of future development should funding become available.

Although not included in connectivity assessments, the Community Transport Sector and KCC's Kent Karrier (Dial-a-Ride) services often meet more localised transport needs not covered by bus, rail or taxi services. Kent Karrier provides door-to-door transport for people with mobility issues or who live more than 500m from a bus stop. It operates across the county and in the year to March 2020 accounted for over 13,000 passenger journeys.

Since 2018 and up to receipt of BSIP funding, KCC has awarded approximately £1m of community transport grants which have supported a number of schemes across the county.



Network Development

Network Development and Kent's BSIP

We originally intended to use our BSIP allocation to introduce new services and enhance existing ones, where they could be self-sustaining in the future and provide greater connectivity where we had identified gaps or shortfalls. However, between the funding allocation being announced and actually arriving, it became clear that reduced bus use and revenue and increased costs were undermining the network's sustainability and service continuity more than we could have anticipated. In this period, a very significant number of services were reduced or threatened with complete withdrawal by operators.

To date, we have protected 49 critical services, most enabling children to travel to school, using BSIP and BSIP+ funding. Using the Project Adjustment Request (PAR) process a proportion of our 2023/24 allocation has been rolled over to 2024/25 to ensure that these services can continue until March 2025 at least. Without this support, they would not be operating, but the estimated cost, of over £3m per year has exhausted the funding and, therefore, our capacity to significantly improve services more widely.

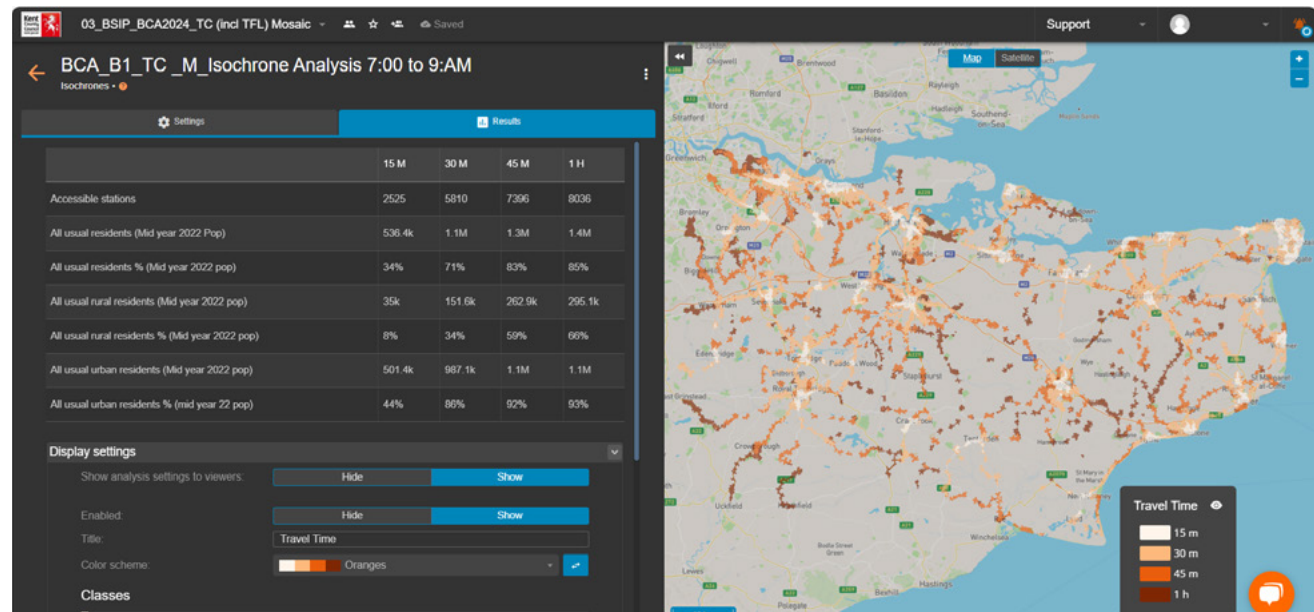
Community Transport Grant

KCC has built active working relationships with

Community Transport providers since the 2021 BSIP. We developed our Community Transport Toolkit to help organisations understand how to introduce and operate smaller-scale transport schemes. In 2023/24, we used BSIP funding to make grants totalling over £500k to 11 organisations to support projects in their communities, building on the positive work we already carried out before the launch of the NBS. We intend to continue to support this sector which is viewed as having an increasing role in providing for rural communities.

Network Planning Tool

We allocated a smaller proportion of the network funding to secure network planning and accessibility assessment tools. We are using it to complete the DfT Connectivity Assessment Survey, identify shortcomings in the current network and inform our approach to future network planning and the 2025–29 network initiatives identified within this BSIP.



Bus Priority and Highway Management

Bus Priority and Highway Management

Introduction

This section summaries the current bus priority offer in Kent and also considers the important relationship between highway management and bus reliability.

When it comes to bus priority in Kent, KCC as the Local Transport Authority (LTA) has typically looked to provide measures in locations where they provide the biggest benefit to the highest number of people, carefully considering the impact on other travel modes and road users. Investment in a countywide traffic model for Kent has helped to identify areas where there are significant delays for buses and to consider these delays in terms of the number of users affected. We like to see bus priority in locations where operators can offer up return investment on their networks – i.e. through journey time savings or additional journeys on the corridors concerned.

Kent has some very good examples of bus priority, including as part of the award-winning Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) scheme – Fastrack, which uses a range of bus lanes, signal control and other measures to support timely and attractive

service operations. In other cases, small tweaks to the network provide benefits to buses such as transponders to trigger traffic signals and small bus only sections to link two localities. In the National Bus Strategy, the Government noted their wish to see bus priority on strong performing bus corridors, enabling services on those corridors to improve further still with respect to frequency offering and journey time.

When it comes to highway management, in a perfect scenario, bus operators would run every journey on a road network which was free from congestion, which had no maintenance or access issues, and which could provide guarantees with respect to end-to-end travel times. In reality however, all road networks are subject to disruption. They must cater for a range of travel modes, react to variances in demand and be maintained and developed appropriately to ensure they are meeting the needs of a growing population with increasingly dynamic travel requirements.

Highway management is key to bus reliability and Kent's bus operators frequently tell us about the importance of issues such as roadworks management, and road closure numbers in facilitating punctual bus services. Kent looks to

address issues affecting bus reliability through its Punctuality Improvement Partnerships (PIPs) which seek to tackle strategic issues and identify pinch points on the highway which can be tackled to improve bus reliability. The two-tier authority nature of Kent also means that support from our district and borough council partners is required in areas such as parking enforcement.

Below we look in more detail at the current position with respect to both of these important areas and discuss progress made to date in delivering improvements since Kent's 2021 BSIP.

Existing Challenges and Barriers

Kent is a well-populated county and has many roads in major town and city centres which suffer from traffic congestion at peak times. Whilst bus priority measures can alleviate some of these issues, these locations often have a lack of physical space to deliver the necessary improvements, particularly in a way which considers the requirements of other road users appropriately. Bus priority schemes often have to compete or work with other sustainable transport schemes such as cycle lanes or active travel initiatives. Lack of physical space also often means that difficult decisions are sometimes required over where to physically install infrastructure.

Bus Priority and Highway Management

Bus priority is of course designed to speed up bus journey times and in doing so provide benefit to the hundreds (and often thousands) of bus users who utilise the corridor concerned. There is often a need to balance the benefit provided to these users with the wider impact on overall traffic flow and other road users, which in some cases may be negative.

When considering appropriate bus priority locations, Kent looks to utilise traffic data and operator feedback to identify locations with significant delay for buses, with high levels of bus usage and with high potential for reciprocal benefit. Consideration is then made on whether there is the physical space to progress a scheme and what the overall impact would be on overall traffic flow and other road users.

With respect to highway management, like many LTAs, KCC is faced with a number of issues and barriers when performing its highways function. Predominantly, demand on the network is increasing at a time when there are diminishing resources, ageing assets and increased public expectation. Whilst we strive to ensure resource and attention is deployed in areas where need is greatest, this is not always possible. There are key network pressure points with respect to

congestion which are difficult to address due to external factors, such as the knock-on effects from queues on trunk roads and the motorway network. Much of Kent is also rural in nature meaning physical traffic solutions can be difficult to accommodate.

As development levels remain high in the county in line with national requirements and other initiatives such as broadband upgrades are rolled out, there is significant pressure on KCC to accommodate roadworks to provide key utility linkups to housing and industrial development sites. Whilst KCC strives to co-ordinate roadworks at times when there is least impact on the travelling public, including bus services, the sheer volume of works requested in this respect means not all work can be conducted during off-peak periods. Many emergency works are also outside of the control of KCC and may be undertaken by utility companies directly, with only retrospective notice required in line with current legal requirements. However necessary Streetworks can have a significant impact on bus services, particularly in rural areas where suitable alternative routes are limited.

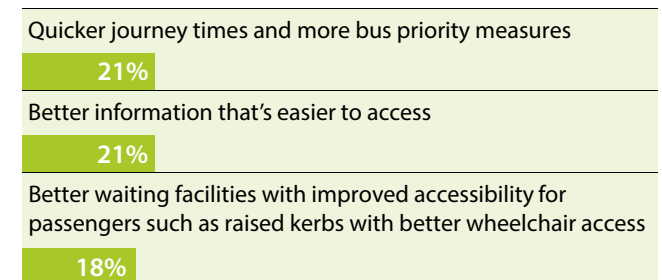
We recognise that better bus services and increased use of them, particularly through shift

from private vehicles, will help reduce the impact of these challenges.

Public/Stakeholder feedback summary

Feedback gathered through our engagement activity in 2021 highlighted that one of the most important factors for passengers when using the bus is the reliability and punctuality of services. Both bus priority measures and highway management can have a major impact on these issues, impacting heavily on end-to-end journey times and the extent to which buses are impacted by wider congestion.

Figure 10. Percentage of respondents who put this in their top three priorities for buses.



Bus Priority and Highway Management

Whilst data shows that the main priority for passengers is the availability and frequency of services themselves, there is also specific reference to these features in feedback, particularly with reference to bus priority. Specific comments included:

“It’s making sure that bus priority is first and foremost in transport planning. People aren’t going to just wake up one day and decide to travel by bus.”

“What’s the point if buses have to sit in the same traffic jams as cars? Why would people travel by bus if the bus is there sitting next to them in a jam, there’s no benefit.”

Bus operators have told us that the provision of a predictable, accessible and efficient highway network is vital if they are to offer reliable and punctual services. Reliability can be impacted by traffic levels on the highway, by pinch points on the network preventing efficient bus access (e.g. buses blocked by parked vehicles) and by how the network is managed during highway incidents. Of course, reliability also requires key attention from operators themselves with respect

to ensuring appropriate resourcing, that vehicles are maintained to a high standard and that timetables are planned and managed efficiently.

Highlighting this, in the 2021 BSIP, 61% of operators ranked it in their top five priorities.



Passengers want to be able to make plans with confidence that the service will turn up on time and arrive at its destination at the time advertised. 38% of respondents rated reliability in the top three areas which would make bus travel easier and more attractive for them. This is a theme that is mirrored in wider national studies, such as research conducted by the independent watchdog for transport users, Transport Focus.

The importance of reliability was also clear from Kent’s 2023 BSIP passenger satisfaction survey.

Current Offer to Bus Passengers Bus Priority

As noted earlier in this section, KCC recognises the importance of bus priority measures in speeding up journey times for bus, and supports the principles set out within the National Bus Strategy. Effective bus priority, if delivered successfully, can reduce delays significantly and result in quicker journey times in comparison to other transport modes. The knock-on effect of improved journey times may also allow bus operators to deliver higher frequencies or other benefits to services, meeting a number of cross-cutting objectives.

Bus Priority and Highway Management

Whilst measures are often difficult or impossible to deliver due to physical road space and the extent of impacts on wider traffic levels, Kent is proud to have some strong examples of bus priority across the county. Measures in use at a number of locations include bus lanes, traffic signal control, priority measures at junctions and segregation.

Some examples of key bus priority infrastructure in Kent include:

- Fastrack (multiple locations in Dartford and Gravesend)
- Canterbury A28 & Town Centre
- Ashford, A28 Canterbury Road
- Tunbridge Wells, A26
- Maidstone A20 & Sutton Road

Kent's 2021 BSIP noted that in line with guidance set out in the National Bus Strategy, we wanted to see further bus priority schemes introduced across the county and wanted to see them delivered in areas which provided significant benefit to bus journey times. We noted that we wanted schemes delivered in areas where operators could offer reciprocal benefits in return, such as frequency enhancements or increased hours of operation.

In order to help inform potential locations for bus priority, we utilised the Kent County Traffic model to identify key congestion locations on the network which also have the highest number of bus movements. This identified a number of corridors of interest. Since 2021 further work has refined this list further and as of 2024 KCC is exploring:

- Dartford – East Hill
- Chalk – Gravesend Town Centre
- Swanscombe to Horns Cross
- Canterbury – Sturry
- Ashford Town Centre
- Tonbridge Vale - Tonbridge – Southborough
- Maidstone to Sandling
- Maidstone to Loose Road

The above is in addition to schemes already in progress using BSIP funding.

We then conducted some analysis work to review these findings to assess opportunities for delivery.

Further discussions with operators and the analysis of existing patronage data also highlighted two further corridors of interest, on the Maidstone Town Centre to Wheatshaf corridor and along the loop service alignment in Thanet. In Kent's 2021 BSIP we noted that a

potential scheme involving the LOOP corridor was of particular interest due to its principles being in close alignment with the Government's Superbus initiative. The Superbus initiative is based on taking high performing routes and developing them further in conjunction with operators, through a combination of infrastructure improvements, frequency enhancements and fares initiatives combined with good marketing.

A map of BSIP 1 corridors and other corridors of interest is provided in Appendix C.

In Kent's 2021 BSIP, we also noted that should the circumstances be right and if funding was to become available, that KCC was keen to look at opportunities to support Fastrack further, in order to improve end to end priority on both the existing Kent Thameside Fastrack initiative and the new Dover Fastrack project.

Whilst Kent did not receive its full funding ask through the BSIP process, Kent's BSIP award for 2023/24 is facilitating the progression of three bus priority schemes across the county, all of which are currently progressing through the delivery process as part of an accelerated BSIP programme agreed with the DfT.

Bus Priority and Highway Management

Dartford – Rennie Drive Bus Priority Scheme.

The Rennie Drive bus priority scheme was chosen due to its alignment with the ambition to improve end to end priority on Fastrack services and due to its deliverability in line with Government requirements. The scheme provides significant benefit to the Fastrack service in Kent Thameside.

Improvements include optimisation of the layout and traffic signals at the junction, which will save Fastrack services an average two minutes of journey time and reduce the impact of congestion at the Dartford crossing. Changes as part of the scheme include:

- allowing Fastrack buses to travel along Rennie Drive in both directions.
- creating a new southbound bus lane within Rennie Drive up to the Fastrack roundabout.
- adjusting footway and cycleway points to improve active travel and cycle use.

Works officially commenced on Monday 4 March 2024 for a 33-week construction period. The scheme will unlock re-investment from Fastrack using resources saved due to the scheme into the provision of an enhanced service between Ebbsfleet Garden City and Gravesend town centre.



Bus Priority and Highway Management

Dover – Pencester Road Bus Priority Scheme

The Pencester Bus priority scheme was selected due to its ability to unlock direct public transport access to Dover Town Centre from/to Dover Priory station and the Port of Dover.

The scheme involves the construction of a dedicated bus and cycle only contraflow lane will along the western side of Pencester Road as well as new traffic signals.

The scheme will enable:

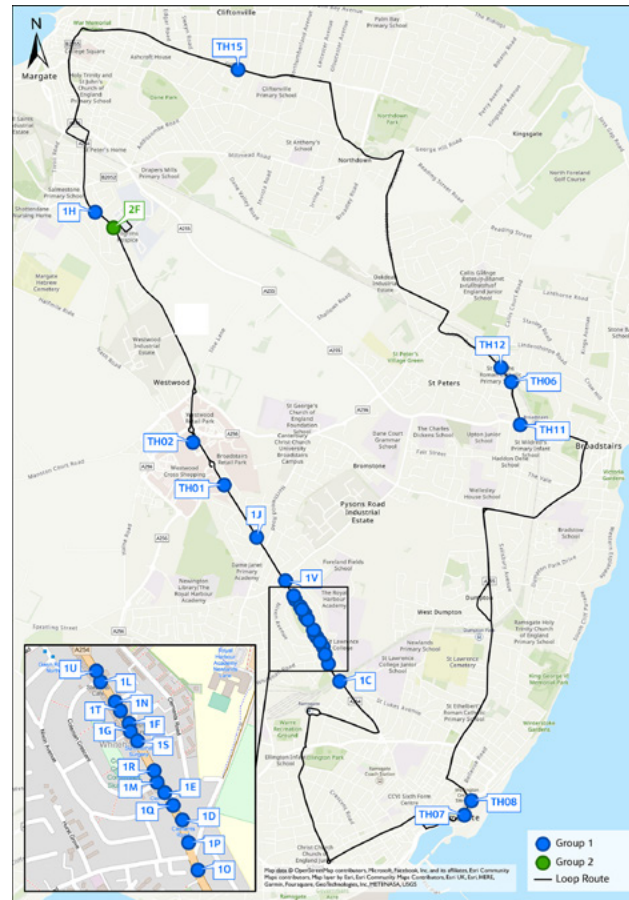
- The Dover Fastrack Bus Rapid Transit system to seamlessly serve Dover Priority Station
- Significantly improved public transport travel to/from Dover Eastern Docks by creating an additional bus link between Dover Priory Rail Station and the Dover Port via Pencester Road. This is a significant operator-provided reciprocal benefit.

Public consultation occurred during winter 2023 and it is anticipated that scheme construction will commence in summer 2024.

Thanet – Superbus Scheme

The Thanet Superbus scheme targets one of the most popular bus services in Kent and was selected due to the forecasted positive impacts

Figure 11. Thanet Loop Scheme – Location of Sites



on bus reliability as well as the reciprocal benefits offered by the bus operator in response to the improvements in journey times. The scheme introduces a package of interventions to improve bus journey times and reliability for the Thanet Loop bus service which connects key locations in Ramsgate, Margate, and Broadstairs.

The scheme’s design phase started in April 2023 and the delivery of the scheme is split into two distinct delivery phases:

- Phase 1 includes road lining and bus build outs to give better bus priority. Delivery of this element commenced in May 2024 with anticipated completion by summer 2024.
- Phase 2 includes the provision of a new bus lane within the vicinity of the QEQM hospital. It is intended to start public consultation on this element of the scheme in summer 2024, following the completion of full detailed design and the necessary utility works.

The scheme will necessitate the strong enforcement of introduced parking restrictions and as such KCC are working closely with Thanet District Council to enable this as far as possible. The bus operator is reinvesting in the Loop service with a significantly increased bus

Bus Priority and Highway Management

frequency, starting from June 2024. The journey time saving will be closely monitored through Kent’s EP.

KCC also secured further BSIP funding in 2023/24 to conduct feasibility works for future potential bus priority schemes across the county. This work is ongoing with the corridor list produced above providing a key basis for scheme identification, alongside operator feedback through Kent’s Punctuality Improvement Partnership (PIP) meetings. One such scheme includes the Downs Road junction in Canterbury, where improvements are being investigated which would allow buses to turn right onto St Stephen’s Hill. The delivery of this scheme would facilitate improvements to the bus network in the area including frequency enhancements.

Highway Management

As part of its function as Local Transport Authority (LTA), KCC has a key role in balancing the demands of all road users, with a view to ensuring Kent’s Road network works for all of its residents. The network seeks to enable safe and reliable journeys and whilst doing so looks to support social and economic prosperity. It must not only facilitate public transport services and the private motorist, but also the transport

of services essential to health and wellbeing, including emergency services, medical services, and food transportation. The network needs to support the delivery of a carbon neutral system, create sustainable, resilient and accessible places, make transport healthier and grow the economy.

Kent’s highway network is made up of a range of assets including approximately 250,000 roadside drains, 120,000 streetlights, 1,500 bridges, 700 sets of traffic lights, two tunnels and over 6,000 bus stops. However, Kent’s biggest highway assets, in terms of size and value, are its 5,400 miles of roads and 3,900 miles of footway. The local highway network is the most valuable asset we own in Kent – a like-for-like replacement of which would cost approximately £19.8bn – one of the largest in England.

As a sustainable and important travel mode, buses are a key consideration for KCC when it comes to its network management. We know there is key relationship between levels of bus uptake and the reliability of bus journeys, which must provide confidence and consistency to the end user as far as possible to encourage continued or new use. Reliable bus services require well managed and accessible highway networks. Market engagement activity



Bus Priority and Highway Management

conducted in preparation for Kent's 2021 BSIP established that reliability and punctuality is a key issue for both operators and passengers. The Confederation for Passenger Transport (CPT) have also re-iterated the importance of bus speeds in taking the role of the bus forwards as part of their 2024 manifestos.

Kent has a focus on supporting growth by delivering major projects and traffic schemes and managing development. KCC is responsible for the management and maintenance of highway assets (excluding motorways and trunk roads which are managed by Highways England) and has an obligation to promote and improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the county. This is achieved through the implementation of local transport schemes which support these long-term objectives.

In order to deliver on the above, KCC has a number of strategic and operational plans in place across its Highways and Transportation division. At the forefront of these is Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4): Delivering Growth without Gridlock 2016-2031, with LTP5 in development. Sitting alongside the LTP are a number of more detailed plans and strategies such as the Highways Asset Management Plan

2022 – 2026, Kent's Active Travel Strategy and the Freight Action Plan.

KCC's highways activity is delivered through two main service areas, Highway Operations and Transportation. Highway Operations inspect, repair and maintain Kent's highways to keep them safe and to provide the best possible service to Kent's residents, visitors and businesses. The service co-ordinates activity on the highway to minimise disruption to road users (including bus services) and facilitate utility services. There is an important balance required to support asset management principles, local operational/service needs and available resource. Key activity related to bus services includes:

- Reacting to reports from bus operators (directly or via KCC's fault reporting tool) with respect to faults or issues on the highway network
- An experienced and long-standing technical officer dedicated to the identification and rectification of vegetation issues on bus routes
- Roadworks notification processes in place to inform bus operators of upcoming road closures or disruption as far as possible (NB this is not always possible for emergency works)
- Permit/Lane Rental scheme for roadworks which seeks to manage access to the road network to limit impacts on buses and other transport modes.

- The Transportation service plans and improves the highway network to help the Kent economy grow, and to ensure that it is as safe and efficient as possible. Key activity related to bus services includes:
 - Liaison with the KCC Public Transport department to inform responses to planning developments, requesting contributions for bus initiatives where appropriate
 - Through Punctuality Improvement Partnerships (PIPs), work with bus operators and other partners to introduce traffic schemes to benefit bus passage e.g. lining, corner protection etc.
 - Management of bus signal priority, e.g. on Fastrack BRT scheme and provision of live traffic and travel information on KCC's Traffic and Travel web pages. Provision of a Kent Design Guide setting minimum standards for developers and other scheme promoters with respect to works which affect the highway. Bus stop guidance and bus accessibility requirements are incorporated in the latest iteration of the guide.

KCC is working within resource limitations with respect to funding and personnel when delivering the above. At the same time, feedback from the county's bus operators tells us that

Bus Priority and Highway Management

this is a vital area from their perspective in the management and potential growth of their networks.

In Kent’s 2021 BSIP, it was noted that we wanted to build on the positive relationships already in place with operators and, should BSIP funding be secured, deliver a number of interventions to support areas such as bus reliability pinch points on the highway, ANPR enforcement of bus gates, information on roadworks, enforcement on the highway and accessibility for buses within new developments.

Kent has cemented its commitment in many of these areas since 2021 both through EP Scheme commitments and use of BSIP funding. Through Kent’s EP Schemes we have included commitments to use KCC’s “new technical approvals process and the Kent Design Guide to ensure that new and upgraded highway schemes fully consider buses with respect to access and design” and for all highways schemes to look to “include improvements which would enhance reliability, service levels and accessibility and incorporate for bus, as funding permits.”

KCC has also included EP commitments and related 2023/24 funded BSIP initiatives in

a number of key areas linked to highways management including:

Punctuality Improvement Partnerships (PIPs) & Related Highways Interventions

In April 2022 we introduced an EP Scheme commitment to re-launch Kent’s Punctuality Improvement Partnerships (PIPs) and to subsequently use them to deliver highways improvements which tackle bus reliability issues. KCC has since allocated £625k of 2023/24 BSIP funding to deliver these improvements and is continuing to progress this improvement programme across the county.

Kent’s PIPs are a positive forum for managing open communication between Kent’s bus operators and KCC officers within Highways and Transportation. The intention of the relaunch was to reinvigorate this line of communication and re-enforce efforts to work jointly for the same outcomes. Through updating on recent changes, identifying problem locations and discussing current challenges, we’ve been able to find and suggest solutions and acknowledge where improvement may be beneficial. In Spring 2023, we approached operators to request they identify locations where bus journey times were being negatively impacted by congestion, by pinch

points on the highway or by issues such as lengthy loading/alighting times at bus stops.

Officers received nearly 100 locations where problems had been identified following this engagement. A lengthy shortlisting process was carried out to ensure both KCC were the correct authority to manage the concern and that it was feasible to carry out any changes to improve matters. It should be noted that some locations are significantly constrained by the built environment, but full assessments were carried out at every location.



Bus Priority and Highway Management

We are currently progressing with 22 sites for design and construction with some works completed. At Silver Hill Road in Ashford, an extension of the double yellow lines has been completed to allow for the free movement of the bus to pass unobstructed. Examples of other locations currently under progression are as follows:

- Installation of bus stop markings and raised kerbs at Old Tovil Road, Maidstone
- Realignment of kerbing at St Georges Roundabout, Canterbury
- Provision of a bus border kerb at Westgate Court Avenue, Canterbury

Roadworks Management and Information

As noted above, KCC has a duty to carefully manage access to the highway to ensure that:

- reliability of all traffic modes is considered, including buses
- the highway and its related assets are maintained appropriately and safely
- Legal obligations are being met with respect to access by utility companies

We appreciate that our Streetworks teams work hard to ensure our legislative responsibilities are adhered to, as well as ensuring they minimise undue delay where possible. There is a difficult

compromise between ensuring works are safely completed to the best standard the first time and removing obstructive works from the highway as soon as possible. Our PIPs have been invaluable for providing a platform to discuss and explain disruptive works and for operators to clarify the impacts Streetworks cause to bus reliability.

To seek to ensure that the county's operators have up to date and accurate information on road closures and restrictions across the county, KCC is using 2023/24 BSIP funding to invest in the Councils Roadworks Management tool (One. Network) to add the bus integration to dynamically assess the impact of a particular closure and provide direct information to operators along with suggested mitigation (i.e. through diversion routes). The tool also include functionality to produce notices to advise passengers of bus changes.

ANPR Camera Enforcement – Bus Gate Locations

In Kent's 2021 BSIP we also highlighted that Kent wanted to make use of new traffic management legislation (Part 6 of Traffic Management Act 2004) to enforce moving traffic offences where appropriate in order to help with congestion management. KCC has followed through on this

with an EP Scheme Commitment to “use new TMA Part 6 powers to enforce bus gate and bus lanes through ANPR enforcement”.

Following the award of BSIP 2023/24 funding in March 2023, KCC is now utilising £450k of BSIP funding to deliver ANPR enforcement at a number of sites across the county. Sites have been identified through engagement with bus operators (through PIPs) and with District and Borough Councils. Since the receipt of BSIP 2023/24 funding, a contract has been finalised to undertake the back-office management function for this activity, with BSIP funding being utilised to fund capital equipment costs at identified sites.

We are currently progressing eight sites in various stages of construction. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Beaver Road, Ashford
- Clive Road, Gravesham
- Greenhithe Station
- Hermitage Park, Maidstone

KCC also had an EP commitment to continue to support buses with respect to soft landscaping issues.

Fares and Ticketing

Fares and Ticketing

This section summarises the current fares and ticketing offering in Kent. In 1986, the Government deregulated almost the entire local bus industry, privatising many bus companies. The result is that bus companies are free to determine the fares set on commercial bus

routes. Fares need to be set at a rate that makes bus travel an attractive prospect compared to other modes of transport, while ensuring they cover operational costs.

Through its work on the BSIP and subsequent surveys, KCC has conducted various public engagement exercises with residents that show bus fares are an important factor when it comes to deciding whether to use public transport. However, Kent’s latest sample survey in July 2023 showed higher satisfaction with value for money on buses, no doubt assisted by the government funded £2.00 Fare Cap.

Different ticketing options already exist including commercial operator fares, KCC subsidised tickets and concessionary travel schemes such as the English National Concessionary Fare Scheme (ENCTS) and the Kent 16+ and Kent Travel Saver schemes.

In addition to these fares, Kent bus passengers can benefit from the Discovery Ticket, which allows unlimited daily travel on services for most operators across the South East region. As of February 2024, an adult ticket for the scheme costs £10.00 (£8.00 for children and £20.00 for a family ticket).

Below we look in more detail at the different types of bus fares and tickets available in Kent and outline the initiative areas that were contained in our original BSIP document.

Existing challenges and barriers

There are a number of barriers when it comes to bus fares with the main one being the deregulation of the industry. Legislation restricts the ability of LTAs to be prescriptive on individual bus fares, although there are now mechanisms for some types of fare under the Enhanced Partnership schemes. From an economic perspective, the increased operating costs in respect of fuel, insurance and driver wages have to be covered. This pushes fares in an upward direction and makes initiatives to reduce costs for passengers more difficult to achieve and afford.

The challenge that the industry faces is that in order to support modal shift, bus fares need to be attractive when compared to town centre or other parking charges. In many parts of Kent, we have seen these decreasing and in fact at some out-of-town destinations there are no parking charges at all. This makes it difficult for the bus to compete on cost.



Fares and Ticketing

Finally, there remains a proportion of the bus network in Kent that is provided by operators who do not have sophisticated ticket machines or back-office functions supporting smart or contactless initiatives. This is something that we are addressing through the BSIP.

Public/Stakeholder feedback summary

Feedback gathered through our public engagement and stakeholder activity in 2021 told us that one of the most important factors for passengers when using the bus is the cost of fares. In total 41% of respondents to the public engagement selected lower fares and different payment options as one of their top three priorities, with 57% of stakeholders putting the same category as their top priority. The lack of ticket flexibility was also a concern raised through this engagement.

Some comments received in the public engagement regarding bus fares are detailed below:

“Ultimately, they need to be about getting people from A to B, affordably regularly, easily, without adding to

impairment or issues that people have, and not for profit. Kent is exceptionally expensive, and it has to change”.

“Bus tickets that allow for wider travel within one payment”.

“The price must be lower. It is absolutely criminal how expensive it is compared to a London bus for example. Over £5 for a return to town which is a mile away is absolutely criminal”.

“It needs to be regular and reliable 95% of the time. Cost needs to be kept to a minimum to tempt people out of their cars”.

“I run a car. For me to use the bus it would be cost and convenience – £1.50 all journeys, any day, any way”.

The introduction of the Government’s £2.00 fare cap has seen this aspect of customer perception improve. Kent’s further sample survey carried out in July 2023 showed an improved value for money satisfaction as a result. However, the

future of the fare cap beyond December 2024 is currently unknown and if the scheme is not continued, this will not be popular with those that are benefiting from it now, particularly if fares have to return to commercial levels.

Current Offer to Bus Passengers

Commercial bus fares

Bus operators in Kent set their own bus fares, normally using a graduated fare scale, with return and promotional fares often not available at peak times. The deregulated nature of the bus market means that operators have a range of different approaches to fare levels and structures, resulting in disparate and sometimes expensive offerings for passengers, with limited examples of multi-operator ticketing initiatives.

A majority of commercial bus routes in Kent are run by bus operators who are taking part in the Government’s Bus Fare Cap Grant which subsidises single fares at a cap of £2.00. This scheme is due to run until the end of December 2024, but it is not known whether any scheme will continue after that date. The scheme does not generally include bus routes that are primarily for home to school journeys and the operators who are not taking part in the scheme are mainly from the West Kent EP area.

Fares and Ticketing

One effect of the fare cap has been to encourage some bus users to trade back to single fares from previous return and period ticket purchases. This has affected the potential effectiveness of some previously intended lower fare proposals whilst the cap is in place as the fare cap has such an impact on operator fare scales.

Buying a weekly, monthly or annual season ticket from a bus company will reduce and simplify the cost for regular bus passengers in most instances. Many operators offer multi- journey or zonal tickets that also offer greater flexibility and better value. There are very limited examples of inter-availability and acceptance of commercial tickets between operators.

KCC-supported bus fares

As KCC cannot compete with commercially provided buses, the regulations essentially demand that fares on KCC supported bus routes are set at the same or very similar levels to that of the commercial services. All KCC tendered bus services make season tickets available and KCC make it a condition of contract that the operator of the service accept valid return and multi-journey tickets sold on other operator services over common sections. However, it is fair to say that with subsidised buses forming a minority of

the overall network, KCC's approach to tendered fares has little influence on the overall offering to the passenger.

ENCTS/Disabled persons bus pass (including companion passes)

The scheme is designed to remove 'cost of travel' as a barrier for significant numbers of passengers travelling off peak, with no charge to the user either for the pass or on-bus. KCC has a statutory duty to provide passes for free bus travel for older and disabled people who qualify under the regulations of the scheme. In addition to those that have a statutory entitlement to the pass, on a discretionary basis, KCC make ENCTS passes available for companions where the disabled passholder requires assistance to travel by bus.

ENCTS entitles the passholder to free travel on any registered local bus service in England during the operational hours of the scheme, 9:30am-11:00pm on normal weekdays (Monday to Friday) and anytime on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays. Usage of the passes is now significantly lower compared to passenger numbers before the pandemic. In view of this, a promotion took place in August 2023 to offer longer days out by offering passholders free travel before 09.30.

KCC Travel Savers

KCC's Travel Saver schemes offer free-at-the-point-of-use transport for passholders. To be eligible for a pass, applicants must live in Kent, be aged between 11 and 19 and attend some form of full-time learning. The pass offers free transport to and from school or college and includes free evening and weekend travel for those of further education age. Applicants must pay for their pass, but KCC contributes around £5.7m per year to subsidise the scheme which is estimated to reduce the cost of bus travel for the passholder by around half over the course of an academic year. In 2023/24, BSIP funding has been used to freeze the cost of the passes at a time where family budgets have been under severe pressure. KCC remains positive about encouraging students to travel to school by bus through schemes like the KTS but must be conscious that the costs of doing so are now amongst the biggest discretionary spends anywhere in the council.

PlusBus

The PlusBus scheme is a rail initiative whereby a cheap travelcard can be purchased with a train ticket. The travelcard gives users unlimited bus travel around the town or city where they start and/or end their rail journey and is accepted on most bus services in Kent. As well as single and

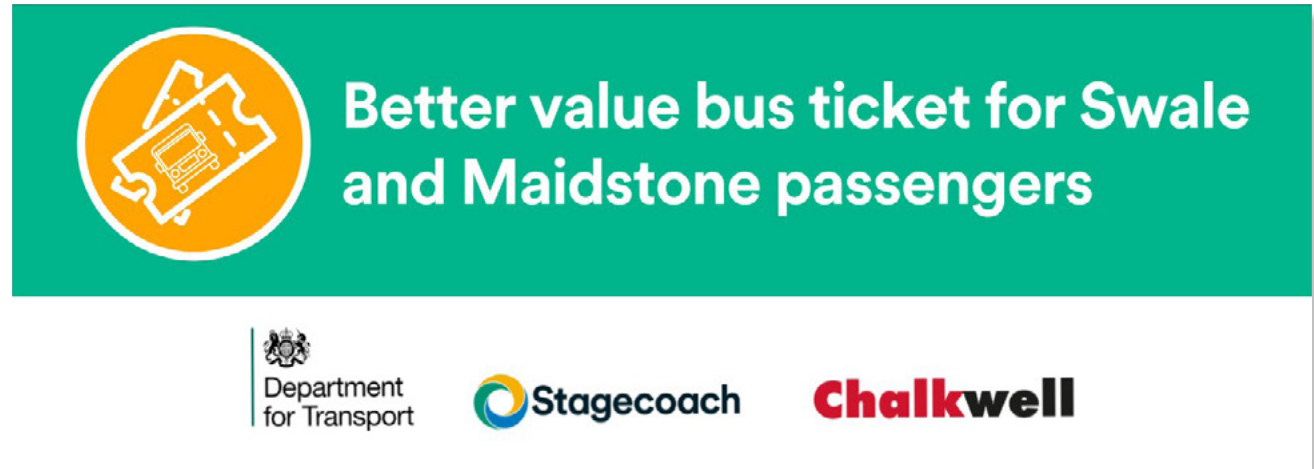
Fares and Ticketing

return trips, season ticket add-ons are available. There are no peak period restrictions to the scheme.

Fares and Ticketing – Kent’s BSIP

As detailed above, there is a lot of positive work already taking place in Kent with respect to bus fares and ticketing. However, in our 2021 BSIP we identified that there was more that could be done, and we are pleased that funding for 2023/24 enabled a number of fares and ticketing initiatives to be introduced in the county, with more planned for 2024/25. This combined with further unfunded initiatives within our EPs has meant some real positive developments have been made. KCC and Kent’s bus operators continue to remain excited about the opportunities that the National Bus Strategy is providing and identify that locally, there remain a number of areas where the offer could be improved further should funding permit.

Firstly, we would like to see the introduction of a genuine and fully comprehensive multi-operator scheme covering the whole county. KCC believes that with this sort of scheme that we can influence fares and create a simple, easy to understand, easy to access and lower cost range of ticketing options for the passenger.



Better value bus ticket for Swale and Maidstone passengers

Department for Transport | Stagecoach | Chalkwell

When it comes to fares, we want to see more flexible options, such as the flexible bus tickets being offered by Stagecoach in the east of the county where passengers can buy a bundle of five or ten tickets that can be used over a 12-month period with costs generally around 30% lower than average daily fares. We understand working patterns have changed in recent times and we believe bus ticketing should reflect this.

As part of our 2024/25 BSIP initiative programme we are working on rolling out an ETM grant scheme, offering small and medium operators the chance to bid for funding to upgrade ticket

machines and back-office functionality. This initiative will now allow technology innovations such as contactless payments for fares, barcode readers and ‘tap on tap off’ ticketing, to complement the acceptance of cash fares, thus allowing a genuine multi-operator ticketing scheme, making available a range of flexible ticketing options at consistent and better value cost. These would be purchasable through a range of mechanisms including cashless and ticketless solutions.

To deliver the above, and based on feedback received, we developed a range of initiatives in 2021. Some are being delivered without funding

Fares and Ticketing

from the National Bus Strategy, but many do require financial support, either to implement or to subsidise future fares schemes.

Multi-operator Ticketing and On-bus ticket machines

There is a large number of bus operators in Kent providing both commercially operated and contracted services. This results in the need for many passengers to want to use the services of more than one company. Where routes are contracted, the Council requires operators to accept all tickets and where children and young people hold Kent Travel Saver passes, these can be used on all operators. However, where services are commercially operated, there is not normally interavailability of ticket acceptance, resulting in less flexibility for passengers or the need to pay for more than one product to make many journeys.

KCC are therefore continuing to work with local bus operators to introduce multi-operator bus ticketing schemes, where possible. This will require negotiation with operators and the introduction of fare reimbursement rates for journeys made that must be fair for all operators.

A trial scheme was implemented in Swale in 2023 to maintain through travel opportunities when a through service was discontinued. This scheme was limited with only two bus operators involved and using low-tech solutions. However, these would not be scalable to a county-wide solution and it is not sensible to create a new back office in Kent in view of the wider developments now happening. Therefore, we intend to adopt the nationwide Project Coral back office for EMV bank cards when it is introduced, possible late in 2024, and will require tap on/tap off readers to be fitted to all buses in Kent to be ready for this introduction. We will be using BSIP funding to help to bring SME operators up to the necessary standards to be able to offer ticketing using barcode readers and for tap on/tap off transactions with an exit reader, with the aim of ensuring they are fitted on all buses in Kent by the introduction date and further details of this are given in Chapter 3 – *Improvements Programme to 2025*.

Outside other initiatives, KCC are using the EP process to gain agreement from operators to accept tickets sold on any service where they run on a common section of route, commencing with return tickets. This is a simple solution that would remove complexity for the passenger and increase the perceived value of tickets.

11-18 Years Travel

The established system of grammar and faith schools in Kent results in a large degree of parental school choice resulting in high demands for sometimes lengthy home to school transport journeys. The Kent Travel Saver scheme has been running for many years where the purchase of an annual pass then grants free travel on the bus network during school hours, primarily for the home to school movement. The scheme is popular, with 27,000 passes issued for this school year, and is aimed at positively encouraging the use of the bus instead of private cars, thus providing a greener transport solution and reducing road congestion at peak period travel points. The school journeys are a vital source of income for most bus operators in Kent and contribute greatly to the sustainability of many bus services.

Significant BSIP funding has been used in 2023/24 to implement a price freeze for the passes to support parents and students with the costs of bus travel through a time of increasing costs of living. The scheme covers two age groups, those aged 11-16 who are of school age and young adults of 16-18 who travel for both further education and employment reasons.

Fares and Ticketing

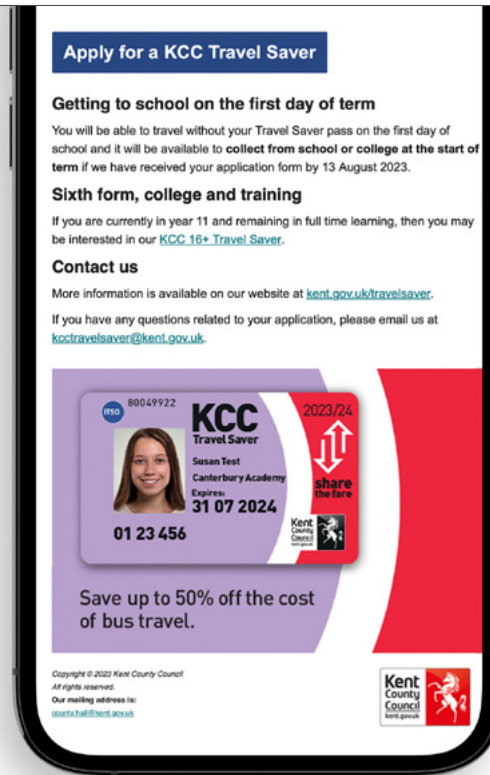
Whilst the annual pass prices are still substantially below the level that would be required on a purely commercial basis, pressures on council budgets had resulted in a budget decision to implement a price rise for the pass for the 2023/24 scheme year. This would have adversely affected bus usage, particularly by the school age group and resulted in more cars on the road. Therefore, significant BSIP funding of £2.5m is being used up to July 2024 to implement a price freeze for the passes to support the 27,000 parents and students with the costs of bus travel through a time of increasing costs of living.

be aggregated. By having a simplified and cost-effective transport solution, passenger share will increase and offset the individual fare concessions needed for each segment of the overall journey. Through an unbiased authority-led scheme, optimised and well-occupied bus routes offer users economy of scale whilst giving participating bus operators a healthy customer base.

BSIP funding is being used to implement a MaaS scheme in Kent Thameside in 2024/25 (see *Chapter 3 – Improvements Programme to 2025*) to complement the Fastrack service upgrade. Our aim is to make MaaS a viable alternative to private car use.

Promoting the Bus

KCC are keen to continue to work with commercial operators to support fares and ticketing promotions in their areas. We are keen to support the introduction of flexible ticketing to compliment changing working patterns (e.g. specified number of journey tickets over a designated time period) or allowing children to travel at a much-reduced rate or for free with a paying adult. Specifically, we are keen to work closely with the local branch of the Department for Work and Pensions to develop fares initiatives that would support job seekers in accessing employment.



The scheme was backed up this year by a targeted promotion to encourage travel to school on the bus network.

Mobility-as-a-Service

Mobility-as-a-service (MaaS) benefits both the transport network and the user, allowing personalised journeys for the passenger (or close to) across different transport modes, such as bus, rail, demand responsive transport and bike hire. However, journey costs cannot simply



Fares and Ticketing

Four promotions were implemented in 2023, utilising £500k of 2023/24 BSIP funding to boost bus passenger numbers and aimed at segments of the bus market which accounted for the areas where reductions in passenger numbers were of most concern. The aim was to both encourage lapsed users to try the bus again and to tempt potential new users to try the bus network, with the expectation that some would return after the promotions ended:

Firstly, a **Free Bus Weekend** was held in June to boost tourism trips, primarily on Kent's comprehensive inter urban bus network. We tied in with the Big Weekend which was promoted by Visit Kent, offering free tickets to venues and attractions in the County. However, the promotion was marketed to a wider audience throughout Kent and Medway for travel on any bus service, not just those to Big Weekend venues. Free travel was offered on both the Saturday and Sunday from first bus until 20.00. After this time, visitor trips have largely been taken and previous experience of free travel on late evening buses had seen cases of unacceptable passenger behaviour. When compared to a normal Summer weekend, the promotion showed an uplift of 33.7%. This represented an increase of 27.6% on the Saturday and 48.4% on the Sunday. Visit Kent asked

their competition participants how they travelled to the venue that they chose, and this showed an increase in the percentage of bus usage, compared to previous years of their scheme.

During the Summer school holidays, we ran two further promotions. The first was named **Bus About Kent** and was targeted at low-income families for travel in the holiday period. Qualifying families were contacted through the Kent Education free school meal dataset to offer the tickets which were then downloaded to mobile phones. Travel needed to be made as a family group, rather than by individual passengers. Despite the use of security measures that could be set up in a short timescale, some cases of fraudulent travel were detected. Nevertheless, an impressive 123,000 family trips were made on this scheme throughout Kent in the six-week holiday period.

It has been clear from operator data that bus travel by **concessionary pass holders** has been much slower to recover since Covid 19 than the overall average bus passengers, despite free travel still being offered. Some advertising to elderly and disabled passholders had already taken place both locally by bus operators and nationally by Government. The promotion sought to widen the available travel day by offering a pre-09.30 free



travel offer on Mondays to Fridays during August to encourage days out at a time of year when buses are generally not as busy without the home to school travel. The promotion encouraged 63,000 trips on these early bus services in Kent.

It is not yet clear which of these four offers has had the greater lasting effect. However, bus patronage continued to increase as 2023 progressed and it is thought that these promotions helped to achieve this trend.

Whilst the 2023 programme of promotions targeted individual market sectors, we are proposing to move to a wider and more general but harder hitting promotion in 2024 but once again aimed at increasing usage of the bus network in Kent.

Waiting and Interchange Facilities

Waiting and Interchange Facilities

This section summarises the current waiting and interchange offer at bus stops in Kent.

Whilst service standards (punctuality, frequency, running days etc.) are vital in encouraging high levels of bus usage, other factors also contribute to the overall travel experience and subsequent passenger uptake levels. bus stop facilities, for example, can have a significant influence on passenger perception. Bus stops & interchanges are typically the first and last point of contact passengers have with the bus network when undertaking their journeys, meaning they can have a high impact on the whole user experience. Boarding or alighting in an area with a dry and safe waiting environment, strong integration, appropriate physical accessibility features, up to date travel information and a high standard of pole, flag and timetable case is likely to be the first step to a positive overall travel experience. In contrast, using a stop which is in a bad state of repair, with no travel information and with physical access constraints is likely to contribute to a negative overall experience or in some cases prevent the use of services at all.

Whilst the rural nature of much of Kent sometimes makes infrastructure provision a challenge, KCC has always aspired to provide high quality bus stops to support Kent's bus services. KCC has also sought to work hard with its partners, including district councils, parish councils, bus operators and Southeastern rail to improve overall bus hub and transport interchange facilities at locations across the county.

Below we look in more detail at the Kent's bus stop offer and discuss progress made to date in delivering improvements since Kent's 2021 BSIP.

Existing challenges and barriers

The rural nature of some towns and villages across Kent can present a challenge when installing and maintaining accessible bus stop infrastructure. Several bus stops in these areas are unmarked or marked in areas that are not pedestrianised, and improvements are not possible due to the nature of the highway network.

Whilst KCC works closely with district councils with respect to bus shelters, there is divided responsibility in this area, and this can lead to differing levels of service across the county.

Some councils are not able to allocate as much resource towards public transport as others, and some do not have a bus shelter contract in place. This can cause a different quality of experience in differing areas of the county and is an issue which KCC is continuing to seek to address through our EPs and regular liaison with Borough and District Councils.

KCC continues to be keen to develop the concept of travel hubs in order to improve integration between travel modes and to work towards a seamless journey for passengers. Many of the county's existing interchanges are however in highly built-up areas or in locations where road space has been carefully managed to ensure optimum traffic flow for all modes. As such retrofitting travel hub sites can prove a challenge.

Public/Stakeholder feedback summary

Feedback gathered through our engagement activity in 2021 showed that one of the most important factors for passengers when using the bus is the reliability and punctuality of services. Bus stop infrastructure provision can have a major impact on these issues, with the standard of facilities at bus stops impacting on boarding/alighting times. Furthermore, the provision of accurate real-time information screens can

Waiting and Interchange Facilities

provide passenger confidence around the timing of their journey.

Providing a high-quality bus service to the people of Kent is also reliant on the co-operation of developers and planners. Like many counties, Kent has a number of upcoming housing developments following strategies outlined by district and borough councils. Ensuring developers and planners are fully educated on the importance of sustainable bus stop infrastructure is essential to future-proof the network in Kent and provide a high-quality service to bus users.

Current Offer to Bus Passengers Bus Stops

Kent is currently home to approximately 6,400 physical bus stops, all of which play an important role in facilitating access to the county's public transport network. Many of Kent's bus stops have been in place many years and at a minimum, typically consist of bus stop poles, flags and timetable cases.

In order to ensure compliance with the Equalities Act 2010, many locations also include areas of hard standing, raised/dropped kerbing and bus stop clearway markings. These measures ensure



that those with mobility issues or disabilities are able to reach bus stop locations easily, can wait for the bus in comfort and are subsequently able to board/alight vehicles safely. These facilities are provided and maintained by KCC. Kent also has standard and recognisable branding on its bus stop flags to easily indicate approved boarding/alighting points for passengers and works closely with bus operators to introduce local branding for particular services where appropriate, e.g. a number of commercial Stagecoach routes in the east of the county.

KCC is committed to the continuous upkeep and improvement of its bus stop assets. We currently spend a significant amount on Bus Stop Infrastructure & Information Management (BSIIM) contracts that ensure that stops are kept in good order through the repair and replacement of parts and regular cleaning. In addition, through the allocation of internal funding, KCC also has a long history of completing upgrade works on its existing assets, through for instance upgrading flag types, changing poles or adding additional accessibility features and branding. Some examples over previous years have included:

- An initiative to replace all concrete bus stop poles in the county to more modern and safer alternatives
- Flag upgrades on the Fastrack route in Kent Thameside to deliver a consistent and recognisable brand throughout the service
- The introduction of new bus stops within a number of new developments to support service extensions.

In order to react to changes on Kent's bus network and to travel need, KCC also actively considers opportunities for new bus stop locations. Potential new locations are typically identified through liaison with operators, through

Waiting and Interchange Facilities

our bus inspectors and through requests from members of the public.

KCC subsequently delivers all parts of the delivery process including safety assessments, public consultation with directly affected properties and subsequent installation. KCC hosts a dedicated email address to provide an appropriate means for operators, members of the public and other stakeholders to request new stops, changes to existing stops and other issues and seeks to react to these as budgets permit. KCC also has a dedicated online form where requests for new or improvements to existing bus stops can be requested.

In Kent's 2021 BSIP, we noted that we would like to see a gradual improvement to all of Kent's bus stop assets and were excited about the opportunity the NBS process could bring to achieve this. We noted that with significant external funding we wanted to see upgraded facilities across a number of Kent's stops, such as high-quality flags with KCC's most recent branding, high levels of accessibility and up to date information in timetable cases at all stops.

Like the majority of LTAs, KCC did not receive its full BSIP funding request in 2021 and as such,

the ability to roll out improvements to stops on a wide scale has been limited. However, KCC has continued to react to customer requests for improvements on a case-by-case basis and is also utilising some of its 2023/24 BSIP funding to deliver stop improvements which improve bus stop reliability as part of its bus highway interventions initiative. KCC has also demonstrated the commitment to improving bus stop infrastructure facilities and accessibility as funding permits through some of our EP scheme commitments. These note for instance that KCC will "introduce new bus stops and upgrade existing bus stops (including poles, flags, timetable cases, raised/dropped kerbing, clearways) to support the network and passenger/operator requests as funding permits." Alongside a commitment that "when conducting civils work at bus stops, KCC will take the opportunity to bring them up to the latest standards with respect to accessibility where practically possible".

In Kent's 2021 BSIP, the intention was also noted to form a bus stop hierarchy in order to categorise Kent's bus stops to enable prioritisation and investment. It was noted that bus stop locations would be ranked in terms of the number of departures, connection with other services,

nearby service provision etc. KCC subsequently committed to deliver this hierarchy in its EP and this has subsequently been used to identify sites for areas such as Real Time Information (RTI) screen deployment. KCC intends to continue to utilise the hierarchy for future initiatives and as such, has made reference to this in Chapter 4 – *Ambitions and Proposals for 2025 and Beyond*.

KCC also continues to work with district councils and operators to identify areas of concern with respect to bus standing & driver facilities and has an EP scheme commitment in this respect.

Bus Shelters

Whilst KCC maintains overall responsibility for bus stop locations, Bus shelters in Kent are typically provided through district councils. There are a number of separate contracts held between district councils and shelter providers. Typically, shelter maintenance costs are offset by advertising revenue generated as income for providers. In rural areas, parish and town councils provide and maintain additional shelters for their local areas.

KCC has traditionally supported shelter provision in Kent by offering a popular Rural Shelter Grant to such groups, where match funding is provided

Waiting and Interchange Facilities



for new or upgraded shelters. KCC also works to encourage the use of environmentally friendly, sedum roof shelters. In Kent's 2021 BSIP, we noted that we wanted to explore whether there was a better way to provide and maintain urban bus shelters other than through separate contracts with each borough/district council. This was with a view to driving high standards and consistency across the county. We noted the aspiration for Kent's bus shelters to provide dry and safe waiting environments for passengers, with good visibility robust maintenance and delivering strong environmental benefit where possible. Since 2021, KCC has introduced a commitment within its EP schemes to explore this possibility and conversations through the EP meeting structure are continuing.

An EP commitment was also introduced to offer the annual rural shelter grant scheme as funding permits. The scheme was not run in 2023/24 due to the wider BSIP programme but will return in 2024/25, highlighting Kent's commitment in this area – see Chapter 3 – *Improvements Programme to 2025*.

KCC does directly manage bus shelters to support the popular Fastrack bus rapid transit scheme and in 2023 this contract was re-tendered and a new supplier appointed. The new contract will provide a series of improvements across the Fastrack network during the lifetime of the contract.

At Stop Innovation & Use of Technology

In Kent's 2021 BSIP, it was noted that KCC wished to embrace the use of existing and emerging technologies to improve the customer experience at Kent's bus stops. Public engagement activity carried out with respect to Kent's BSIP also told us that live at stop public transport information was important to bus users. In reaction to this, KCC established an EP commitment following the publication of its BSIP to "trial new technological solutions at bus stops as funding permits".

2023/24 BSIP funding is being utilised to roll out a number of new Real-Time Information (RTI)

screens and totems at key bus stop locations across Kent. These displays will provide live transport information and be capable of displaying important bus updates for passengers. In 2022, a new bus hub opened in Gravesend town centre, representing £2.5m of investment. The bus hub includes RTI screens and marks the start of the increase of this provision coming to the county in the coming years. A tender exercise was conducted across 2023 for this purpose and screens will start to be rolled out across Kent in summer 2024. Kent's bus stop hierarchy has been utilised to inform locations and feedback has been obtained from bus operators and local district councils on the approach to this prioritisation through Kent's EP meeting structure.

KCC intends to roll out further RTI screens in late 2024 and early 2025 utilising further 2024/25 BSIP funding, subject to its final confirmation. Trials of wider technologies such as solar lighting at bus stops and e-ink at stop timetables are also planned for 2024/25, again using BSIP funding. KCC intend for successful technology trials to be adopted as part of its wider offering of bus stop infrastructure if future funding allows. Chapter 3 – *Improvements Programme to 2025* provides more information on this area.

Waiting and Interchange Facilities

KCC will also be rolling out QR codes at all marked Kent bus stops during 2024/25, utilising BSIP funding from 2023/24. These codes will provide direct links into the relevant information on the Bus Information Portal.

Interchanges/Travel Hubs

There are 130 identified interchange locations in Kent which support public transport network integration and bus operational requirements. When considered in terms of size, links with other modes and other connectivity factors, 18 of these locations are major interchanges, 21 can be considered as medium-sized interchanges while the remaining 70% are minor interchanges with up to two bus stops. Some locations act as single bus boarding points with no link to other services, whilst others are used for connecting bus services or other sustainable transport modes.

Interchanges are essential assets supporting the bus network; these locations should be carefully monitored to ensure opportunities for interchange are maximised. This involves the co-ordination of multiple aspects including infrastructure, information, ticketing and schedule integration.

In Spring 2022, a new bus interchange was opened in Gravesend Town Centre providing close integration with rail, new passenger information and high-quality waiting facilities.

As noted above, KCC has established a bus stop hierarchy in order to identify and prioritise key interchange points with respect to investment. High-priority sites utilise both existing BSIP

2023/24 and 2024/25 funding, subject to confirmation, and more should further BSIP funding come forward from Government. KCC has set out in Chapter 4 – *Ambitions and Proposals for 2025 and Beyond* how we would like to improve further on Kent’s offer with respect to waiting and interchange facilities should additional external funding come forward through future years of the BSIP process.



Bus information

Bus information

KCC's involvement in the provision of passenger information has reduced significantly in recent years, as operators have taken greater responsibility for printed and digital information, although most operators have reduced expenditure in this area. The council's direct involvement in passenger information has been largely restricted to the coordination of printed information at the roadside and the supply of local data to Traveline, the National database.

KCC has continued to provide a website with key information and the main offers for bus services. In recent months, a summary of forthcoming significant service changes has been included. However, detailed bus service timetables are either provided by the bus operators individually or by national specialist websites such as Bustimes.org and Traveline and further outlets informed by data from the Bus Open Data Service (BODS).

Existing challenges and barriers

While the national Traveline website is likely to exist for the foreseeable future, we have already seen many of Traveline's regional journey planning websites close, including the one for the

Southeast. This has resulted in the loss of certain functionality which the regional sites offered but which the national site does not, such as the ability to attach service disruption messages to timetables. It presents timetable information in a less intuitive manner and, overall, the information it provides is far less complete than the sites it replaced. Traveline does not offer bus maps, which would further aid potential passengers, especially those who are unfamiliar with the area. We must consider the risk that the national site itself will close at some point. While this does not seem likely at present, the possibility remains given that other sources may be developed using the open data generated from BODS.

The Kent Connected site offers some of the same capabilities as Traveline. Unfortunately, at present it is not a public transport journey planner in the generally accepted sense, as it lacks a number of features. For instance, there is no ability to specify a step-free journey, a slower walking speed than average or a maximum tolerable walking distance. Much of this is by design, as it was originally intended as an active travel planner, aimed at encouraging modal shift away from cars by persuading fit, healthy adults to make greater use of active travel options. By contrast, the average local bus user is more likely to be

elderly or to have a mobility impairment or other disability of some kind.

Finally, it should be noted that no option currently available offers a good e-ticketing solution for passengers. Bus operators' websites may only offer their own season tickets, for instance, which is not useful for spur-of-the-moment journeys. Very few multi-operator tickets are offered in Kent and Traveline does not offer an e-ticketing solution at all.

Whilst the ideal situation could be real time displays at every bus stop, this would take an enormous amount of investment. We are therefore implementing other solutions including the use of QR codes at bus stops linking to Real Time Information sources without the need for Real Time Information screens at all but the busiest stops.

Public/Stakeholder feedback summary

Surprisingly, feedback through the original BSIP consultation did not identify accessibility to high quality public transport information as a barrier to greater bus use. However, at various conferences on accessible information and open data organised by the Public Transport Information Co-ordination group (PTIC) and by the DfT

Bus information

between 2017 and the present day, passenger advocacy groups such as Transport Focus and Bus Users UK were invited to speak and reported that different passenger demographics prioritise different things.

For instance, young people place a high priority on the cost of the journey. Disabled passengers may require a step-free journey, something that older passengers may also prefer even if they do not identify as disabled. Tourists, who by definition may not be familiar with the area they are travelling in, typically want the simplest journey with the fewest connections, while commuters tend to prefer the fastest one.

The current one-size-fits all approach does not cater well to the needs of these disparate groups. In particular, feedback from the passenger advocacy groups indicates that information about fares is difficult to access at the moment, often requiring visits to multiple websites belonging to different bus companies, if the information is available at all. This makes the cost of a journey very difficult to predict in advance.

Similarly, disabled passenger groups reported that they place a premium on information about the accessibility features at the stops they will

be travelling to. This is especially true in rural areas, where stops are often on grass verges etc. Likewise, visually impaired passengers may have problems accessing digital information, but can also have issues with printed publicity where this has not been created with visual impairments in mind. However, feedback from stakeholders has identified an appetite to see Real Time Information displays at bus stops. KCC will therefore try to support this at key locations by seeking funding for the upfront costs of securing and installing screens and ongoing technical support. We will also look to establish a uniform standard and common identity for roadside timetables at bus stops.

The 2023 BSIP passenger survey showed that 19% of passengers surveyed used printed timetables at bus stops. Passengers in the West EP area were the least satisfied on their access to bus information in general.

Current Offer to Bus Passengers Public Transport Information

In KCC's view, the cessation of the Traveline Southeast Service to deliver bus information means there is not currently a localised resource for consolidated information relating to all bus services in the South-East. Whilst there are



national databases, including Traveline and Bustimes, these do not provide information tailored to local users, such as information on service disruptions or comprehensive bus maps.

Most of the operators produce information online and via apps, with some including real time information, but this is just for their own services. One of our priority initiatives has therefore been to create a one-stop-shop for public transport information, potentially including rail and carrying real time passenger information in respect of all bus services in Kent.

In accordance with the KCC Information Strategy, the Council provides public transport information to customers via a number of methods. Ultimately, these are driven by a comprehensive database of information maintained by KCC's

Bus information

Public Transport Department, fed by the bus operators who have a legal duty to submit any changes to their services to the council using standard registration and timetable formats. More generally, KCC will work with operators to better promote the bus network, encouraging greater bus use and supporting recovery from the pandemic.

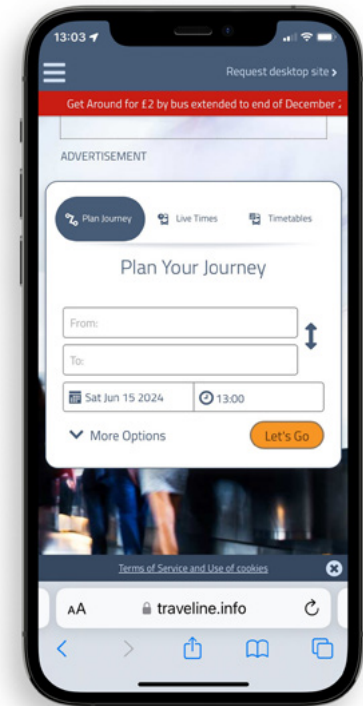
Roadside timetable information

We use the routing and scheduling information that we hold to provide a roadside timetable posting service for those bus operating companies that need it. At present, we allow bus companies to post their own service information if we deem them competent to do so. However, for companies that are unable to meet this customer need themselves, the council provides this service free of charge. The bus services posted this way are overwhelmingly contracted ones. The current software exports bus service data on demand for use in roadside timetables, but the raw output is difficult to read. Formatting it to make it suitable for public consumption is currently a manual task and is often quite time consuming. This work is done within the Public Transport department, and the finished documents are forwarded to our contractor for printing and distribution at the roadside.

Digital Information

The bus service information we hold is exported to two digital information resources. The first of these is called Traveline, which is aimed at the travelling public. Traveline is a national partnership of transport companies, local authorities and passenger groups which takes route and scheduling data feeds from transport operators and local authorities to form a national dataset called TNDS (Traveline National Data Set). A bulk export of the KCC data goes to Traveline once per week. Traveline add this to the TNDS, which is used to provide timetables and journey planning to the travelling public via their website www.traveline.info and through an app. It also provides real time information where available but does not provide yet fares data.

The second resource is the Bus Open Data Service (BODS) which is aimed at software developers and is a Department for Transport (DfT) initiative aimed at making bus data available in digital form to any interested party with the aim of increasing reliable public transport information through further outlets. Exported data is hosted locally and is linked to by the BODS website, which acts as an aggregator. Feeds aggregated on the BODS site include scheduled bus time data, live vehicle location information and fares data.



Most bus operators are providing data in the correct format to BODS, but the technical hurdles to doing so can be daunting for smaller companies. Consequently, KCC also act as a BODS data supply agent for a number of SME bus operating companies across the Southeast, in addition to the route and scheduling data which we supply to Traveline. This includes producing and hosting fare chart data for the client, linking to a real time location feed for their vehicles and providing any other technical advice they require to discharge their open data responsibilities.

Bus information

BODS is still in its infancy and is not yet fully populated. However, use of BODS is expected to grow and it could eventually be the main source of data supply to the Traveline dataset.

Feedback from stakeholders during the BSIP process has identified an appetite to see Real Time Information screens at bus stops. At present this is limited, largely on the Kent Thameside Fastrack services, with 50 electronic signs around Kent but work is in hand to increase this provision during 2024. This is covered further in the Waiting and Interchanges section of this document.

Lastly, the council currently offers the Kent Connected journey planner. This is an active travel planner which promotes the use of public transport, cycling and walking by offering online cross-boundary journey planning and comparing factors such as calories burned, and CO² produced. The Kent Connected journey planner uses the Google Direction Service, so does not benefit from local input.

Internally, KCC has developed its own interactive map of the bus network which can be used for planning purposes. As well as the map itself providing a visual representation, the database behind this can be used to answer a number of

questions which currently cannot be answered in any other way. However, it is not suitable for public use and an alternative solution is needed to perform this task.

Better Bus Information: Kent's BSIP

To make digital information more easily accessible, KCC are currently procuring a bus information portal for Kent public transport information including an interactive bus map which is due to go live during 2024. Funding for this will include £140k of capital and £100k of revenue funding from the 2023/24 BSIP award. It will also feature pop up timetables, access to e-ticketing, links to bus operator websites and fares information available via web and app platforms.

The portal will include interactive and static maps of the bus network in Kent, showing the routes of local bus services along with the locations of bus stops and other public transport services, such as rail stations and taxi ranks plus information on stops and services such as accessibility information, timetables and fares. Service disruption alerts will also be displayed as a pop up when a route is selected.

An interactive county map can be used to answer different questions from the ones typically

answered by a journey planner. Instead of answering the question "Starting at point A, how can I reach point B", interactive maps answer the question "Where is easy to get to from here?". This information is of particular interest to tourists, who represent a significant source of income in some areas of the county. However, it is also of use to local residents wishing to know which schools are easiest to reach by public transport, or which areas would offer the simplest commute when seeking employment.

Within such a system and linked to and from the journey planner and the interactive map, each bus stop in the County will shortly be given a link to its own landing page via a QR Code. The available information will include the accessibility features at the stop, a map of the local area and its amenities such as tourist attractions, public conveniences, schools, hospitals, police stations, rail stations or taxi ranks nearby. It would also include links to timetables, fares, live real time passenger information and a link to the journey planner pre-populated for the stop.

The Bus Information Portal will also include a more inclusive public transport journey planner, with the intention of including the options that public feedback suggests that less-mobile

Bus information

customers would find useful, such as the ability to limit walking distances in journey plans or to specify a step-free journey. Eventually, the planner could also feature links from journey planning results to appropriate fares and real time data. Integrated e-ticketing would allow passengers to plan a journey and pay for it in advance, storing the ticket on their smartphone or printing out a paper ticket at home, making it a one-stop-shop for both planning and paying for journeys.

All of the above will help to personalise digital information to the needs of the individual passenger, allowing them to select journeys which fit their individual criteria.

We will work with appropriate partner organisations to investigate the application of assistive technologies for disabled users. While measures to assist mobility-impaired users are well understood and widely implemented, technologies to assist users with other disabilities, such as visual impairments, dementia or learning disabilities, are relatively new. However, such technologies have been in development for some time and are now reaching the market. This represents an opportunity to open up the network to these groups in a way which has

not been previously possible, giving access to employment, education and healthcare as well as offering a general improvement in quality of life. A significant step forward will be the fitment of next bus stop audio and visual displays in all buses, together with hearing loops.

In order to deliver the above, we have developed a range of initiatives in our Enhanced Partnership and some of these can be delivered without funding from the NBS. To this end, we will work with passenger and disability advocacy groups to ensure that the information and options we provide are relevant and complete, as well as working with Visit Kent and Tourist Information Centres to ensure that suitable attractions and points of interest are included on maps and bus stop landing pages.

As well as working with customers, we will need to work with transport providers such as local bus operators, to implement e-ticketing and multi-operator ticketing, creating buy-in via enhanced partnerships; and rail companies, to gain access to appropriate data feeds for multi-modal journey planning and to place onward travel plans at appropriate locations in railway stations.



Mobility-as-a-Service

Mobility-as-a-service (MaaS) adds to the available passenger information, allowing personalised journeys for the passenger on different transport modes, such as bus, rail, demand responsive transport and bike hire. 2023/24 BSIP funding is being used to procure a MaaS platform in Kent Thameside in 2024/25 to complement the Fastrack service upgrade. It will be available as an app on mobile communication devices.

This will allow personalised journeys for the user across different transport modes, such as bus, rail, demand responsive transport and bike hire with the options set out in one place. This is discussed further under the Fares and Ticketing section of this document.

Bus Passenger Experience

Bus Passenger Experience

Introduction

Improving the bus passenger experience is a common theme across all of our initiative areas and is outlined in each section. This section concentrates on the development of a Bus Passenger Charter. Whilst most individual bus operators have a customer promise or published minimum standards, we are working with the operators to produce a joint Bus Passenger Charter which will cover all local bus operations in the County. All of the Medway operators also run services in Kent. This will give an assurance to passengers of the minimum standards that they can expect from their bus services. The charter is due to be launched in 2024.

Existing challenges and barriers

To avoid any confusion at the boundaries between Kent and the Medway unitary authority area, particularly on cross-boundary routes, KCC is working with Medway Council to agree a similar charter to apply in both areas. This will assist both bus passengers and operator staff and avoid any conflict with differing standards applying in each area. Joint working with operators will avoid conflicts with any established customer promises that may apply over a wider area than just Kent and Medway.

Public/Stakeholder feedback summary

In the 2021 Kent Bus Passenger Survey, lower cost fares and improved reliability of bus services were the second and third highest concerns of those passengers surveyed. Better bus service information and better waiting facilities also scored significantly.

In the sample survey carried out in Summer 2023, these areas featured once again as concerns of bus passengers.

The charter will therefore include these subject areas to address customer concerns, together with other subject areas that have been the subject of feedback to both the councils and the bus operators.

More details of the content of the charter are outlined in Chapter 3 – *Improvements Programme to 2025* as part of our 2024/25 delivery plan.



Environmental and Improvements to the Bus Fleet

Environmental and Improvements to the Bus Fleet

We are at a critical point where change is needed, and our actions today will shape the Kent of tomorrow. While we have huge pressure for growth in Kent, we must ensure that it is sustainable with respect to impacts on emissions and air quality. In 2019 Kent recognised the UK climate and environment emergency and in 2020, The Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy set a single goal to ensure Kent’s residents and businesses do their bit to care for and protect The Garden of England.



Improvements to public transport with respect to vehicle emissions standards and how the benefits of bus travel are promoted can have a real impact on KCC’s overall environmental objectives, as well as providing an opportunity to increase bus usage. Kent’s BSIP, decarbonising our bus fleet, introducing MaaS and an increased use of DRT are some of the initiatives in the Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy Implementation Plan, part of Kent’s Net Zero action plan.

The Kent & Medway Emissions Analysis and Pathways to Net Zero report was published in December 2020. This high ambition pathway relies on a progressive programme of emission reduction measures, including zero emission buses. To achieve zero emissions by 2050 in Kent and Medway there must be front-loaded CO2 reductions during this decade. KCC is keen to utilise any funding available to deliver greener fleets in Kent and encourage operators to modernise their vehicles to match some of the investment in our BSIP initiatives achieved through this BSIP.

Together with Medway Council and Kent’s 12 district and borough councils, KCC is part of the Kent and Medway Air Quality Partnership.

We support the other local authorities in this partnership to meet their legal duties to monitor and take action to address areas of poor air quality. The Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy recognises air pollution as a priority for action. We are the lead authority for the strategy, and we work with the Air Quality Partnership to take coordinated action.

Through our BSIP, KCC is keen to promote the positive impact that bus services already have on air quality in keeping cars off the road, particularly at peak times supported through our KCC Travel Saver schemes.

Firstly, as part of an Enhanced Partnership initiative, the council have developed a hierarchy – essentially adopting Air Quality Management Areas – and will use these as the basis to prioritise bus air quality initiatives. This has already been utilised to identify corridors of interest to put forward as part of our 2025-2029 proposals.

We will look to use our Enhanced Partnerships to establish minimum Euro standards for buses deployed on all day services and set targets that will organically improve the emissions standards on these vehicles over a period of time. Finally, we will continue to explore all opportunities to

Environmental and Improvements to the Bus Fleet

secure funding to support initiatives concerned with making more use of electric and hybrid vehicles. We are in the process of converting the Fastrack Thameside (BRT) network to full electric operation during 2024.

Current bus fleet in Kent

There were 1133 buses operating on routes which serve Kent during Summer 2021. Of these, 454 are Euro 6 diesel buses. The remaining vehicles are of Euro 5, standard or below. Some vehicles are 20 years old, 15 years being the normal lifespan of an operational bus. Efforts are being made to improve emission standards across the county by upgrading older buses.

The Kent Thameside Fastrack fleet was the subject of a successful bid for ZEBRA funding from Government and zero emission vehicles are currently being built for introduction in 2025. The forthcoming new Fastrack service in Dover will also be operated with electric powered vehicles as part of this funding award.

Outside of Fastrack, there have been trials of zero emission buses with different operators, and one is now in permanent use.

Existing challenges and barriers

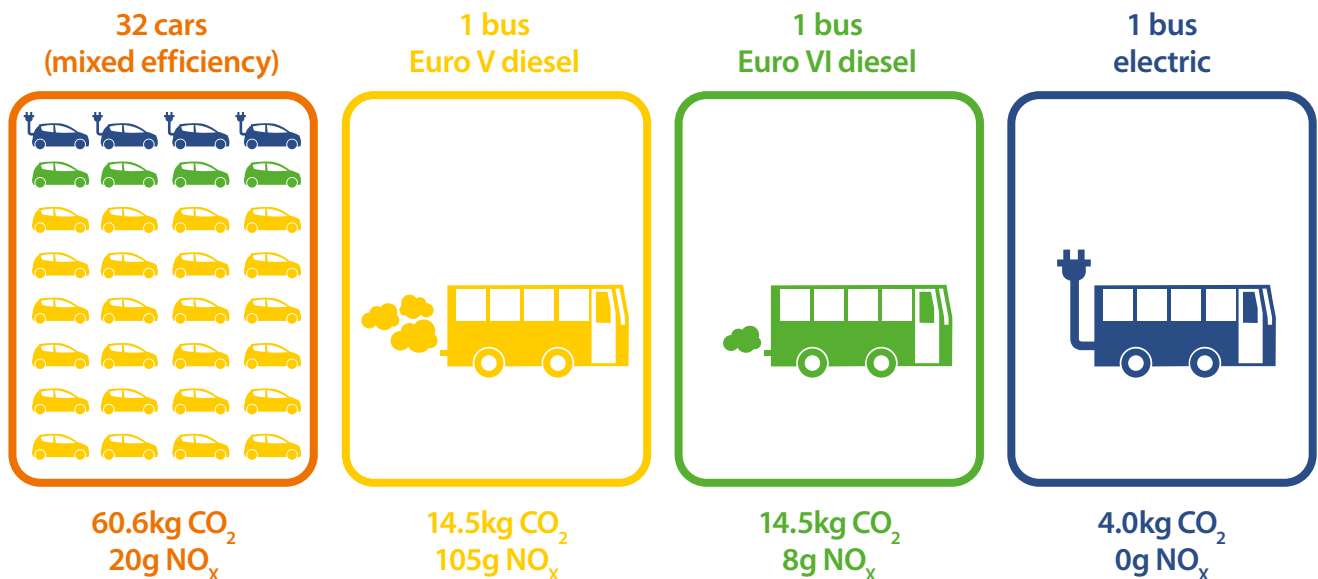
The biggest challenges are funding the purchase of zero emission buses, as these initial purchase prices are more expensive than equivalent diesel vehicles, and the associated depot infrastructure energy sourcing/maintenance procedures. KCC were successful in gaining funding through the Government's ZEBRA (Zero Emissions) initiative to secure funds to convert the current and pending Fastrack services to a fully electric bus fleet. However, more work is needed in this area and a

steadier evolution to higher quality diesel vehicles should not be overlooked.

The council is keen to promote the positive impact buses already have on the environment where, at peak times, a single bus can take many vehicles off the road (see figure 11).

Particularly where vehicles have better emission standards, buses are already supporting the overall agenda to improve air quality.

Figure 11. Emissions by vehicle type (average)



Environmental and Improvements to the Bus Fleet

Aggregating transport has clear environmental benefits, regardless of energy source, a point which is not always appreciated. In this context, one of the biggest challenges is reversing the decline in bus use and increasing the share of transport options that are more sustainable than the car. This would form an important part of an overall marketing strategy to attract passengers back to the bus.

At the current time, bus operators are still recovering from the impact of Covid-19, which accelerated a reduction in bus use. Bus services are still not on a sustainable footing and many operators are still concentrating on this aspect rather than being able to look ahead with significant future investment. From an economic perspective, this increases the challenge to support investment into the evolution of bus fleets to newer and more environmentally friendly financial and resource restrictions, meaning the majority of them are currently unable to fund the procurement of zero emission bus fleets – which are more expensive than Euro 6 diesel buses – without the help of central government or third-party investors. These costs can come in the form of re-fitting workshops, installing power supplies etc.

Public/Stakeholder feedback summary

Feedback from our public engagement activity in 2021 indicated that ‘better environmental standards’ was not one of highest priorities for bus users or potential bus users, who instead place greater emphasis on current services themselves e.g. reliability, frequency etc. However, from subsequent comments we know that environmental standards are still important to people if the basics of the service are already in place. Other stakeholders have put a bigger emphasis on environmental issues and district councils, in particular, are very keen to see significant efforts to improve the environmental standards of our buses and air quality through the Kent BSIP. However, in noting the positive impact that buses already have on air quality, it could be argued that all initiatives concerned with increasing bus use could have a positive impact on the air quality aspirations of the Kent BSIP.

Current Offer to Bus Passengers Air Quality

Through the BSIP and associated EP, KCC has a range of initiatives that seek to steadily improve the environmental standards of buses in Kent as the bus network stabilises and further funding becomes available. KCC and its bus operators will achieve this through a combination of

improvements to vehicle emission standards incentivised through EP targets, and more focused initiatives aimed at expanding the use and understanding of vehicles that use alternative fuel types.

KCC has developed an air quality corridor hierarchy. This takes account of the county’s Air Quality Management Areas and the intensity of bus activity in these zones. The hierarchy is being used to help identify future priority corridors that using further funding could be converted to zero emission operation.

Finally, we would argue that any increased bus use has a positive environmental impact, and therefore better promotion of the bus network will also be central to our efforts.

Fastrack

Fastrack follows the principles of ‘Public Transport Oriented Development’. This means that Fastrack is built around new developments that are in close proximity to the network by design. With a high modal share locally on the existing Kent Thameside network, our high frequency Fastrack network is already playing a critical role in improving air quality by providing nearly a quarter of local journeys.

Environmental and Improvements to the Bus Fleet

As road traffic is often the biggest contributor to poor air quality in places where people live and work, it is the responsibility of Fastrack to be a good neighbour and mitigate the impact of our footprint. As outlined already, the successful ZEBRA bid with investment of over £9m from both the ZEBRA funding and other sources including the Fastrack operator will transform the service with a fleet of electrically powered tram-like buses being introduced in 2025.

KCC's plan is then to further enhance the Fastrack network across Kent, with the next planned operation being the route from Whitfield into Dover, as outlined in the next chapter.



Through the Enhanced Partnership, we will have greater influence over the quality of buses in Kent and will use the Fastrack investment for learnings and as an example of good practice.

Some services that run into Dartford, Swanley and Westerham operate across the boundary from London and are run on behalf of Transport for London. Their policy for upgrading their

operating fleet to greener vehicles is well advanced and this part of Kent therefore already benefits from a lower emission fleet running at Euro 6 standard, with a stated pathway to move to zero emission vehicles by 2030.

KCC also owns an electric minibus which is currently used on the bus network in North West Kent.

Accessibility and Inclusion

Accessibility and Inclusion

Introduction

Kent's original BSIP document issued in 2021 included a Key Principle covering accessibility and stated: *We strive to improve the levels of physical and digital accessibility both on buses and through infrastructure to ensure a fully accessible network for disabled passengers.* When combined with Inclusion and Passenger Safety, this section now covers the following areas:

Safe walking routes to access bus stops

An accessible vehicle cannot be effectively accessed if the route to and from bus stops is not usable by all passengers. Whilst the wider footpath network is outside of the scope of this document, where there can be action is where new developments are designed through the planning process to ensure that footpaths to and from bus stops in the developments are accessible.

The waiting environment at bus stops

This important topic is covered under the Waiting and Interchange Facilities section of this chapter.

Bus driver recruitment, training, and staffing

The bus driver is usually the only point of contact with customers when they make a bus journey.

Operators therefore need to ensure that their driving teams are trained to drive safely and considerately and have good customer service skills. To ensure a reliable service, sufficient drivers need to be available to enable journeys to operate. Whilst buses are now equipped with accessible features, driver training will need to ensure that staff are able to follow procedures which cover alternatives for the passenger if any of the accessible features are not available.

Customer services

An easily accessible and relevant customer advice and information service should be provided to give assurance to customers of the details of upcoming journeys. The forthcoming Kent and Medway customer charter will outline what service a customer can expect and how to get help or make a comment where things go wrong.

Public transport information

Good and easily accessible information is also an important feature for passengers, and this is covered well in the Bus Information and Network Identity section of this chapter.

Existing challenges and barriers

Buses for many years now have been to a low floor design with no steps from the entrance door to the

front area of seats. This has improved accessibility inside the vehicle. However, this has been taken a stage further as all buses used on registered services must now meet at least the minimum accessibility requirements set out in the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee guidelines. This covers a wide range of design aspects on a bus, such as access for wheelchairs and clear destination displays. However, travel can still be a challenge for those who have poor sight or hearing. A further requirement for bus services is being introduced now where all buses need to be fitted with audible and visible information to show and announce next bus stops. This is able to display the information in advance of arriving at the bus stop through the use of GPS co-ordinates.

As buses have become more accessible, it is more important to less ambulant users for these facilities to be in operation, such as wheelchair ramps or having a vacant wheelchair space. Operators are required to implement clear procedures for their drivers to follow should no space be available or if the accessible features are not working.

As more live information for passengers is available through the use of apps both before and during a journey, there is a need for good connectivity and many buses in Kent now feature free wi-fi

Accessibility and Inclusion

connections inside buses together with free phone charging to ensure continuity. Passengers can then increasingly follow their trip on the app with the knowledge that they will have sufficient power for the journey.

Whilst there is a policy of siting bus stops where they are needed and, in urban areas, ensuring that these are generally no more than 400m apart, stops may not be accessible to disabled users if the walking routes to and from the stop are not also accessible. KCC is forming a bus stop hierarchy, taking account of bus service and passenger usage levels, our interchange analysis and the strategic importance

of the location. Busier sites will be prioritised for better infrastructure, including access routes where possible, with enhanced levels of innovation and more facilities, enabling these locations to act as interchange points.

There is a high proportion of bus drivers on Kent's bus routes that have many years of experience. However, this has created an age profile that will be of concern as these long serving staff retire from driving. Recruiting new drivers is essential to ensure that a reliable bus network can be maintained. This needs to target younger age groups, preferably with those who already have skills and experience

in other customer facing roles. Whilst the larger bus companies generally have the resources and job market reach to be able to recruit such staff, small and medium sized companies find this more difficult to do on their own. The next section therefore describes a planned initiative to set up a driver training facility for smaller bus operators.

As discussed further in the Bus Information section of this document, passengers rely on clear and reliable information in whichever formats they are provided. Kent's BSIP places a requirement on the operators to provide a clear website for their services, with links into the Bus Information Portal.



Public/Stakeholder feedback summary

In the 2021 Kent Bus Passenger Survey, there were comments on more opportunities for customer feedback and better customer service as well as improved waiting facilities for passengers, including better accessibility. Whilst these were not the most commonly made responses received, they still registered as areas of concern to the people affected.

In the sample survey carried out in Summer 2023, these areas featured once again as concerns of bus passengers, reinforcing the need to ensure that standards are set and adhered to.

Long Term Transformation of the Network

Long Term Transformation of the Network

Introduction

Under the Network Development section of this 2024 BSIP, we have outlined the current position with respect to the bus network in Kent, including an assessment of current service levels across the county and connectivity/accessibility to key destinations. In Chapter 4 – *Ambitions and Proposals for 2025 and Beyond* we have then included a set of initiatives which consider how this current base network can be sustained and then built upon in the period from 2025-29 should further funding be made available by Government through the BSIP process.

Beyond 2029 we want to see a bus network which continues to work towards our overall bus vision but what this looks like is dependent on what happens in the period up to this point and on any funding made available to support our proposals for 2025-29. We also want our longer-term plan for buses to align with our Local Transport Plan (LTP), a new version of which is currently being developed and which will set the longer-term overall transport priorities for the county.

What we are sure of is that both within the 2025-29

period and beyond we want to see the continued growth of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) across the county. Our award winning Fastrack service in the Kent Thameside area of the county is hugely successful, with the Fastrack B route one of the most heavily utilised in Kent. Fastrack is based on linking new housing developments and existing urban centres together, providing bus priority, modern vehicles and attractive ticketing options to offer a genuinely attractive alternative to the private car.

2024/25 is an exciting time for Fastrack with a number of positive initiatives getting underway or coming to a conclusion. We will shortly see the commencement of a new operating contract for the service with the Go-Ahead group. This will see the introduction of the first zero emission buses in Kent, utilising Government ZEBRA funding to provide pantograph charged vehicles. New bus priority schemes are to be introduced on Fastrack in Rennie Drive, Dartford (using 2023/24 BSIP funding) and in Bath Street, Gravesend and we will see new links between developments in Ebbsfleet and Gravesend Town Centre. More information on these schemes can be found in the Bus Priority and Highway Management section of this chapter.

2024/25 will also see the launch of the new Dover Fastrack service, linking significant housing

expansion in the Whitfield area of Dover with the Town Centre and Dover Priory Station. The infrastructure to deliver Dover Fastrack is being provided through the Government's Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) provided to Dover District Council (DDC) with ZEBRA funding also being utilised to provide zero emission buses on the route. One link supporting Dover Fastrack is the Pencester Road bus priority scheme which is currently being delivered (subject to final decision) utilising 2023/24 BSIP funding and is detailed in the Bus Priority and Highways Management section of this chapter. 2024/25 also sees the delivery of a Fastrack Expansion study, where we consider potential growth opportunities for the Fastrack concept.

In Chapter 4 – *Ambitions and Proposals for 2025 and Beyond* we have considered initiatives which can build on the current Fastrack offer should further funding become available through the BSIP process or other external sources.

Existing challenges and barriers

Whilst Kent continues to be passionate about BRT and the benefits it offers, we must ensure that schemes are established on a basis that works for all of Kent's residents, and in a manner which provides long term sustainability. Issues for consideration include:

Long Term Transformation of the Network

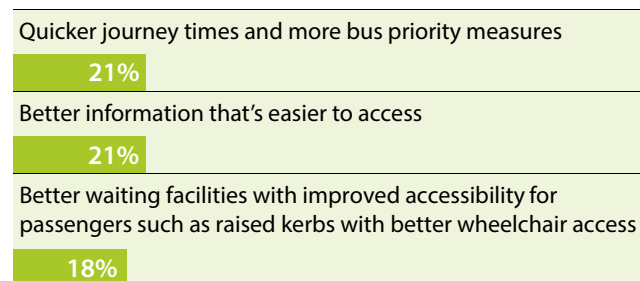
- Ensuring that BRT schemes offer enough ‘end to end’ priority in order to provide real journey time benefits over other modes.
- Ensuring that there is an appropriate level of potential usage to sustain a viable BRT network.

These challenges will be considered when analysing future development opportunities for Fastrack, particularly in relation to the expansion study being conducted in the 2024/25 financial year.

Public/Stakeholder feedback summary

Feedback gathered through our engagement activity in 2021 highlighted that one of the most important factors for passengers when using the bus is the reliability and punctuality of services. BRT and that Fastrack concept is based on providing reliable journeys and quicker journey times and as such supports this feedback.

Figure 12. Priorities in 2021 BSIP Engagement Exercise



Whilst data shows that the main priority for passengers is the availability and frequency of services themselves, there is also specific reference to these features in feedback, particularly with reference to bus priority. Specific comments included:

“It’s making sure that bus priority is first and foremost in transport planning. People aren’t going to just wake up one day and decide to travel by bus.”

“What’s the point if buses have to sit in the same traffic jams as cars? Why would people travel by bus if the bus is there sitting next to them in a jam, there’s no benefit.”

Bus priority measures are key to Fastrack and perhaps the most important aspect of establishing a successful BRT scheme.

Current Offer to Bus Passengers Fastrack

Fastrack is Kent’s Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) brand. The service provides fast, reliable and affordable transport in the Kent Thameside area and is soon to be expanded to Dover.

The Fastrack network in Kent Thameside comprises exclusive busways, bus priority measures and purpose-built bypasses, making travel by Fastrack significantly quicker and more convenient for local journeys and onwards connectivity than a private car. Significant infrastructure investment continues in Kent to retain this edge.

Fastrack Kent Thameside Service Offer

The first Fastrack route (referred as Route B) opened in 2006 and provides fast, reliable, and efficient transport access across the Kent Thameside area. Since then, an additional two routes (Route A and Route AZ) have been introduced, creating a high-frequency network stretching between Dartford and Gravesend via popular destinations, such as, the Bridge Estate, Amazon Fulfilment Centre, Crossways Business Park, Darent Valley Hospital, Bluewater Shopping Centre and local train stations.

Route B was the first service introduced to the area in 2006 and links communities with key destination and transport interchanges within the area such as Darent Valley Hospital, Bluewater Shopping Centre and local train stations between Dartford and Gravesend.

Long Term Transformation of the Network

Route A was established in 2007 and provides links between Dartford and Bluewater Shopping Centre via The Bridge development and Crossways Business Park. The Bridge development. In 2021 a third route was defined, Route AZ, following the opening of an Amazon Fulfilment Centre located between The Bridge development and the Dartford Crossing. Due to the levels of congestion near the Dartford Crossing, the retailer did not make on-site parking provisions and instead set up a new bus service between the warehouse, Dartford, Gravesend and Ebbsfleet station, passing through the Bridge Estate and Crossways Business Park. This service runs 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, with the frequency of buses reaching every 15-minutes during the day and every 30-minutes during the evening.

In 2024/25 the Fastrack network will grow further to support ongoing development in the Ebbsfleet area. This expansion will be supported by a new operating contract – see Chapter 3 – *Improvements Programme to 2025* for more information.

Patronage Levels

Fastrack has seen encouraging passenger levels even when taking into account the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2019, the combined total number of passengers reached 2.6 million, the equivalent of

over 7,100 people a day. During 2020 and 2021, the level of public transport patronage plummeted across the country due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which is also evident for Fastrack patronage. In 2021, the country opened up from pandemic restrictions, and route AZ was introduced on the Fastrack network. The 2022 passenger levels started climbing and in 2023 pre-pandemic levels were surpassed, though this could partially be due to the introduction of an additional route as patronage levels on individual Routes A and B have not reached pre pandemic levels.



In 2019, service routes A and B accumulated 2,630,600 passengers in total. In 2023, service routes A and B accumulated 2,516,500 passengers, which is 96% of 2019 levels. Whilst the patronage on routes A and B does not quite match pre-pandemic levels, the AZ service route runs a similar route to route A, so the patronage is now dispersed across three routes instead of two. The total 2023 patronage exceeded pre pandemic levels by 5%.

Fastrack and Kent's BSIP

In Kent's 2021 BSIP we noted how we wanted to continue to evolve the Fastrack offer in Kent Thameside, to introduce a service to Dover and to explore the possibility of zero emission vehicles should funding permit from the Government's ZEBRA scheme. This has certainly been the case and Fastrack has seen considerable growth since this point including:

- A tender and subsequent award to the Go-Ahead group for the longer-term operation of the Fastrack Kent Thameside network. The new contract will commence in 2024 and will see partnership working between KCC and the operator to ensure optimum service performance.
- A tender and subsequent award for shelter

Long Term Transformation of the Network

maintenance and real time information across the Fastrack Thameside services which will be embedded during 2024/25.

- The progression of further bus priority schemes including Bath Street in Gravesend, and Rennie Drive in Dartford, the latter of which is funded through 2023/24 BSIP funding and will offer significant reliability benefits.
- The opening in 2022 of a new bus hub in Gravesend Town Centre, providing more appropriate interchange facilities for Fastrack including the space for pantograph charging.
- A successful outcome for Kent's ZEBRA bid for Fastrack which has seen over £9m awarded to KCC for the delivery of Zero emissions buses on the Kent Thameside and Dover Fastrack networks.
- The continued roll out of Dover Fastrack including significant infrastructure delivery in the Whitfield area and the progression of a service contract for the project.

Figure 13. Dover Fastrack: Artist's Impression



3 Improvements Programme to 2025

Introduction

This chapter details our intended delivery programme for buses across the 2024/25 financial year. At the start of the chapter, we have included a funding table which details all budgeted spend on bus activity for the county, including tranche 2 BSIP funding (which is still subject to final confirmation), together with funding from other sources and KCC's own funds.

The chapter then considers each BSIP initiative area and provides information on projects being delivered in 2024/25. We have updated on the delivery of our 2023/24 (tranche 1) BSIP funded programme in Chapter 2 – *Current Offer to Bus Passengers*.

		2024/25	
Baseline Budget Category	Funding Source	Revenue	Capital
Supported Bus Services & Kent Karrier	KCC	£5.91m	£0
ENCTS Concessions <small>Budget dictated by demand and re-imburement</small>	KCC	£15.47m <small>*inc £.2.5m anticipated impact of DfT calculator</small>	£0
Kent Travel Saver Concessionary Ticketing Scheme <small>Payment to operators</small>	KCC	£15.02m	£0
Bus Stop Infrastructure Maintenance Contract	KCC	£100k	£0
Fastrack Infrastructure	KCC	£250k	£0
Bus Service Policy, Community Transport and New Bus Stop Infrastructure	KCC	£329k	£0
BSIP Funding	Dft	£4.37m	£11.70m
LTF/BSIP+	Dft	£2.3m	£0
Local Authority BSOG	Dft	£1.08m	£0
Zero Emission Bus Grant (ZEBRA)	Dft	£0m	£2.5m
Housing Infrastructure Fund (for bus projects) <small>Funding to DDC for Dover Fastrack – KCC Delivery Partner</small>	Dft	£0m	£7.63m

Services and Network Coverage

Services & Network Coverage

The following BSIP budget was allocated to Network Initiatives in 2023/24; delivery will continue across this financial year.

Initiative	Capital	Revenue
Network Support – sustaining services		£2.5m*
Network Assessment and Planning Tool		£50k
Network Support – Community Transport Grant	£450k	£0

*Funding support for network sustainability is also using Kent's BSIP+ allocation for 2023/24, totalling £2.3m.

Subject to final confirmation, the following BSIP tranche 2 budget has been allocated to Network initiatives in 2024/25:

Initiative	Capital	Revenue
Network Support – sustaining services		£1.0m*

*Funding support for network sustainability is also using Kent's BSIP+ allocation for 2024/25, totalling £2.3m

As noted in Chapter 2 – *Current offer to Bus Passengers*, we had intended to use our BSIP network allocation to introduce new and enhanced services, where these could be self-sustainable in the future, to provide greater connectivity particularly in areas and at times where gaps or shortfalls existed.

However, between the funding allocation being announced and the BSIP funds for 2023/24 actually arriving, it became clear that reduced bus use and revenue and increased costs was undermining the network's sustainability and service continuity more than we could have anticipated.

A very significant number of services were reduced, or risked complete withdrawal by operators who could not continue to provide them commercially. As noted in Chapter 2 – *Current offer to Bus Passengers*, we have therefore had to use all network funding to sustain critical services that were placed at risk of withdrawal.

To date, we have protected 49 critical services, mainly enabling children to travel to school, using BSIP and BSIP+ funding, without which they would not be operating today. The estimated cost of sustaining these services is over £3m per

annum and has exhausted the funding available. Therefore, it has not been possible to introduce significant service enhancements. Using the Project Adjustment Request (PAR) process, a proportion of our 2023/24 allocation has been rolled over to 2024/25 to ensure these services can continue at least until March 2025.

Community Transport

We used 2023/24 BSIP funding to award £500k of community transport grants supporting 11 schemes across the county and will continue to support the sector during the 2024/25 financial year. We have a dedicated Community Transport Officer to advise and guide organisations wanting to establish new schemes or develop existing schemes. We also have a community transport toolkit to support these ventures.

Network Planning Tool

We will continue to use the network planning tool we secured with BSIP 2023/24 funding to inform data returns and network planning in the 2024/25 financial year.

Bus Priority and Highway Management

Bus Priority and Highway Management

The following BSIP budget was allocated to bus priority and Highway Management in 2023/24. Spending for all of these initiatives commenced in 2023/24 and all initiatives are continuing to be delivered across this financial year.

Initiative	Capital	Revenue
Bus Priority Pencester Road, Dover	£3.0	
Bus Priority Rennie Drive, Dartford	£2.5m	
Bus Priority Thanet Superbus	£2.0m	£50k
Bus Priority Feasibility Studies		£250k
Highway Management Bus Interventions to Support PIPs	£625k	
Highway Management ANPR	£450k	

Subject to final confirmation, the following BSIP tranche 2 budget has been allocated to bus priority and highways management initiatives in 2024/25:

Initiative	Capital	Revenue
Bus Priority Bean Road Tunnels	£9.5m	
Bus Priority/ PIP Interventions Further Bus Priority initiatives (to be developed) and bus related highway interventions to support Punctuality Improvement Partnerships	£1.5m	
Highway Management ANPR	£104k	



Bus Priority – Bean Road Tunnels:

If finalised, this funding will deliver a significant bus priority measure for the Kent Thameside Enhanced Partnership (EP) area. The measure will see the creation of a section of tunnel (for buses, walking and cycling only) linking the Bus Station at Bluewater Shopping Centre and the Eastern Quarry development at Ebbsfleet Garden City. The scheme will provide a fast and reliable bus link for the Fastrack BRT service, which is developing significantly in the coming years in reaction to the high level of housing growth currently taking place in the Ebbsfleet area.

The scheme has high levels of local support and has match funding already secured from Ebbsfleet Development Corporation (EDC).

Bus Priority and Highway Management

Bus Priority/PIP Interventions:

This funding will support the delivery of further bus priority schemes and highway initiatives to support bus reliability in the 2024/25 financial year, identified through feasibility work conducted using 2023/24 BSIP funding and through Kent's PIPs. Outside of BSIP funding, we will also continue to focus on delivering commitments related to bus priority and highway management within our EP Schemes. In addition, a bus priority project in Bath Street, Gravesend is due for completion and the Dover Fastrack BRT service including a new dedicated bus bridge over the A2 is due to launch. We will also continue to work with operators through Kent's PIP's & local focus groups, using these forums to seek to consider key strategic issues affecting bus reliability such as parking enforcement and streetworks.

Highway Management – ANPR

This funding will support the installation of ANPR cameras at a number of bus gate locations across the county. The initiative follows on from a 2023/24 BSIP initiative which is being rolled out currently and is already proving to have immense support from both bus operators and local residents impacted by the misuse of these restricted areas. The intention of the bus gates

KCC manage within Kent has always intended to prioritise bus travel and change the perception of journey times by providing specific links to shorten routes. Unfortunately, the impact of these bus only routes is significantly reduced through misuse by other motorists. Often, we have seen delays for a number of minutes where other traffic has also seen the benefits of using the bus gates. The use of ANPR enforcement is one which not only provides a safe method of enforcement

over manning the gates, but also reiterates the importance of these routes being solely for their specified uses. Following the DfT's guidance on the application of ANPR enforcement, Kent will only install these cameras where other reasonable methods of deterrence have failed. Our officers have identified a number of other locations which would likely benefit from this enforcement method to provide a more reliable and punctual bus service.



Fares and Ticketing

Fares and Ticketing

A significant part of the BSIP budget was allocated to fares and ticketing projects in the 2023/24 year as follows:

Initiative	Capital	Revenue
Fares and Ticketing Multi Operator Ticketing Trial		£100k
Fares and Ticketing Kent Travel Saver Price Freeze	£2.5m	
Fares and Ticketing Fares initiatives and Promotions	£500k	



Subject to final confirmation, the following BSIP tranche 2 budget has been allocated to fares and ticketing initiatives in 2024/25:

Initiative	Capital	Revenue
Fares and Ticketing Wider Multi Operator Ticketing		£180k
Fares and Ticketing 11-18 Years Price Reduction		£3m
Fares and Ticketing Kent Wide Promotion		£200k
Fares and Ticketing Mobility-as-a-Service Platform*	£1.45m	
Fares and Ticketing Ticket Machine Grant for SMEs*	£1.178m	£196k

*These initiatives are funded from Kent's 2023/24 BSIP allocation but due to programme changes agreed with DfT will see their whole spend made in 2024/25.

Multi-operator Ticketing and On-bus ticket machines

KCC are working with the bus operators to introduce multi-operator bus ticketing schemes where possible. Kent's Enhanced Partnership

requires operators to accept each other's return tickets, and this will be enabled during 2024. There is also an intention to extend this principle to longer period tickets, although this would become more achievable with the introduction of the national back office, as outlined below.

Following the trial multi-operator scheme in the district of Swale, it is planned to adopt the nationwide Project Coral back office for EMV bank cards when it is introduced, possibly late in 2024. This will require tap on/tap off readers to be fitted to all buses in Kent to be ready for this introduction. We are therefore using BSIP funding to help to bring SME operators up to the necessary standards to be able to offer ticketing using barcode readers and for tap on/tap off transactions with an exit reader. Specifications and costings to upgrade the existing on-bus equipment are being agreed with the two core ticket machine suppliers, with the aim of ensuring they are fitted on all buses in Kent by the introduction date. Final operator negotiations are due to take place shortly, but indications are that we will be within the allocated budget of £1,177k Capital and £196k revenue.

Fares and Ticketing

Through the implementation of this scheme, we will look to provide a range of ticketing options that are simple, easy to access, and which are sold at a reduced rate by comparison to single operator fares bought on the bus. Once the scheme is operable, as well as countywide products which could offer Kent-wide travel for less than the Discovery ticket, KCC intend to develop more localised area pricing zones, particularly for the main towns. KCC will work with the bus operators to adopt flexible pricing which can help with the changing working patterns, particularly post-pandemic with more people now combining home and office working. These new ways of working can make the prospect of a traditional season ticket less attractive as it isn't required daily. Flexible zone pricing would combat this and make bus travel more appealing than using private cars and paying for parking. The tap on/tap off mechanism will allow a very flexible pricing range based on actual passenger journey usage without customers having to pre-select products where they may not know their actual forthcoming travel patterns.

Through the implementation of this scheme, we intend to enable a range of ticketing options that are simple, easy to access and sold at a reduced rate by comparison to single operator fares bought on the bus.

For the 2024/25 year, we have allocated £179.5k to support further development of multi-operator ticketing. If the Project Coral platform is available in time, it will be used to support setting up and developing/promoting ticketing schemes on this platform. If it is not available to us during 2024/25, we will seek to introduce a further localised scheme using current technologies at a location in the County where interchange between bus operators is particularly important.

11-18 Years Travel

The Kent Travel Saver price freeze has maintained a strong school travel demand in the county at a time of rising prices across the economy. The existence of grammar and faith schools in Kent results in longer journeys to school with high numbers travelling to a school that is not the nearest location to home addresses.

The costs of operation of bus services continues to rise. It is therefore necessary to regularly review the scheme to ensure that it remains sustainable within council budgets.

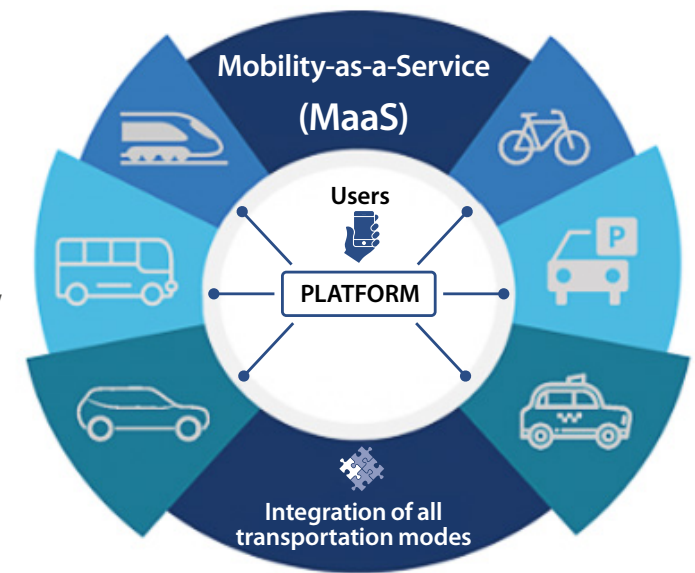
For 2024/25, BSIP funding will be used keep the cost of the pass for both the 11-16 and 16-18 age groups as low as possible. BSIP support of £3m has been allocated to achieve this and full details

of the 2024/25 KTS scheme were published in early June 2024.

Mobility-as-a-Service

Mobility-as-a-service (MaaS) is a comprehensive platform, available as an app on mobile communication devices. It allows personalised journeys for the user across different transport modes, such as bus, rail, demand responsive transport and bike hire with the options set out in one place.

Fig 14 – MaaS Integrations



Fares and Ticketing

The system benefits both the transport network and the users but journey costs cannot simply be aggregated, and the platform makes sales of the chosen modes available in a simple format with tickets bought then used on the device when required. By having a simplified and cost-effective transport solution, passenger share is forecast to increase and offset the individual fare concessions needed for each segment of the overall journey. Through an unbiased authority-led scheme, optimised and well-occupied bus routes offer users economy of scale whilst giving participating bus operators a healthy customer base.

The Kent Thameside area of Dartford and Gravesend is seeing substantial new housing and commercial developments as part of the Thames Gateway. Much of the development is being occupied by younger age groups who are more likely to use the latest technology, including for transport use. The transport network is strong and is being expanded as the new sites are occupied, with the fast High-Speed train route to London and the coast and the award winning Fastrack bus network.

BSIP funding is being used to procure a MaaS platform to enable the introduction of a scheme in Kent Thameside in 2024/25. This will complement

the Fastrack service upgrade, which will see a new operator and a new fleet of electrically powered vehicles. MaaS will tie together journeys on the Fastrack service with other bus routes as feeder services, together with rail travel at the convenient interchanges at Dartford, Greenhithe, Ebbsfleet and Gravesend. The existing DRT service will also be included and in due course, cycle hire is planned to be added to the platform.

The operators of each mode of travel will be allocated revenues due to them from the platform with sales being subject to a commission from the platform.

A procurement process is underway to secure the platform and it is intended to have the Kent Thameside scheme in operation during the 2024/25 year. The MaaS platform will be funded by an allocation of £1,450k from the BSIP award.

Fare Initiatives and Promotions

As described in Chapter 2 – *Current offer to Bus Passengers*, a series of promotions were implemented in 2023/24 aimed at increasing bus passenger numbers which had fallen sharply since the pandemic, caused by the reductions in services during the Covid 19 infection period and by the national message not to travel on public transport.

Whilst the 2023 programme of promotions targeted individual market sectors, we are proposing to switch to a wider and more general but harder hitting promotion in 2024. This will be undertaken in conjunction with the bus operators and employ an advertising agency. It will be targeted on the positive features of bus travel and will again be aimed at increasing bus usage in Kent. As part of this work a further specific campaign is also proposed, which will see the promotion of bus services serving the Weald area. A budget of £200k of BSIP funding has been allocated to support these promotions.

We will also be continuing to focus on the delivery of other EP commitments related to fares and ticketing across 2024/25.



Waiting and Interchange Facilities

Waiting and Interchange Facilities

BSIP funding from 2023/24 has been utilised to support waiting and interchange facilities as follows:

Initiative	Capital	Revenue
Highway Management Bus Interventions to Support PIPs – note not all for bus stops	£625k	



Subject to final confirmation, the following BSIP budget has been allocated to waiting and interchange initiatives in 2024/25:

Initiative	Capital	Revenue
Infrastructure Other Delivery of Further Real Time Information Screens	£500k	
Infrastructure Other Trials of technological interventions at bus stops	£100k	
Highway Management Bus Interventions to Support PIPs – note not all for bus stops	£1.5m	
Infrastructure Other Real Time Information Screens*		£662k

*These initiatives are funded from Kent's 2023/24 BSIP allocation but due to programme changes agreed with DfT will see their whole spend made in 2024/25.

Infrastructure Other – Delivery of Real Time Information

Over the course of 2023/24, a contract was secured with a Real Time Information Screen (RTI) supplier. 2023/24 BSIP funding is now being

utilised to roll out a number of new RTI screens across the county over the course of the 2024/25 financial year utilising this contract. As noted in Chapter 2 – *Current offer to Bus Passengers*, Kent's bus stop hierarchy is being used to identify and prioritise locations based on factors such as the number of departures, interchange with other modes etc.

Subject to final confirmation, 2024/25 tranche 2 BSIP funding will be utilised to deliver a programme of further RTI installations across the county, again utilising the bus stop hierarchy to prioritise appropriate sites.

Infrastructure Other – Trials of technological interventions at bus stops

As identified in Chapter 2 – *Current offer to Bus Passengers*, technology with respect to bus stop infrastructure is continually evolving. In Kent, we would like to ensure that we are making the most of new opportunities in this area to enhance the passenger experience as far as possible. As such, subject to final confirmation, we will utilise 2024/25 BSIP tranche 2 funding to launch trials at bus stop/interchange locations identified through the bus stop hierarchy. In particular, following feedback in the 2023/24 passenger satisfaction survey, Kent is keen to explore improving

Waiting and Interchange Facilities

safety at bus stops where there is no potential for full time lighting. As such, the authority would like to explore the potential for installing battery operated solar lighting at identified bus stops. E-ink at stop timetables is also under consideration as part of these trials.

Highway Management – Bus Interventions to Support PIPs – note not all for bus stops

As identified in Chapter 2 – *Current offer to Bus Passengers*, Kent’s Punctuality and Improvement Partnerships (PIPs) are utilised to identify key congestion hotspots and issues impacting bus reliability on the network. 2023/24 BSIP funding is being used to deliver a number of schemes to tackle these issues and subject to final confirmation we will use 2024/25 BSIP Tranche 2 funding to delivery further such interventions emerging from PIP meetings and local focus groups.

Wider Initiatives to support Waiting and Interchange Facilities

Outside of BSIP funding we continue to put considerable support into bus stop infrastructure in Kent. As detailed in the funding table at the start of this chapter, Kent invests significant annual funding in maintaining over 6000 bus stop assets through a maintenance contract. This will continue to be in place for 2024/25.

In addition, we will continue to utilise part of an overall policy and infrastructure budget to deliver new bus stops and bus stop upgrades, reacting to enquiries and seeking to improve accessibility where possible. Kent’s bus shelters will also continue to be maintained through contracts held by borough and district Councils. KCC has recently appointed a new contractor to manage shelters on the Fastrack Thameside network, many of which will be replaced over the course of the contract. In addition, KCC has allocated funding

within its overall policy and infrastructure budget in 2024/25 to run a Rural Shelter Grant scheme which will see funding offered to local parish and town Councils (through an application process) to provide new or upgrade existing locally owned bus shelters in their areas. This has proved a very popular scheme when run previously.

We will also be continuing to focus on the delivery of other EP commitments related to Waiting and Interchange Facilities across 2024/25.



Bus Information

Bus Information

BSIP funding from 2023/24 is being utilised to support bus information as follows:

Initiative	Capital	Revenue
Bus Information Bus Information Portal	£140k	£100k

The following initiative is funded from Kent’s 2023/24 BSIP allocation but due to programme changes agreed with DfT will its whole spend made in 2024/25.

Initiative	Capital	Revenue
Bus Information Bus Stop QR Codes		£325k

Bus Information Portal & QR Codes

Work on the bus information portal for Kent public transport information will continue in the 2024/25 financial year. Once the basic site has been completed, including the interactive map and comprehensive journey planner, further options will include the promotion of scenic walking routes and the possibility of targeted offers through the portal. It should also be feasible to include an option for users of the portal to download static maps of parts of the bus network to be printed and used offline.

A further innovation will see the roll out of QR code plates at all marked bus stops across the county which will provide a dedicated and instant link to the bus information portal. When following the codes, real time information will be provided to the user for the stop in question with the ability to then use further functionality on the portal. The installation of the QR Code plates along with Kent’s initiative to install RTI screens at key stops identified through the bus stop hierarchy will mean that all marked bus stops in Kent will have access to real time departure information. The QR Codes are being funded through 2023/24 tranche 1 BSIP funding and will be rolled out in 2024 following the finalisation of a delivery contract which commences imminently.



*Please note an example image has been used as final design of QR code plates are yet to be finalised

Bus Information

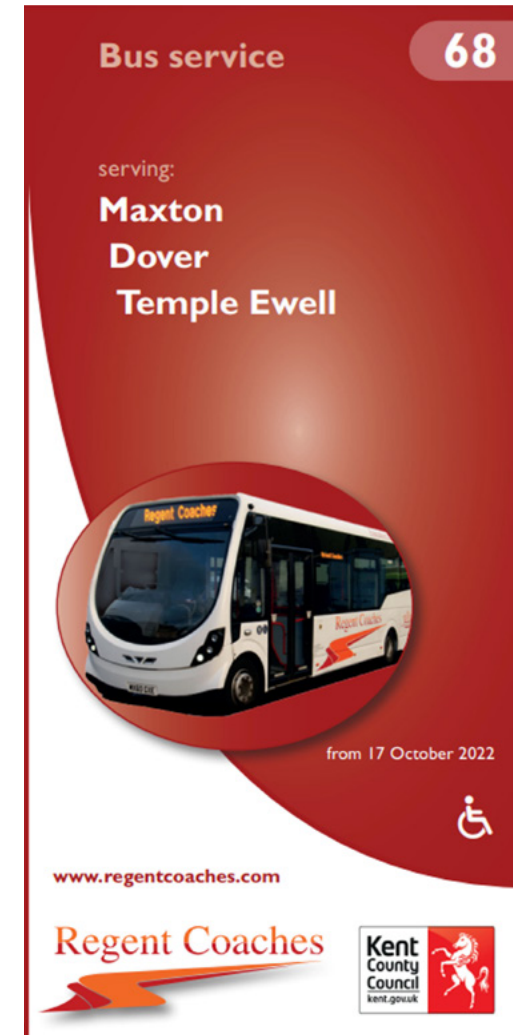
In-Bus Announcements and Hearing Loops

A significant step forward for those who are mobility-impaired will be the fitment of next bus stop audio announcement and visual displays in all buses used on scheduled services. This will give information on the service that the bus is working, the direction, each upcoming stop, and the beginning of any diversions. The aids will make the announcements available via induction loop systems. This is a statutory requirement funded by the bus operators themselves, with grants available for small operators, and is due to be implemented by October 2026. In addition, all new buses introduced after October 2024 must also include visible information which can be seen by a wheelchair user when travelling in a rearward facing wheelchair space.

Common Identity

KCC and Kent's bus operators agreed in 2021 to agree a common identity and approach to the design of publicity relating to all bus services around the county. Whilst this review has not yet taken place given other priorities, to achieve this initiative, KCC will negotiate with local bus operators with a view to agreeing a common identity to the design of bus service publicity in the county. Although some bus operators have their own brands and preferred approach to publicity, it is hoped that an agreement can be reached to provide a more common identity, while ensuring bus operators' branding is included. For example, to make it easier for bus users to better understand travel times, printed publicity should display a simplified timetabled grid created to an agreed format, in accordance with the current RNIB 'clear text' guidelines for the benefit of the visually impaired.

The inclusion of local contact details (including phone, email, website) should be displayed on all bus service publicity, along with contact details for KCC in the instance of subsidised bus services. Information relating to the passenger charter should also be included.



Bus Passenger Experience

Bus Passenger Experience

No part of the BSIP budget was allocated to the development of the passenger charter itself in either 2023/24 or 2024/25 and any promotion of the charter will be funded by the councils and operators from their own resources. However, many of the areas of concern have been allocated funding and these measures are discussed in the relevant subject area chapters of this document.

Bus Passenger Charter

Kent and Medway councils are working with their bus operators to develop a Bus Passenger Charter for the two council areas. This work is at an advanced stage and the final document will be launched during 2024.

As well as the feedback from the two bus passenger surveys, the charter will take into account the guidelines from Passenger Focus on this subject.

The key sections of the charter are planned to be as shown opposite:

What you can expect from Kent County Council and Medway Council

- To work with bus operators to maximise the opportunities to provide as comprehensive network of bus services as is possible accounting for commercial, funding, and operational conditions.
- Up-to-date timetable information at every marked bus stop, where required.
- The ongoing maintenance of bus stop infrastructure (including the bus stop pole, flag, timetable case)
- Bus shelters: in Kent, bus shelters are usually the responsibility of the local District/Borough Councils, or in some more rural areas Parish Councils.
- Consider requests for new bus stop infrastructure within budgetary constraints, ensuring any new bus stops are fully accessible.
- Improve the accessibility of public transport information. In Kent, this will include the introduction of a centralised source of online information outlined in the passenger Information chapter of this document.
- To work with bus operators to try and provide passengers with the best ticketing options available, while also promoting all multi operator tickets or council produced ticket options.
- KCC commits to conduct ongoing reviews of the Passenger Charter with consultation on any revised versions. We will work closely with neighbouring authorities to ensure consistency for bus users.
- Planned timetable changes will be advertised in good time wherever possible.
- To work collaboratively with bus operators to deliver the principles of local Bus Service Improvement Plans.
- To work on providing bus priority and effective roadwork co-ordination to help services run more reliably.

Bus Passenger Experience

What you can expect from Bus Operators

- To work with KCC to maximise the opportunities to provide as comprehensive a network of bus services as is possible accounting for commercial, funding, and operational conditions.
- Safe and reliable bus services operating as timetabled, with services not running early, and ideally not operating more than five minutes late, subject to the status of the highway network.
- Clean buses both inside and outside, while accepting sometimes it is hard to keep the outside of buses clean in adverse weather.
- Professional, fully trained, friendly, helpful drivers in their relevant company attire, who offer assistance to those that need additional help and overall good customer service.
- Buses that are fully accessible and enable the carriage of wheelchairs and buggies.
- Buses that have a working destination display showing the service number and destination.
- Planned timetable changes are advertised on websites and social media in good time wherever possible.
- To respond to all customer complaints in a prompt and professional manner.
- To work collaboratively with Local Authorities to deliver the principles of local Bus Service Improvement Plans.



Further sections will outline how passengers can help towards efficient bus services and then a section on how to make a comment or complaint.

The charter will have a formal review process with the creation of a Passenger Charter Group in each of the three EP scheme areas. This will consist of a range of stakeholders to monitor fulfilment of the charter in each area.

We will continue to carry out sample passenger surveys to monitor progress and to ensure that funding is targeted at the areas of most concern to passengers.

The inclusion of local contact details (including phone, email, website) should be displayed on all bus service publicity, along with contact details for KCC in the instance of subsidised bus services. Information relating to the passenger charter should also be included.

Bus Fleet and Air Quality

Bus Fleet and Air Quality

No part of the BSIP budget was allocated to the Bus Fleet or Air Quality projects in the 2023/24 year. However, the new Fastrack fleets in Kent Thameside and Dover attracted significant ZEBRA funding and the initial air quality hierarchy did not require funding. Once again, in 2024/25, no BSIP funding has been allocated to this subject area however Kent is working with neighbouring authorities to use further ZEBRA funding allocated to West Sussex County Council (WSCC) to deliver a hydrogen bus scheme between Tunbridge Wells and Crawley.

Bus fleet

As the year to 2025 progresses, the fleet of Fastrack electric vehicles will be introduced, transforming the service between Dartford and Gravesend. This project received funding from the Government’s ZEBRA project which contributed substantially to the vehicles and both the depot and on-road charging infrastructure.

Also in 2024, the Dover Fastrack service will commence. KCC’s plan is to further enhance the Fastrack network across Kent, with the next planned operation being the route from Whitfield into Dover, supporting the extensive

new housing developments in both Whitfield and the former Connaught Barracks site and providing a link to Dover Priory Station. Much of the route will be on Fastrack Busway, with a new bridge over the A2 and a new bus link across to Dover Road and the castle. Commencing in 2024 with new Euro 6 emission buses, the service will be upgraded to Fastrack electric vehicles in 2025, using the ZEBRA funding.

Kent will also play a small part in the exciting ZEBRA bid to introduce hydrogen powered buses on a number of Metrobus services from Crawley and Gatwick Airport, including the 291 route between Tunbridge Wells and Crawley. The Council has contributed to the bid which has now been accepted by DfT, subject to approval of the hydrogen storage facilities at the Metrobus depot in West Sussex. If this issue is resolved, an order for new vehicles is due to be placed by January 2025.

It is hoped that further funding can be gained to enable the introduction of further zero-emission buses in Kent, including bus services that are not part of the Fastrack network.

Through our EP Schemes, KCC intends to set minimum emissions standards for vehicles deployed on the Kent bus network. We will need



to be careful about where standards are set, in order not to prohibit competition and service viability. Therefore, our intention is to employ a reducing (Euro) scale, thus steadily improving the environmental qualities of the Kent bus fleet once the network has stabilised.

In 2024, Stagecoach have committed to the delivery of 11 new vehicles to Euro VI emission standards. These will be small buses that can operate in the more rural parts of Kent.

As identified above, even standard diesel buses are already having a positive impact on air quality by taking cars off the road. Therefore, KCC and Kent’s bus operators plan a variety of initiatives to promote the existing network with a view to increasing bus mode share and improving air quality.

Bus Fleet and Air Quality



Air Quality

To ensure that buses contribute more to the Low Emissions Strategy, we have a number of initiatives in our EP, some of which will progress in 2024/25.

Firstly, the council has developed a hierarchy – essentially adopting Air Quality Management Areas – and will use this as the basis to prioritise bus air quality initiatives. The hierarchy has now been produced with detailed information for the two main areas of interest in Maidstone and Sittingbourne worked up. These areas form part of our proposed initiative programme for 2025-29 (see Chapter 4 – *Ambitions and Proposals for 2025 and Beyond*). In 2024-25, we will develop the next priority sites further.

We have noted in our EP that we intend to establish minimum Euro standards for buses deployed on all day services and set targets that will organically improve the emissions standards on these vehicles over a period of time. This remains the ambition should future funding and economic conditions permit.

Finally, we will continue to explore all opportunities to secure funding to support initiatives concerned with making more use of electric and hybrid vehicles.

Accessibility and Inclusion

Accessibility and Inclusion

No part of the BSIP budget was specifically allocated to accessibility, inclusion and safety, as this subject area is a new addition to BSIP guidance. However, funding aimed at other parts of the BSIP plan also assist these areas, such as improving the waiting environment, providing support to enable the introduction of further community bus services and introducing comprehensive bus service information. These areas are covered in the relevant sections of this document.

Outside of BSIP support, other funding has been used to:

- Continue support for the pre-bookable Kent Karrier service for those who are not able to use conventional bus services.
- Continue support to enable free travel for companions for disabled users within the ENCTS scheme.
- Deliver accessibility improvements at bus stops.
- Provide funding towards implementing a driver recruitment and training scheme for the smaller bus operators.

Community transport

The community transport sector plays a key part in Kent's overall transport offer and in many areas provides a service where more conventional transport modes are not able to do so. The county has a vibrant community transport market with a number of organisations running services to meet the needs of their local areas or supported groups, often on a voluntary basis. We feel there is a key role for wider groups such as community transport operators that are not party to EP requirements, and this is something we would like to explore further.

KCC's role within the sector is mostly signposting and facilitation, a responsibility we take seriously. Our website directs would-be users to community transport schemes in their areas, and relevant resources which they may find of use. KCC has also developed a community transport toolkit which is a step-by-step guide for starting up or improving a community transport scheme. Since 2018, KCC has awarded a number of community transport grants across the county. KCC is eager to build on this positive work to further develop the community transport sector to complement our overall bus offer.

We are working with community transport partners to evolve Kent's community transport offer. Funding through 2023/24 BSIP is already supporting the introduction of further grants to facilitate new community transport schemes including a new service in the Faversham area. This subject is covered in more detail in the Network and Development section of this document.

KCC also runs its own community transport scheme, the Kent Karrier which provides door to door transport for those with mobility issues or who live more than 500m from a bus stop. The service operates across the county and in the year up to March 2024 over 11,500 passenger journeys were made.

KCC is also supporting the Kent Community Rail Partnership (KCRP) using some of its policy and infrastructure budget in 2024/25 in recognition of the importance of connectivity between bus and rail services. Improved wayfinding signage for buses has been included as an initiative for the KCRP in 2024/25 as part of this support.

Accessibility and Inclusion

Bus Driver Training

To address the bus driver shortage and future need for replacement drivers as existing long-serving staff retire, some of the SME companies have an initiative to set up a recruitment and training facility for the smaller bus operators. KCC have also offered some funding towards this venture.

Driver recruitment will look to attract people from other industries and experiences, particularly where good customer facing skills have been acquired, such as staff displaced by retail store closures. This would help to encourage people out of unemployment.

The training centre will either purchase its own training bus or utilise local commercial PCV driver training companies to assist in carrying out the practical training.

As well as training for the PCV licence, candidates will receive further training through the Certificate of Professional Competence programme, with such topics as disability awareness and assisting passengers to board and alight together with procedures for when disabled facilities are not available on the bus, such as when a ramp is not functional or the designated disabled space is already occupied.



Longer Term Transformation of the Network

Longer Term Transformation of the Network

Improvement Programme to 2025

Whilst there are no Fastrack specific initiatives to be delivered under the 2024/25 Kent BSIP programme, there are BSIP initiatives across 2023/24 and 2024/25 which support both the Fastrack networks in Kent Thameside and Dover which continue to be rolled out. These include:

- The Rennie Drive, Dartford bus priority scheme which is being finalised in 2024/25 using 2023/24 BSIP funded. The scheme is anticipated to complete in the summer of 2024 providing significant reliability benefit to Fastrack. More information is provided in the Bus Priority and Highway Management section of Chapter 2 – *Current offer to Bus Passengers*.
- The Pencester Road, Dover bus priority scheme which is being progressed across 2024 (subject to final decision) using 2023/24 BSIP funding and which will provide significant benefits to the Dover Fastrack service. More information is provided in the Bus Priority and Highway Management section of Chapter 2 – *Current offer to Bus Passengers*.
- The Bean Road Tunnels bus priority scheme which will further enhance the Fastrack offer in

Kent Thameside. More information is provided in the Bus Priority and Highway Management section of Chapter 3 – *Improvements Programme to 2025*. This scheme is subject to final confirmation of 2024/25 BSIP funding.

As detailed in Chapter 2 – *Current offer to Bus Passengers*, a significant number of wider Fastrack projects are progressing in 2024/25 including:

- The start of a new operating contract for the Fastrack network in Kent Thameside with the Go-Ahead Group.
- The use of ZEBRA funding to introduce a fleet of zero emission buses to the Fastrack network in both Kent Thameside and Dover.
- The start of a new contract for the maintenance of shelters and Real Time Information on the Fastrack route.
- The development of a Fastrack expansion study which will explore how the Fastrack concept could be rolled out to other areas of Kent.

Dover Fastrack Launch

The 2024/25 financial year will also see the launch of the Dover Fastrack service. Dover Fastrack is a new bus rapid transit system that will connect Whitfield, Dover town centre and Dover Priory Station, to provide a reliable, high-quality, and

frequent bus service. The buses will have priority over other traffic on the route. The Dover Fastrack will use existing roads, new roads and dedicated busways. It will link housing developments in the Whitfield Urban Expansion area and Connaught Barracks, White Cliffs Business Park, Dover Leisure Centre and Dover Castle.

The scheme is funded through £22.9 million grant from Homes England (awarded to Dover District Council through the Housing Infrastructure Fund designed to help stimulate new housing growth in Whitfield and at the former Connaught Barracks site).



4 Ambitions and Proposals for 2025 and Beyond

2025-2029 Initiative Proposals

Despite the challenges affecting the bus industry the NBS process and the funding it has delivered to support our BSIP have enabled us to work with our operators to protect the most essential parts of the bus network. We have also driven forward some notable improvements through initiatives delivered using the first tranche of BSIP funding, which we will continue in 2024/25.

This phase of the NBS concludes at the end of March 2025. This also marks the end of the current BSIP funding period, but we and our partners are committed to continuing to deliver on the principles of our first BSIP and this revised version. We will work towards fulfilling our vision to protect existing services and develop a fast and frequent, reliable, sustainable and fully accessible network that connects our communities with essential services. Passengers will travel on modern, environmentally friendly vehicles, have access to using dynamic and readily available information, with high-quality bus stops and infrastructure and flexible, affordable tickets that are easy to pay for.

Doing so will require a continuation of current BSIP+ support funding to enable us to maintain

currently unprofitable services. We will also need long-term funding plan to support our vision and the future initiatives set out in this chapter. These are as an extension of the first BSIP, taking into account engagement with key stakeholders both at that time and more recently.

Should funding allow, these initiatives would bring developments in all areas of network provision including new and enhanced services, greater connectivity, reduced bus journey

times and improved reliability, flexible ticketing, modern accessible vehicles and infrastructure and better information.

This programme, along with our bus vision, covers 2025-2029. We are currently developing a new Local Transport Plan (LTP) which will establish new proposals for delivering our overall transport strategy. We intend to produce longer-term BSIP proposals to align with this new LTP in future versions of the BSIP, including in 2025 if the LTP has been finalised by this point.



2025-2029 Initiative Proposals

Network development

Reference	Initiative Description	External Funding Required?
NDI 1	KCC will secure ongoing funding that will enable the Council to work in conjunction with bus operators to protect the existing network, sustaining services currently supported through BSIP and BSIP+ funding.	YES
NDI 2	KCC will work in conjunction with network operators to review the possibility of growing the rebased bus network, reintroducing services and improving frequencies, and introducing a more expansive evening and weekend network of buses on identified strategic bus corridors where there is new optimism for patronage growth and future sustainability.	YES
NDI 3	KCC will use the results of the Bus Connectivity Assessment complimented by analysis of outputs from the Network Planning tool to increase the proportion of Kent households with access to; business, healthcare, work, education, retail and leisure destinations within 30 minutes of bus travel and increase levels of rural connectivity to the core network.	YES
NDI 4	KCC will look to use its BSIP and any associated funding to support the key aspirations of more localized bus strategies and sustainable transport strategies forming part of District Council's Local Plans such as the Canterbury Bus Strategy, the Ebbsfleet Sustainable Travel Strategy and the Tunbridge Wells Bus Strategy.	YES
NDI 5	Secure the long-term access and use of a Network planning tool to continue to inform future BSIP reviews and responses to Bus Connectivity Audits.	YES
NDI 6	Strengthen data collection tools and processes to improve reporting, analysis, evaluation, and monitoring of network changes & improvements.	YES

2025-2029 Initiative Proposals

Bus Priority and Highways Management

Reference	Initiative Description	External Funding Required?
BP 1	<p>To progress detailed feasibility reviews and subsequent delivery of bus priority schemes on bus corridors identified in Chapter 2 – <i>Current Offer to Bus Passengers</i>. Many of these sites were also in Kent’s 2021 BSIP but do not yet have funding.</p> <p>A detailed review will be required to ensure the sites provide practical support in line with The Plan for Drivers and DfT guidance.</p> <p>Identified corridors include: (Gravesend- Chalk, Swanscombe- Horns Cross, Dartford East Hill, Tonbridge (Southborough), Maidstone- Loose Road, Maidstone- Sandling, Canterbury- Sturry, Ashford Town Centre).</p>	YES
BP 2	To identify and deliver a further package of minor highway improvements which may be beneficial to operators (and provide reciprocal benefit) following feedback from existing Punctuality Improvement Partnership meetings.	YES
BP 3	Work with Kent Borough Councils to use district Local Transport Plans and Strategies to identify additional locations (to BP1) for bus priority. Ensuring a well-rounded approach to transport which increases efficiency and impact. (e.g. Canterbury Bus Led Strategy).	YES
BP 4	Develop understanding of alternative methods of innovative data capture (such as mobile network data, real time sensors and BODS reliability outputs) to identify additional bus priority locations to BP1 & BP 3. Focus on those areas where delays exist but may be underrepresented by those experiencing delays and areas which improve bus operating speed and punctuality – i.e. addressing BSIP Targets.	YES

2025-2029 Initiative Proposals

Bus Priority and Highways Management

Reference	Initiative Description	External Funding Required?
BP 5	Using the Traffic Management Act 2006 Part 6 powers to continue carrying out ANPR enforcement to ensure effective and safe bus priority. Investigating ways other traffic restrictions may improve bus priority, such as yellow box junction enforcement.	YES
BP 6	Increasing the inspection regime for temporary street works on bus routes to ensure works are completed without undue delay. Supporting the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 and managing pressures roadworks place on punctual bus movement.	YES
BP 7	Installation of countywide RTIGXML Traffic Priority system. Enables bus ticket machines to provide our traffic light signals with real time location data to ensure priority through traffic light corridors.	YES
BP 8	Explore innovative methods of enforcement of parking restrictions to promote compliance.	YES
BP 9	Parking policy and countywide strategy between district councils. Supporting district councils in retaining civil enforcement officers and attracting strong employment.	YES

2025-2029 Initiative Proposals

Fares and Ticketing

Reference	Initiative Description	External Funding Required?
FT 1	Develop a network of multi-operator ticketing zones in the County using the Project Coral back office and EMV cards or M-ticketing with bar codes. Would need some expert resource if setup is not part of the Project Coral package. Assumes pricing at commercial fare levels if funding to reduce prices is not available. See below for funded offers.	YES
FT 1A	Introduce a maximum day ticket fare across the County. This could replace the Discovery Ticket for travel within Kent and would affect top end single fares if the fare cap ceases.	YES
FT 1B	Introduce local daily fare zones around Kent's major towns. Potential for flat fares if the fare cap ceases. The level of fare discount will depend on future stability and the level of support available. Priority for Thanet (Superbus) and West Kent (larger number of operators).	YES
FT 2	Support Home to School travel on the bus network with innovative ticketing pricing solutions.	YES
FT 3	MaaS expansion to the rest of Kent if it is sustainable or cost neutral after the set up and introductory period.	YES
FT 4	Ticketing provision trial in Bus/Travel Hubs to speed bus boarding times. Simple EMV purchase of most popular tickets.	YES
FT 5	Expand the successful bus/rail plus bus ticket scheme to include, for example, stations in Swale and to relaunch the scheme to enhance its promotion.	YES

2025-2029 Initiative Proposals

Waiting and Interchange Facilities

Reference	Initiative Description	External Funding Required?
WI 1	<p>Using the bus stop hierarchy produced in 23/24 as a base, build on information currently available to produce a full asset database for each marked bus stop in the county.</p> <p>Subsequently seek to deliver improvements using this hierarchy as a base, including improvements to overall accessibility to the bus network, facility levels in terms of information, connectivity with other travel modes etc. Consider locations for upgrade to Travel Hubs under this analysis.</p>	YES
WI 2	<p>KCC will seek to roll out successful technology trials introduced at bus stops using 24/25 BSIP funding at locations across Kent, utilising the bus stop hierarchy to inform this.</p> <p>Further technology trials will be pursued as new advancements are made.</p>	YES
WI 3	<p>Work collaboratively with Parish Councils to Improve passenger experience and safety in rural villages through technological innovation. This will include the provision of battery powered real-time information and solar-powered lighting at key rural locations.</p>	YES
WI 4	<p>KCC will look to identify and engage with key tourist destinations to improve the infrastructure offer at these locations, increasing attractiveness of using sustainable travel to these locations and raising awareness through branding.</p>	YES

2025-2029 Initiative Proposals

Waiting and Interchange Facilities

Reference	Initiative Description	External Funding Required?
WI 5	Following the rollout of a number Real-Time Information screens in 23/24 and 24/25, KCC will continue the rollout of improved passenger digital information utilising its 'Bus Stop Hierarchy'. Consideration will be given to how integration can be maximised through this work – e.g. potential for screens at rail stations/health care centres etc.	YES
WI 6	KCC will engage with Kent Police to identify crime hotspots in the county. KCC will conduct a feasibility study identifying potential improvements to passenger safety, and the perception of passenger safety. This may include increased stop relocation, improved lighting in the area, working with District Councils to provide CCTV etc.	YES
WI 7	Continue to work in partnership with Southeastern, bus operators, Active Travel Schemes and local groups to improve Kent's transport cohesion. KCC will aim to create one travel hub for each EP area over the 25-29 BSIP period.	YES

2025-2029 Initiative Proposals

Bus Information and Network Identity

Reference	Initiative Description	External Funding Required?
PTII 1	KCC and Kent's bus operators will proactively promote the bus network and the role of buses in supporting strategic priorities and other activity such as tourism, environmental benefits, road safety etc. We will work with key partners to ensure public transport is publicised. KCC will work with organisations such as Visit Kent, National Trust and Kent Country Parks to produce publicity informing the public of the sites of interest in Kent which can be accessed by bus.	YES
PTII 2	KCC will Improve on street wayfinding signage between Bus, Rail and Ferry services to improve the ease of interchange between different modes. This will include arrows and maps detailing the public transport infrastructure located nearby.	YES
PTII 3	KCC recognises that a significant number of residents are not able to access the improved digital journey information. KCC will look to utilise paper-based materials to support the publicity of BSIP funded initiatives and campaigns to encourage the use of the bus.	YES
PTII 4	KCC will continue to provide and develop the interactive bus map provided with 23/24 BSIP funding (e.g. explore how fares information can be included from BODs).	YES

2025-2029 Initiative Proposals

Bus Passenger Experience – Passenger Charter

Reference	Initiative Description	External Funding Required?
BPE 1	Using the principles of the Kent Bus Passenger Charter, develop the means in which feedback can be provided online by passengers to KCC and operators. Consider whether this can be aligned with KCC's Bus Information Portal (delivered with 23-24 BSIP funding).	YES
BPE 2	Develop other physical means for passengers to provide feedback in line with the passenger charter – e.g. potential trial of feedback buttons on buses and ability to feedback issues/concerns with infrastructure at travel hubs.	YES
BPE 3	The support of an annual survey of passengers (and non-passengers) to understand levels of satisfaction and areas for development.	YES

On Bus Accessibility, Inclusion, personal safety and security

The areas of accessibility, inclusion, safety and security including walking routes to bus stops and waiting facilities are covered within other initiative categories.

Reference	Initiative Description	External Funding Required?
OB 1	Bus Driver Training – Work with SME operators to develop the training school and associated training materials, with an emphasis on passenger safety training and customer service.	YES

2025-2029 Initiative Proposals

Environment and Improvements to the bus fleet

Reference	Initiative Description	External Funding Required?
EAQI 1	The introduction of zero emission buses (for all day workings) on priority corridors identified through KCC's Air Quality Management Area Hierarchy:	
	Upper Stone Street, Maidstone	YES
	A2, Sittingbourne	YES
	Dartford Town Centre	YES
EAQI 2	Tendered services will invite bids for differing levels of emission standards, so that costs can be clearly identified.	YES

2025-2029 Initiative Proposals

Longer Term Transformation of the network – Alternative Delivery Models

Reference	Initiative Description	External Funding Required?
LTT 1	Dynamic Scheduling. Use Fastrack and another high frequency service in the east of the county to test London style dynamic scheduling for one year outside of London on High Frequency services to improve reliability. Approval needed by the Traffic Commissioner. GAL will be able to do this easily as they already have the software and experience from TfL contracts.	YES
LTT 2	£1 Bus Travel for Amazon Prime Members. Using the Fastrack network as a testbed, work with our partners at Amazon to measure the propensity for increased bus use with such app-based membership discounts..	YES
LTT 4	Bus Specific Town Planner/Developer Training. Design and implement a short training course for town planners and housing developers demonstrating the positive impact and necessary role buses must play in future design. With the ambition of future national adoption and mandatory status. With input from bus operators on optimal design.	YES
LTT 5	Growth of Fastrack BRT Concept: Through utilising recommendations within the commissioned Fastrack Expansion Feasibility Study, seek to develop and introduce the Fastrack model to other viable areas across the county.	YES

Commentary on Initiatives

Commentary on Initiatives

Network Development

NDI 1

KCC will secure ongoing funding that will enable the Council to work in conjunction with bus operators to protect the existing network, sustaining services currently supported through BSIP and BSIP+ funding.

Reduced off-peak bus usage and revenue plus increased operating costs has made much of the network commercially unsustainable. Currently, 49 services are operating only with financial support provided using BSIP/BSIP+ funding. Our priority in both our initial and this updated BSIP is to ensure we can sustain the current network before considering enhancements, but this will rely on a long-term funding plan.

NDI 2

KCC will work in conjunction with network operators to review the possibility of growing the rebased bus network, reintroducing services and improving frequencies, and introducing a more expansive evening and weekend network of buses on identified strategic bus corridors where there is new optimism for patronage growth and future sustainability.

During and since the pandemic, Kent’s bus network has contracted by around 20% with some services being reduced in frequency or coverage, and others withdrawn completely. KCC will use any funding available to ‘pump prime’ journeys or services; re-introducing frequencies and journeys previously removed where they can be sustainable again in the future and building on the existing network to expand coverage of the network through extended times and days of operation.

NDI 3

KCC will use the results of the Bus Connectivity Assessment complimented by analysis of outputs from the Network Planning tool to increase the proportion of Kent households with access to; business, healthcare, work, education, retail and leisure destinations within 30 minutes of bus travel and increase levels of rural connectivity to the core network.

The Bus Connectivity Assessment (BCA) completed in Spring 2024 considers whether the current bus network provides appropriate access to schools, employment centres, healthcare, retail and other destinations. KCC will use funding available to build upon improvements delivered in NDI2 to further expand the network. We will

look to deliver an Enhanced Inter-Urban corridor strategy that provides services operating at least every 30 minutes during the daytimes on Mondays to Saturdays and hourly at evenings and weekends and supplementing this enhanced core network with a range of transport solutions for more rural areas.

An indicative example of how the network could evolve following the delivery of NDI1, NDI2 and NDI3 (should funding be available through the NBS process) is included as Appendix D.

NDI 4

KCC will look to use its BSIP and any associated funding to support the key aspirations of more localized bus strategies and sustainable transport strategies forming part of District Council’s Local Plans such as the Canterbury Bus Strategy, the Ebbsfleet Sustainable Travel Strategy and the Tunbridge Wells Bus Strategy.

KCC will look to use its BSIP and any associated funding to support key aspirations in more localised bus and sustainable transport strategies within District Councils’ Local Plans such as the Canterbury Bus Strategy, Ebbsfleet Sustainable Travel Strategy and the Tunbridge Wells Bus Strategy.

Commentary on Initiatives

NDI 5

Secure the long-term access and use of a Network planning tool to continue to inform future BSIP reviews and responses to Bus Connectivity Audits.

Using BSIP funding, KCC has secured a network accessibility analysis and network planning tool. We are using this to inform our BSIP refresh and support work on the BCA. Funding would enable us to continue using this tool on future work in this area.

NDI 6

Strengthen data collection tools and processes to improve reporting, analysis, evaluation, and monitoring of network changes & improvements.

Developing and reporting on BSIPs, responding to BCAs and understanding and planning the network more generally are increasingly data driven. We will work to develop our data management and analysis capabilities to support this.

Bus Priority & Highways Management

BP 1

To progress detailed feasibility reviews and subsequent delivery of bus priority schemes on bus corridors identified in Chapter 2 – *Current Offer to Bus Passengers*. Many of these sites were also in Kent’s 2021 BSIP but do not yet have funding. A detailed review will be required to ensure the sites provide practical support in line with The Plan for Drivers and DfT guidance.

To promote bus travel effectively, we must ensure services are reliable and journey times are efficient. Bus priority seeks ways to attract bus users by reducing journey times. By identifying congestion hotspots, we understand where bus priority measures would create improvements and smoother journeys in busier areas. These are high traffic locations, requiring significant design and implementation to see real improvements. They remain a priority for KCC and part of our pledge to provide an environment where buses can be the preferred method of travel. We are also committed to ensuring any proposals are updated to reflect the current environment and wider ideals, including The Plan for Drivers. We recognise that that bus priority measures can look different in each location given the existing infrastructure and local environment.

BP 2

To identify and deliver a further package of minor highway improvements which may be beneficial to operators (and provide reciprocal benefit) following feedback from existing Punctuality Improvement Partnership meetings.

We have seen great success with the PIP initiative under the existing BSIP. With operators we have identified lower-level concerns and issues affecting wider punctuality and service levels. By enabling operators to make their own submissions, we have ensured this provides local, smaller-scale benefits in locations where funding would otherwise have been unavailable. The nature of these schemes has also meant the BSIP has reached areas of Kent where other measures may not. We aim to continue reinforcing the support provided by the BSIP funding. The number of submissions from operators countywide has been higher than expected, underlining the need for this funding source. This has given our PIP meetings greater direction and impact since proposed changes can actually be funded.

Commentary on Initiatives

BP 3

Work with Kent Borough Councils to use district Local Transport Plans and Strategies to identify additional locations (to BP1) for bus priority. Ensuring a well-rounded approach to transport which increases efficiency and impact. (e.g. Canterbury Bus Led Strategy)

Working with Borough councils on their wider Local Plans and Strategies, we seek to ensure that early opportunities for bus-led schemes will form part of our combined approach. We will ensure our transport strategies align and support the future of Kent's bus travel. Our changing landscapes and increasing residential and commercial development continue to provide opportunities to highlight bus priority at early stages. We intend to emphasise this link further to ensure measures are given greater importance in planning stages.

BP 4

Develop understanding of alternative methods of innovative data capture (such as mobile network data, real time sensors and BODS reliability outputs) to identify additional bus priority locations to BP1 & BP 3. Focus on those areas where delays exist but may be underrepresented by those experiencing delays and areas which improve bus operating speed and punctuality – i.e. addressing BSIP Targets.

We are aware that information about bus delays may be limited to known congestion and disruption hotspots. We need to consider the whole network equally and ensure we are actively seeking data on where interventions may be required. Keeping up to date with changing data capture methods means we can consider issues which may traditionally not have been as clear and obvious. The county will be visualised as a whole, which should reduce the time taken to identify locations. We recognise the need for continued improvement to the network: this initiative aims to keep us engaged with the lived experiences of Kent residents.

BP 5

Using the Traffic Management Act 2006 Part 6 powers to continue carrying out ANPR enforcement to ensure effective and safe bus priority. Investigating ways other traffic restrictions may improve bus priority, such as yellow box junction enforcement.

Our devolved powers to enforce certain traffic restrictions has helped reduce the impact of wider misuse on existing bus priority measures. We have already identified locations around Kent where ANPR enforcement will maximise journey time savings. With additional funding, we wish

to explore the full extent of these new powers to further strengthen our current measures and ensure success for any future similar locations. Through enforcing restrictions such as yellow box junctions in our busiest locations, we can expand any route improvements beyond physical infrastructure.

BP 6

Increasing the inspection regime for temporary Street works on bus routes to ensure works are completed without undue delay. Supporting the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 and managing pressures roadworks place on punctual bus movement.

Kent and its operators consistently face the challenge of disruption to the road network and bus services from planned or emergency road works. Utility companies and others who work on the highway are bound by legal notification and consultation requirements, but there is often a disparity between this legislation and rules that apply to public transport. It is therefore increasingly important that we combine the needs of bus users, utilities and our highway authority to maintain apparatus and repair roads. While we understand road works are necessary, we will look to bolster the inspection regime on

Commentary on Initiatives

routes with frequent bus services, to promote on-site attendance and requests for faster site clearance. Works cannot always be done quickly, but this initiative will give us the best chance of reducing disruption wherever possible.

BP 7

Installation of countywide RTIGXML Traffic Priority system. Enables bus ticket machines to provide our traffic light signals with real time location data to ensure priority through traffic light corridors.

Kent's road network is extremely complex, and it is often very difficult to install new priority routes for buses within existing infrastructure. We must therefore consider alternative ways to allow buses to pass smoothly through our busiest locations. The RTIGXML Traffic Priority system uses existing ticketing machines readily available on most services to notify linked traffic light systems of buses' approach, using preset GPS data feeds. Traffic signals will then be programmed to prioritise the approaching bus by changing to green. This technology can create a corridor where there are multiple signal-controlled junctions, providing a faster through route. We believe this is the most time- and cost-efficient method of promoting bus priority through these congested areas.

BP 8

Explore innovative methods of enforcement of parking restrictions to promote compliance.

We will look for alternative means to enforce parking restrictions. We will research and develop enforcement using methods such as Outdoor Individual Space Monitoring, where sensors detect parked vehicles during restricted times. Using technology, we may be able to enforce a wider area and make motorists aware they risk being caught even if the area is not actively patrolled, which should improve compliance.

BP 9

Parking policy and countywide strategy between district councils. Supporting district councils in retaining civil enforcement officers and attracting strong employment.

We will continue to reduce misuse of parking restrictions which obstruct the free-flowing movement of buses. As advised in the 2021 BSIP, we have worked with district councils to create focus groups and identified where and why enforcement issues may be occurring. District councils are concerned at satisfaction and retention levels among civil enforcement officers (CEOs). Through understanding the challenges CEOs face, we intend to support Districts through incentives and improved working conditions.

Fares and Ticketing

FT 1

Develop a network of multi-operator ticketing zones in the County using the Project Coral back office and EMV cards or M-ticketing with bar codes. Would need some expert resource if setup is not part of the Project Coral package. Assumes pricing at commercial fare levels if funding to reduce prices is not available.

The current programme for 2024/25 will equip bus operators with on-bus ticket machines able to work with QR codes and tap on/tap off readers. Using this capability, we will implement multi-operator ticketing once the nationwide Project Coral revenue allocation platform is up and running. Under this initiative, we would employ outside expert resources to set up ticketing zones across Kent on the Coral platform. The assumption is that these zones would be priced under this initiative at commercial pricing levels. However, if funding becomes available allowing us to launch with reduced pricing, the following two initiatives will build on this one to achieve it.

Commentary on Initiatives

FT 1A

Introduce a maximum day ticket fare across the County. This could replace the Discovery Ticket for travel within Kent and would affect top end single fares if the fare cap ceases.

Most of Kent’s bus network is covered by the Discovery Ticket which gives a full day’s travel across the South-East. Prices can seem high for more local travel just within the county of Kent, so we propose to use funding to support a more attractive price for travel within the county, at least for its initial years of operation.

FT 1B

Introduce local daily fare zones around Kent’s major towns. Potential for flat fares if the fare cap ceases. The level of fare discount will depend on future stability and the level of support available. Priority for Thanet (Superbus) and West Kent (larger number of operators).

To make bus travel even more attractive, we are seeking funding to introduce fare zones around the main towns in Kent, linking in with Project Coral. We would include day and period tickets and, if the current £2.00 fare cap ceases, look at introducing flat fares in these zones. Priority would be given to the Thanet area, to build on the LOOP Superbus initiative, and in West Kent where the

larger number of operators means multi-operator ticketing would be most beneficial.

FT 2

Support Home to School travel on the bus network with innovative ticketing pricing solutions.

School travel is a vital part of Kent’s bus network owing to the wide range of parental choice in the county. We have already used BSIP funding to offer lower ticket prices than would otherwise be possible, providing welcome relief to parents at a time of rising costs of living. If funding is available, we will continue to provide discounted travel for schoolchildren and the 16-19 age group on the Kent bus network.

FT 3

MaaS expansion to the rest of Kent if it is sustainable or cost neutral after the set up and introductory period.

BSIP funding will enable a Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) scheme in Kent Thameside in 2025 consolidating planning and booking platforms from different transport modes in one app. This complements the new developments in this area and the expanding Fastrack network but will also benefit existing residents. If the first stage is successful, we would seek further funding to expand the MaaS platform across Kent.

FT 4

Ticketing provision trial in Bus/Travel Hubs to speed bus boarding times. Simple EMV purchase of most popular tickets.

We are also planning to improve bus stations and key interchanges, including introducing Travel Hubs. To add to their attractiveness and improve boarding times, if funding is available, we would conduct a trial in at least one hub with a modern compact ticketing facility using EMV cards or phone scanners to enable quick purchase of the most popular ticket types.

FT 5

Expand the successful bus/rail plus bus ticket scheme to include, for example, stations in Swale and to relaunch the scheme to enhance its promotion.

Most Kent towns are already part of the PlusBus ticketing schemes giving a local bus add-on to train tickets. This initiative would expand this where not currently available and where there are good links to a station. We have identified stations in Swale as a gap in PlusBus coverage; a small amount of funding would enable us to run a promotional campaign in this area, and a more general relaunch of the ticket in Kent.

Commentary on Initiatives

Waiting and Interchange Facilities

WI 1

Using the bus stop hierarchy produced in 23/24 as a base, build on information currently available to produce a full asset database for each marked bus stop in the county. Subsequently seek to deliver improvements using this hierarchy as a base, including improvements to overall accessibility to the bus network, facility levels in terms of information, connectivity with other travel modes etc. Consider locations for upgrade to Travel Hubs under this analysis.

At present, we do not have a detailed database of bus stop infrastructure in Kent. This can make it challenging to maintain them, and lead to delays in repairs or confusion when replacing parts.

Subject to funding, we will conduct a survey of all our physical bus stop infrastructure to create a database. This would enable us to conduct repairs and react to vandalism more efficiently. It would also be used in conjunction with the hierarchy to identify high importance boarding points with sub-standard infrastructure for targeted upgrades.

WI 2

KCC will seek to roll out successful technology trials introduced at bus stops using 24/25 BSIP funding at locations across Kent, utilising the bus stop hierarchy to inform this. Further technology trials will be pursued as new advancements are made.

Following successful local trials, we will seek to roll out well-received new technology more widely. Since bus stops mark both ends of any journey, it is important that they are modern and attractive to new and existing passengers. This is particularly important in Kent, with its historic infrastructure and rural character.

To keep up with advances in technology, we will also commit to further trials in the 2025-29 BSIP period. It is increasingly important that we embrace new ways of working: allowing our infrastructure to become old and outdated reduces its appeal to new passengers.

WI 3

Work collaboratively with Parish Councils to Improve passenger experience and safety in rural villages through technological innovation. This will include the provision of battery powered real-time information and solar-powered lighting at key rural locations.

Unsurprisingly, bus stops with the highest footfall mostly lie within more densely populated urban areas. This tends to attract greater investment from local authorities looking for improvements that deliver value for money by benefiting as many passengers as possible.

We are keen to ensure that rural areas and smaller towns do not miss out. Rural areas offer unique challenges for public transport, including lack of street lighting and access to power. Subject to funding, KCC will use local knowledge to identify key areas within parishes where investment will be of greatest benefit. Improvements will be tailored to individual sites but will include access to simpler forms of real-time information and lighting.

WI 4

KCC will look to identify and engage with key tourist destinations to improve the infrastructure offer at these locations, increasing attractiveness of using sustainable travel to these locations and raising awareness through branding.

Kent is known as the 'Garden of England' and has numerous beauty spots, sites of historical significance and tourist attractions. Following the success of similar 'branded route' schemes, we

Commentary on Initiatives

want to promote these destinations and improve their accessibility via public transport. Those in rural locations would benefit from infrastructure modernisation.

Targeted infrastructure improvements and brand awareness campaigns will allow better access for those with mobility impairments, young children etc. Promoting sustainable travel to these locations will also aid the local economy, and potentially lower congestion.

WI 5

Following the rollout of a number of Real-Time Information screens in 23/24 and 24/25, KCC will continue the rollout of improved passenger digital information utilising its 'Bus Stop Hierarchy'. Consideration will be given to how integration can be maximised through this work – e.g. potential for screens at rail stations/health care centres etc.

In market research, residents highlighted improved provision of accurate service information. We are already delivering this through real-time information screens at urban centres, transport interchanges and bus stations.

There is however plenty of scope to take this

further. Having already purchased a back office' for real-time information, further investment will provide a greater return on spend. We can continue to use the bus stop hierarchy to identify priority spots to install information, such as at railway stations and health centres.

WI 6

KCC will engage with Kent Police to identify crime hotspots in the county. KCC will conduct a feasibility study identifying potential improvements to passenger safety, and the perception of passenger safety. This may include increased stop relocation, improved lighting in the area, working with District Councils to provide CCTV etc.

Passenger surveys showed perceptions around safety, particularly in darkness, are a major barrier to using public transport, especially for vulnerable groups. We therefore will work with passenger groups, district authorities, Kent Police, operators and other stakeholders to identify measures to overcome this barrier. This could include increased stop relocation, improved lighting, working with district authorities to provide CCTV and more.

WI 7

Continue to work in partnership with Southeastern, bus operators, Active Travel Schemes and local groups to improve Kent's transport cohesion. KCC will aim to create one travel hub for each EP area over the 25-29 BSIP period.

Today's transport environment is largely deregulated and Kent's bus and rail services are run by independent operators. While this has some advantages, it can lead to areas existing in a 'transport vacuum'. We will seek to bridge the gap between different transport modes, including providing walking and cycle routes, under our remit as the highway authority. Better integration of sustainable travel methods will give passengers a better experience and make the network more efficient overall.

To achieve this, we will commit to investing in specific travel hubs in each EP area before 2030. These will provide interchanges between different transport modes at key locations, identified via working groups with relevant stakeholders.

Commentary on Initiatives

Bus Information

PTII 1

KCC and Kent’s bus operators will proactively promote the bus network and the role of buses in supporting strategic priorities and other activity such as tourism, environmental benefits, road safety etc. We will work with key partners to ensure public transport is publicised. KCC will work with organisations such as Visit Kent, National Trust and Kent Country Parks to produce publicity informing the public of the sites of interest in Kent which can be accessed by bus.

Kent’s numerous leisure attractions are enjoyed by residents and tourists alike. Providing information on how to reach them by bus boosts both bus usage and visitor numbers. We are looking to establish partnerships with visitor organisations to improve this information, and give the public greater confidence regarding timetables, stopping points and walking routes.

PTII 2

KCC will improve on street wayfinding signage between Bus, Rail and Ferry services to improve the ease of interchange between different modes. This will include arrows and maps detailing the public transport infrastructure located nearby.

While our 2023/24 initiatives have focused on improving real-time on-street service information for bus and rail journeys, knowing where to go when interchanging is also important. We are looking to improve wayfinding signage, including maps and arrows, at interchange points between bus, rail and ferry, to make walking between these different modes easier. Where these facilities are not located next to each other, improved signage will boost public confidence around interchanging and help overcome a potentially important barrier to multi-modal journeys.

PTII 3

KCC recognises that a significant number of residents are not able to access the improved digital journey information. KCC will look to utilise paper-based materials to support the publicity of BSIP funded initiatives and campaigns to encourage the use of the bus.

Utilising existing BSIP funding, we are rolling out a bus service information portal, including an interactive bus map, as well as QR code technology at bus stops to provide service information. However, we recognise digital technology does not work for all members of the public. Bus operators have traditionally been responsible for paper-based service publicity. Subject to funding, we would seek opportunities to use these materials, including timetable information and publicity for other BSIP-funded initiatives and events, to raise awareness and boost bus use.

PTII 4

KCC will continue to provide and develop the interactive bus map provided with 23/24 BSIP funding (e.g. explore how fares information can be included from BODs)

The bus passenger information portal will combine real-time bus tracking information, timetables and a multi-modal journey planner on a single site. Working with operators and BODS, we will seek opportunities to develop this further, identifying additional bus data feeds, including fare information, vehicle occupancy, and service disruption, which could be beneficial to users.

Commentary on Initiatives

Bus Passenger Experience – Passenger Charter

BPE 1

Using the principles of the Kent Bus Passenger Charter, develop the means in which feedback can be provided online by passengers to KCC and operators. Consider whether this can be aligned with KCC’s Bus Information Portal (delivered with 23-24 BSIP funding).

Key principles within the Kent Bus Passenger Charter will include the wider passenger experience and how users report challenges to operators. Should funding be available, we could further develop our Bus Information Portal to include a feedback element, allowing passengers to report issues/successes with particular services separately to KCC.

BPE 2

Develop other physical means for passengers to provide feedback in line with the passenger charter – e.g. potential trial of feedback buttons on buses and ability to feedback issues/concerns with infrastructure at travel hubs.

To harness technological advances, should funding be made available, we will look to trial using feedback buttons on hand-picked key

routes to determine overall journey satisfaction. We could also investigate using technology to report issues or concerns with infrastructure at major travel hubs.

BPE 3

The support of an annual survey of passengers (and non-passengers) to understand levels of satisfaction and areas for development.

To build on survey work conducted to date to support our BSIP and EPs around passenger satisfaction we will expand our survey audience to reach non bus users.

On Bus Accessibility, Inclusion, personal safety and security

OB 1

Bus Driver Training – Work with SME operators to develop the training school and associated training materials, with an emphasis on passenger safety training and customer service.

Three small and medium sized operators plan to introduce a small-scale driver training school in 2024 with a grant from KCC. However, to be effective, the project needs to be expanded. We are seeking further funding to acquire mid-life buses for training and to contribute towards running costs.

Commentary on Initiatives

Environment and Improvements to the bus fleet

EAQI 1

The introduction of zero emission buses (for all day workings) on priority corridors identified through KCC’s Air Quality Management Area Hierarchy: Upper Stone Street, Maidstone, A2, Sittingbourne, Dartford Town Centre.

Decarbonising the bus fleet will be a gradual process, with some routes still requiring improvements in technology before they could be considered for electrically powered buses. In using public funds to accelerate the process, we look to maximise the environmental benefits by concentrating on areas with poor air quality. At this stage, we would be converting routes running all day rather than concentrating on school and peak-only buses, which make only one or two journeys per day through the area.

Upper Stone Street is part of the A229, a key exit route from Maidstone town centre, used by buses heading south and south-east on both local and longer distance routes. The wider A229 is part of the worst air pollution AQMA area in Kent, so conversion of buses here would have a wider impact.

Sittingbourne is the second worst AQMA in Kent. All-day bus routes in the town are provided by two operators, both of whom have investigated the use of electrically powered buses. The road layout, pedestrian crossings, and lights to control conflicting movements, creates stop-start traffic in the town centre. Emissions from diesel buses are consequently higher than in free-flowing conditions (although a number do meet Euro VI standards) but could be entirely eliminated with electric vehicles.

Dartford town centre AQMA area is the third worst for NOx and PM in Kent. Further investment here would complement the ZEBRA-funded investment on the Kent Thameside Fastrack contract, and also new spending by TfL, which is responsible for almost half of bus movements within Dartford town centre.

EAQI 2

Tendered services will invite bids for differing levels of emission standards, so that costs can be clearly identified.

Many tendered services are operated by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). For them, the cost of brand-new buses is a significant barrier, while the cost of depot electrification

could not be borne by a single contracted service, most of which employ fewer than three buses. In addition, peak hour extra journeys, for example school transport, often use older buses that carry out little or no other work at other times. However, some SMEs use former TfL buses with exhausts upgraded to meet, or nearly meet, Euro VI standards. Our tendering procedure will explicitly seek prices for vehicles that meet these higher standards, so we can assess value for money against the cost of using other vehicles that do not.

Commentary on Initiatives

Longer Term Transformation of the Network

LTT 1

Dynamic Scheduling. Use Fastrack and another high frequency service in the east of the county to test London style dynamic scheduling for one year outside of London on High Frequency services to improve reliability. Approval needed by the Traffic Commissioner. GAL will be able to do this easily as they already have the software and experience from TfL contracts.

While the UK bus network has done a good job of utilising better available data in fixed service planning, outside of London it has not translated this into real time service planning. Alongside improvements in live passenger information, including the development of Kent’s MaaS app, there is an opportunity to develop real time dynamic bus schedules to vastly improve service reliability for our customers. Fastrack operates in an area of Kent with the most variability in traffic conditions but as a high frequency operation it has the ability to adapt schedules instantly to reflect those current conditions. Developing a methodology for Dynamic Scheduling would allow journey planners to transform mobility, particularly in urban areas. The data we need to build dynamic networks and communication

channels already exist. It is a process and framework to legally work within that needs to be developed outside of London.

LTT 2

£1 Bus Travel for Amazon Prime Members. Using the Fastrack network as a testbed, work with our partners at Amazon to measure the propensity for increased bus use with such app-based membership discounts.

The way in which we consume things has changed. The idea of a wallet is no longer a piece of folded leather but a folder on a Smart device. Usership over ownership is the driving economic force now and buses should seek to sell products through the most popular retail channels and ‘shop windows’ of our potential customers. Over 90% of those that use or would consider using Fastrack state that they use Amazon to make purchases at least once a month. Over 60% hold Amazon Prime accounts, and nearly all of these memberships are obtained for specific discounts that can be obtained. Building on our existing contractual relationship with Amazon, we propose to test the idea that discounted bus travel would be an attractor to Prime membership and in return, Amazon would use this increased uptake to part

subsidise public transport and increase uptake through the attraction of exclusive discount. Digital products purchased would be compatible on services instantaneously and furthermore, prepaid products are likely to reduce boarding dwell times.

LTT 4

Bus Specific Town Planner/Developer Training Design and implement a short training course for town planners and housing developers demonstrating the positive impact and necessary role buses must play in future design. With the ambition of future national adoption and mandatory status. With input from bus operators on optimal design.

The planning and establishment of a new BRT system within a new or existing urban environment is a huge challenge. Although the initial concept may have germinated in the context of existing planning duties, it is advisable to structure, motivate, and select a collective BRT focused working group to develop the idea in the earliest planning phase of the system. A quality BRT system can only be achieved within the desired time frame through a detailed understanding of the requirements and required outcomes. Through the development of a

Commentary on Initiatives

nationally recognised training Programme and recognition by town planners and developers alike, prosperous communities can be built around fully functioning large scale bus networks.

LTT 5

Growth of Fastrack BRT Concept: Through utilising recommendations within the commissioned Fastrack Expansion Feasibility Study, seek to develop and introduce the Fastrack model to other viable areas across the county.

The commission would be for a further deeper dive analysis within Kent of where BRT could unlock further development opportunities as well as improving existing bus networks in specific locations. Canterbury has been identified as an additional opportunity area, alongside the existing research for eastbound expansion of the existing Kent Thameside Fastrack network.

5 Targets, Performance Monitoring and Reporting

Introduction

This chapter discusses how Kent’s BSIP and EP are monitored through an established meeting structure and progress to date on targets set in the 2021 BSIP & subsequent EP.

Approach to Governance/Monitoring and Engagement

In our 2021 BSIP, we noted that, regardless of any ultimate funding award, we wanted to use the opportunities provided by the NBS to create closer working relationships with stakeholders including district councils, bus operators, the wider public and most importantly bus users. We then noted how we wanted to use those developed relationships to monitor progress on our BSIP targets and EP commitments through a meeting structure designed to both meet statutory governance requirements and provide local engagement opportunities.

Although not required to by the guidance, we engaged widely with operators, local members, district and borough Councils and Kent residents when drafting our 2021 BSIP. This activity is summarised in Appendix A.

Meeting Structure to Support Kent’s BSIP and EPs

We have established a meeting structure, as outlined in the 2021 BSIP, to support the ambitions outlined above. The Enhanced Partnership Board (EPB) oversees Kent’s EP as a whole. It is chaired by KCC’s Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport and comprises other officers from KCC and bus operator representatives. The EPB votes on key changes or additions to our EP schemes and fosters positive dialogue between KCC and the bus operators.

We also run three Enhanced Partnership Scheme Monitoring Groups (EPSMGs), one for each EP Scheme area. These are attended by KCC and all operators in the area who have an EP commitment to attend. They are also open to the relevant district and borough councils. They consider any proposed decisions coming to EPB, have the ability to raise concerns and suggest items for the EPB agenda and provide a forum to discuss strategic improvements in the area concerned.

In January 2023, we relaunched our Punctuality and Improvement Partnership (PIP) meetings. These support bus operators in all aspects of KCC and District Councils’ network management responsibilities, tackling issues such as bus priority scheme identification and design, network and

roadworks management and reliability, parking strategy and parking enforcement. We used the PIPs to inform our 2023/24 BSIP initiative programme, particularly to identify locations for bus-related highway improvement schemes and for sites for ANPR enforcement.

Our 2021 BSIP noted that, before the NBS was published, Kent ran a number of Quality Bus Partnerships. These brought KCC, local operators and the relevant borough or district council together to discuss local strategic and operational issues such as planning, parking enforcement and infrastructure. While the EP required new statutory meetings– i.e. the EPB and EPSMGs – we did not want to lose this more local engagement. We therefore stated our intention to encourage district and borough councils to establish focus groups to replicate the positive local discussions at QBPs and feed into the wider EP meeting structure. Councils including Canterbury and Swale have established these groups successfully.

Performance and Targets

The 2021 BSIP set out six targets for improving Kent's bus network in 2024/25. Base information was provided for 2018/19 and 2019/20, the last two years before the Covid pandemic. However, we produced these targets before our BSIP award was announced. The allocation to KCC, and indeed to all authorities, whilst positive was smaller than we had hoped and as such would not support delivery of the full BSIP and therefore original targets. We therefore revised the targets in our EP schemes in April 2023 to reflect the actual award, which itself was delayed by almost a year.

Past performance	Actual 2018/19	Actual 2019/20	Actual 2020/21
Journey Time (bus speeds)	n/a	24.7 KM/hr	23.88 KM/hr
Reliability (Service timekeeping)	Nov19: 77.7%	Jun21: 85.0%	Nov 23: 72.6%
Reliability (Service operated)	Nov19: 98.7%	Jun21: 99.0%	Nov 23: 97.1%
Passenger numbers (Adjusted for Cross boundary routes)	52.6m	51.0m	44.8 m
Passenger satisfaction (Different basis from 2018-2020)	(86.0%)	(89.0%)	67.9%
Vehicle Emissions	n/a	26.1%	40%

Bus Speeds

In 2019/20, the average timetabled speed on Kent bus routes was 24.7 KM per hour. Our target was to maintain this in 2024/25 before any bus priority measures were introduced. However, the 2023/24 figure shows scheduled speeds of 23.88 KM/hour (representing a 12-month average from March 2023 – March 2024). This reflects many operators reworking their timetables to improve service punctuality in the light of performance standards set by the Traffic Commissioners. It is important to note that challenges facing bus services have been felt acutely in rural areas.

This has been demonstrated further within Kent's Bus Connectivity Assessments. Bus speeds are generally faster in rural areas where there is less congestion and better traffic flow. This has had an impact on this figure.

Service Timekeeping

While work is proceeding on the three bus priority schemes and smaller works measures in 2024/25, no significant improvements have yet been made to the road network on bus routes. The overall service reliability figure provided by operators in November 2023 was 72.6%. Although lower than 2019/20, that year had lighter traffic volumes owing to the pandemic, and congestion has returned to at least pre-Covid levels since then. As per bus speeds, most operators have regularly revised their timetables, but this has not kept pace with reality. Our target of maintaining the 2019/20 performance has therefore not been fully met, but the forthcoming bus priority measures should produce progress in future years. We aim to move to full ABOD reporting after we have worked through some issues reported by operators. As noted within earlier chapters of the BSIP, reliability of bus services is a big priority for both KCC and operators. For this reason, we have put a large focus on highway management within

the document and have included a number of initiatives for 25-29 which will look to improve this performance.

Service Operated

In 2023/24, 97.1% of scheduled miles were actually operated. This represents a fall against the base years and our target of 99.5% has not yet been achieved. The key reason was the acute driver shortage after the pandemic, which have now been largely addressed through management action and new recruitment policies. A new driver training facility for smaller operators will also help.

Passenger numbers

Passenger figures for routes operating into Kent were 44.8m in 2023/24. The data for 2018/19 and 2019/20 quoted in the 2021 BSIP document included figures for cross-boundary services, including Transport for London (TfL) contracted routes. These are no longer included where a majority of the route lies outside Kent, and the early-year base figures have been adjusted accordingly. In our 2021 BSIP we noted that the target for 24/25 was to grow the network by 10% when compared to the rebased (post covid) network. This rebased figure as of 22/23 was 42.3m

While passenger numbers have clearly recovered, they are still at just 85% of 2018/19 levels. This has not been helped by the significant reduction in ENCTS passholders using buses.

Passenger Satisfaction

Our Summer 2023 passenger survey showed a satisfaction rate of 67.9%. Before the pandemic, surveys carried out on Passenger Focus asked passengers about the journey they had just taken. From 2023, we changed to conducting interviews at bus stops focusing on people's views of their bus service in general. We will continue our annual surveys on this basis, with the 2023 data as our baseline. The results have been calculated by the three EP scheme areas, so from 2024, we will be able to follow trends in each part of the county.

Vehicle Emissions

In the 2021 BSIP, we showed 26.1% of services operating with buses to at least Euro VI standards. However, most of these were on TfL cross-boundary services, where this is the minimum contracted standard. There was just one zero-emission bus in Kent. We now have 40% of buses on Kent routes meeting Euro VI emissions, reflecting low investment by operators during the pandemic recovery period. However, there is

now investment in zero-emission buses on the Fastrack bus fleet, due to enter service in 2025, plus Stagecoach's new fleet of 11 Euro VI buses in East Kent in 2024.

We will set new targets for 2024/25 in all six subject areas through the EP process and reflect on both the 2023/24 figures and the BSIP schemes coming into effect in the next year.

6 List of Appendices

The appendices can be found at: kent.gov.uk:

Appendix A – Engagement Report from 2021 BSIP

Appendix B – 2024/25 Current Network Table

Appendix C – Supporting Maps and Data

Appendix D – 2029 Indicative Future Network Table

Appendix E – Letters of Support from Kent Bus Operators

National Bus Strategy

Kent Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

Version 2

July 2024

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