

Kent Bus Service Changes

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This note provides details of known and anticipated changes and cancellations to Bus Services in Kent. A summary of all significant changes is shown as the end of this note.

Background

During and since the pandemic the bus industry across the UK has been contending with the combined impacts of reduced bus use, a national driver shortage and increased staff, fuel and maintenance costs. This resulted in a very unsettled period where a number of service changes and withdrawals have been seen as operators were unable to sustain services.

Whilst some pressures have eased, essentially the same challenges to the network exist. Notably use of buses in the off peak in particular has not recovered and in parts of the County this remains as low as 60%. With the costs of running buses continuing to be affected by rising inflation and operator revenue reduced owing to less use, essentially the privatised (i.e. unsubsidised) model that has supported the network since de-regulation is currently broken jeopardising the future of parts of the network.

KCC position

The industry in Kent and across most of the UK remains de-regulated and as such there is nothing that KCC can do to prevent operators from making these commercial decisions.

KCC is in receipt of Government funding that will enable us to intervene to retain and replace some services, prioritising the protection of school services. However, this funding is time limited and therefore the use of funding to support or protect services has only be considered where there is the prospect of them being sustainable again in the longer term. To date, KCC has been able to use the funding available to protect services from withdrawal and the Council is now supporting an additional 49 services, mainly school buses, that would not otherwise be running.

The expected annual cost of supporting these services is £3m and this has exhausted the funding available whilst KCC's own budgets for the support of bus services are also fully allocated. Unfortunately, this means that KCC are not in a position to intervene when further services are subject to change or cancellation.

Whilst KCC understands the decisions that operators are needing to be made, it is important to reiterate that these are not decisions being made by KCC and enquiries about their withdrawal do therefore need to be directed towards the operator.

Changes to services

Bus number	Operator	Route	Change and impact	Date of expected change	Latest update
305	1 st Bus Stop	Vigo – Gravesend Schools	Service cancelled by the operator.	15 th April 24	KCC is not in a position to fund a replacement service. Services 306 and Vigo 1 offer alternative journeys for some passengers.
B150	Farleigh Coaches	Walderslade to Maidstone	Off peak journeys cancelled.	2 nd January 24	Schoolday only service is now operated by Chalkwell.
S11	Go Coach	Darenth – West Kingsdown - Wrotham – Sevenoaks Schools	Service cancelled by the operator..	10 th February 24	KCC is not in a position to fund a replacement service. Services S10, S12 and 308 provide alternatives for some passengers. Service 408 is to be re-routed to provide an alternative from Wrotham Heath and St Mary's Platt.