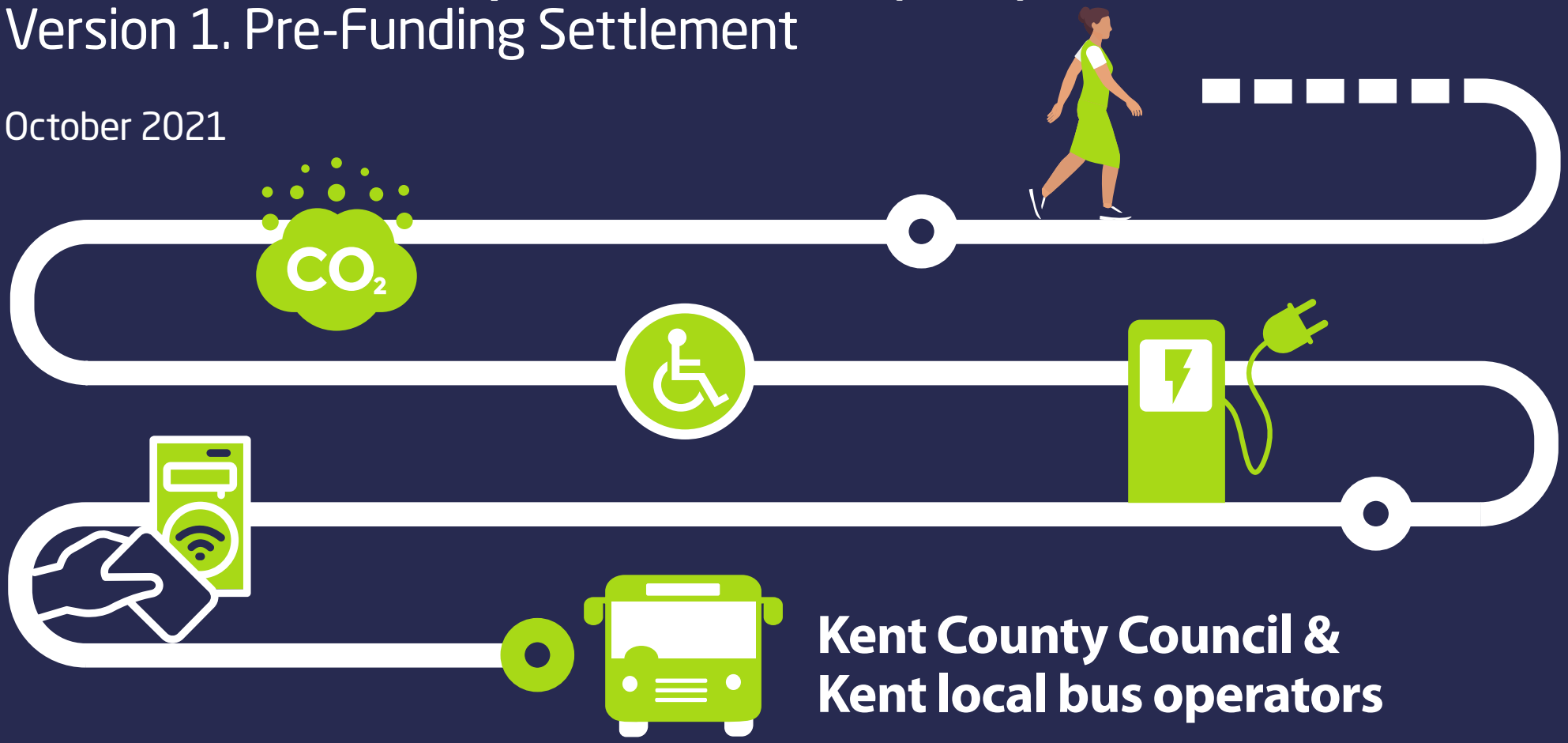
National Bus Strategy

Kent Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)
Version 1. Pre-Funding Settlement

October 2021



Kent County Council &
Kent local bus operators

Let's talk
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Kent County Council
kent.gov.uk

Foreword

David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

Both in my constituency and through my role as the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, I know how important buses are to the people of Kent.

In a rural county like Kent, alongside rail and other forms of public transport, buses play a particularly important role for our residents enabling even those living in some of the most rural parts of the county to travel to work or to school, and to access essential services such as the doctor or the supermarket.

I am proud that in Kent we have maintained our financial support for bus services whilst other authorities have needed to reduce or stop their expenditure in this area completely. In addition to providing the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme, we continue to spend £6m per year providing over 100 lesser-used bus services, and through our School Travel Saver schemes we spend another £10m each year helping reduce the cost of travel for school children.

We hope this will encourage more travel to school by bus, which will help reduce congestion.

We have been keen to embrace alternative models such as feeder buses and the new Demand Responsive Transport service in Sevenoaks. We have more of these planned, and believe they have a big role to play in transport provision in the coming years. In the right conditions such solutions can be more sustainable and provide a better, more tailored service for our residents.

We do all of this because you tell us how important buses are to your everyday life, but we want to do more and so do our operators. We have some fantastic relationships with our bus operators, and through our Quality Bus Partnerships we already work collaboratively and in a targeted way for the good of the bus network and its users.

The National Bus Strategy and our new Enhanced Partnership Schemes offer an exciting opportunity to take our efforts a step further and build on the good work that we have already done. This Bus Service Improvement Plan shares our vision for buses in Kent and demonstrates how we intend to:

- Recover from the impact of the pandemic and secure a sustainable bus network for Kent into the future
- Improve the public transport choices available for Kent residents, providing new and innovative modes with better value and transferable ticketing solutions
- Support our bus operators through our role as the highways authority
- Work closely with district councils on key issues such as planning and parking enforcement
- Provide easily accessible and interactive public transport information about transport options
- Make air quality and environmental factors central to our thinking and that of our partners
- Better engage with all stakeholders and bus users and ensure everyone has a voice.

The National Bus Strategy is the biggest change to the industry in over 30 years. It is also the greatest opportunity that we have had to work with all our partners and drive forward change. For this reason we undertook as much local engagement as possible; we want this plan to reflect what our communities want and need.

This pre-funding settlement version of our Bus Service Improvement Plan is ambitious and subject to funding, although of course we hope we can deliver as many of our initiatives as possible. We intend to grab this opportunity with both hands, and make things better for our bus users and residents.

David Brazier,
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

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1 Overview

Setting the Scene – Kent's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

Kent County Council (KCC), in conjunction with the county's 39 bus operators, has produced this Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in order to provide a strategic vision of how Kent's bus offer can be improved in line with the requirements of the National Bus Strategy (NBS). The plan sets out the existing bus offer in Kent through consideration of the current regulatory set up, the existing approach and known success stories. It also highlights the barriers and challenges that may be restricting greater bus use.

To support the formation of the plan we undertook significant data-led analysis of the current network. We also looked at associated measures that have been used to identify areas demanding attention. The plan then uses feedback from bus operators, Kent residents and other key stakeholders to consider potential areas for improvement and future development. These are captured under a set of key principles and more detailed initiatives. While some of these may be delivered within existing budgets, others will require NBS funding to succeed.

National Context

The National Bus Strategy

The NBS was published by the Government on 15th March 2021 and sets out an ambitious vision to improve bus services across England. The strategy seeks to provide greater opportunities for local leadership and aims to reverse the shift in journeys away from public transport and encourage passengers back on the bus.

The NBS covers a range of key areas which are integral to a positive experience of bus travel for passengers including network development, fares and ticketing, service integration, infrastructure, accessibility, innovation, service information, customer service standards and highway management. The Government is calling for improvements in all of these areas in order to a) support recovery of the bus industry as the country builds back from the Covid-19 pandemic, and b) grow bus usage levels across England as part of a drive to increase uptake of sustainable travel modes.

In order to deliver these objectives, the Government has committed £3 billion of new funding to Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) and bus operators. To access an allocation of the funding, LTAs and bus operators must commit to a new approach to service delivery, as detailed in their Bus Service Improvement Plan.

Delivering the National Bus Strategy

To deliver the aims and objectives of the NBS, the Government has set requirements on LTAs and bus operators. These must be adhered to in order to ensure the availability of existing national funding streams as well as a potential new funding allocation through the NBS process. These requirements are as follows:

- To produce and publish the initial version of a BSIP (this document) by 31st October 2021 detailing how, working closely with local bus operators and the local community, LTAs intend to deliver the aims and objectives of the NBS
- To introduce a new statutory path for the regulatory set up of bus services in the county by March 2022, including the use of franchising or Enhanced Partnerships. Both of these were made possible through the 2017 Bus Services Act.

The process involves extremely tight timescales to encourage increased use of bus services as quickly as possible.

What is a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)?

A BSIP is a strategic document which describes how LTAs and operators in a given area will look to achieve the goals of the NBS. The intention is that the BSIP will then provide a framework for delivery which can be introduced through new statutory processes from March 2022. The BSIP also acts in part as a bidding document for future funding available through the NBS. Funding from the £3 billion available will be essential for delivering many of the objectives of the NBS.

What is an Enhanced Partnership?

An Enhanced Partnership (EP) is a statutory agreement between an LTA and the local bus operators in their operating area. It sets out how partners will work together to deliver the objectives of the NBS and concurrently the BSIP. An EP provides more control to LTAs over the bus network in their area, with the ability to set standards with respect to issues such as customer service, vehicles and emissions. It does not however fundamentally change the commercial nature of the industry which in Kent sees 90% of journeys operated under no contractual relationship with KCC. Instead, an EP is about creating a governance set up which facilitates improvements to bus services through close partnership working and high levels of engagement.

Enhanced Partnerships are delivered through a combination of an EP Plan which sets out the strategic approach for deployment, and EP Schemes which carry the detail for the specific area concerned. It is the BSIP, revised to reflect the resulting funding allocation, that will form the basis of the EP Plan.

Kent's approach to the National Bus Strategy

KCC is fully supportive of the NBS agenda and sees it as a major opportunity for reflection, review and potential change. On a national level, including in Kent, the bus industry has suffered from a reduction in passenger numbers in recent years and this has been compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic. The NBS and its related requirements provide an opportunity to reverse this trend and KCC, in conjunction with local bus operators, believes it has produced an ambitious BSIP which, subject to funding, could deliver significant benefits for the county's residents.

Key headlines

Name of LTA: Kent County Council

Delivery Model: Use of Enhanced Partnership (EP) approach with one EP Plan for the county delivered through three EP Schemes serving Kent Thameside, West Kent and East Kent

Single or Joint BSIP: Single BSIP with close collaboration with neighbouring LTAs

Enhanced Partnership or franchising?

In June 2021, following a key decision by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, KCC published a statutory notice in line with Government guidance that it would be forming an Enhanced Partnership (EP) for Kent from March 2022. The EP model will allow KCC to build on the positive relationships it already has with the county's bus operators, in order to seek to deliver the aspirations of the NBS.

The use of franchising was given due consideration but was not deemed appropriate at this time. Franchising is not automatically available to non-mayoral authorities (instead requiring approval from the Secretary of State) and there are considerable questions over the implications on resourcing and subsequent service levels which could be delivered in the county. KCC also already has strong relationships with its operators which can be the basis for more formal statutory EP Schemes in the future.

Kent has an active bus market with 39 operators currently registered with the Traffic Commissioner to operate services in the county. Close ties already exist between operators and KCC through such initiatives as the Kent Travel Saver, Kent's eight Quality Bus Partnerships (QBPs) and through management of contracted local bus services. It is felt that these existing relationships will form a strong base for establishing an EP model. KCC received no objections from

operators to this approach during engagement conducted for the production of the BSIP.

Enhanced Partnership approach

Kent is the most heavily populated non-metropolitan authority in the UK. The county is made up of a mixture of larger urban centres such as Canterbury and Maidstone, and smaller towns and villages and more rural areas. The county sees unique situations for certain locations with for instance the Gravesham and Dartford areas having close proximity to London and the Dover and Folkestone & Hythe areas being most heavily impacted by cross-channel traffic. It also sees variations across its area in relation to key indices such as employment levels, levels of deprivation and education, and it has 12 borough/district authorities operating in a two-tier administrative set up. There are also variations with respect to bus service provision and which bus operators run services. For example Stagecoach and Arriva are the major national group operators in the east and west of the county respectively.

The above means that the county's geographical make up is not conducive to a single EP arrangement. As a result KCC intends to introduce an EP Plan covering its entire geographical area (see figure 1) but, within it, introduce three EP Schemes. This will allow the overall aims, objectives and targets of Kent's BSIP to be considered and reflected across the county as a whole, but with delivery tailored for different local circumstances, needs and operating territories.

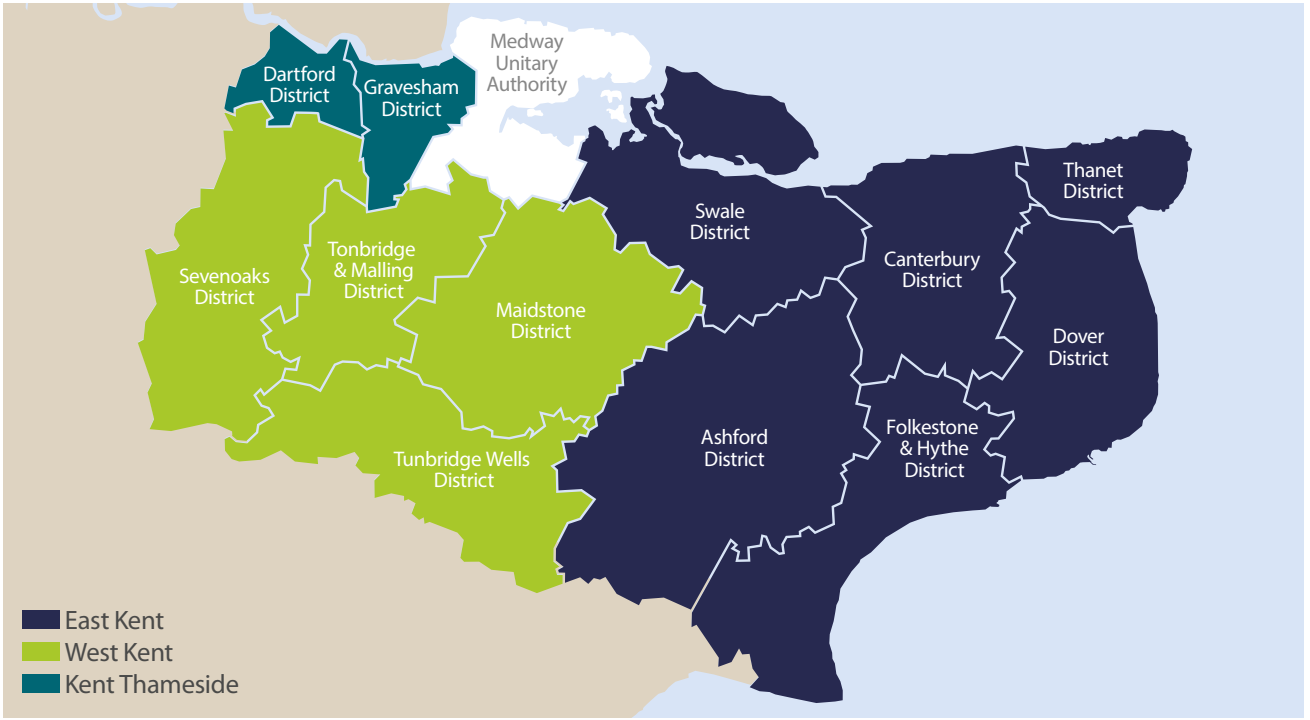
Kent's EP Schemes are intended as follows:

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. Map of geographical and EP Scheme areas



Neighbouring authorities

Kent has borders with four other LTAs: East Sussex, London, Medway (Unitary Authority) and Surrey. KCC has held conversations with all four LTAs to discuss the overall approach to BSIPs, common issues between areas and to seek agreement for collaborative working with respect to cross boundary issues. The differing characteristics and circumstances of each authority means that a joint BSIP was not deemed appropriate. However there is a strong willingness to work together and move forward on key issues such as ticketing and cross boundary implications of passenger charters.

Particular consideration was a given to a joint BSIP between Kent and Medway. However this was not pursued for a variety of reasons including:

- In comparison to overall mileage there are only a small number of routes which operate between the two areas
- There is a differing geographical and social-economic make-up between the two areas
- There is a difference in administrative set-up between the two LTAs. Medway is a Unitary Authority holding responsibility over areas such as planning, parking and bus shelters. In Kent these powers are shared with our district partners under a two-tier system.

Kent's bus operators have indicated support for this approach.

Further details on Kent's approach to EPs can be found in Section 4.1.

Kent's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

As detailed above, KCC and the county's bus operators are excited about the opportunities that the NBS could offer the industry and Kent's residents. We support the Government's view that the use of sustainable transport modes is important as the country recovers from the pandemic, and see this as a vital part of tackling key issues such as air quality and congestion. We have developed a combined approach which brings together some proposals which can be delivered directly and without funding through the NBS, complemented by others which will require NBS funding.

Working with our operators, we have produced an ambitious BSIP which looks to deliver on the national aims and objectives detailed in the NBS, but with a localised approach informed by Kent's circumstances. At the start of the process, we were determined that our BSIP would be locally driven as we know that bus services need to match local characteristics and requirements. For similar reasons this project has been delivered in-house through existing public transport officers supported by additional fixed term resource. We believe our BSIP demonstrates to Government the scale of ambition and belief in buses not just from KCC and operators but also from Kent's residents and key stakeholders who engaged with us in high numbers as we moved through the BSIP process.

Within our BSIP we have sought to highlight the strong work already underway in the county and some of the key success stories which can be built upon. Whilst timescales have been tight, we were determined that our BSIP would be informed by high levels of engagement. To this end we utilised a public engagement platform which generated almost 3,500 responses, and held stakeholder groups which included our district and other key partners, e.g. Department for Work and Pensions, Chamber of Commerce and Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC), as well as seminars with KCC's elected Members. We held workshops and surveys with our operators and identified nominated operator representatives for more direct involvement. We identified that there is an

implication and role for wider groups which are not party to EP requirements (e.g. community transport operators) and have looked to reflect this in our plan. We have brought this together through a market engagement report that was used to develop the content of our BSIP and the initiatives included within it. A summary of our engagement activity can be found in Appendix A.

Led by feedback received through our engagement activity, we developed a range of key principles to act as a framework and establish the vision for the BSIP. In turn these have been used to develop more specific initiatives to support enhancements across all areas of bus service provision. Some of these initiatives can be delivered through building on our existing strong partnerships at no cost or at no cost from the NBS, whilst many require funding from the NBS to deliver.

Strategic position at Kent County Council

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. Kent's LTP brings together the authority's transport policies by looking at local schemes and issues as well as those with a countywide or national significance. Within LTP4, KCC has identified bus improvements as a key strategic priority. As the county recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic, travel patterns change and wider factors such as cross-channel traffic variances due to Brexit have an effect on the county's roads, KCC has embarked on a review of LTP4, with the intention to establish a new plan.

In any new LTP, KCC will set out policies and proposals that reflect the BSIP and further its delivery. Sitting alongside LTP4 are a number of more detailed plans and strategies such as the Highways Asset Management Plan 21/22 – 25/26, Kent's Active Travel Strategy and the Freight Action Plan. It is intended that Kent's BSIP will sit alongside the LTP. It is also likely to align with a number of district LTPs.

Duration and arrangements for review

In line with the requirements of the NBS, KCC and operators intend the Kent BSIP to be a living document which is updated regularly. The BSIP will be reviewed at least annually using EP Governance processes (see Section 4.1 and Section 5). It will seek to reflect any changing circumstances in the county and to align with new or changing policy or national requirements. EP Boards will be utilised to inform the review process.

Specifically, this pre-funding settlement version of the BSIP will be reviewed following an understanding of the funding made available to Kent. This will allow the formation of a post-funding settlement version of the BSIP that will be adopted to align with the commencement of our EP schemes from April 2022, having been taken through usual KCC governance processes.

We anticipate that the post-funding settlement version of the BSIP and subsequent reviews will set the strategic framework and vision for buses in Kent until 2031. This will align with Kent's Local Transport Plan 4.

Key principles

Informed by our engagement activity, KCC identified a set of key principles which shaped the development of our BSIP and which are reflected in the detail of the plan. These principles are:

Regulation

1 Form Enhanced Partnership Agreements covering all public buses in Kent, setting ambitious targets with respect to punctuality, journey times, vehicle quality and accessibility.

Customer

2 Put the customer at the heart of everything we do through developing a passenger charter agreed through EPs and by developing the Bus Services Feedback portal.

Network developments

3 Seek to secure all available funding and prioritise its use to 1) support services, alongside BSOG, that have become unsustainable at reduced passenger levels until such time as other NBS initiatives drive growth and 2) further develop and enhance Kent's public transport through a range of initiatives.

Undertake a countywide and then localised network analysis to help inform the use of existing and new funding, with a view to providing service enhancements for rural communities where levels are currently lacking.

5 Continue to support the development of the community transport sector in Kent to supplement the core bus network.

Innovation and digital accessibility

6 Consider and embrace innovative transport solutions such as DRT and MaaS models as possible alternatives to the private car, and make use of BRT where appropriate.

Fares and ticketing

7 Provide flexible and better value ticketing options and use technology to provide cashless and ticketless solutions on all operators' services.

Public transport information

8 Improve the quality and accessibility of public transport information, including the provision of a one-stop-shop for live bus times and fares information and making greater use of technology e.g. for voice announcements.

Accessibility

9 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.

Environment and air quality

10 Promote the role of buses in solving air quality issues and work with operators and other stakeholders to improve emissions standards. This would include using funding to support the move from diesel to emission-free vehicles.

Infrastructure, network management and bus priority

11 Put buses at the centre of decision-making in respect of new road schemes, planning and developments, and support bus operators and services in KCC's role as the highway authority. Seek to improve bus journey times on key congestion corridors in order to deliver related benefits such as air quality, reliability and passenger usage.

Schools transport

12 Continue to promote the bus and the convenient, cost effective and sustainable means for travel to School and College. Seek to provide suitable and reliable journeys for all significant demands and attract funding to ensure that we can continue to support parents with costs through our Travel Saver Schemes'

2 Current offer, challenges and future thinking

Buses in Kent

In a large rural county like Kent, the bus network plays a major role in connecting remote, less populated areas with essential services and local centres. For this reason, KCC and Kent's bus operators have fought to protect service levels through a combination of funding and partnership working. However it is acknowledged that in every area of provision there is more that can be done. Our Bus Service Improvement Plan sets out a range of ambitious initiatives to address identified challenges and shortcomings across all aspects of service provision.

Current operating context

As is the case in most parts of the UK, bus services in Kent operate in a de-regulated market outside the control of KCC. The Department for Transport, not KCC, is responsible for the licensing of operators and services. In this de-regulated environment, operators provide services at their own discretion and set vital features such as routes, timetables, frequencies and fares.

Around 90% of all bus journeys in the county are provided on this commercial basis. They do not attract subsidy from KCC, but run only for the revenue generated by passenger usage.

Covid-19 challenge and the future

Throughout the pandemic, KCC has worked very closely with all its transport providers to ensure that services continue to operate and are provided in line with emerging guidance. Our relationships with bus operators in particular have strengthened as a result of this. From a financial perspective, KCC supported the network by maintaining payments to operators for contracted bus services, and freezing pre-Covid re-imbursement levels for concessionary schemes. This, coupled with other support provided by the Government, ensured that buses continued to operate and we avoided a significant reduction to service levels in Kent.

However, it is acknowledged that this challenge remains. Covid restrictions resulted in a fall of 66% of passengers on Kent's bus network in the 2020/21 year. KCC continues to work closely with operators and collectively we are confident that ongoing financial support in the form of the Bus Recovery Grant and concessionary travel payments will sustain the network until April 2022. At this point, exceptional funding from Government is expected to cease, and reimbursement will be based on actual usage.

Consideration also needs to be given to the pressure on KCC finances, particularly in discretionary areas and with challenging operating conditions caused by increased congestion and running times, and rises in costs such as fuel, wages and insurance. For these reasons, it has been difficult for the council and Kent's bus operators to be ambitious in recent years.

As well as any additional funding that might be forthcoming, the NBS and BSIP represent a positive framework for supporting network recovery. Initiatives in the form of enhancements to public transport information and ticketing will be used to encourage passengers to the network with a view firstly to recover patronage to pre-Covid levels and ultimately to exceed them. Patronage targets will be set on an increasing scale through our Enhanced Partnership (EP) Process.

Taking account of the above, KCC is prioritising BSIP initiatives that will maintain commercial and subsidised service levels consistent with or similar to the pre-pandemic network. Having secured this base level of provision, additional funding will be used to deliver a range of aspirations that will, be prioritised through future stakeholder engagement.

More generally, whilst KCC and Kent's bus operators have continued to maintain standards and levels of provision, it is acknowledged that there is scope for significant improvement.
In respect of bus information, ticketing, fares, infrastructure, innovation and digital accessibility, KCC has identified specific areas for development. These are outlined in respective sections of the BSIP, along with initiatives for improvement in each area.

Council involvement

KCC has to date managed to protect its allocation of funding to subsidise socially necessary but non-profitable bus routes. Despite its discretionary nature, the council continues to spend around £6m per annum on financial support for over 100 services or contracts that would not otherwise operate. These form the other 10% of Kent's bus journeys.

In addition to this more direct funding involvement with the bus network, KCC has over many years fostered strong and positive working relationships with its bus operators. In some instances, these are formalised in the form of voluntary Quality Bus Partnership agreements. KCC is the lead partner on Kent's eight Quality Bus Partnerships (QBPs) which cover the districts of Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe, Maidstone, Swale, Thanet and Tunbridge Wells.

QBPs consist of KCC, the local district council and the primary commercial bus operators, bringing together those responsible for supporting and delivering bus services through a targeted approach. The aim is to deliver bus service improvements through a combination of funding, KCC's highway management role, parking policy and enforcement, development planning and bus operator investment and service delivery.

To date our QBPs have established good working relationships and delivered successful schemes and service enhancements. Using the meeting and governance structure we developed to support and monitor our EP Schemes, we intend to establish a similar working approach with all district councils, including those without a current QBP.

To cement these relationships, KCC intends to form Memorandums of Understanding with all district councils. These will be used to establish bus support across a number of areas of respective responsibility, including parking enforcement which in Kent is devolved to district councils.

Whether in QBP areas or otherwise, KCC also supports the bus network through the provision and maintenance of bus stop infrastructure, competing for funding and priority for highway and other schemes, supporting operators to evolve their environmental standards and increased use of innovation. KCC also supports community transport local schemes with funding and expertise.

The largest area of direct financial support from the council is to passengers, through the subsidising of fares through Kent's Concessionary Travel Schemes.

In addition to the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme, KCC reduces travel costs for students through our KCC Travel Saver schemes which provide free at the point of use transport for eligible children. There is also a policy of using the public transport network for the transportation of children entitled to free transport to school. The result is a particularly strong peak time network, which in turn supports the provision of many services throughout the day. It also supports a greater than usual number of services provided commercially by other operators, resulting in improved competition for tendered and commercial bus work.

KCC currently employs 13 members of staff, from senior and middle management to administrator level, who support the delivery of bus-related services.

Delivery

As well as any additional funding that might be forthcoming, the NBS, BSIP and EP schemes represent a positive framework for supporting network recovery.

Although it is not fundamentally changing the deregulated and commercial nature of the bus network, KCC is intent on forming BSIP and Enhanced Partnership schemes that promote close working relationships with operators and stakeholders, and permit more direct influence on standards and outcomes.

The bus network in Kent

Kent's bus network is well established and consists of 533 services provided by 39 different operators.

Two national group operators provide 49% of all services in Kent, with Stagecoach being the dominant operator in the east of the county and Arriva running many of the services to the west.

The **West Kent** area of Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells is a semi-rural area with several small to medium size towns including Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. The area is bordered by the remainder of Kent, Medway, East Sussex, Surrey and the London Boroughs of Bromley and Bexley. The population of more than 500,000 has a slightly higher average age than the national average and are relatively affluent when compared with the rest of the country.

The area has regular train services to London and supports a strong commuter coach network. Bus services across the district are provided by both large national companies and middle to small local bus operators. Most bus services operate on a commercial basis with the remainder requiring local authority support. Commercial services tend to operate six or seven days a week whilst supported services mostly operate on weekdays only. A few supported services cross the county boundary and are jointly funded by both KCC and the neighbouring authority.

The largest local bus provider is Arriva Kent & Surrey, who provide services from their three depots in Maidstone, Northfleet and Tunbridge Wells. Most of the other services are provided by local independent companies based within the area. Buses used on the local network include minibuses, full sized single-deck and double-deck vehicles. In recent years the age profile of local fleets has improved, with a high proportion of Euro 5 and Euro 6 specification vehicles now in everyday use.

Together with traditional registered local bus services, there is a popular Demand Responsive Transport scheme operating with county council support within the district of Sevenoaks.

A large proportion of bus users are students attending the many secondary schools in the area. In particular Kent's grammar schools generate a large number of longer and more complex journeys. These schools attract students from a wide geographical area across the county and from neighbouring authorities.

The **Kent Thameside** area covers the districts of Dartford and Gravesham including the riverside market towns of Dartford and Gravesend and a rural hinterland 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 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 system has been introduced. This will enable true public transport orientated development to be planned and built around an efficient transport network.

The bus network is largely operated by Arriva and London Buses, who link in from the London boroughs of Bexley and Bromley. Urban services are amongst the most frequent in the county with largely commercial evening and Sunday services operated. The rural area is more challenging to serve. Routes are largely on the main road network but there has been some decline in service levels in recent years.

In **East Kent,** an area comprising the districts of Ashford, Folkestone & Hythe, Dover, Canterbury, Thanet and Swale, the majority of 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 operating largely tendered or peak school routes. The exception is in Swale, where independent operator Chalkwell provides several commercial services on the Isle of Sheppey.

The East Kent area is dominated by several large towns with their own well established town networks connected by numerous inter-urban services. Of note is the City of Canterbury, which is a focal point of the East Kent network. Canterbury boasts a central bus station acting as an interchange where passengers can connect to an array of services serving the East Kent area.

Local bus coverage in rural areas is limited and there is little by way of a commercial offering. Around £3m of Kent's supported bus budget goes to supporting socially necessary bus services in East Kent, ensuring these rural communities have access to essential services.

Gap analysis

Whilst the network in Kent is still considered to be comprehensive in its coverage, it is acknowledged that the obvious focus for commercial bus operators is on the urban areas and interurban corridors which benefit from higher levels of investment and associated service levels. This means there are areas of the county that do not benefit from a level of service appropriate for their scale or demographics. Other, typically rural locations, have no service at all beyond limited schemes such as Kent Karrier (dial-a-ride) or more locally delivered community transport schemes.

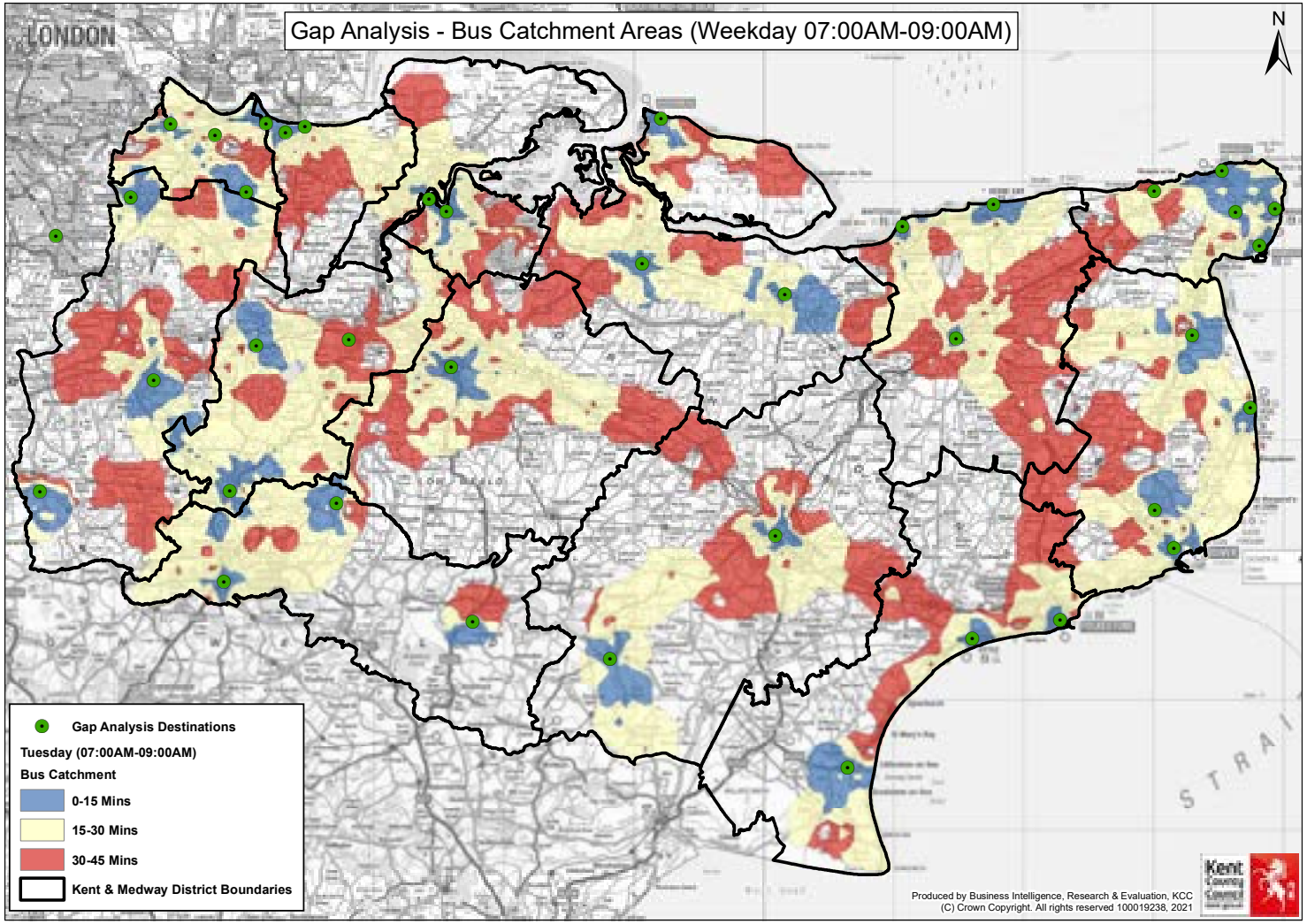
Some corridors can appear to be 'over bussed' as they enter immediate town centres. However as all these services tend to have unique origins, there is limited opportunity to re-deploy some of the them to other outlying areas. Similarly, whilst KCC intends to use the BSIP process – and a proportion of available funding – to enhance bus priority and reduce journey times, the potential for this to free up 'whole' resources (in this case vehicles and drivers) for use elsewhere is considered to be limited.

Feedback received through ongoing BSIP and previous consultations identified that major barriers to greater bus use lie in service detail, e.g. the absence of a service, the absence of appropriate service frequencies or the absence of journey choices.

If service levels are a priority area, they must underpin our Improvement Plan. We therefore undertook analysis of the current network to identify disparities in relative service levels. In addition we completed a countywide exercise, overlaying the bus network and associated service levels on a base map showing population and basic demographical information.

As a result we were able to identify parts of the county where service levels may not match perceived need, based on population density and associated demographical information. More detail on our Network Gap Analysis can be found in Section 4.3.

Figure 2. Output from the Network Gap Analysis



This analysis will be used as part of developed methodology to prioritise the use of available revenue funding to a) deliver Year 1 service initiatives derived from public and stakeholder engagement, and b) identify areas of the county for more detailed network and need analysis.

To inform the use of any revenue support funding beyond that required to sustain current service levels, more detailed network analysis will be undertaken in areas identified in the countywide analysis as having lower accessibility levels. An example of this more detailed network analysis can be found in Appendix D. This study relates to the outlying areas of Maidstone that have been identified by KCC as having poorer levels of accessibility. They contain a representative mix of commercial and subsidised services and school flows, and there are already examples of service delivery models.

Through the BSIP, KCC wishes to secure funding to support similar studies in other areas. This will lead to a more intelligent evolution of the network including consideration of commercial service levels, existing KCC funding, the relationship with dedicated school transport services, adult social care and hospital transport and the role of alternative service models such as DRT, where they may be a more appropriate solution to a conventional bus service. It is thought that this more considered approach, applied to Year 2 and Year 3 service initiatives, offers the best chance to explore opportunities to re-purpose existing funding, whether that be KCC funding or that relating to client transport services. Services and service levels can then be orientated so they have a greater chance of being sustainable at the end of the funding period.

For more detail on our plans for network development please refer to:

Section(s)	4.3
Appendix	C, D, E
Initiatives	NDI 1-6

Alternative delivery models

Kent can already evidence an openness to, and examples of, alternative transport types. The county delivered a Bus Rapid Transit Scheme in the form of Fastrack in Dartford, has the Go2 Demand Responsive Transport Scheme in Sevenoaks and has introduced feeder services to replace some more conventional bus services in Maidstone.

New BRT and DRT schemes are already planned for delivery during the term of the Kent BSIP and our experience of feeder services suggests these may be a better alternative to the 'village to town centre' approach. KCC and bus operators will also consider the potential for Superbus networks to be introduced in the county, turning already successful services to a premium standard network.

Our BSIP initiatives are broad in scope and not limited to conventional end-to-end bus services. For example, while they are not the answer in all cases, KCC is of the view that DRT may be more appropriate than conventional bus services in some parts of the county. The detailed area

and network analysis used to inform our Year 2 and Year 3 service initiatives will ensure due consideration is given to embedding DRT and feeder services as part of a network solution, taking account of all existing financial support and other parts of the private transport network such as adult social care and patient transport. It will be a 'total transport' approach to service delivery.

In relation to areas already supporting higher levels of bus services or in areas where there is the potential for higher levels of bus use such as large-scale developments, the council will continue to employ BRT solutions where this is justified. We also intend to develop a method for assessing where BRT or Superbus services would be appropriate and justified.

Finally, KCC will continue to support the community transport sector financially and with expertise to assist the delivery and sustainability of localised transport schemes.

For more detail on our plans for alternative services please refer to:

Section(s)	4.4
Appendix	D
Initiatives	NDI 3, ADMI 1-5

Fares and ticketing

Fares and purchase options are set by operators, and local authority intervention or influence in this area is difficult for a number of reasons. As a consequence, fare structures can vary from operator to operator making them overly complex and with limited examples of multi-operator ticketing initiatives.

Analysis of commercial fares shows a countywide average for adult single and return fares of £2.36 broken down as £1.98 on urban services and £2.58 on other routes.

By proposed EP areas, average fares are as follows:

- East: £2.21
- West: £2.63
- Kent Thameside: £2.18

These figures reflect the variations in service types and distances across different parts of the county, and are a good example of why multiple EP schemes are proposed for Kent. Multiple schemes will allow us to tailor actions for each area.

The English National Concessionary Travel Scheme is designed to remove 'cost of travel' as a barrier for significant numbers of passengers travelling off peak. KCC has a similar intervention for school children travelling at peak times, namely our Travel Saver Schemes. The schemes offer free at the point of use travel on buses in Kent for any eligible child. Whilst customers pay a fee for the pass, the overall cost is estimated to be around half of the cost of tickets bought directly from operators. Through the NBS, KCC is looking to attract funding that enables this support to continue.

Other fare and ticketing initiatives are orientated towards removing barriers to future initiatives by upgrading operators ETMs where needed with modern electronic ticket machines and

back-office functionality. This would support our intention to introduce a genuine multi-operator ticketing scheme, making available a range of flexible ticketing options (for example to take account of post pandemic working patterns), at consistent and better value cost. These would be purchasable through a range of mechanisms including cashless and ticketless solutions.

For more detail on our plans to improve fare levels and ticketing options please refer to:

Section(s)	4.5
Appendix	N/A
Initiatives	FTI 1-6

Infrastructure and bus priority

Infrastructure, including bus priority is largely shared between KCC and local councils. As the highway authority, KCC maintains overall responsibility for bus infrastructure, but bus shelters in urban areas are typically provided through district council advertising contracts. Some shelters in rural areas are provided by parish councils with grant funding from KCC. In respect of priority, as the Local Transport Authority, KCC would be responsible for the delivery of schemes. However, positive

engagement with district councils is needed in respect of any bus only features where there is devolved responsibility for enforcement.

In addition to funding, historic barriers to the delivery and enforcement of bus priority schemes have been nervousness around the sensitivities of the schemes, and resourcing the back-office requirements for enforcement. In respect of infrastructure, financial pressures meant that the costs of ongoing maintenance made it difficult to support anything other than the most basic levels of bus stop furniture.

KCC has developed a range of initiatives and undertaken work to inform the focus of the BSIP with a view to improving the quality and accessibility of bus stop infrastructure, particularly in respect of information. In addition, we will seek funding to develop twelve bus priority schemes across our EP scheme areas during the three year BSIP period.

To underpin these initiatives and decide how schemes and initiatives are prioritised, KCC is forming a bus stop hierarchy taking account of service and usage levels, our interchange analysis and the strategic importance of the location. Busier locations will be prioritised for better infrastructure with enhanced levels of innovation and more facilities, enabling these locations to act as interchange points. Similarly, KCC is using its Kent Traffic Model to identify key bus corridors that suffer from high levels of congestion and reduced traffic speed. This will identify a priority list for the exploration and eventual introduction of bus priority measures.

For more detail on our plans for better infrastructure and improved bus priority please refer to:

Section(s)	4.3, 4.6
Appendix	N/A
Initiatives	IPI 1-7

Environment and air quality

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 co-ordinated 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. Through our BSIP, we want to ensure that buses contribute more to the Low Emissions Strategy and we have developed a series of initiatives to progress this.

Firstly, the council will develop a hierarchy – essentially adopting Air Quality Management Areas – and use these as the basis to prioritise bus air quality initiatives. We will 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 secure funding to support initiatives concerned with making more use of electric and hybrid vehicles. We intend to convert the Fastrack Thameside (BRT) network to full electric operation from 2023.

For more detail on our plans to use buses to meet the environmental and air quality challenge please refer to:

Section(s)	4.7
Appendix	N/A
Initiatives	EAQI 1-4

Innovation and digital technology

Innovation and technology contribute to almost every aspect of bus service planning and delivery, and KCC acknowledges that in many areas these benefits and opportunities have not been fully embraced or utilised. Already, some of the work undertaken to inform our BSIP has demanded greater use of technology. Increased use of these resources will be imperative to supporting the initiatives in a variety of areas identified for improvement in the BSIP.

Our countywide network analysis and the more granular Maidstone Area Study (included as Appendix D) were data-led studies making use of software that assisted with interpretation, represented outcomes and proposed solutions. KCC will continue with this data-led approach and intends to secure planning software that can,

in time, be embedded within KCC's criteria for the support of socially necessary bus services. This will inform our allocation of funding, particularly towards service and bus priority measures.

To support future fares and ticketing initiatives, KCC is seeking funding to equip the operators of all public bus services with the most modern electronic ticket machines. These accept smart tickets, contactless payments and fare capping, and support enhanced levels of reporting on usage, vehicle and journey tracking and Real Time Information. KCC hopes that supporting advancements in these areas will remove barriers and empower operators to deliver commercial enhancements into the future. It will also assist the necessary journey planning and back-office facilities needed to support a MaaS (Mobility as a Service) approach. We believe MaaS could add significant value if deployed in the right areas with the right conditions.

Finally, KCC also wants to make better use of technology at passenger interfaces, supporting a better experience for passengers who can access more live information and make use of accessibility-friendly features. As part of our approach to improving passenger information, KCC wishes to include Real Time Information as part of its offering, both on the web and in some instances also at bus stops. We would also like to explore the roll out of next bus stop audio technology within buses across the network, to meet some of the ambitions set out in recent accessibility guidance.

For more detail on our plans to use innovation and digital technology please refer to:

Section(s)	4.8
Appendix	N/A
Initiatives	IDA 1-4 & FTI 4

Public transport 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. At the current time, the council's direct involvement in passenger information is restricted to the coordination of printed information at the roadside.

In KCC's view, the recent cessation of the Traveline South East Service and the greater reliance on Bus Open Data Services to deliver Information means there is not currently a resource for consolidated

information relating to all bus services in our region. One of our priority initiatives therefore is 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. This can be

further developed to be part of a Mobility as a Service (MaaS) platform

This information will be made accessible from bus stops using QR codes opening up Real Time Information without the need for Real Time Information screens. However, feedback from stakeholders has identified an appetite to see Real Time Information screens 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.

Finally and more generally, KCC will work with operators to better promote the bus network, encouraging greater bus use and supporting recovery from the pandemic.

For more detail on our plans to improve public transport information please refer to:

Section(s)	4.9
Appendix	N/A
Initiatives	PTII 1-6

Highways and network 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.

Through our Quality Bus Partnerships, the Punctuality Improvement Partnerships and more generally in our capacity as the highways authority, KCC and our district council partners look to support bus operators through a shared approach to highway and network management. Accepting that there will always be competing demands on road space and priorities, we suggest a range of initiatives to ensure bus services are a primary consideration across all aspects of highway and network management.

A Memorandum of Understanding with district councils will be formed to capture respective responsibilities in supporting buses through a bus orientated approach to planning, roadworks management, bus priority and parking strategy and enforcement. To support these initiatives, the council is seeking funding to pay for additional resource which will be directed to scheme design, parking enforcement and monitoring.

For more detail on our plans to support services and operators through our approach to highways and network management please refer to:

Section(s)	4.3, 4.10
Appendix	N/A
Initiatives	HNMI 1-9, NDI 5 & IPI 6

3 Targets

Headline targets

Approach

KCC and Kent's Bus Operators are keen to include targets within this plan to ensure any actions taken have clear focus and objectives. The selected targets are specific and relevant to the principles included in this document. They are designed to be deliverable whilst also being challenging, particularly in the current post-pandemic environment. The targets are also measurable against our BSIP aspirations.

Targets are based on data from years 2018/2019 and 2019/2020, which shows pre-Covid and during-Covid trends. Future aspirations will be set at 2024/2025 to reflect a post-recovery situation, with time for the actions taken to have an effect. These target levels are shown in Section 6 'Overview Table'.

The targets set out in this pre-funding settlement version of the BSIP will be reviewed and updated when the plan is republished. This will happen at least annually, to reflect the ongoing operating and economic environment and the levels of funding achieved.

The Enhanced Partnership (EP) development process will take into account the BSIP targets, which will then form the basis of the EP Plan. The three EP Schemes in Kent will also be based on the principles of these targets, suitably adapted to meet local circumstances and priorities. Actions will be developed to achieve these targets, progress will be closely monitored and all three EP Schemes will be developed further in the light of the results.

Further details of the EP process is outlined in Section 4.1 of this plan whilst the intended approach for ongoing monitoring and review of the schemes is included in Section 5.

The Summary of Initiatives in Section 4.11 links the planned initiatives in the BSIP to the targets discussed in this section. As can be seen, the two correlate well and the targets will give a good view of the initiatives' progress.

The proposed targets are outlined below. They reflect the contents of the DfT guidance together with two further targets for enhanced coverage.

Target 1 1
Journey time (bus speeds)

The effectiveness of the bus network is demonstrated by how efficiently vehicles can use the available road space. This affects journey times for passengers and is a significant driver in the attractiveness of a bus service to potential bus users. Speeds can be improved by introducing measures to improve the flow of buses and to minimise delays on bus routes.

The average bus speed in Kent has been calculated from data extracted from the Kent Traffic Model, combining route by route performance to form a county average. Unfortunately, we do not have historic

information using this method. The current calculated figure of 24.7 KMs/hour will therefore represent our initial baseline, against which future progress can be measured.

This target is supported by the following Initiatives:

HNI 1-9, IPI 6, ADMI 1, 2, 4

Target 2
Bus reliability (service timekeeping) 2

Public engagement carried out as part of this plan's development showed reliability to be one of the top three concerns. However planned timetables can only realistically reflect an average of normally operating bus services, as extending bus running times to cover every eventuality would build in unnecessary delays to services if drivers sat and waited for time in normal traffic conditions. Therefore when incidents do happen there are delays which clearly cause inconvenience and affect passenger confidence in the service.

The key therefore is to minimise delays through good management of the bus operation by operators and minimising delays on the road network. Reliability targets are considered to be a good measure of both parties (KCC as the highway manager and bus operators themselves), and can be used to gauge the effectiveness of initiatives in this area. Section 4.6 discusses road network management further.

We have obtained data from bus operators (where this is available from smart ticket machines) that shows the percentage of journeys that operate within a window of one minute early and five minutes late. This is in line with the 'on time' standards published by the Traffic Commissioner, the bus industry regulators.

In future we will obtain service timekeeping data from the Bus Open Data service, which is currently in its early stages of development and use. Reliable data is not currently available for all services, but this will be a useful resource once it is operating fully with a reporting capability.

Overall averages for Kent on this basis were **77.7%** 'on time' in November 2019 and **85.0%** in June 2021, reflecting operation in the Covid-19 period.

This target is supported by the following Initiatives:

HNI 1-9, IPI 6, ADMI 1, 2, 4

Target 3
Bus reliability (service actually opetating) 3

As seen in Target 2, bus service reliability featured highly in the public engagement process. However as well as bus timekeeping, the chance of a bus actually operating is very important to users.

Failures to operate are largely caused by one or more of three reasons:

- Staff availability. This could be due to staff sickness, the non-availability of spare staff or not having sufficient staff to operate the service

- Vehicle availability. This could be due to bus breakdowns and the non-availability of spare vehicles that are able to cover quickly
- Traffic and weather conditions. Traffic congestion, road works and adverse weather conditions all cause unexpected delays to services.

Information has been supplied by most operators showing scheduled mileage for each service against actual mileage operated.

Overall averages for Kent on this basis were **98.7%** of mileage operated in 2018 November 2019 and **99.0%** in June 2021.

This target is supported by the following Initiatives:

HNI 1-9, IPI 6, ADMI 1, 2, 4

Target 4
Passenger numbers

4

This is a core measure of the use of bus services in the county. As actions are taken to improve the quality, frequency and reliability of bus services, additional users should be attracted to the bus network.

However in the last 18 months the effects of the pandemic, including restrictions, lockdowns and messaging to avoid public transport unless absolutely necessary, has resulted in a sharp reduction in bus usage in the UK.

The aim is to stabilise this trend and build back confidence in Kent's bus services. An increasing trend in passenger numbers would confirm the success of this approach.

Information has been supplied by most operators regarding the number of passengers carried on their services. This has enabled us to benchmark the level of bus use pre-pandemic and during the pandemic period, to demonstrate its effects.

This can be summarised as:
2018/2019 55.4 million
2019/2020 53.5 million
2020/2021 18.1 million

The effects of Covid-19 restrictions have resulted in a fall of **66%** of passengers on Kent's bus network in the 2020/2021 year.

This target is supported by ALL Initiatives which are intended to collectively make buses more attractive to passengers and potential passengers.

Target 5
Passenger satisfaction

5

This is a reflection of passenger views on the quality of bus services and how satisfied they are with their service. The quality of bus services, their reliability and the extent of the bus network all contribute to passenger views of their service.

For some time now, the council has arranged for Kent to be included in the respected Transport Focus Bus Passenger Survey which is a national survey of bus passengers taken across most of England. A representative sample of routes is included with passengers being interviewed on the bus.

The measure used is the overall satisfaction with the bus journey, taking the percentage of those passengers who were very or fairly satisfied out of five categories.

By the measure, a score of **86%** was recorded in the 2018 survey with an improved figure of **89%** in 2019.

This target is supported by ALL Initiatives which are intended to collectively make buses more attractive to passengers and potential passengers.

Target 6
Vehicle emissions

6

With the developing green agenda and zero-emission vehicles becoming more mainstream in the future, the proportion of lower emission vehicles in Kent's bus fleet is a useful measure of our progress in updating and upgrading our buses.

As a baseline figure, we have obtained information on the percentage of vehicles meeting at least the Euro 6 standard for diesel bus emissions or zero-emission technology.

The current situation is that **26.1%** of vehicles in the local bus fleet meet this standard.

This target is supported by the following Initiatives:

EAQI 1-4, PTI I5

4 Delivery

Section 4.1
Roll out of Enhanced Partnerships

Enhanced Partnerships

These are formal partnerships targeted at improving bus services. Although they are published by the local transport authority, they are close partnerships between bus operators and the local authorities. Other parties will play a part, including district councils, passenger groups and businesses, and there will be consultation, including obtaining public views, on what needs to be improved and what the priorities should be.

It is planned to introduce one **Enhanced Partnership Plan** for Kent, covering all of the county to take effect from April 2022. This will set out a strategic view on how the partners will improve bus services in Kent, and will take most of its content from this BSIP. It will be updated annually.

It is then proposed to introduce three **Enhanced Partnership Schemes** as shown in the map opposite:

The three areas would be:

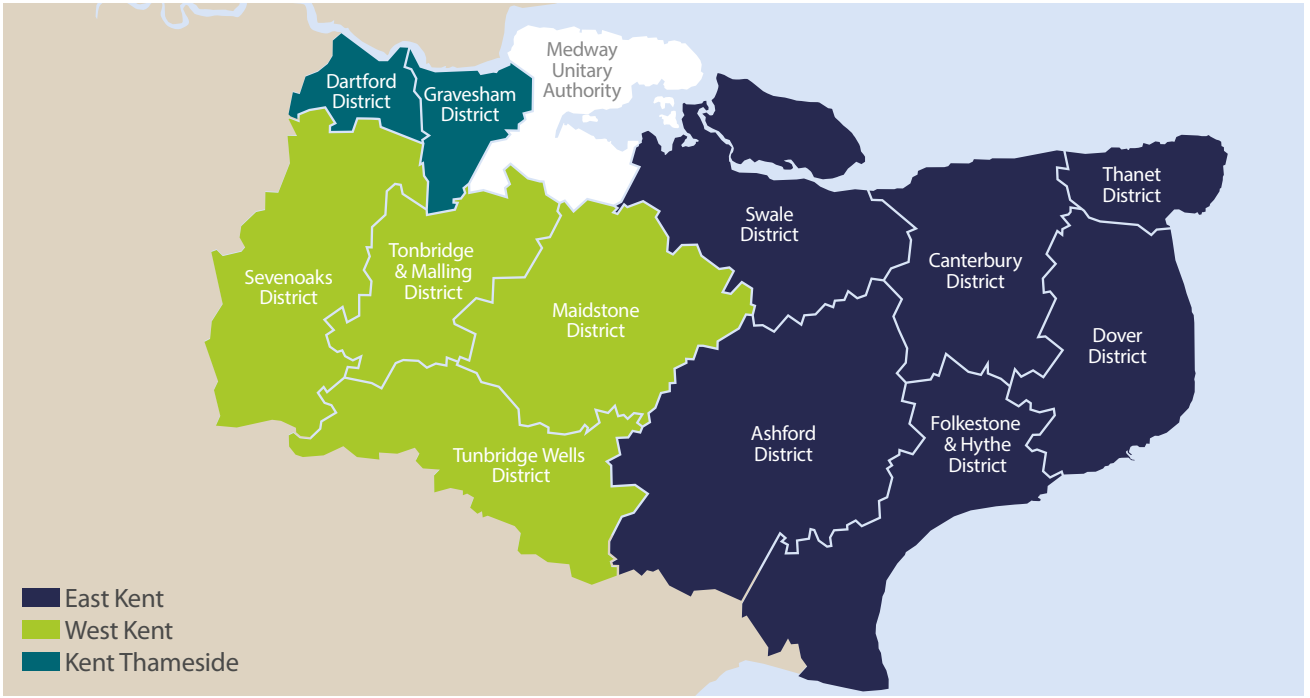
East Kent: covering Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone and Hythe, Swale and Thanet Districts

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

Kent Thameside: consisting of the Dartford and Gravesham Districts

These schemes provide a more tailored approach for each of these smaller areas setting out more detail of the plans for improvements to be made and taking on board local views. They will set out intentions for the following few years and will be updated from time to time as the degree of success of the early schemes become clear and the demand for bus services changes.

Figure 3. Kent's EP Scheme areas



Section 4.1 Roll out of Enhanced Partnerships (continued)

Current Quality Bus Partnerships

In many areas of Kent, voluntary Quality Bus Partnerships (QBPs) between the county and district councils and the local bus operators have been in place for a number of years. The Enhanced Partnership schemes will build on and in most cases carry forward the positive work achieved by these arrangements. The governance proposals are designed to ensure that groups are in place to reflect the legal requirements of the EP (e.g. overall EP Board, EP Scheme Board etc.) but that these are complemented by more localised groups reflecting QBPs.

Improved bus services

The agreements with the bus operators will be aimed at bouncing back from the pandemic period, during which far fewer people used buses in Kent. Once pre-Covid levels of passengers have been achieved, the EP will be used to go for growth by increasing the bus share of the transport market and to position the bus as a green form of transport.

More detail on the proposed measures being considered will be set out in subsequent sections. Our ability to introduce a number of these will depend on the availability of funding. The highlights are:

- Increased bus services including during the evenings and to out of town employment sites
- Lower fares, including more flexible seasons and better tickets where you need to use more than one operator
- More use of smartcards and mobile phone tickets to make purchases even easier, with rail tickets and even car hire available on the same app
- Improvements to the child and youth fare schemes
- Better integration with other transport modes
- Innovative ways of retaining rural transport links, such as demand responsive services
- An expanded Fastrack, frequent and high-quality services and consideration of a 'Superbus' network
- Modern and comfortable buses and a move to zero-carbon vehicles
- Traffic management measures to speed up buses on the key radial routes
- Improvements to bus stops and the information shown at them
- Comprehensive bus and train information on a one-stop site
- Introduction of a bus passenger charter, with redress when things go wrong

Cross-boundary services

The extent of cross-boundary working with Kent's neighbouring authorities has been considered, particularly in terms of a potential joint EP Plan. The key neighbour is Medway, which is surrounded on three sides by Kent. As Medway has different priorities and urban geography to Kent, it is not proposed to undertake a joint plan. However, both authorities are working closely to minimise any cross-boundary issues that might arise, and are looking at developing joint initiatives where suitable.

We will also liaise closely with East Sussex and Surrey councils and with Transport for London to ensure that cross boundary routes can continue to operate effectively.

Governance

The Enhanced Partnership Plan and schemes will be supported by a governance structure. This will cover:

- An executive board supplying strategic overview and carrying out the key decision-making process, including formal reviews of the contents of the schemes
- Monitoring groups in each of the three scheme areas, and reviewing progress of the local initiatives

Section 4.1 Roll out of Enhanced Partnerships (continued)

- Network and bus punctuality improvement partnerships, concentrating on road network improvements and management
- Passenger charter groups in each scheme area monitoring progress of the charters and feeding back customer views
- Local focus groups in each district and borough, feeding the district views into the process and addressing issues previously covered by Quality Bus Partnerships.

This structure is covered in more detail in Section 5 of this plan.

Setting up an Enhanced Partnership

The first stage of forming an EP is informal discussion between the local transport authority and the bus operators. This was carried out as part of the work on this BSIP. As a result, the required Notice of Intention to prepare an EP was published on 28th June 2021.

Wider engagement has also been carried out, including stakeholder meetings including bus operators, KCC officers (including education and highways), district representatives, Passenger Focus, DWP, disability groups and other interested local parties. This contributed to the BSIP, which will in turn inform the EP Plan. This engagement, together with more detailed ideas, will now be considered for the EP Schemes.

Once the funding settlement is understood and the post settlement BSIP has been developed, attention will switch to developing the formal EP Plan and its schemes. The governance structure will work to inform the actions to be included and negotiations will be undertaken between the local authorities and bus operators on:

- The measures and facilities to be included such as traffic management measures and comprehensive local bus information, including connections with other transport modes
- The contribution from the operators including better vehicle features, lower emissions and improved operating standards
- Fare and ticketing requirements including integrated and multi-operator products, fare capping and a MaaS app
- Bus network reviews including service co-ordination and better connections.

Passenger charter

The EP will include a passenger charter developed initially by the targeted charter groups in each EP scheme area. These will set out the service that passengers can expect, the commitments made by both local authorities and bus operators and how any passenger issues will be addressed. Performance of services against the charter criteria will be monitored and complaints analysed to inform further actions in the EP Schemes. More details are included in Section 5 of this Plan.

Consultation and publication

Once a draft EP Plan and schemes have been produced, there will be a formal consultation. If this results in a requirement for changes, a revised version can be agreed and published. The published EP will take affect from April 2022.

Section 4.2
Funding Approach

Introduction
Although it is estimated that around 90% of bus journeys in Kent operate on an entirely commercial (i.e. unsubsidised) basis, the provision of some services, infrastructure and financial support for bus users is almost entirely reliant on KCC funding.

Current position and KCC investment in the bus network
Whilst austerity measures in recent years have seen many local authorities reduce their discretionary financial support to the bus network, KCC has fought to protect all funding streams. KCC continues to inject £35m per annum into the bus network in Kent both directly such as through subsidies for socially necessary bus services, and indirectly through subsidies to pass holders and fares reimbursement.

Revenue funding into the bus network consists of both statutory and discretionary spend areas, and includes subsidies to operators, to passengers and other financial support for schemes and projects. KCC's financial out-turns in areas supporting the bus network in the 2021/22 financial year are summarised opposite.

Figure 4. Summary of current KCC bus-related spend

Funding	Value	Supports
English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS)	£16m	Free travel for 250,000 ENCTS pass holders
KCC Travel Saver Schemes	£10m	Discounted bus travel for 30,000 pass holders aged between 11 and 19 and in full time education
Socially Necessary Bus Services	£6m	Financial support for over 100 not profitable but socially necessary services contracts
Scholar Season Tickets	£2m	School bus travel for 3,500 children entitled to free transport to school
Community Transport	£180k	Grants for small transport schemes operated by the community sector
Infrastructure	£100k	Maintenance of roadside furniture, timetable postings and small infrastructure schemes
Capital Allocation	£430k	Bus infrastructure and rural shelter schemes plus other capital initiatives

Section 4.2 Funding Approach (continued)

Concessionary travel schemes (English National Concessionary Travel Scheme and the KCC Travel Saver)

The English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) is a statutory, national scheme offering free transport to around 250,000 elderly and disabled passholders. In Kent, in addition to the statutory minimum and on a discretionary basis, KCC offers free disabled companion passes for qualifying individuals to help the primary pass holder access bus services and make use of the scheme.

The KCC Travel Saver Schemes are provided on an entirely discretionary basis to help parents and young people with the cost of travel to and from school. The £10m subsidy KCC allocates to the scheme is estimated to reduce the cost of bus journeys by about half compared to the cost of season tickets purchased from bus operators. Although in effect a subsidy to the passenger, the scheme is acknowledged by bus operators as being positive for the bus network in Kent. It encourages the use of buses for journeys to and from school, leaving a legacy of continued bus use after the pass holder's educational lifespan.

Home to School Transport

In addition to the KCC Travel Saver scheme, KCC also provides free bus travel to around 3,500 children entitled to free transport to school. This is a statutory duty placed on authorities under the Education Act. KCC has a policy of making use of the existing public transport network wherever possible.

In addition to supporting 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 off peak services, supporting the wider bus network and the communities it serves.

Community transport

KCC has developed increasingly close working relationships with the community transport sector in recent years and has formed a Community Transport Tool Kit for organisations wanting to understand how to introduce and operate small transport schemes.

Over the last four years KCC has provided 19 organisations with grants totalling nearly £400k, to support the introduction and development of local transport schemes. The nature of the grants are nearly always in the form of one-off funding to launch very localised community transport schemes, followed by ongoing support and advice to sustain them. KCC remains committed to this approach and will continue to make support and finance available to develop the community transport sector throughout the period of the Kent BSIP.

Existing challenges and barriers: Funding pressures, the pandemic and risks to the network

In general terms there is pressure on KCC to reduce spend, particularly in discretionary areas. However as other discretionary budget areas have steadily reduced and in some instances stopped, KCC has fought to protect financial support to the bus network and its users. The result is that public transport now represents some of the largest areas of discretionary spend anywhere in the council: £6m p/a subsidy towards non profitable bus services and £10m p/a in subsidy towards the cost of bus passes through the Travel Saver Schemes.

As the financial impacts of the pandemic have increased, KCC has had to consider how to right size its budget, bringing these areas into focus. However, to match the ambitions of Government

Section 4.2 Funding Approach (continued)

and the NBS, and to provide stability to bus operators to support post-pandemic recovery, Kent aims to continue to provide funding to support the bus network financially through the initial 3 year NBS period.

Despite this, it is recognised that the bus network in Kent and across the UK faces a significant challenge to recover from the pandemic and sustain current levels of service long term. Government support in the form of CBSSG (bus recovery funding) and KCC support through the maintenance of concessionary travel payments at pre-Covid levels, has enabled the bus network to be maintained at pre-Covid levels of service despite a significant absence of use.

KCC and Kent's bus operators are confident that service levels can be maintained until April 2022. But with support funding in all forms expected to cease from this date, it will be necessary for passenger and associated revenue levels to have returned to near pre-Covid levels if we are to avoid a contraction of the current bus network.

Bus use in Kent had fallen by 66% compared to pre-Covid levels, with peak time bus use being more resilient and closer to pre-Covid levels than off peak use. In simple terms, the concern for the industry is that we reach the point where existing support funding needs to be withdrawn and bus usage levels have not returned. This would present a significant challenge to sustaining the current network.

In addition, bus operators continue to experience rising costs off operation in the form of increases in the cost of fuel, insurance, wages and management and facilities (summarised below). This represents an additional risk to sustaining service levels, particularly whilst future patterns of bus usage remain low.

Figure 5. Estimated Summary of Increasing Operator Overheads

Overhead	Inflation (last 3 yrs)	Estimated inflation (next 3 yrs)
Fuel	12.9%	9.6%
Wages	22.2%	18.2%
Insurance	19.7%	15.7%

For these reasons, the methodology developed to apportion NBS funding will prioritise the use of revenue for the maintenance of appropriate service levels on the subsidised and the commercial network post pandemic. It will also seek funding to maintain financial support for children of secondary school age. Further revenue funding identified for the support of service initiatives would then be prioritised using a method that looks at a number of factors, with longer term self-sustainability being a primary consideration.

Public/Stakeholder feedback summary

Public consultation and the focus of KCC's discussions with stakeholders has been orientated towards trying to get more detailed and localised input to the development of initiatives and schemes. It also seeks to understand which areas of service provision e.g. routes and frequencies, waiting facilities, cost, reliability, information etc., are the most important to bus users and potential bus users.

From the end of June and throughout July and August, KCC asked members of the public the following question: *'What are the things that would make using buses easier and more attractive for you?'*

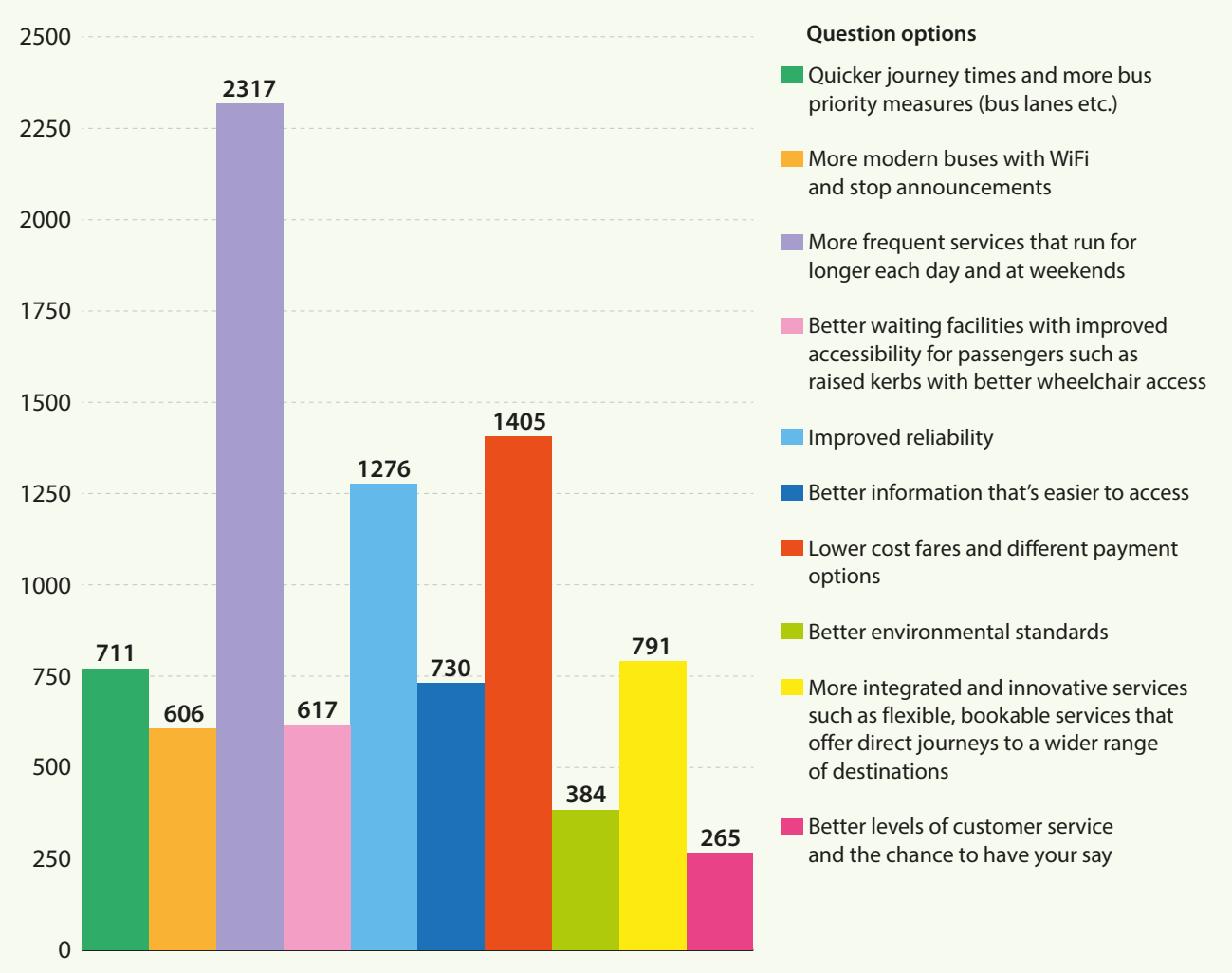
Section 4.2 Funding Approach (continued)

They were asked to choose their top three from the following:

- More modern buses with Wi-Fi and stop announcements
- More frequent services that run for longer each day and at weekends
- Better information that's easier to access
- Better environmental standards
- More integrated and innovative services such as flexible, bookable services that offer direct journeys to a wider range of destinations
- Better levels of customer service and the chance to have your say.

Almost 3,500 responses have been received and these are summarised opposite.

Figure 6. Summary of response to public consultation



Section 4.2 Funding Approach (continued)

Appendices A and C provide more detailed reporting and analysis of the feedback the council received through a combination of responses to questions posed through the consultation platform and more broadly through discussions with stakeholders. However, the response received to the initial consultation question clearly identifies that service levels, reliability and cost are most important to Kent residents. It is therefore important to reflect this in the BSIP, and in our approach to the use of funding.

Funding requirements

Although formal consultation on the BSIP was not required, KCC feels that its priorities, the development of initiatives and the allocation of any funding should, in part, be informed by feedback from the public and other stakeholders.

The support of Kent's BSIP initiatives will need to be funded through a combination of existing council budgets and funding awarded through the National Bus Strategy process.

KCC has committed to maintain funding for bus services and this does provide scope to use some existing council budgets to support the more modest BSIP initiatives. However, it must be clearly acknowledged that the majority of this funding is fully allocated to maintaining existing services and infrastructure. Therefore KCC's capacity to support anything other than more modest initiatives without additional funding is very limited. Opportunities do exist in the form of other external funding such as KCC's bid for 'Zebra' (zero emissions) funding or through the planning process, but in many instances this would involve timescales extending beyond the initial BSIP period so funding would not be awarded in time.

For these reasons, and when taking account of initial BSIP guidance and more recent NBS funding requirements, we have actively sought to identify a combination of initiatives that can be delivered using existing KCC funds and that will be entirely dependent on new funding delivered through the NBS process.

Funding requirements are usually a combination of revenue support and capital costs. However with future sustainability identified as such an important consideration for apportioning funds, KCC's capital requirement outweighs its need for revenue support.

A summary of funding requirements is shown opposite. It shows the estimated costs of supporting all initiatives, split by funding type and source and the area of improvement the funding will support. This forms the basis of the funding template submitted to the Department for Transport alongside the BSIP.

Figure 7. Initiative Funding Requirement

Total number of Initiatives: 47 **Number requiring NBS funding: 31**	
Category	**NBS Funding Requested**
Network Development	£56.75m
Fares and Ticketing	£34.75m
Bus Priority, Infrastructure and Highway Network Management	£86.68m
Environment and Air Quality	£16.5m
Innovation and Digital Accessibility	£16.28m
Public Transport Information	£1.19m
Total Amount Requested	**£212.6m**

Section 4.2 Funding Approach (continued)

Approach to prioritisation

Heeding the vision of the NBS, KCC's approach to the development of a BSIP has been ambitious. This is reflected in both the number and range of initiatives that have been developed, and in the overall value of the funding required.

Whilst the method of BSIP assessment and how it will relate to the provision of funds is unclear, KCC accepts that it is unlikely to receive funding that would support delivery of all of the initiatives and aspirations of our initial BSIP.

The BSIP does however clearly show the extent of KCC and the Kent bus operators' ambition to improve the overall bus offering in Kent.

For this reason, we developed a methodology for the prioritisation of initiatives, and separate criteria for prioritising service delivery. This was used to filter and the prioritise the initiatives that form the Kent BSIP, and the funding requirements to support it.

This methodology is used to assess BSIP schemes and informs our priorities for funding:

- Pandemic recovery and maintenance of appropriate service levels
- Alignment with NBS principles
- Outputs from consultation and engagement
- Future sustainability
- Value for money
- Deliverability
- Support of other council policies (the new Local Transport Plan)
- Positive impact on the identified problem
- Reciprocal investment by operators

Separate criteria is used for the assessment and prioritisation of service initiatives. A long list of potential 'quick win' Year 1 service initiatives is included as Appendix C. This list was formed using feedback received through public and stakeholder engagement. As a result it is extensive and it is acknowledged that the cost of delivering all of the desired service enhancements would be prohibitive with many also likely to be unsustainable in the longer term.

Once the NBS funding settlement is understood, the council will apply the following criteria to shortlist Year 1 service initiatives. This takes account of:

- Compliance with planning guidelines
- Cost
- Potential benefit
- Value for money
- Main target contribution
- Support for Covid recovery
- Sustainability
- Engagement support
- Founding type
- Deliverability
- Implementation time scale

It must be understood that the council's immediate priority, reflected in the prioritisation of the funding spreadsheet and regardless of financial outcomes, is to sustain all areas of provision at current or appropriate levels. As such, initiatives and funding that supports continuation of commercial and subsidised bus services and other areas of council support to passenger and operators will be prioritised.

Funding awarded over and above this base requirement will be allocated to initiatives based on the level of funding available and the priorities identified. There will also be new consideration of the criteria identified above.

Section 4.3
Network Development

Introduction
Bus network improvements can take many forms including more frequent services, extended hours of operation, quicker journey times, more reliable services and greater integration between buses and other modes. However the delivery of this requires a collaborative approach between KCC as the Local Transport Authority (LTA) and bus operators. Traditionally, the deregulated nature of the network has made this challenging, but we believe the NBS could provide the tools and related funding needed for success.

This section considers Kent's current bus network as a whole, develops a model for assessing potential EP Year 1 schemes and proposes a method for more detailed consideration of longer-term network planning from Year 2 onwards.

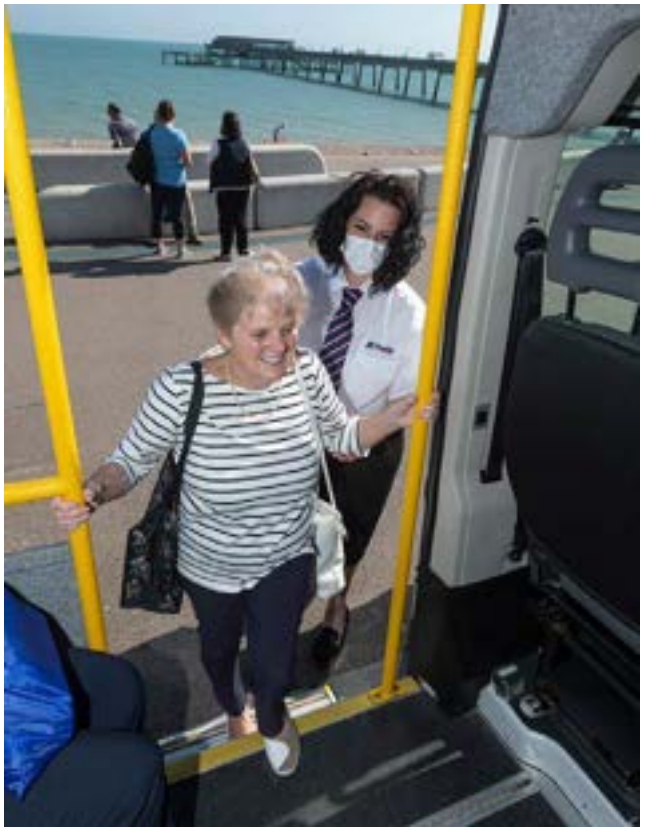
Consideration is also given to the processes, software and databases required in the longer term to improve bus planning in Kent.

Current context and council involvement
The de-regulated nature of the bus market in Kent means that commercial bus operators tend to focus on providing services in areas which will be most profitable. KCC, in its function as LTA, then considers areas where additional provision is required to meet social need, as far as budget levels permit.

Although KCC has no ability to directly influence which commercial services operators run and at what frequencies, routes, timetables or fares, it uses its positive relationships with operators and district councils to seek to influence and inform the development of the network to meet the needs of Kent residents. This includes using such forums as QBPs (see Section 4.2) to consider issues such as how development funding can be used sustainably to improve the network.

In a rural county like Kent, many areas simply do not generate a level of passenger demand and revenue that make provision of transport services on a commercial basis viable without other financial support. KCCs contracted services seek to meet this gap. However, the geography of rural Kent means that this is challenging to achieve with conventional buses with effective use of public funding.

Despite these limitations, the combination of contracted services and other complementary provision such as community transport and KCC's Kent Karrier mean that all parts of the county have access to some form of public transport, even if that may be only once or twice a week.



Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

Kent Bus Network high level analysis

KCC bus network overview

The registered bus network in Kent includes over 500 registered bus services operating an estimated 28 million miles per year, end to end, including cross-boundary services.

Supported by the KCC Travel Saver schemes and underpinned by the grammar school system in Kent, peak usage in the county is high and sees half of bus routes operating to schools or colleges services. A positive side effect of this is that operators are able to provide a greater number of off-peak services, using the same resources utilised at peak times.

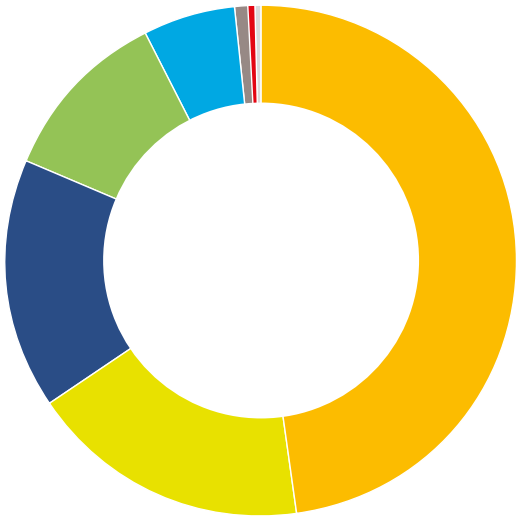
Urban and interurban bus routes account for a further third of Kent's bus services, while 60 rural routes and two community services are registered. An additional 5% of services run between Kent and areas outside the county. The Kent bus network includes a successful BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) scheme, Fastrack, and two Park and Ride (P&R) operations.

The table opposite summarises the number of routes in each of the EP areas, including cross-border services. While most of the routes belong to one EP area only, 50 routes serve bus stops in two EP areas.

Number of bus routes in EP Scheme Areas:	
Kent Thameside	66
West Kent	246
East Kent	274

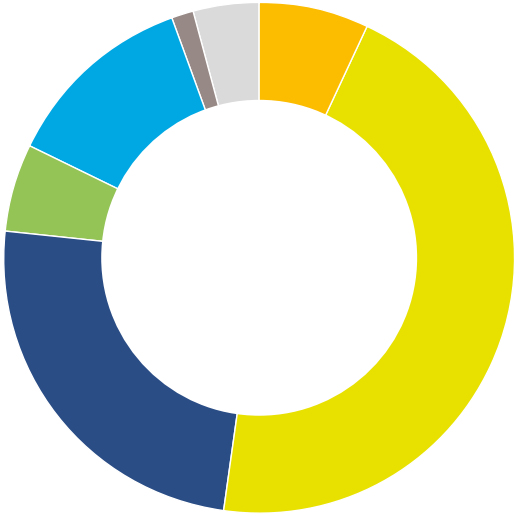
Figure 8. Kent bus mileage by service type

Number of services/routes



1. School/college: **257**
2. Interurban: **94**
3. Urban: **85**
4. Rural: **60**
5. Cross Boundary: **31**
6. Park & Ride: **5**
7. Community services: **2**
8. BRT: **2**

Estimated miles/year



1. School/college: **1,996,320**
2. Interurban: **12,457,841**
3. Urban: **6,828,141**
4. Rural: **1,521,945**
5. Cross Boundary: **3,330,335**
6. Park & Ride: **380,048**
7. BRT: **1,148,379**

* Community services: flexible mileage

Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

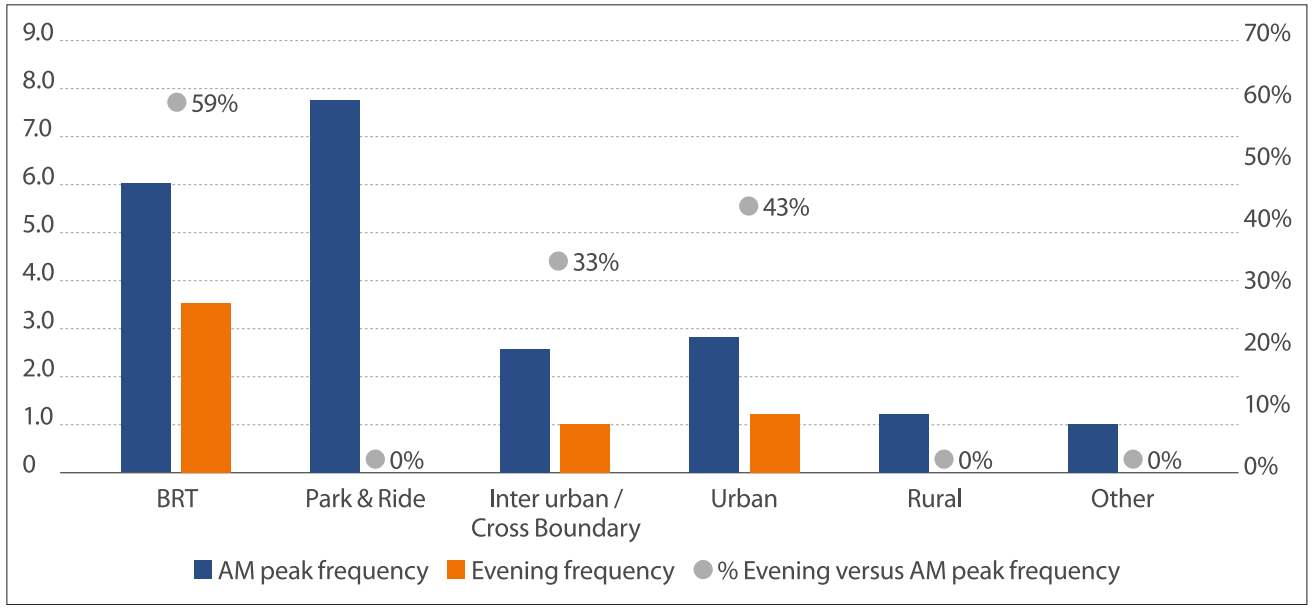
Level of service

Most services operate only a small number of journeys at school times or during off-peak periods. Approximately 122 of services operate between one and three buses per hour. These are mostly composed of regular rural services, urban and interurban services. A very small number of urban services operate between three and five buses per hour.

18 services operate at least five buses per hour. These include Fastrack, most of the P&R services and some urban services serving major towns and cities within the county.

The network is also supported by a number of less frequent community transport services and DRT services. These services in the main are not registered.

Figure 9. Levels of service (LoS) in Kent



Levels of service in off-peak and particularly evenings after 8pm vary between service types (see Figure 9). On average it is observed that BRT, urban, interurban and urban services provide between 40% and 60% of morning peak service levels. Rural and other low frequency services do not provide evening services. P&R levels of service after 8pm are non-existent due to their commuter market. Overall it is felt that later evening services would be justified on these corridors.

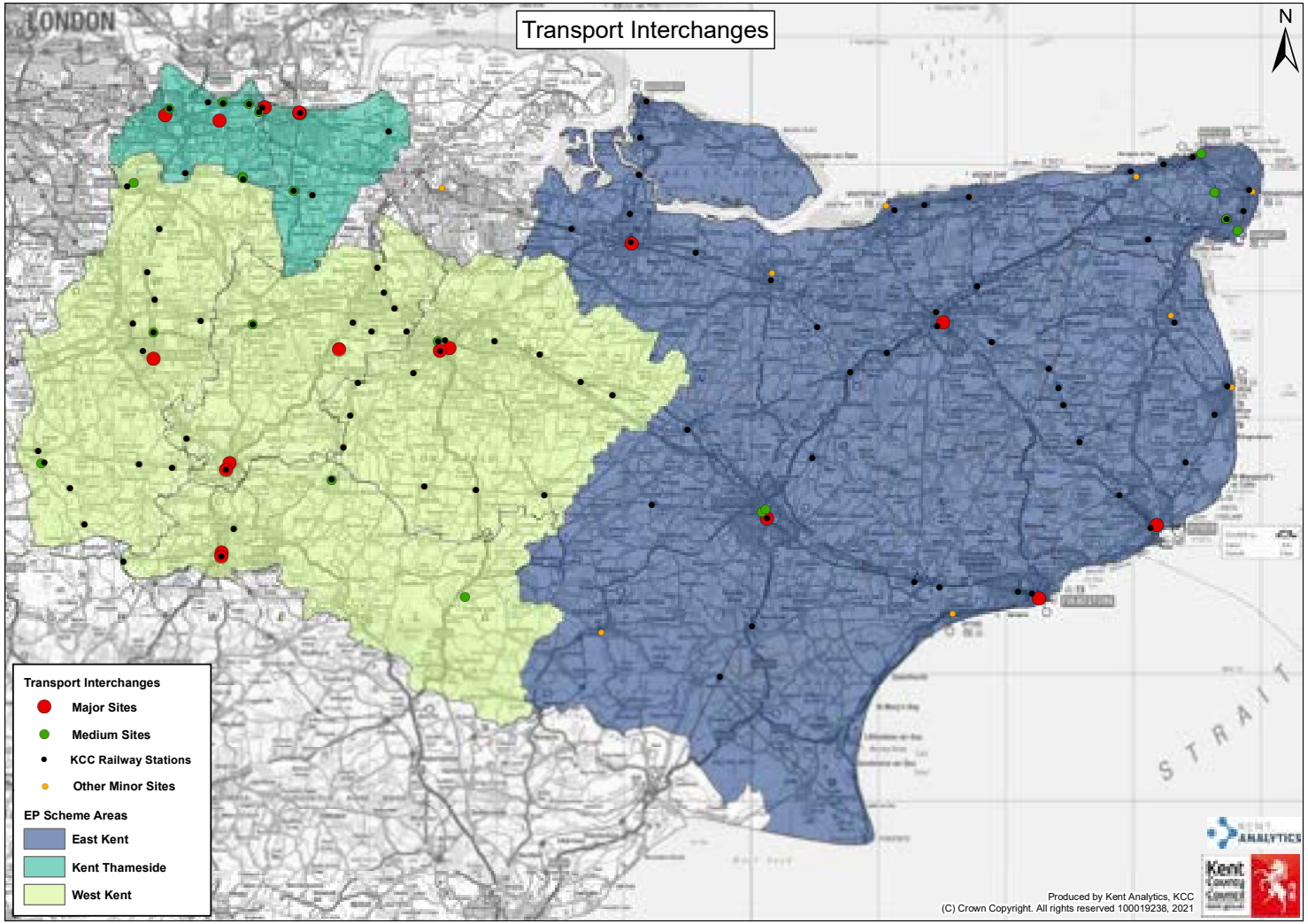
Levels of service are generally lower on Saturdays and Sundays where the school and commuter elements are not present.

Interchanges/integration

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. Figure 10 illustrates the location and size of these interchanges.

Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

Figure 10. Kent interchange points



Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

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 which are covered within other sections of this BSIP.

Demand

It is estimated that pre-pandemic bus patronage in Kent reached on average 179,000 on a weekday, 118,000 on Saturdays and 44,000 on Sundays.

Patronage observed in June 2021, demonstrated an average loss of patronage of just above 34% compared to June 2019. This loss was more pronounced at peak time and less significant in off-peak.

Park and ride services seem to have been the most affected showing the largest loss followed by rural and school services. The urban, Fastrack and intercity network lost was closer to the average.

In absolute terms, this is roughly 1.8 m trips lost in the month of June. However, it is recognised that the patronage in June is not necessarily representative of current usage in September 2021.

Data collected through the Travel Saver scheme from September 2021 indicates that the concerned market segment recovered up to 78% of the patronage overall. Data collected early September on Fastrack shows a similar trend.

While the future is still uncertain, it is probable that some office workers who previously commuted daily by bus may have transferred to hybrid working and may now be commuting only few days a week. This may result in slower recovery of peak time patronage when compared to off-peak, for example.

Corridors

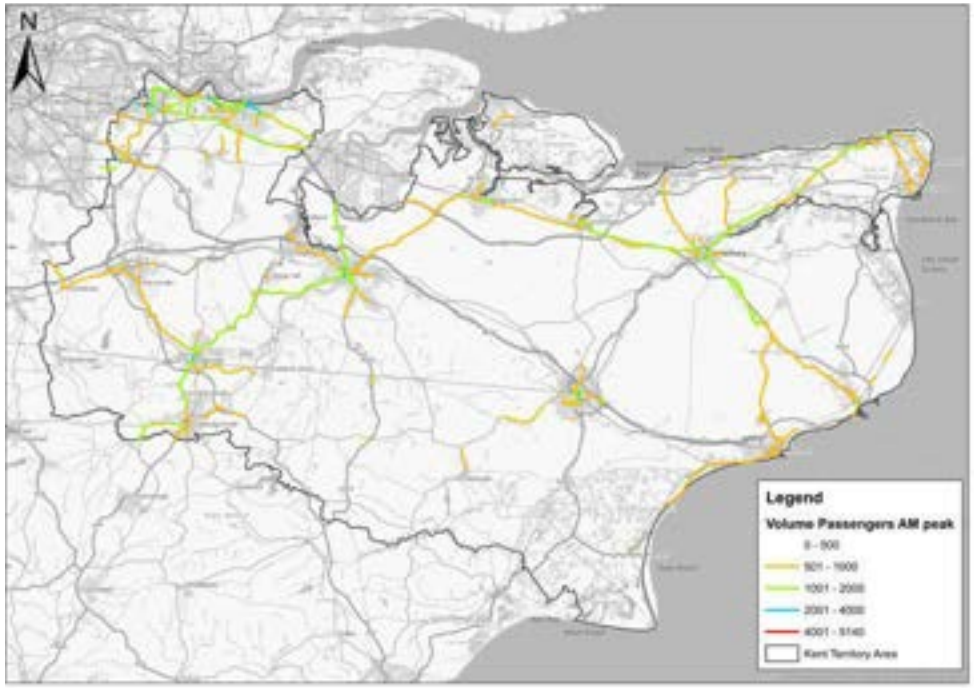
As expected, the majority of current patronage is present on the urban and interurban networks. Further investigation of passenger demand generated by the KCC traffic and public transport model[1] in morning peak hours (Figure 11) has allowed us to identify corridors with major travel movements in Kent.

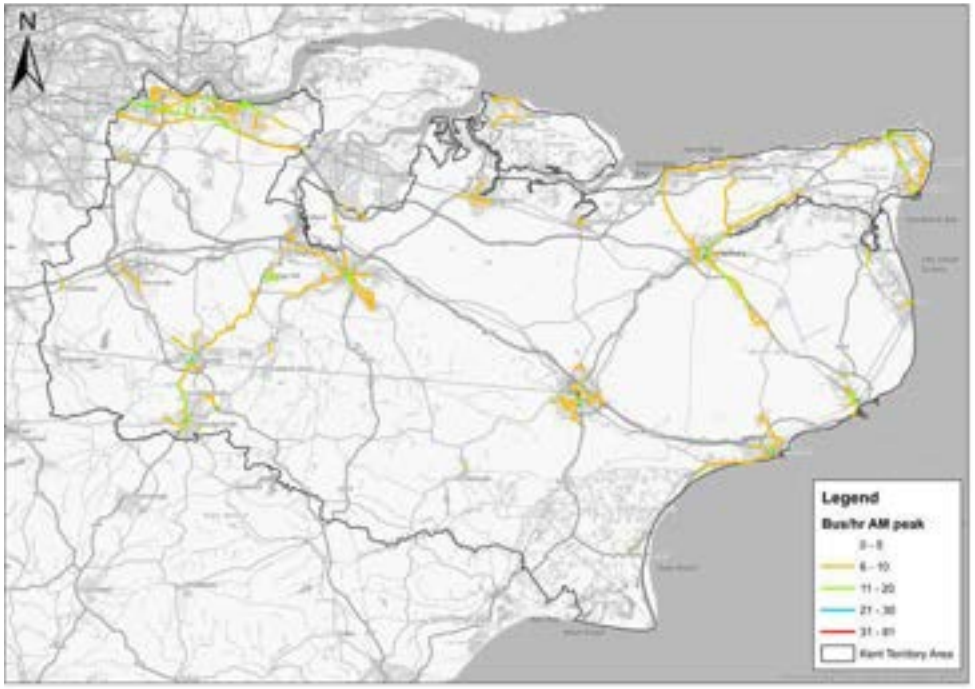
Bus patronage data collected over the summer will allow to validate bus volumes in the model and refine this analysis.

Footnote
1: Kent Traffic Model.

Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

Figure 11. KCC model estimated bus demand and bus volumes in morning peak hours[2]





Footnote
2: Bus patronage figures to be validated.

Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

Roads with estimated passenger flows exceeding 2,000 passengers across morning peak hours and with high bus volumes have been classified as primary bus corridors in Kent for the purposes of this analysis.

Primary bus corridors identified on this basis are:

- A207 Dartford Road to East Hill via Dartford Town Centre (two corridors)
- A226 Chalk–Gravesend Town Centre
- A 226 London Road Northfleet–Greenhithe (two corridors)
- Bluewater Approach
- Bridge–Canterbury Town Centre-Fordwich
- Tonbridge Road–Maidstone Town Centre
- Tonbridge Town Centre–Tunbridge Wells Town Centre
- Ashford Town Centre A2042

Further discussions with operators and the analysis of existing patronage data also highlighted two further corridors of interest, along the loop service alignment in Thanet and on the Maidstone Town Centre-Wheatsheaf corridor.

It is envisaged that further refinement (following validation of the data collected over the summer) will allow us to:

- Confirm the analysis below including the relative position of the Thanet Loop and Maidstone South corridors
- Classify the roads with passenger flows between 1,000 and 2,000 passengers during the morning peak period as secondary bus corridors.

Planned network coverage and journey time

An analysis comparing bus network journey times[3] and population coverage based on planned bus services between 7am and 9am (Figure 12) demonstrates that 28% of Kent's population can reach their closest identified main destination[4] using the bus within 15 minutes, door to door. This increases to 75% within 30 minutes and 89% within 45 minutes. 11% of the population is outside this catchment.

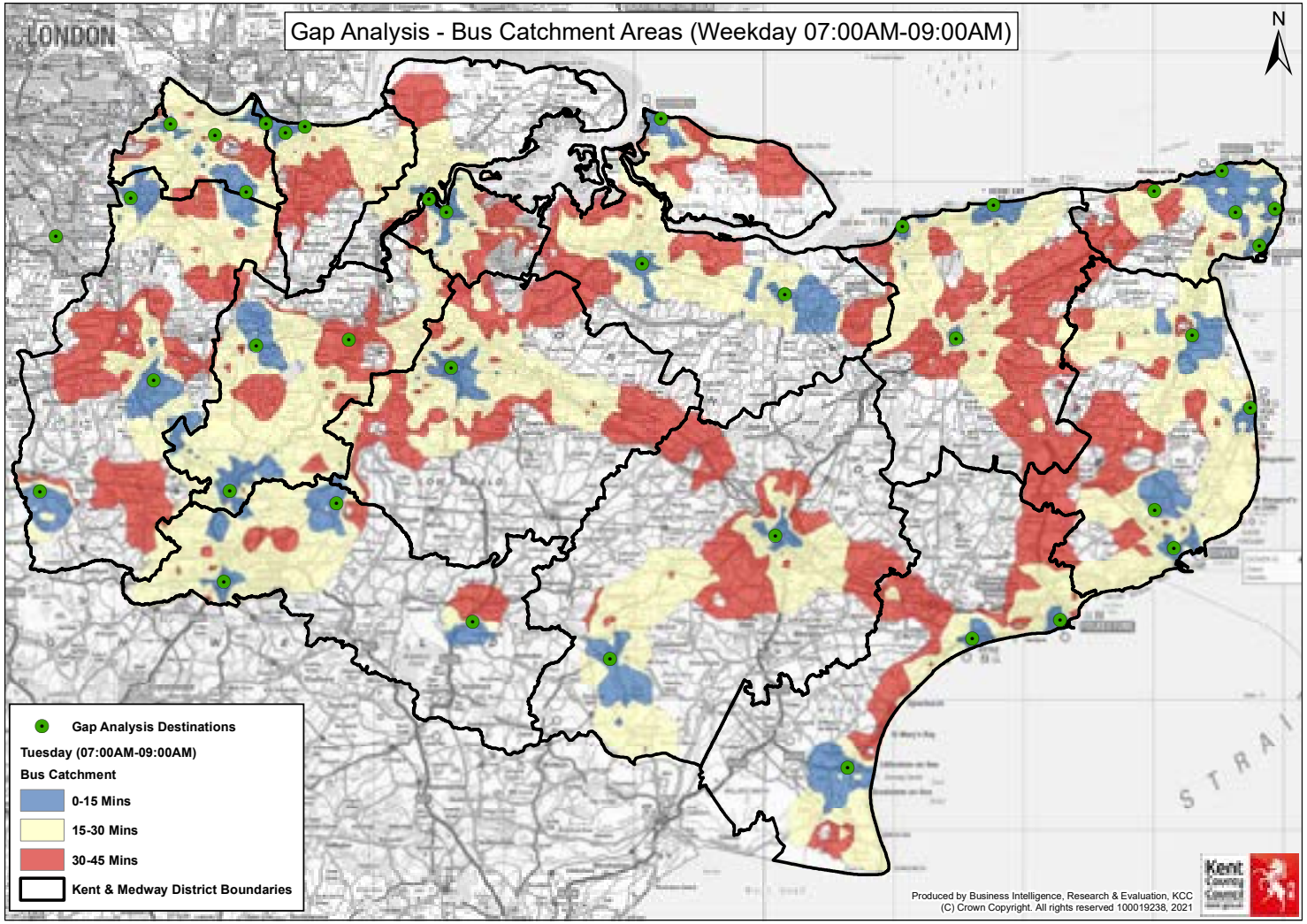
The same analysis conducted at midday indicates that journey times are slightly better during the day. Figure 12 illustrates the door-to-door travel time by bus from anywhere in the county to the closest main destination, in the morning peak hours.

Footnote

3. Includes services from one bus per hour, walking distance up to 1km.
4. Based upon 40 key locations throughout Kent.

Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

Figure 12. Journey times to closest destination by bus in morning peak hours



Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

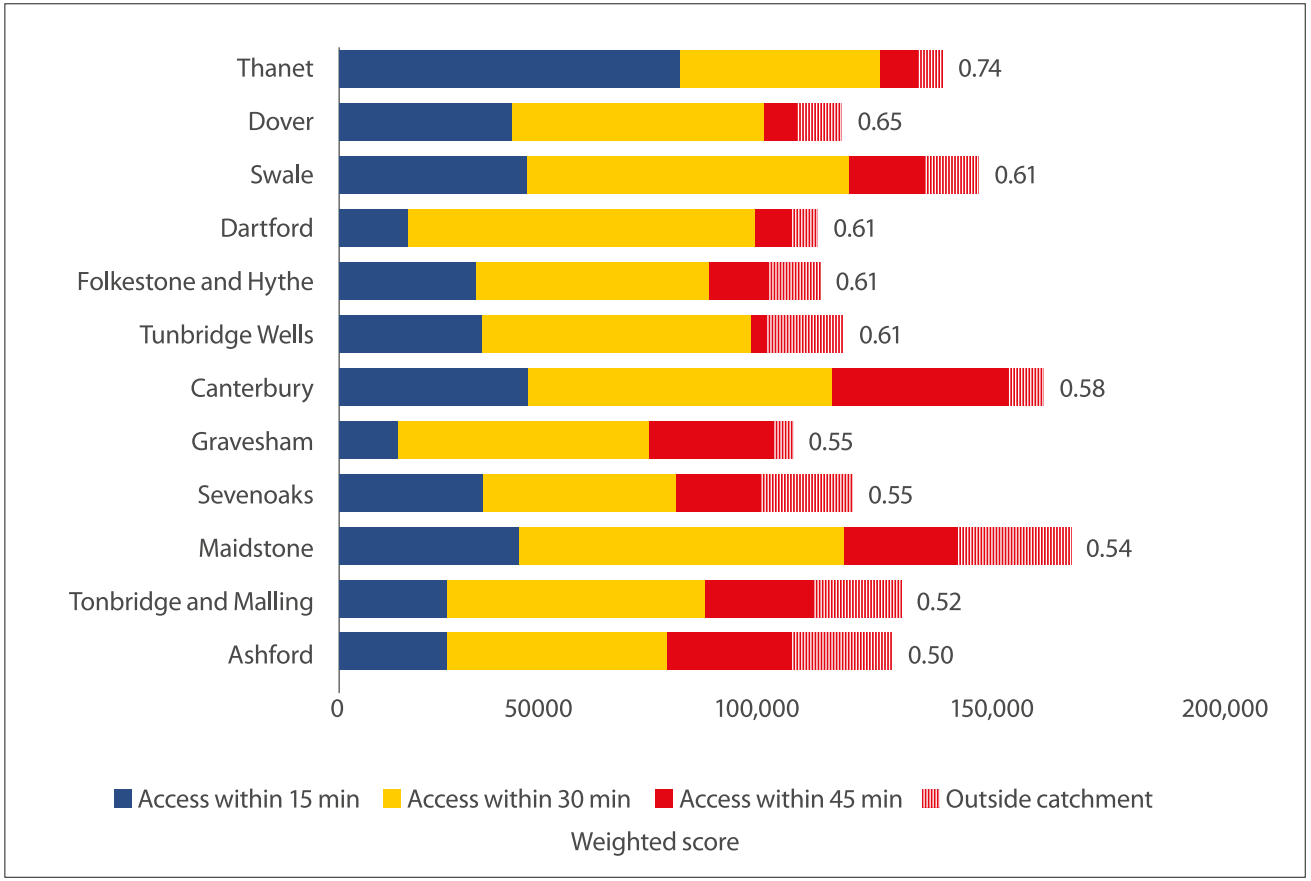
The same data was used to calculate an accessibility score for each district. The scoring method attributes a weight to the population covered for each travel time duration, whereas the population with the smallest travel time is given more weight.

The accessibility score for the morning peak demonstrates that coverage varies between districts. Thanet and Dover districts' bus provision demonstrates the widest population coverage (high accessibility scores), while Ashford and Tonbridge & Malling show the lowest coverage over all parts of the districts (see Figure 13).

The results for Ashford and Tonbridge and Malling show that around 60% of the population is within 30 minutes of their closest destination by bus, and a significant proportion of the population is not served by bus in the morning peak.

It is worth noting that this analysis aims to describe the availability of bus services by showing actual journey times to key destinations. The results therefore partly reflect the issue of traffic congestion in Kent.

Figure 13. Coverage by district



Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

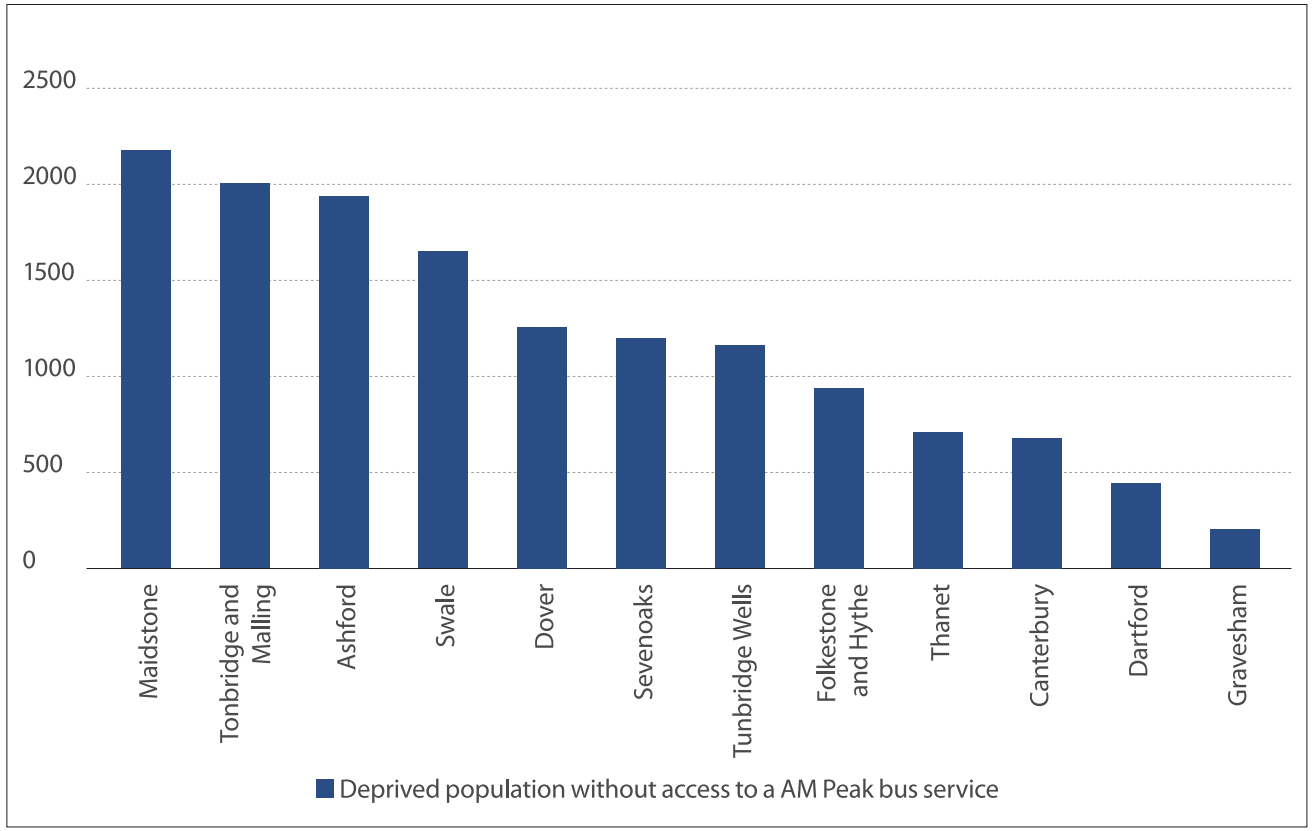
It is worth noting that this analysis aims to describe the availability of bus services by showing actual journey times to key destinations. The results therefore partly reflect the issue of traffic congestion in Kent.

Areas outside of catchment

The journey time analysis indicates that around 11% of the population cannot reach their geographically closest key destination within 45 minutes during the morning peak. For the purpose of this analysis, this population is considered out of catchment of a regular bus service. This conclusion is partly due to the assumptions used to carry out journey time analysis, excluding school routes and services below one bus per hour such as community services or Demand Responsive Transit (DRT). The areas identified as 'out of catchment' are mainly in rural areas.

Further analysis of the 'outside of catchment' population indicates that 8.7% of this population can be qualified as deprived[5]. This is equivalent to around 15,000 people or less than 1% of the Kent population overall. Maidstone and Tonbridge and Malling districts show the highest absolute number of the deprived population without access to a morning peak bus service, closely followed by Ashford (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Deprived population without access to an AM peak bus service



Footnote

5. The Income Deprivation Domain measures the proportion of the population in an area experiencing deprivation relating to low income. The definition of low income used includes both those people that are out-of-work, and those that are in work but who have low earnings (and who satisfy the respective means tests).More information can be found on https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/indices-of-deprivation-2019-income-and-employment-domains-combined-for-england-and-wales/indices-of-deprivation-2019-income-and-employment-domains-combined-for-england-and-wales-guidance-note.

Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

Socio-economic profile of the population

Kent household socio-economic data taken from the mosaic dataset has been categorised into three client groups to understand the potential bus user base per EP area:

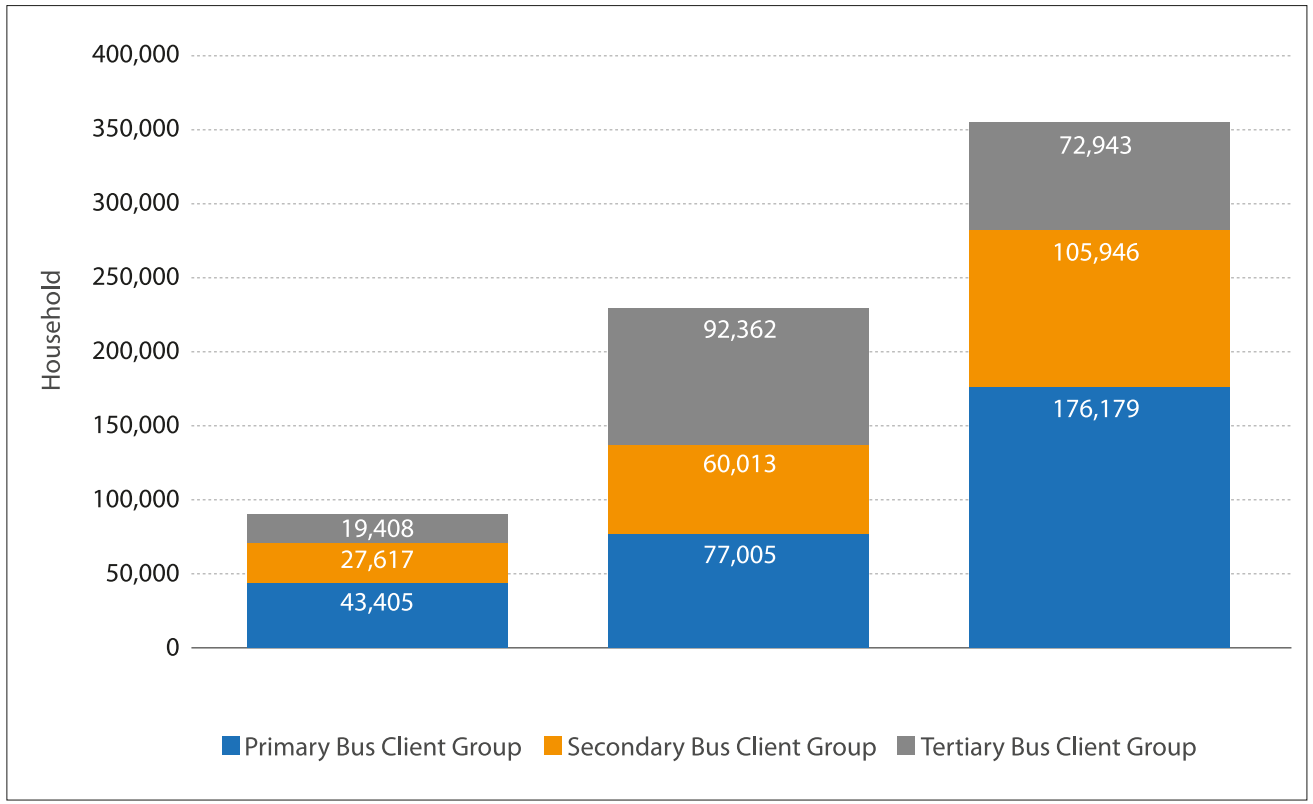
- Primary client group – households likely to use existing public transport regularly.
- Secondary client group – households which may occasionally use public transport and could use it more.
- Tertiary client group – households which are unlikely to be attracted by the bus network in its current form.

Figure 15 illustrates the number of households per client group per EP area. It shows that EP West presents the largest proportion of households in the tertiary client group.

A geospatial analysis of this data demonstrated that 93.3% of all households were within the 400m catchment of a bus stop, leaving almost 16,000 primary and secondary client group households without access to a bus network entry point less than 400m away.

Further detailed analysis of the mosaic data at district and Middle Layer Super Output Area levels will be useful to understand where and how we can increase bus patronage.

Figure 15. Household client group per EP



Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

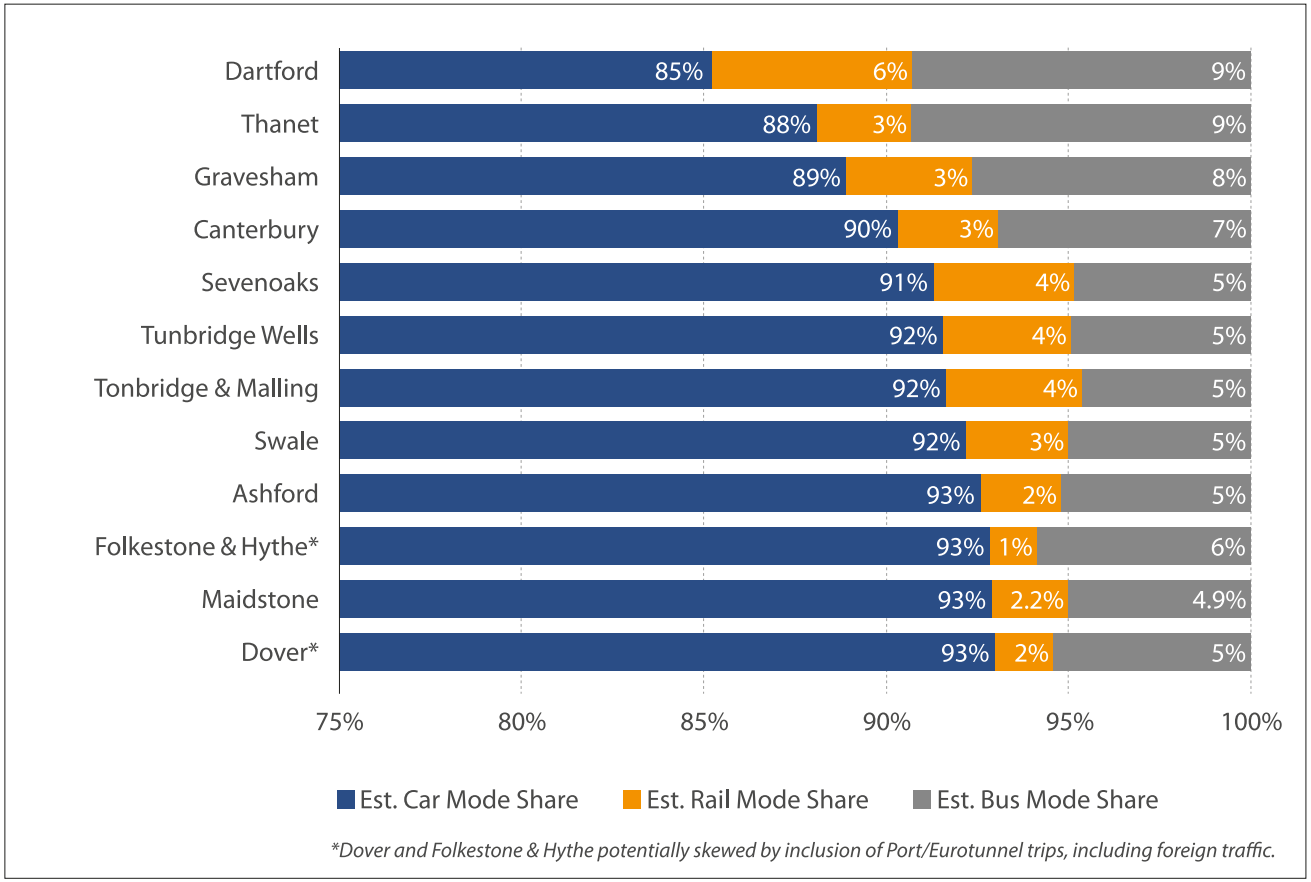
Mode share

The KCC traffic and public transport model[6] has estimated a theoretical pre-Covid public transport mode share (bus + rail) for Kent and Medway of around 9.2% between 7am and 7pm. The public transport mode share per district is presented in Figure 16.

Dover, Folkstone & Hythe, Maidstone and Ashford districts present the lowest public transport mode share (below 8%), although it should be noted that figures in Dover and Folkestone & Hythe may be impacted by cross-channel traffic.

Our journey time analysis concentrated on low network coverage for these districts and also highlighted pockets of deprived population which reinforce these results.

Figure 16. Mode share in Kent districts



**Dover and Folkestone & Hythe potentially skewed by inclusion of Port/Eurotunnel trips, including foreign traffic.*

Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

On-time Performance (OTP)

Data collected from operators pre-Covid demonstrated that buses were operating at 77.7% on time across the network. Such performance highlights the challenge of building a reliable schedule, indicating high variability in traffic congestion in Kent. Statistics collected from operators in June 2021 presented an average of 85% service on time.

OTP results presented earlier clearly highlight the challenges faced by operators when trying to set a workable and reliable timetable. While some counties achieved well over 90% bus on time and the England outside London average reached 83,5% in 2019, Kent's estimated OTP figure was 77.7% on time in November 2019. The main causes of variability include variable volumes of traffic, roadworks, and the impact of the M25.

More detail obtained through ABOD shows the peak hours are even more affected, while performance in off-peak and weekends are better overall.

Speed per service type

The analysis of existing schedules demonstrates that the planned commercial speed of services is around 24.7km/h on average in the morning peak for most service types, except for P&R and urban services which reach around 19km/h for the same period.

New developments

Across the county there have been high levels of residential and industrial development in recent years and this trend is expected to continue as housing demand increases. Information extracted from the Kent Transport Model shows that up to 270 locations are 'more than likely', 'near certain' or 'reasonably foreseeable' to be developed in the coming years. Collectively these could create over 109,000 new households and 277,000 jobs in Kent by 2037, if all schemes are constructed and occupied.

Development locations are spread across the county and across each of the three EP Schemes. As highway authority, KCC is a statutory consultee to the Kent planning authorities in their determination of planning applications. KCC will seek measures to be implemented and/or funding to be provided to mitigate their impact and to support sustainable travel choices such as improved bus services and associated infrastructure.

The KCC model also indicates that future year growth in the 2037 'Do Minimum' scenario is likely to result in significantly increased congestion unless significant investment in new or upgraded measures to support bus operation are introduced which would affect bus route performance. With significant investment to support new transport infrastructure and implementation of transit-orientated development (TOD) design, it could also be an opportunity to improve public transport mode share.

It is also noted that a number of new developments are located close to each other. These may justify the provision of segregated infrastructure when considering their cumulative effect.

Existing challenges and barriers

Covid impact

Bus patronage in Kent has been significantly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

While patronage is now slowly increasing, latest statistics indicate that levels are around 66% of those pre-pandemic as of June 2021. Since this time, an early indicator of recovery can be seen in figures for the Kent Travel Saver schemes for the 2021/22 academic year, which are reaching roughly 78% of pre-pandemic levels.

Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

While services have been mostly kept to pre-pandemic levels via various support mechanisms, current patronage is unlikely to sustain the cost of operation without continued financial support.

Network integration

The current privatised and fragmented bus system makes integration between operators and other modes challenging. This can impact on the attractiveness of using multiple modes or bus routes to reach a destination.

It can also sometimes lead to under or over provision of buses in various locations and confusing route numbering at corridor level where operators compete. This is rare in Kent, but is usually due to buses travelling from different origins to a common destination along a major corridor.

Initiatives in this section, as well as related initiatives in other sections, would collectively create an opportunity to raise the quality of interchanges, rationalise service levels and improve the attractiveness of public transport overall.

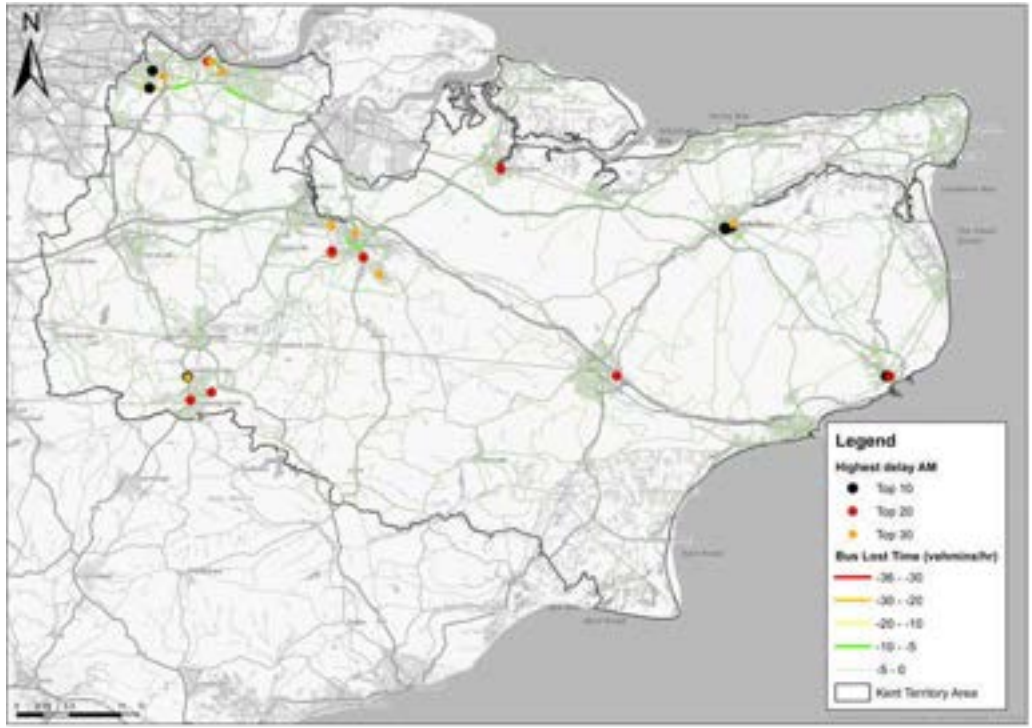
Congestion

In some areas the bus network in Kent is significantly affected by traffic congestion. This is visible through our journey time analysis.

An analysis of main congestion points extracted from the Kent traffic model clearly highlights locations around the M25 in Dartford, Canterbury, Dover and Tunbridge Wells as being particularly affected, as illustrated in Figure 17.

Not surprisingly, these locations almost all coincide with the key bus travel corridors identified in Kent.

Figure 17. Congestion locations



Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

Planning capability, resource and timescales

With the requirement to deliver the NBS at a fast pace, KCC utilised a variety of datasets already available through our current activity. This was complemented by further research and data from operators, requested during development of the EPs.

Moving forward, we are looking to improve our planning resources and tools to support delivery of our EPs.

Public/stakeholder feedback summary

Network development was consistently the number one priority for Kent residents and other stakeholders emerging from KCC's engagement activity. Feedback has told us that more buses, improved frequencies, better reliability and quicker journey times are required, and that this is a key driver for decisions on whether to use the bus.

Operators' priorities centred on funding availability post Covid-19 allowing them to run full networks for their customers. They are also keen to improve reliability and journey times which will help retain and attract customers, and may allow resources to be re-deployed to improve service options such as frequency levels.

Multiple suggestions for service specific initiatives were received through our public engagement activity and these will be considered as part of an initiative to deliver Year 1 service improvements. They will also form part of our prioritisation for longer term service enhancements.

Areas for development and future thinking

Our high-level strategic network analysis, the challenges it identified and the results of our engagement activity helped us gain more knowledge of the current bus network and identify potential gaps and areas for improvements.

Six network development initiatives are proposed to deliver the NBS aspirations and improve the Kent bus network. Consideration will be given to the prioritisation of these initiatives to ensure that improvements have the greatest benefit to Kent residents and are sustainable in the longer term. The number one priority with respect to the network will be recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. From this point, further initiatives will seek to build on our goal to deliver improvements to service levels and the areas served.

Initiative: NDI 1

KCC will secure all available funding and prioritise its use to support services, alongside BSOG, that have become unsustainable at reduced passenger levels until such time as other NBS initiatives drive growth.

As detailed above, our high-level network analysis demonstrated that the pandemic significantly impacted the bus industry in Kent. It also limited the operators' ability to invest in new vehicles or take market risks.

While it is hoped that patronage on buses will eventually return to pre-pandemic levels, this is unlikely to happen quickly. Support will be needed as the network recovers, and throughout the course of the NBS. Therefore, KCC and Kent bus operators' number one BSIP priority is to ensure services return to appropriate levels to meet passenger demand. Failing to do so will result in reduced levels of service, which in turn will result in less patronage and start a downward spiral of reducing patronage and activity.

NDI1 seeks to ensure sufficient funding and support is provided so that operators can sustain pre-pandemic levels of service. The projected cost takes account of anticipated shortfall in

Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

operator revenue and KCC's own future funding position. It is expected that the contribution will slowly be reduced in line with recovery and patronage growth.

Initiative: NDI 2

KCC and Kent's bus operators will deliver a range of Year 1 service initiatives based on feedback gathered through engagement activity with operators, stakeholders and the general public. Initiatives will be prioritised based on evaluation criteria which takes into account factors such as network gap analysis (e.g. accessibility to town centres), sustainability, value for money and deliverability.

In order to react quickly to the aspirations of the NBS and the priorities identified through our engagement activity, KCC will utilise feedback collected to identify and deliver (subject to funding) a series of Year 1 service enhancements that are quickly deliverable.

Over summer 2021, based on feedback, the KCC public transport team collated over 1,000 suggestions for such service enhancements. The list is extensive and the NBS would not be able to support implementation of them all.

As a result, KCC developed the following methodology which will be used to shortlist and then prioritise suggested Year 1 service enhancements.

Filter

We have promoted all ideas for evaluation which met the following tests:

- That the enhancement is legally and practically deliverable
- That the enhancement offers genuine improvements with respect to current service provision
- That the enhancement is not prohibitively expensive to deliver
- That the enhancement is in line with wider KCC policy
- That the enhancement does not compete with an existing service.

This approach produced a long list of potential Year 1 service enhancements. These are detailed in Appendix C.

Evaluate and Prioritise

Following submission of this list of service enhancements in the pre-settlement version of the Kent BSIP, a process will take place to evaluate and prioritise them based on the following factors:

- Positive impact on current service levels
- Potential patronage and suppressed demand
- Ability to support Covid-19 recovery and network growth
- Ability to be reliable
- Positive impact on congestion levels
- Positive impact on air quality
- Positive impact on accessibility to key locations
- Ability for delivery with respect to physical accessibility
- Extent of support within engagement feedback
- Future sustainability potential
- Extent of integration with other services and sustainable travel modes.

Select

Once Kent's BSIP funding settlement is understood, a list of affordable service enhancements will be proposed for delivery, all of which will have been through this evaluation and prioritisation process. They will then be considered through KCC's governance processes and ultimately through the EP process for approval.

Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

Initiative: NDI 3

KCC and Kent's bus operators will deliver a range of Year 2 and 3 service initiatives which address areas with poorer accessibility levels identified through our Network Gap Analysis. In these areas more detailed analysis will be undertaken which will consider changes to the commercial and subsidised bus network, taking account of over and underserved corridors, the use of DRT and other alternative solutions and the Total Transport Concept, including the relationship with other layers of transport provision such as home to school and patient transport services.

Whereas the Year 1 proposals aim to deliver more instant service enhancements, subsequent years' network enhancements will be developed based on a robust analysis of specific issues. Areas of focus will be identified using a high-level Network Gap Analysis exercise conducted for this BSIP and detailed below. For these areas, KCC will conduct (or procure) holistic area reviews and evaluations to ensure all proposals meet the aspirations and targets of Kent's BSIP and related EP Schemes. These studies will include consideration of alternative forms of transport delivery (see Section 4.4) such as DRT which could also lead to more 'total transport' based solutions focused on integration with other service provision, such as non-emergency hospital transport and school transport outside of normal times.

To support these studies and the subsequent delivery/monitoring of solutions, KCC and operators will require:

- Consideration of solutions to facilitate data collection and optimise data manipulation on a regular basis. This will include setting common references and parameters and investigating software solutions already available within KCC such as Power BI
- Access to supporting planning tools
- A review of processes and staff resource to cover the increased scope of the transport planning activity
- A refined or new evaluation method to assess service solutions
- Consideration of an ongoing monitoring and review process to assess the impact of solutions on BSIP and EP targets.

Subject to funding, KCC and its operators will work towards delivering two detailed area studies in years one and two with a view to delivering supporting service enhancements.

Case study

Countywide gap analysis and congestion corridor analysis identified that Maidstone would be a priority area for review and detailed analysis. As such, in summer 2021 KCC commissioned a study to act as an exemplar of the approach we would use for further detailed studies. A summary of the approach and conclusions from this study can be found on the following pages.

Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

Maidstone Study

Purpose: Identify how to improve bus patronage in Maidstone focusing on increasing network coverage and accessibility to public transport in the district.

Population (2019 mid-year estimate): **172,000**

Percentage of population within 45 min of Maidstone Town Centre by bus: **85%**

Percentage of households within 400m of a bus stop: **91.6%**

Deprived population without access to a peak bus service: **2,100**

Primary client group households: **42%**

Secondary & tertiary client group households: **58%**

Number of bus routes: **50**

Estimated annual mileage (Remix): **5 million miles pa**

Estimated patronage pre-Covid: **7 million pa**

Accessibility score: **0.54**

Public Transport Mode Share (KCC Model estimation): **7.1%**

Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

Maidstone Study

Analysis:
The analysis of the existing bus network in Maidstone and results of engagement indicated the presence of a comprehensive and established network, carrying healthy passenger volumes. The commercial network is complemented by a subsidised network which covers the most rural parts of Maidstone districts and some school routes. While the network carefully balances level of services with established demand and funding available, some shortcomings are noted:

- Limited hours of operation on some routes (esp. on weekends and after 18:00 on weekdays) e.g. Services 13, 79, 89, 130, 205
- Convoluted routes with long journey times e.g. Services 9, 25, 67, 79A, 79C, 130, 185
- Low frequency of subsidised routes e.g. Services 206, 581, B150
- Complex service patterns e.g. Services 89, 205, X1

The shortcomings mostly result from need to maximise commercial viability and to ensure best use of the limited public funding and resources available. In some areas, these

financial limitations allow only a more limited level of service which in turn may contribute to the low PT mode share observed in the district. The study looks to explore options to address this gaps and 'level up' service provision more evenly between rural and urban areas.

Option developments
Several options will be considered to capture new patronage and improve quality of service of the current network. Embedded within the other BSIP initiatives, it is expected these will involve a mixture of:

- Adjusting the existing network to reduce journey times, improve directness of route, and strengthen corridors
- Improving level of service to relevant areas by funding longer hours of operation and/or increased frequency of service
- Exploring the use of demand-responsive transport (DRT) to improve rural and suburban transport
- Improving integration at railway stations and other interchange points, deploying MaaS at strategic locations. This also considering integration of other modes such as community transport options including the Kent Karrier Dial-a-Ride and dynamic carpool platforms (e.g., LiftShare).

Network design options, financial and patronage evaluations are currently being developed by *Via*. A short update of current progress is provided in Appendix D. KCC will carefully consider the wider impact of each option to shortlist a preferred option.

Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

Initiative: NDI 4

KCC and Kent's bus operators will seek to increase the proportion of the population within the 15, 30 and 45-minute catchment of the closest defined town centre for their district by improving corridor performance, service levels, speed and integration, including during off-peak hours.

Our high-level network analysis of bus journey time at district level revealed current peak performances. While no benchmark was established, it is recognised that improved journey time can significantly increase the attractiveness of the bus network, particularly to those who say they do not travel by bus because it is quicker by car. This is as much true for off-peak as it is for peak hours.

Overall bus journey time is affected by a number of factors:

- The vehicle speed, which is linked to congestion, number of stops and availability of infrastructure
- The level of services which impact the wait time and the ability to change vehicles within reasonable time
- The network design and resources available
- The ability to keep up with scheduled times

The most significant impact of any improvement is likely to be seen where travel demand is the high. Therefore this initiative will particularly target corridors in Kent.

For identified primary corridors, KCC will strive to meet the aspirations stated in the NBS in order to:

- Improve reliability and journey time by implementing more bus priority measures
- Improve overall journey times by reducing waiting times where feasible
- Ensure levels of service are adequate at all times, including in the evening
- Improve route and corridor design to limit the number of route variations and simplify the network where possible
- Ensure the route names do not create confusion
- Improve existing BRT routes or consider the introduction of new BRT routes where there is sufficient demand.

It is suggested that each of the primary corridors identified in the high-level network analysis is subject to further analysis and discussion with operators in Year 1, in order to commission at least two corridor studies per year thereafter. The studies will be holistic and consider feasibility of bus priority, segregation, level of service, network design, modal integration, supressed demand, marketing, etc. They will also consider the viability of BRT or Superbus solutions.

Case study: How corridor A226 Chalk - Gravesend Town Centre matches the NBS aspiration

A226 Chalk – Gravesend Town Centre

Number of services: **8 (incl. 2 school routes)**

Services: **190, 480, 481, 490, 416, 417, NAG1, V1**

Length: **1.6 km**

Population within 5 min walk: **6,000**

Expected activity from new development within 700m: **1,400**

Pre-Covid estimated daily pax on the corridor: **10,300**

Maximum estimated unrestricted demand: **2,000** (KCC model)

Attraction in peak: **940**

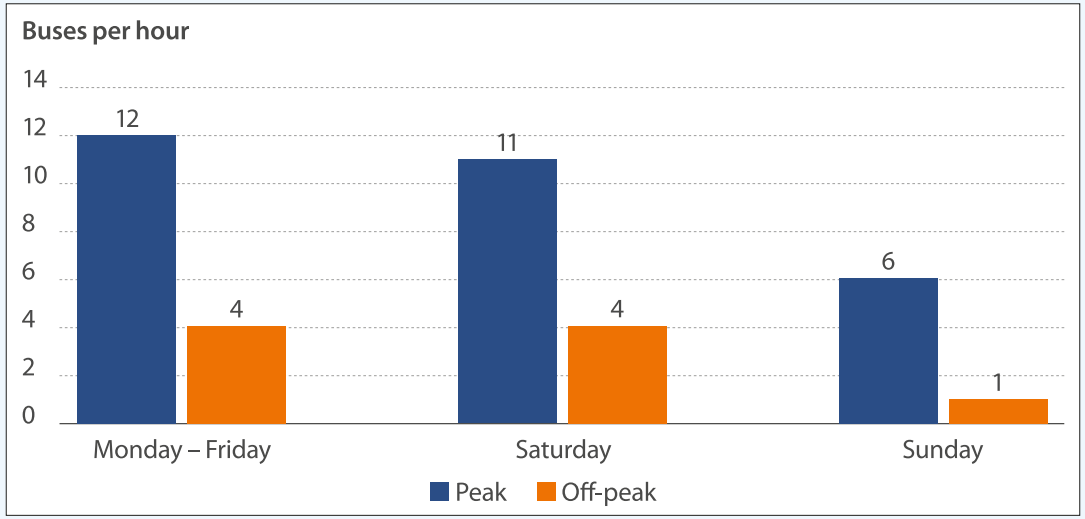
Peak Runtime: **8 min**

Evening Runtime: **5 min**

Peak schedule speed: **16km/h**

Evening schedule speed: **24km/h**

Other considerations: one way system in Gravesend leads to different route patterns. Parking is widely available along the A226.



Case study: How corridor A226 Chalk – Gravesend Town Centre matches the NBS aspiration

Corridor Quality Measures	Rating	Comments
Peak Frequency	**10 bph +jnys**	Turn up and go in peak
Peak to Eve	**31% to 12%**	Meet NBS requirement of 15 min in evening weekdays, but poor LoS on Sundays
Peak capacity vs attraction	**134%**	Potential to catch additional demand identified
Numbering duplication	**No**	
Service interval in peak	**between 3 and 11 minutes**	Timetable are not fully inter-timed
OTP on main services	**below target**	Performance affected by delay in other corridors
Speed differential Peak/off peak	**150%**	Investigate cause of run-time difference
Congestion	**High at the approach of Gravesend and Gravesend Town centre**	
Bus priority on roads	**One gate to access King Street**	
Number of different pattern per routes?	**<20%**	Few short journeys and services to Bluewater when opened, justified
Design	**Sound**	Design is adequate, LoS could justify last mile investment
Potential for BRT or Superbus	**Potentially yes**	Loading could justify, however needs further investigation. Will require network design changes
AQMA Zone	**Yes**	At the approach of Gravesend – Milton Rd

Section 4.3 Network Development (continued)

Initiative: NDI 5

KCC will review its criteria for the support of council-funded socially necessary bus services to ensure it continues to reflect the travel needs of the community and is in line with the changing requirements of the NBS.

NDI3 and NDI4 present new processes and new ways of working, targeting a passenger-centric approach and more collaboration with operators and stakeholders.

In parallel, a number of new delivery models are currently being developed nationwide and in Kent. These create opportunities to think differently, and potentially offer efficient solutions to existing challenges.

Considering these new processes, skills and models, KCC will look at reviewing the criteria currently used to consider funding for socially necessary bus services.

Initiative: NDI 6

KCC and Kent's district councils will produce a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), to ensure that improvements to bus services are fully considered and delivered with consideration of new planning developments.

Some elements of the NBS do not fall exclusively within the remit of KCC and instead sit with our district councils. Therefore, as part of the BSIP engagement process KCC has developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which has been presented to all of our district councils. We are working with our districts to get signed versions ready for the start of our EPs and there is broad support.

The MOU outlines what KCC and operators will offer through the NBS in terms of fair consideration of funding allocation and engagement with districts. In return, it asks that districts:

- Support the council and Kent's bus operators in all aspects of the Kent BSIP and EPs
- Help bus operators provide reliable bus services in their role as the parking authority by reacting positively to requests for targeted parking enforcement and by imposing new restrictions where needed to address problems affecting bus access in their remit
- To ensure that the needs of bus services are considered appropriately as part of any public realm works (including at construction phase), and that any such scheme is not to the detriment of services or passengers
- Work collaboratively with KCC and bus operators to maximise the opportunities for new bus stop infrastructure (shelters), establish appropriate locations and ensure all infrastructure is maintained and repaired as required
- Promote the bus as an effective way of tackling air quality issues and work with KCC on any funding streams available for the support of low-emissions vehicles
- Support KCC and our views in response to proposed new development consultations, and ensure the needs of bus operators and services are a primary consideration in all applications. Specifically, district councils must consider the Kent Design Guide in any new application and seek to secure funding through the development process to introduce new and enhanced services where appropriate.

Section 4.4
Alternative Delivery Models

Introduction

Both KCC and the county's bus operators accept that bus services in their conventional form are not the solution to all transport needs. In some rural parts of the county the geography, characteristics of the highway network and local demographics mean it is not viable to run full-sized vehicles throughout the day and on a frequent basis. In fact it is often not commercially viable or socially necessary to provide such a level of provision in these areas. In contrast, there are parts of the county where population levels, the number of travel destinations and geography mean that a more intensive level of service is required. Here, a higher level of frequency and very high levels of priority are needed for buses to become the transport service of choice.

We believe alternative forms of transport are sometimes more appropriate to meet these different needs. KCC has a number of examples of alternative transport modes, from our Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) scheme Fastrack to the use of different delivery models for rural areas, such as Demand Responsive Transport (DRT), community transport services and feeder buses connecting remote locations to the core bus network.

This section details Kent's current position with respect to alternative models of transport delivery. It also proposes initiatives to improve the offer through the opportunities presented by the NBS.

Current context and council involvement

Kent can already evidence an openness to, and experience of, alternative transport solutions. The county has successfully delivered a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) scheme in the form of Fastrack in the Kent Thameside area, and the model will shortly be rolling out in Dover to support the Whitfield urban expansion.

Kent has some good examples of Demand Response Transport (DRT) services such as the Go2 scheme in Sevenoaks (which features in the NBS document) and a developer-funded scheme in Ebbsfleet. In recent years, KCC has also introduced alternative rural transport initiatives in the form of feeder services around Maidstone and West Malling.

There is also a strong community transport presence in Kent. This plays a vital role in meeting transport needs in rural areas, particularly for some groups which may find it difficult to access conventional buses. KCC has a facilitation role in this respect, providing support and grant funding to parish councils and other key stakeholders to help set up new or develop existing community transport schemes.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)

Fastrack is Kent's Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) brand. The service provides fast, reliable and affordable transport in the Kent Thameside across two routes, services A and B.

Section 4.4 Alternative Delivery Models (continued)

The existing Kent Thameside network comprises several new and existing housing developments and business units around Dartford, Ebbsfleet and Gravesend. The Fastrack network in Kent Thameside connects communities to Bluewater shopping centre, a hospital, local town centres and national and international rail stations. From 2022, the Fastrack service will run at least every 15 minutes, 24 hours a day and 365 days a year.

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.

The current Kent Thameside network is the transport mode of choice for 22% of local journeys (within 500 metres of the network) and is internationally recognised as a proven example of BRT. We are targeting a 25% modal share by 2025. It is our view that Fastrack networks belong to the communities they serve, and the services provided must be directly influenced by them. So we include the views of non-users (including local businesses) who live and work closely, in forming our service plans.

Fastrack follows the principles of 'Public Transport Oriented Development' This means that Fastrack is built around developments that are in close proximity to the network by design. As the modal share statistics showed in earlier sections, the share of Fastrack versus the car is strong.

Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)

Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) is a user-led form of public transport often characterised by flexible routing and scheduling of smaller vehicles operating with shared occupancy between pick-up and drop-off locations according to the needs of the passengers. Whilst the concept itself isn't new, the advent of smart technology and on-demand service apps has led to a recent resurgence of the concept.

There are currently two DRT services in operation in Kent. In the Sevenoaks area, the Go2 service operated by Go-Coach was established in spring 2020, initially as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The service offers journeys on fully accessible vehicles on a 'bus stop to bus stop' basis between 6am-6pm Monday-Saturday. Journeys can be booked either using a mobile app or by speaking to a dedicated call centre booking line. The service is very popular and has been expanded in recent months to better meet the needs of local residents.

Kent also has another form of DRT in the Ebbsfleet area, funded through a local development site. The service is in place as a temporary measure before a permanent Fastrack service is established, to embed sustainable travel habits at an early stage. KCC acknowledges the vital role DRT can play, particularly in rural areas, and we are committed to exploring opportunities where it may meet transport needs more sustainably than conventional buses.

Section 4.4 Alternative Delivery Models (continued)

Other alternative transport models

In 2018 KCC conducted a countywide consultation of bus users and would-be bus users with a view to trialling new delivery models in rural areas which were proving problematic to serve through more conventional means. Following the consultation, five rural transport initiatives were introduced in 2019 on a trial basis. The pilots, which consisted of three feeder services, one taxi bus and one community transport scheme, continue to operate today as we evaluate their performance and consider their long-term potential. The results may also inform similar schemes across the county.

To date, the feeder services have been a success and have allowed for an increased level of provision for areas such as Hollingbourne and Leeds villages in East Maidstone. Passengers change buses to an onward connection (in this case to Maidstone Town Centre) at a designated point on a commercial bus route. Infrastructure improvements were delivered at this point when the feeder service was introduced, including a bus stand and an upgraded bus shelter.

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, parish councils and other groups 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.

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 also awarded a total of £395,070 in community transport grants across the county. The grants have allowed for the creation or growth of a number of community transport services including services in Bean, Hadlow, Northgate, Rolvenden, Rusthall and Tenterden. KCC is eager to build on this positive work to further develop the community transport sector to complement our overall bus offer.

KCC 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 2020 completed over 13,000 passenger journeys.

Existing challenges and barriers

Whilst KCC is keen to develop alternative transport options further, there are a number of challenges and barriers which need to be considered. 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

Section 4.4 Alternative Delivery Models (continued)

term sustainability. Issues for consideration include:

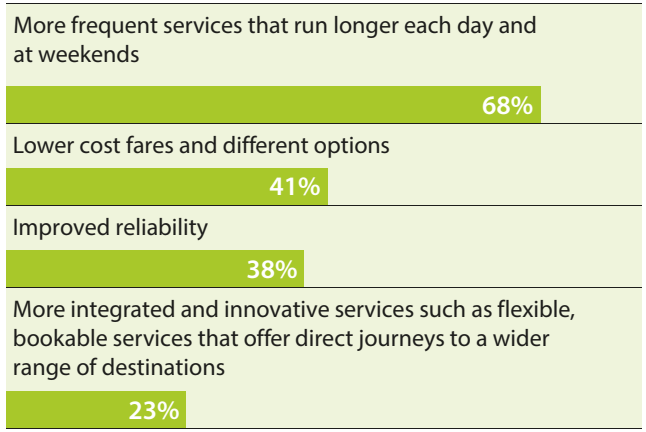
- Ensuring that BRT schemes offer enough 'end to end' priority in order to provide real journey time benefits over other modes
- Ensuring that there is an appropriate level of potential usage to sustain a viable BRT network
- Consideration that alternative modes e.g. DRT do not always come at a reduced cost and do not always offer better service levels for the same resource
- Consideration that some users may be resistant to the use of alternative modes, particularly if it involves using technology which might not be accessible or usable for all
- Consideration that, in the case of community transport, local organisations/parish councils may not have the resource, funding or skillset to deliver the schemes
- Ensuring that ticketing and fares offers can be integrated into alternative models.

Public / Stakeholder feedback summary

Feedback obtained through Kent's engagement activity for the production of the BSIP has identified that the main priority for Kent's residents is to have access to frequent and reliable services which operate on as many days as possible and for long lengths of time. As noted earlier in this section, this may not always be achievable or best suited through conventional bus travel, and this is where alternative transport options play a key role.

Feedback also showed that Kent's residents are open to new modes of transport. However we also learned that a number of residents still want conventional options within the equation, e.g. the ability to pay with cash and book by phone, not just via a smartphone app.

Figure 18. Results from public consultation



Kent's bus operators have told us they would be open to trailing new ways of operation to better meet the needs of Kent residents.

Areas for development and future thinking

We are keen to develop all the areas of alternative transport provision detailed within this section and have developed a set of initiatives to support this. Firstly, we wish to develop our Fastrack offer in the Kent Thameside area through growth of the network and the introduction of new infrastructure. We want to see full electrification of the fleet and the Fastrack model rolled out to Dover in East Kent.

We want to continue our positive work with respect to community transport and fully consider the role that DRT and other transport solutions can play in providing high levels of bus provision in rural areas.

We also want to deliver Superbus networks in Kent, taking high performing routes and refining them in conjunction with operators through a combination of infrastructure improvement, frequency improvements and fare initiatives. Our BSIP initiatives for this important area are detailed below.

Section 4.4 Alternative Delivery Models (continued)

Initiatives

Initiative: ADMI 1

KCC will continue to develop Fastrack Kent Thameside to delivery of full network, roll out the service to Dover and give consideration to the future relationship between Fastrack Kent Thameside and Crossrail.

KCC wants to see the continued development of the Thameside Fastrack service to establish a world-class rapid bus network to serve the Dartford, Gravesham and Ebbsfleet area.
The existing Fastrack network is already popular with local communities, integrating the new developments at the Bridge, Crossways and Ingress Park areas of Dartford. Fastrack routes A and B have proved particularly successful and the 25km network now comprises 60% dedicated bus lanes or bus-only roads. However, there are areas where the buses still run on the general road network, causing significant delays.
The Ebbsfleet Development Corporation are investing in completing new sections of dedicated Fastrack lanes to enable fast, frequent, reliable and sustainable journeys and reduce car-dependency in the area.

The completed network will bind together hubs and communities across the Ebbsfleet area and these public transport corridors will create the spine along which higher densities of housing, employment and local facilities will be concentrated. It is hoped that Fastrack will become a truly world-class BRT system and maximise usage levels with the following attributes:

- A consistent, comprehensive, high-frequency service
- Varying priority along its route, but assuming the highest levels of segregation from traffic on dedicated roads. More than 80% of the system proposed will be on segregated routes
- High quality bus stops and roadside infrastructure
- High quality vehicles
- Bespoke operating contract /arrangements
- Premium branding, promotion and marketing

Section 4.4 Alternative Delivery Models (continued)

A bid has been submitted to the Government's ZEBRA fund to support the establishment of zero emission buses across the Fastrack network.

A new Fastrack network will also be delivered in Dover to connect the town centre with its High Speed 1 rail link, Dover Town Centre and new housing developments around the suburb of Whitfield. The network will connect local communities with their amenities, places of work and commuter rail, but also key tourist markets such as historic Dover Castle and White Cliffs attractions, and international travellers heading to France. Fastrack Kent Thameside is considered the flagship bus operation of Kent. Its success attracted Dover to take on a 2nd Fastrack network.

In 2019, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) provided funding to the C2E Partnership to undertake a comprehensive study into options to improve transport connectivity between Abbey Wood and Ebbsfleet/Gravesend in order to support new housing and employment growth along the corridor.

The C2E Partnership is looking to improve transport links between Abbey Wood in south east London and Ebbsfleet in north west Kent. Whilst rail and bus links already exist, journey times both within the area and into central London and other parts of Kent can be slow and unreliable. Pre Covid-19, the services were also over-crowded at peak times.

The opening of the Elizabeth Line (Crossrail) will provide fast, frequent services direct to Canary Wharf, central London and Heathrow, but will terminate at Abbey Wood. Improvements to the transport network east of Abbey Wood would make the most of the new Elizabeth Line services, supporting new homes being built whilst improving access to jobs, services, major transport hubs and leisure opportunities across the area and beyond.

Local authorities in the area have long sought to improve public transport and enhance the quality of life for residents. Despite the pandemic, we still need to plan ahead to make sure our local area is well placed to lead a future economic recovery. Even if our working habits change, high quality public transport links will remain important to our daily lives.

One option is a lower cost package of transport connectivity improvements that combines enhancement to existing National Rail services between Abbey and Northfleet and the introduction of new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) services between Abbey Wood and Ebbsfleet.

The National Rail element of the option proposes that four Southeastern trains per hour operating between London and Dartford via Abbey Wood would be extended from Dartford to Northfleet. This would increase the number of Southeastern trains to/from London serving stations between Northfleet and Dartford for connection to Elizabeth line at Abbey Wood from four to eight trains per hour. To accommodate this, the two trains per hour 'circular' services currently operating between the Bexleyheath branch line and the Abbey Wood branch line would be diverted to Dartford and the second train per hour 'circular' service operating between the Crayford and Abbey Wood branches lines would be diverted to operate a new 'circular' service between the Crayford and Bexleyheath branch lines. It is also proposed that the two Thameslink services per hour that operate between Abbey Wood and Ebbsfleet would also stop at Belvedere and Erith (they currently do not). To deliver these service enhancements some new infrastructure works would be required at Northfleet station to accommodate and turnback the additional services on the route east of Dartford.

Section 4.4 Alternative Delivery Models (continued)

The BRT element introduces two new service routes, each operating at six buses per hour in each direction, supported by a combination of bus priority measures on existing highway and sections of a new segregated busway, accompanied by new high-quality zero emission vehicles and passenger facilities (stops, information etc.). One service route would operate between Abbey Wood and Ebbsfleet International station via Slade Green, Dartford and Bluewater.

The other service would operate on a more northerly route between Slade Green and Ebbsfleet via Greenhithe and Northfleet. These new BRT services are anticipated to make use of existing Fastrack infrastructure where appropriate between Dartford and Ebbsfleet, in addition to the Fastrack network already in place. The introduction of the services between Abbey Wood and Dartford might be accompanied by complementary bus service changes on other existing routes.

Initiative: ADMI 2

KCC will establish a policy to ensure opportunities for BRT are explored, including the creation of a housing development trigger-point for larger scale developments.

As development levels increase in a number of areas across the county in response to national requirements and housing need, KCC acknowledges that there could be a prominent role for BRT to play in the transport offer. However BRT requires high densities of population, space for end-to-end priority and a local appetite to embed buses into the local development process. KCC will work with its partners under our EPs to develop criteria, and particularly a housing development trigger-point, to inform when BRT may be an appropriate transport solution for the area concerned.

Initiative: ADMI 3

KCC will continue to support the community transport sector. We will continue to refine our toolkit to support the sector's growth, and continue to run grant schemes that fund the delivery of new community transport services.

KCC will work with our community transport partners to evolve Kent's community transport offer. Funding through the NBS would support the introduction of further grant schemes which would then be used to facilitate new community transport schemes including a new scheme to link Romney Marsh and Ashford which has been proposed by the local community and develop existing services. KCC will refine the community transport toolkit to support this work.

Section 4.4 Alternative Delivery Models (continued)

Initiative: ADMI 4

KCC and Kent's bus operators will consider areas where a Superbus approach to network development could be implemented to deliver improvements in infrastructure, fares, reliability and journey times and achieve a 'premium' service standard.

Kent has previously explored the potential to adopt the Superbus approach, and identified a possible scheme for submission for the Government Superbus Fund at the start of 2020. In line with DfT's Superbus definition, our scheme sought to work closely with the operator and local district council to deliver improvements at congestion pinch points on the already well performing LOOP service. In return for the priority measures, Stagecoach would have delivered further improvements to the local bus network in terms of frequency improvements and fares initiatives. All parties would also work towards improved marketing in the area. Ultimately, this was not submitted but it enabled the council to form a view that parts of our network have the potential to support such a scheme. Using NBS funding we are seeking to reinvigorate this Thanet Scheme.

KCC views the Superbus ethos as supporting multiple BSIP initiatives: underpinning parts of the network that already have a strong commercial service, supporting a number of areas to stimulate further bus use, and adding service enhancements to create a 'premium' standard.

With our existing knowledge of the network and through operator engagement supported by the BSIP and EP Governance structure, KCC will identify areas of the network suitable for 'Superbussing'.

Initiative: ADMI 5

KCC and Kent's bus operators will consider the role that DRT, feeder services and other alternative modes can play in solving rural connectivity issues.

Kent can already point to the use of alternative transport types to service rural areas. Experience gained from the launch of the 'Go2' DRT scheme in Sevenoaks, and the replacement of some end-to-end bus services with feeder services, supports our view that in some cases these alternatives provide better solutions than conventional bus services, particularly in rural areas.

Section 4.4 Alternative Delivery Models (continued)

By its nature DRT only operates when there is a need, so if designed and focussed well it can represent a far more efficient means of providing transport for areas with less significant or consistent demand. In turn, this can mean larger areas can be serviced with more limited resource.

In addition to efficiency considerations, DRT can also offer a different type of service. Different destinations and journeys that operate longer hours and on additional days of the week could attract new and even non-bus users to use public transport. Commuters are a good example of such a group, where DRT can offer journeys and rail connections that would not be considered sustainable on a conventional bus service.

As Kent expands the number and coverage of DRT schemes, KCC intends to provide a common platform for service management and passenger information and booking. It is hoped this could remove some of the financial barriers that currently exist, and the platform could be opened up to new schemes and operators. KCC will also give consideration to putting all DRT schemes under one common brand.

Similarly, whilst not such a radical departure from end-to-end bus services, areas not directly served by but in in close proximity to higher frequency bus corridors are ideal for feeder services. In 2019, the council launched a series of new rural transport schemes that included three feeder services that continue to operate today. In each instance, we identified and built enhanced interchange points with suitable infrastructure and an area to turn vehicles. Supported by through-ticketing agreements between operators where needed, instead of running the rural service all the way to the local town centre, passengers are dropped at the interchange location where they can access high frequency connections to the town centre.

The time saved is then repurposed into a higher level of frequency for the villages served. In addition to increasing frequency, organising services in this way also has the potential to open up a different choice of destinations through connecting services. KCC believes that there are other parts of the county with similar conditions and opportunities that should be explored.

In respect of all alternative rural transport solutions, a considered approach is needed. Suitable areas with both need and potential must be identified, and the design of the service must ensure that scale and resource are set at appropriate and sustainable levels, whilst still achieving a step change in provision. This more intelligent approach can be used to identify existing layers of transport and funding streams that can be incorporated to ensure sustainability.

The Council is therefore proposing that these alternative solutions form part of the delivery of Year 2 and 3 schemes. These will be focused on areas identified through countywide network analysis (explained in Section 4.3) as having poorer levels of current accessibility. Network redesign will stem from in-depth, data-led reviews of current provision on localised areas (as per the study included as Appendix D).

Section 4.5
Fares and ticketing

Introduction
This section summarises the current fares and ticketing offering in Kent, identifies areas for improvement and proposes initiatives that seek to address shortcomings and provide attractive ticketing offerings for bus passengers.

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.

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.

Different ticketing options already exist including commercial operator fares, KCC subsidised tickets and concessionary travel schemes such as ENCTS, and the Kent 16+ and Kent Travel Saver tickets. In addition to these fares, Kent bus passengers can benefit from the Kent Connected & Medway Smart Card and the Discovery Ticket, which allows unlimited daily travel on services for most operators across the South East region. In October 2021, an adult ticket for the scheme costs £9.00.

Below we will look in more detail at the different types of bus fares and tickets available in Kent.

Current context and council involvement
Commercial bus fares
Bus operators in Kent set their own bus fares using a graduated fare scale, with return and promotional fares not normally 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.

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 service. 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 such a small part 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)
KCC has a statutory duty to provide passes for free bus travel for older and disabled people who qualify under the regulations of the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS). 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 pass holder to free travel on any registered local bus service in England during

Section 4.5 Fares and ticketing (continued)

the operational hours of the scheme, 9:30am-11pm on normal weekdays (Monday to Friday) and anytime on Saturdays, Sunday and public holidays.

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 £10m 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. KCC remains committed to the schemes, but the costs are now amongst the biggest discretionary spends anywhere in the council.

Connected Kent + Medway

KCC and Medway Council have worked collaboratively in recent years to deliver the Connected Kent and Medway Smartcard scheme. The scheme is a multi-operator E-Purse scheme that offers an alternative to cash fares on smaller operator services where they do not yet have a contactless ticketing offer. Passenger fare incentives through the scheme are limited and for this reason, use of the pass is currently quite limited. However, it is considered that this could serve as an appropriate platform for new ticketing initiatives.

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. There are no peak period restrictions to the scheme.

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 bus fares.

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 difficult to achieve.

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 in some out-of-town destinations there are no parking charges at all. This makes it difficult for the bus to compete on cost.

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 wish to address through the BSIP.

Section 4.5 Fares and ticketing (continued)

Public / Stakeholder feedback summary

Feedback gathered through our public engagement and stakeholder activity has 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 is also a concern that has been raised through our 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".

Areas for development and future thinking

As detailed above, there is a lot of positive work already taking place in Kent with respect to bus fares and ticketing. However there is more that could be done. KCC and Kent's bus operators are excited about the opportunities and funding that the National Bus Strategy can provide. With this in mind we have come up with a number of key principles, one of which is to provide flexible and better value ticketing options and use technology to provide cashless and ticketless solutions on all operators' services.

Firstly, we want to investigate the possibility 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.

When it comes to fares, we want to see more flexible options such as the new flexible bus tickets being offered by Stagecoach in the Ashford area. Passengers can buy five or 10 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.

Through our BSIP and alongside some of our neighbouring authorities, we are also requesting that the DfT opens up the 16-17 railcard and 16-25 railcard products so that they become a public transport card for each respective age group. This approach is consistent with the aims of the Government's Bus Back Better strategy.

We want to continue to provide our Innovations Grant which offers operators the chance to bid for funding for ticket machine improvements or technology innovations such as contactless payments for fares, or 'tap on tap off' fares, to complement the acceptance of cash fares.

Section 4.5 Fares and ticketing (continued)

To deliver the above, and based on feedback received, we developed a range of initiatives. Some can be delivered without funding from the National Bus Strategy, but many require funding, either to implement or to subsidise future fares schemes.

Initiatives

Initiative: FTI 1

KCC and Kent's bus operators will introduce a multi-operator ticket covering the Kent network and through this will seek to introduce a simpler, more attractive and flexible ticketing offer.

We will work with local bus operators with a view to introducing multi-operator bus tickets covering the whole county, one option being to build on the existing Discovery ticket. This will require negotiation with operators and the introduction of a fare reimbursement rate for journeys made that must be fair for all operators.

Discovery
Your ticket to explore

KCC would like to investigate the possibility of bus operators introducing flexible fares. Flexible fares 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 standard season ticket less attractive as it isn't required daily. Flexible fares or season tickets could combat this and make bus travel more appealing than using private cars and paying for parking.

Through the implementation of a multi-operator ticketing scheme, KCC will look to provide a range of ticketing options that are simple, easy to access and sold at a reduced rate by comparison to fares bought on the bus.

Initiative: FTI 2

KCC and Kent's bus operators will look to identify and deliver specific fares and ticketing schemes, with a particular focus on initiatives which support recovery from the pandemic and access to tourism, employment opportunities and the support of Kent businesses.

We will work with individual bus operators regarding the possibility of fares and ticketing promotions in their areas. This could include the introduction of flexible ticketing to complement 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 a fares initiatives that would support job seekers in accessing employment. Fares promotions around tourism, events and outside activities will also be considered. One such example is Reconnect, a community-led programme designed to get Kent's children and young people back to enjoying the activities and opportunities they enjoyed before Covid-19. As part of the scheme, KCC provided Reconnect Family bus passes that allowed free travel for families during the school summer holidays in 2021. Not only did the Reconnect Family bus pass get people back on buses and help raise confidence in public transport after the pandemic, it also gave families without access to cars the ability to take part in the Elmer Elephant trail, where children hunted for decorated Elmer elephants in Maidstone town centre.

Section 4.5 Fares and ticketing (continued)

Initiative: FTI 3

KCC will support Kent's bus operators to develop their ETM and related back-office capabilities to enable the introduction of innovative and user-friendly ticketing offers including full network acceptance of contactless payments and fare capping.

KCC will continue to provide the Innovations Grant to local bus operators. This is a discretionary scheme that gives local bus operators the opportunity to bid for funding to either replace or upgrade existing ticket machines to offer smart compatibility (e.g. acceptance of contactless payments) or introduce wider technological innovations to their services (e.g. Wi-Fi, USB charging ports, visual/audio announcements). In the last couple of years KCC has awarded grants to assist local bus operators to upgrade or replace their current ticket machines with a particular focus on offering contactless payment during the Covid-19 pandemic. We would like to consider whether 'tap on tap off' can be applied to bus ticket machines, as used in London. Although recently the Innovations Grant has had a focus on cashless payment options, cash payments will remain on local bus services in Kent.

Initiative: FTI 4

KCC will consider the fares, ticketing and back-office requirements required to enable the introduction of ticketing solutions covering bus, rail and other modes to support the MaaS concept of service delivery.

MaaS benefits both the transport network and the user, allowing personalised journeys for the passenger (or close to). However, journey costs cannot simply 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.

Initiative: FTI 5

Through our EP Schemes, KCC and Kent's bus operators will seek to support the acceptance of multi-operator tickets on common sections of route.

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

Initiative: FTI 6

KCC will seek to continue to support home to school travel through initiatives such as the Kent Travel Saver, which make journeys more attractive and cost effective for the user.

KCC is seeking funding through the NBS process to ensure that it can continue to support parents and students with the costs of bus travel through its Travel Saver Schemes. In normal scheme years, these passes reduce the costs of bus travel for around 30,000 passholders, encouraging the ongoing use of the bus and tackling congestion at school times. In the event that funding can be secured, consideration may be given to expanding the under-16s scheme to include free evening and weekend travel.

Section 4.6
Infrastructure and Bus Priority Measures

Introduction

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 uptake levels. These include supporting services such as bus stops and the road network on which buses operate.

Bus stops 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 at a stop with a dry and safe waiting environment, 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 travel 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. But there is more that can be done.

Likewise, we know that there is a clear link between overall bus usage and end-to-end journey times on offer to passengers. One approach for speeding up travel times and making buses more resilient to pressures from the wider highway network is through the use of bus priority measures. Measures include traffic management, traffic signal control, bus lanes, priority at junctions and segregation. 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. Kent has a number of examples of effective bus priority which can provide the blueprint for future schemes.

This section looks to detail Kent's current position with respect to bus stop infrastructure and bus priority, and proposes initiatives to improve the offer through the opportunities presented by the NBS.

Current context and council involvement

Bus stop infrastructure

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 for a number of years and at a minimum, typically consist of bus stop poles, flags and timetable cases.

Section 4.6 Infrastructure and Bus Priority Measures (continued)

In order to ensure appropriate accessibility levels, many locations also include areas of hardstanding, 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 Maintenance (BSIM) 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 regularly undertakes upgrade works to its existing assets, e.g. by for instance upgrading flag types, changing poles or adding additional accessibility features and branding. Some examples over recent years include:

- 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 the county's Quality Bus Partnerships (QBPs) 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 in order 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.

Section 4.6 Infrastructure and Bus Priority Measures (continued)

Bus shelters in Kent are typically provided through 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 supports shelter provision in Kent by offering a popular Rural Shelter Grant to such groups, where match funding is provided for new or upgraded shelters. In recent months KCC has encouraged the use of environmentally friendly, sedum roof shelters to support Kent's Plan Bee initiative.

KCC also works closely with district councils and bus operators to monitor available standing/ layover space in Kent.

Bus priority measures

When it comes to bus priority in Kent, KCC as the Local Transport Authority 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 in the county. The nature of Kent's geography and physical road network does present a number of challenges in terms of identifying areas with the appropriate road space to deliver measures.

Despite this challenge, Kent has some very good examples of bus priority, including part of the award-winning Bus Rapid Transit 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.

KCC supports, where appropriate, the use of ANPR enforcement cameras on its bus gates to ensure that there are no safety issues arising from other modes utilising the infrastructure.

Existing challenges and barriers

Kent has some rural towns and villages across its geographical area which 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.

While KCC works closely with district councils with respect to bus shelters, this divided responsibility can lead to differing levels of service across the county. Some councils are not able to allocate

Section 4.6 Infrastructure and Bus Priority Measures (continued)

as much resource towards public transport as others, and some do not have a bus shelter contract in place. This causes a different quality of experience in differing areas of the county.

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented challenges for maintaining and installing bus stop infrastructure. Social distancing and furloughed staff delayed non-urgent work for some time and created a backlog that must be tackled while Kent continues to reopen.

Kent is a well-populated county and has several roads in major town and city centres that suffer from congestion at peak times. Whilst bus priority measures would alleviate some of these issues, often these locations have a lack of space for the road to expand. Bus priority therefore must compete with other sustainable transport schemes such as cycle lanes. The lack of space also means difficult decisions sometimes have to be made over where to physically install infrastructure, as a location with no impact on any surrounding business or home is not always available.

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.

Public / Stakeholder feedback summary

Feedback gathered through our engagement activity has shown that one of the most important factors for passengers when using the bus is the reliability and punctuality of services. Both bus stop infrastructure and bus priority can have a major impact on these issues, with the standard of facilities at bus stops impacting on boarding/alighting times and the availability of bus priority impacting heavily on end-to-end journey times and the extent to which buses are impacted by wider congestion.

Figure 19. Results from public engagement

Whilst data shows that the main priority for passengers are the services themselves, there is also specific reference to these features in feedback, particularly with reference to priority. Specific comments have 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."

Areas for development and future thinking

As detailed above, there is a lot of positive work already taking place in Kent with respect to bus stop infrastructure and bus priority. However there is more that can be done. KCC and operators are excited about the opportunities and funding that the National Bus Strategy can provide to a) roll out some of our success stories on a wider basis and b) develop new initiatives and collaborative working approaches through our EPs.

Firstly, we want to continue to drive improvements at our marked bus stops, to bring

Section 4.6 Infrastructure and Bus Priority Measures (continued)

upgraded facilities to more of Kent's 6,400 stops and to improve consistency across the county. We want there to be high quality flags with KCC's most recent branding at all of our stops, we want to have timetable cases at every marked stop with no exceptions and we want bus stop poles to be consistent, modern and in a good state of repair. We want to see more raised/dropped kerbs, clearways and areas of hardstanding to improve accessibility and we want to utilise advances in technology to make our stop environments as safe and appealing as they can be.

We want to undertake a thorough review of the way bus shelters are delivered in the county to determine whether there is a better way to drive high standards and consistency across Kent. We want Kent's bus shelters to provide a dry and safe waiting environment for passengers with good visibility of approaching buses and a robust approach to maintenance. We want to use Kent's shelters to deliver environmental benefits as far as possible through the use of sedum roofs, and explore opportunities to deliver key promotional safety or public messages.

We want to give key consideration to additional improvements that can be delivered above the standard offer at stopping locations which act as interchanges, either with other bus services or other transport modes. We want to build stronger relationships with our partners to ensure buses have appropriate waiting facilities at key locations in line with network development levels.

When it comes to bus priority, we want to see more schemes introduced in the county but we want to ensure these are delivered in areas which provide the maximum benefit to buses with respect to journey times. We have developed an approach for identifying congestion hotspots and will use it to inform where feasibility studies take place, subject to funding. Finally we want to drive further improvements to the infrastructure supporting our Bus Rapid Transit schemes.

To deliver the above, and based on feedback received, we developed a range of initiatives. Some of these can be delivered without funding

from the NBS, but many require funding, either to implement or to increase the rate at which improvements can be delivered.

Initiatives

Initiative: IPI 1

KCC will ensure that there is continuous focus on the quality of marked bus stops across Kent. KCC will look to provide high quality boarding and alighting points for passengers as far as possible and continue to drive forward improvements in accessibility and appearance across Kent's bus stop assets.

KCC is committed to upgrading its existing infrastructure wherever possible to maximise accessible boarding points for public transport across the county. As a rural county, Kent has several stops in rural areas providing transport into major town and city centres. For some residents these stops are a lifeline, and we feel it is important that the quality of infrastructure in these areas rivals that of the busier stops wherever possible.

In some rural areas, further physical infrastructure development is challenging, and fully furnished bus stops may be unachievable. To overcome this, KCC will continue to develop a plan to support Hail & Ride operations in appropriate locations.

KCC is committed to using its resources to review Hail & Ride suitable locations and identify new opportunities where available to keep Kent connected. We will work with our EPs to ensure Hail & Ride is used appropriately and safely, and to ensure Hail & Ride is utilised to best benefit our rural communities.

As the bus network grows and changes, KCC must ensure that adequate infrastructure is provided to serve the network and ensure access is provided for anyone that needs it. Regardless of funding, KCC will look to ensure that any new bus stops installed meet full accessibility standards, and that existing bus stops are upgraded to the same standard whenever work takes place.

Additionally, where problems are identified through EPs or reports from members of the public, we will seek to make necessary highway changes to ensure problem boarding points become accessible. We will attend and upgrade sites as they are identified, installing raised boarding points, crossing areas and parking restrictions where necessary. We will also ensure all stops have appropriate room for timetable information to be posted, ensuring that multiple operators and services do not need to complete for space.

If funding is secured through the NBS, we will also look to proactively upgrade the existing bus network wherever possible. We will commission a full survey of all existing marked bus stop assets in the county to establish what measures are already in place and identify areas for improvement. We will then identify specific corridors or areas to upgrade with agreement from our Enhanced Partnerships, delivering at least two schemes per EP per year.

Initiative: IPI 2

Working with borough, district and parish councils, KCC will seek to deliver improvements in the provision and maintenance of bus shelters across the county, placing particular emphasis on using advances in technology to incorporate environmental benefits.

As detailed earlier in this section, a high-quality boarding, alighting and waiting environment can make a significant difference to a passenger's overall experience, particularly if the bus service being accessed is subject to delays.

Currently in Kent there is a varied approach to bus shelter provision with some shelters (mostly in urban areas) provided by borough/district councils, others by parish/town councils

Section 4.6 Infrastructure and Bus Priority Measures (continued)

and some via new housing developments, with mixed results. This initiative seeks to use the new partnership powers of the NBS to deliver improvements and consistency in this important area.

Firstly, through Kent's EP schemes, we will seek to explore whether there is a better way to provide and maintain urban bus shelters other than through separate contracts with each borough/district council. We will seek to explore whether there are opportunities to introduce a unified approach covering each EP Scheme area, delivering economies of scale, increased and improved consistency of design and a single point of contact for maintenance, cleanliness and repair issues. Contract costs at borough and district councils with respect to bus shelters are typically offset by advertising revenue generated at shelter sites. This can typically limit the number of shelters which can be provided overall within available budgets. Through the BSIP, KCC is also seeking funding to increase the potential number of shelter sites which can be provided.

In rural areas, KCC already provides a rural shelter grant to assist parish/town councils in delivering and improving bus shelters in their areas. The scheme is highly successful and oversubscribed every year. As such, KCC is also requesting funding through the BSIP to increase the bidding pot available through its Rural Shelter grant, delivering more improvements across the county each year.

As a key consideration for both of the above, KCC plans to use EP Schemes to drive forward the use of environmentally friendly bus shelters which use sedum roofs to provide a habitat where pollinators can thrive. This supports Kent and Medway's Energy and Low Emissions Strategy and KCC's Plan Bee project which has been developed to encourage local communities to improve food sources and habitats for pollinators in Kent.

Initiative: IPI 3

Through working with borough and district councils, KCC will seek to ensure that as Kent's bus network develops it provides appropriate operator facilities such as bus stands and driver amenities.

Through stakeholder meetings with operators, a frequent issue encountered in major town and city centres is identifying appropriate places for bus stands, where buses wait and drivers can take statutory breaks. Operators often request stands are installed close to appropriate amenities such as shops, public toilets, etc. These requests can compete with views from borough/district councils, who have specific visions for their town centres and do not want buses waiting in areas with heavy pedestrian footfall.

As the bus network changes and transport is needed for future developments, the requirements for bus waiting areas will be subject to change. We would therefore use EPs to continually monitor stand provision, and in partnership with

Section 4.6 Infrastructure and Bus Priority Measures (continued)

district councils, seek to create new areas where appropriate. EPs provide an ideal opportunity for finding locations that are agreeable to all.

Initiative: IPI 4

With a focus on integration, KCC will create a hierarchy for bus stops in Kent to identify key locations that have high levels of connectivity, either with other bus services or other transport modes. We will seek to deliver improvements beyond the 'standard' offer at these locations, with bike parking facilities, higher levels of passenger information, etc.

In Section 4.3, reference was made to Kent's key interchange points. This noted that some locations act as single bus boarding points with no link to other services but others are used for connecting bus services or other sustainable transport modes.

In relation to this, KCC and bus operators wish to ensure that there are appropriate levels of facilities at interchange points. Areas such as information, infrastructure, innovation and measures to support connectivity should be considered, reflecting levels of use. With this in mind, we will create a bus stop hierarchy to inform where funding should be prioritised.

In areas where there is interchange with other modes, consideration will be given to supportive measures such as bike parking facilities. Outcomes from our network analysis will be useful when conducting this work.

Initiative: IPI 5

KCC will use advances in technology to ensure Kent's bus stops are modern, safe and of a high standard of appearance, to enhance the user experience.

Scientific and technological advancements often provide us with exciting opportunities for new ways of working and creative ideas. At the same time, new legislation can change the requirements for bus stop infrastructure, to ensure the network is accessible for those who need it most. To keep up with these improvements and a changing bus network, it is important our infrastructure is modern and up to date.

Regardless of funding, we are committed to maintaining and trialling infrastructure and will continue to modernise Kent's bus stops. We will also investigate and trial the use of new reflective flags to enhance driver visibility.

Where appropriate and if funding is secured, we will adopt more advanced technology to provide a better quality of service for our residents. For example we will identify suitable poorly lit bus stops in rural areas to trial environmentally friendly solar powered renewable bus stop lighting. This will make bus users feel safer

Section 4.6 Infrastructure and Bus Priority Measures (continued)

accessing public transport during darker hours in areas where street lighting is not available. As the technology does not require a mains connection, we believe it will be of significant benefit to bus users in Kent's rural communities.

Initiative: IPI 6

KCC will look to evaluate the merits and feasibility of two bus priority schemes per year in each EP Scheme. These will take account of bus congestion modelling identifying pinch points that affect bus journey times, and consider local context and sensitivity, as well as potential network and passenger gain.

As noted earlier in this section, bus priority used correctly can have a big impact on end-to-end journey times, reliability and overall levels of service. KCC welcomes this focus and wants to build on the successful schemes already in place on the Fastrack network and in other parts of the county. We also want to ensure priority schemes are properly thought out, to ensure they:

- Deliver the biggest benefit for buses and passengers in high congestion areas
- Are delivered in areas where operators can offer benefits in return, such as frequency enhancements or increased hours of operating
- Formed through input from local representatives and stakeholders so that impacts are managed appropriately and maximum benefit is gained
- Align with wider strategies such as Active Travel to ensure that overall road space is optimised.

With this in mind, KCC used the Kent County Traffic model to identify key congestion locations on the network which also have the highest number of bus movements. The model shows the following locations as having the biggest issues:

- A207 Dartford Road to East Hill via Dartford Town Centre (two corridors)
- A226 Chalk – Gravesend Town Centre
- A226 London Road Northfleet – Greenhithe (two corridors)
- Bluewater Approach
- Bridge – Canterbury Town Centre – Fordwich
- Tonbridge Road – Maidstone Town Centre
- Tonbridge Town Centre – Tunbridge Wells Town Centre
- Ashford Town Centre A2042

Section 4.6 Infrastructure and Bus Priority Measures (continued)

Further discussions with operators and the analysis of existing patronage data also highlighted two further corridors of interest, along the loop service alignment in Thanet and on the Maidstone Town Centre to Wheatsheaf corridor.

This data will be supplemented by input from operators to inform a longlist for consideration of improvements.

In Year 1, subject to NBS funding, we will work with operators and other key stakeholders to conduct feasibility studies for two potential schemes to improve bus journey times in each EP Scheme area. In Years 2 and 3, again subject to NBS funding, we will seek to deliver these schemes following full local consultation.

Initiative: IPI7

KCC will support infrastructure and highway schemes to support the development of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) projects in Kent.

As noted in Section 4.4, KCC is proud of the success of its BRT scheme Fastrack. Where circumstances are right and if funding is available, we are keen to look at opportunities to roll out the project on a wider basis. To support Fastrack, we will continue to identify opportunities to improve levels of end-to-end priority to further enhance the journey experience.

Specifically, through the NBS we are seeking funding to replace all shelters on Kent Thameside Fastrack Routes A and B with more modern alternatives including upgrades of all RTI screens. We are also seeking funding to deliver appropriate bus infrastructure facilities in Dover Town Centre to support a punctual operation of the pending Dover Fastrack Scheme needed to support the Whitfield Urban Expansion.

Section 4.7
Environmental factors and air quality

Introduction
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 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.

Current bus fleet in Kent
There were 953 buses operating on routes which serve Kent during Summer 2021. Of these, 249 are Euro 6 diesel buses. The remaining vehicles are of Euro 5, standard or below. Some vehicles are nearly 20 years old, 15 years being the normal lifespan of an operational bus. Efforts need to be made to improve emission standards across the county by upgrading older buses.

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

Current context and council involvement
Around 90% of all services operating in Kent are provided on a commercial basis and do not attract subsidy from KCC, running only for the revenue generated by passenger usage.

Section 4.7 Environmental factors and air quality (continued)

Our EPs provide us with new opportunities to build on the positive relationships we already have with our operators. They will enable us to deliver environmental benefits in the county through the promotion of the bus as a sustainable means of travel and by improving fleet emission standards when possible.

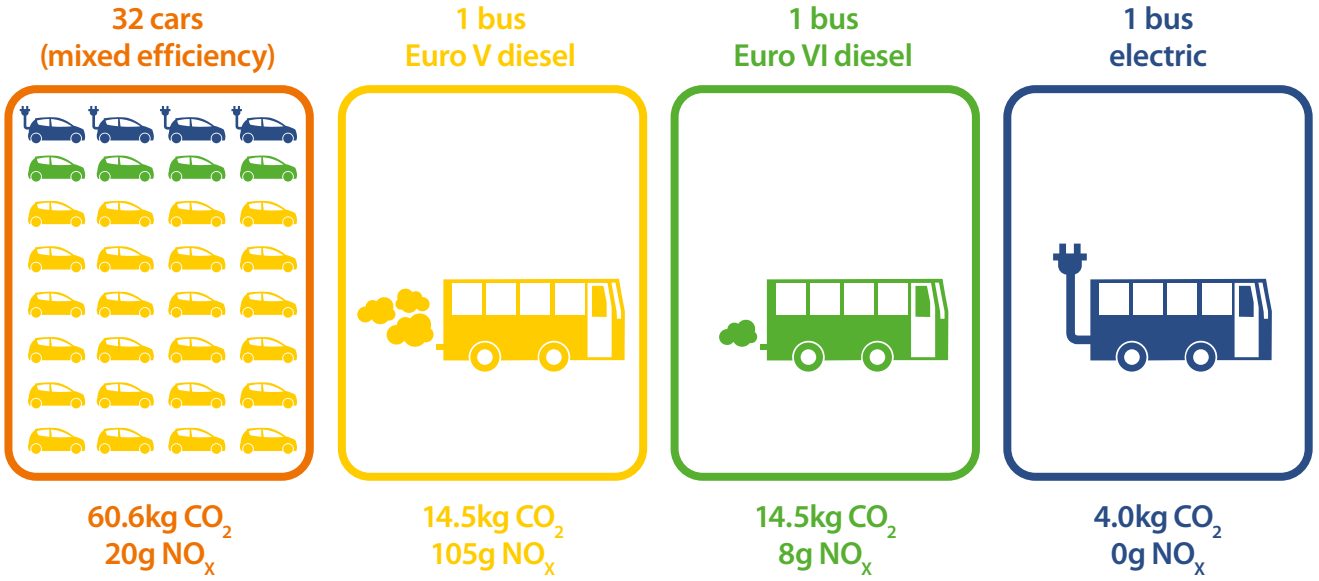
Through its bid to the DfT ZEBRA fund, KCC has used Fastrack as an initial focus for a new zero emission bus fleet with 'opportunity charging' to improve environmental issues and air quality. Through this BSIP we have given consideration to how NBS funding could be used to roll out further vehicles to other areas. As a crucial element of KCC's Local Transport Plan, and an integral part of regeneration in Kent, Fastrack is closely managed by KCC as the LTA.

As an example, electrifying our BRT network (Fastrack) is included in The Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy. The strategy sets out how KCC will respond to the UK climate emergency and ensure that our re-emergence from the Covid-19 pandemic is driven by clean and resilient economic growth. The goal is eliminating poor air quality and reducing fuel poverty, whilst also promoting the development of an affordable, clean and secure energy supply chain across Kent and Medway. To be successful, the strategy will develop programmes in partnership with local businesses, community groups and residents. A technical implementation plan accompanies this strategy and provides detailed information on the specific actions to be taken to achieve each priority, the partners involved, timescales and outputs. Progress, risks and issues are regularly reviewed by Kent Leaders, Kent Chief Executives and appropriate partnerships. In the case of Fastrack, the Fastrack Advisory Board provides an additional layer of scrutiny and support. Progress reports and the latest indicators for our scheme will be published online at www.kent.gov.uk/environment

Existing challenges and barriers

The biggest challenge is funding the purchase of zero emission buses, as these initial purchase prices are currently more expensive than equivalent diesel vehicles.

Figure 20. Positive environmental impact of the bus



Section 4.7 Environmental factors and air quality (continued)

KCC are seeking funding though 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 more steady 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 10.1). Particularly where vehicles have better emission standards, buses are already supporting the overall agenda to improve air quality. 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.

Impact of Covid-19

Bus operators are still recovering from the impact of Covid-19, which accelerated a reduction in bus use. From an economics perspective, this increases the challenge to support investment into the evolution of bus fleets to newer and more environmentally friendly vehicles.

The recovery from Covid-19 has been car-centric and this needs to change to encourage more use of public transport. Bus operators have financial restrictions and 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.

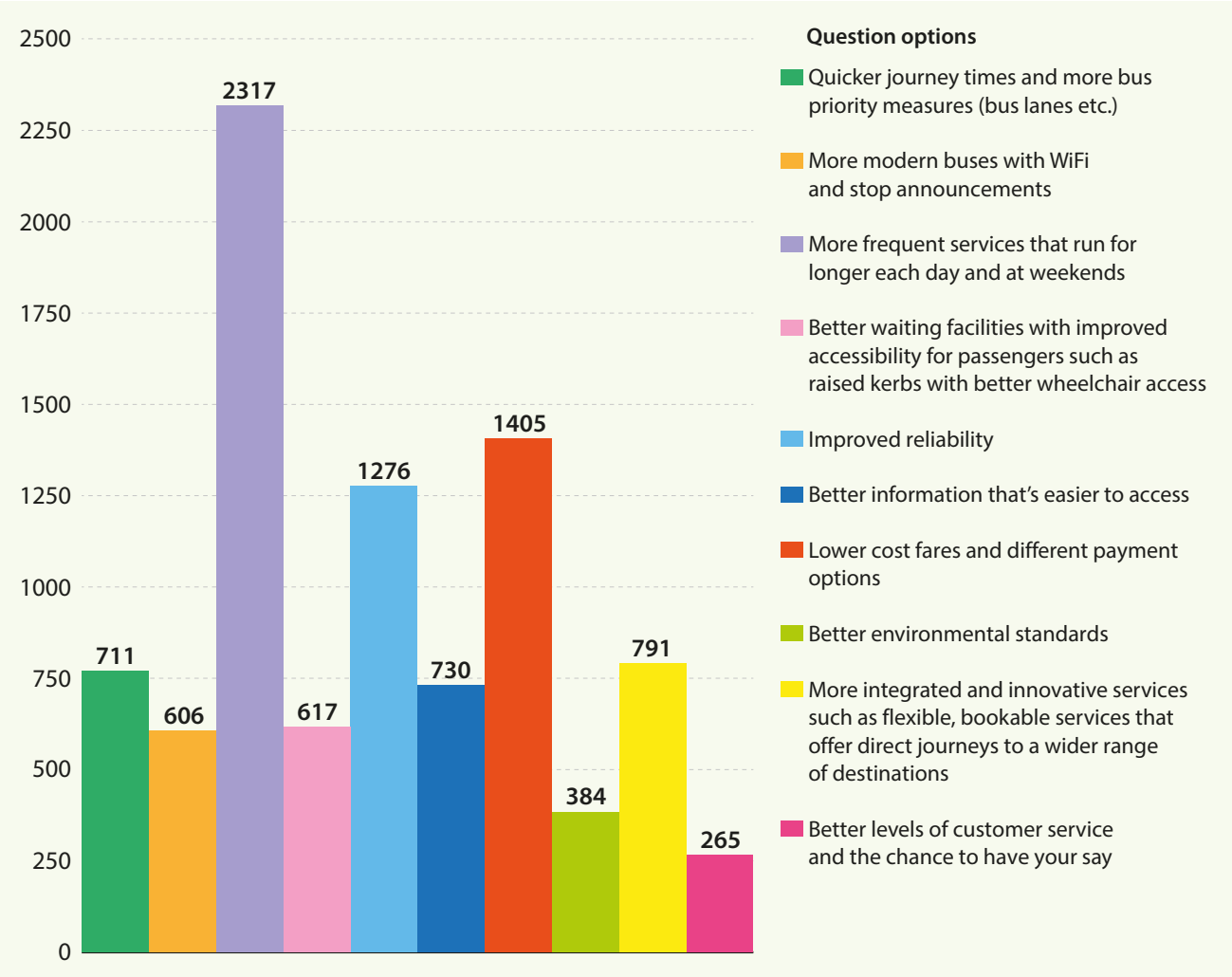
Section 4.7 Environmental factors and air quality (continued)

Public / Stakeholder feedback summary

Q1. What are the things that would make using buses easier and more attractive for you? Choose your top 3.

Feedback from public engagement indicates that 'better environmental standards' is 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 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 are keen to see air quality improved through the Kent BSIP. 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.



Section 4.7 Environmental factors and air quality (continued)

Areas for development and future thinking

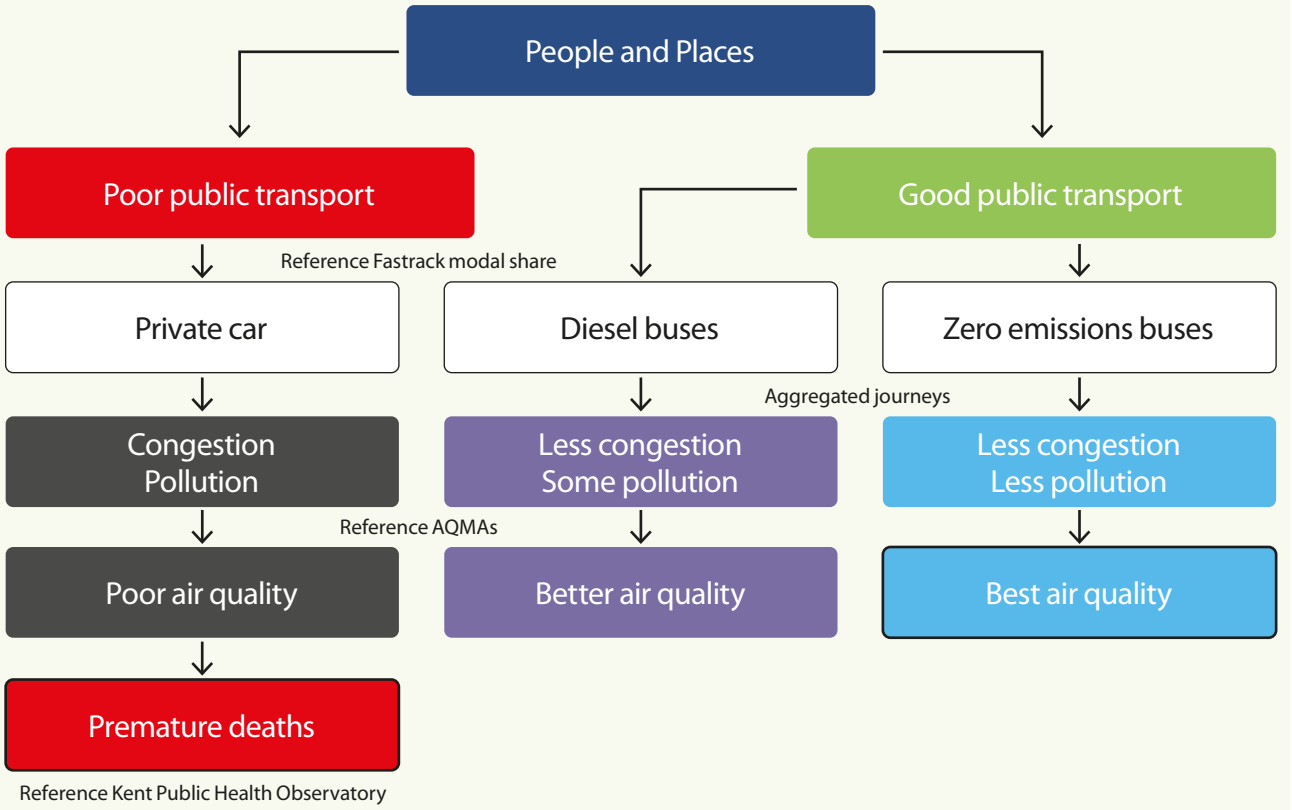
Through the BSIP and associated EPs, KCC has a range of initiatives that seek to steadily improve the environmental standards of buses in Kent as funding becomes available. KCC and its bus operators will achieve this through a combination of improvements to vehicle emission standards incentivised through EP targets, and more focussed initiatives aimed at expanding the use and understanding of vehicles that use alternative fuel types.

To focus the efforts of the BSIP in the right areas, KCC is developing 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. 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 Electric case study

Fastrack follows the principles of 'Public Transport Oriented Development'. This means that Fastrack is built around developments that are in close proximity to the network by design. As the modal share statistics showed in earlier sections, the share of Fastrack versus the car is strong.

Figure 21. Model for PTOD



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.

KCC's plan is to further enhance the Fastrack network across Kent, as it truly represents a viable and attractive alternative to the private car. Through aggregated journeys, we can alleviate both emission levels and gridlock.

Section 4.7 Environmental factors and air quality (continued)

With a 22% modal share locally on the existing Kent Thameside network, rising to 25% by 2025, our high frequency Fastrack network will play a critical role in improving air quality by providing nearly a quarter of local journeys.

Beyond Fastrack, it is KCC's ambition as the LTA to purchase non-fossil fuel vehicles for any future services contracted by the authority where KCC provides the vehicles. Through the new National Bus Strategy, we hope to have greater influence over the quality of buses in Kent, and will use Fastrack for learnings and as an example of good practice.

Initiatives

Initiative: EAQI 1

KCC and Kent's bus operators will explore all opportunities to secure funding to improve emission standards on buses operating across Kent, with a particular focus on moving parts of the network towards zero emissions.

KCC has already submitted a second stage bid for ZEBRA funding based on the electrification of the Kent Thameside and future Dover Fastrack bus fleet (explained above). We feel this will increase our understanding of the opportunities and limitations of using this fuel type, and become a 'blueprint' for similar initiatives where conditions and service contexts are right. Through the Kent BSIP KCC is asking for funding which would part fund alongside investment by the local operator the conversion of the rest of the Kent Thameside network to Zero Emissions.

Initiative: EAQI 2

KCC will form an air quality corridor hierarchy taking account of Kent Air Quality Management Areas, and use this as the basis on which to prioritise future funding for zero emission corridors.

KCC will form an 'air quality corridor' hierarchy, taking account of already identified Air Quality Management Areas as well as the intensity of bus operation in these zones. The hierarchy will be used to identify two priority corridors that using NBS funding we would look to convert to zero emissions during the three year period of the NBS.

Initiative: EAQI 3

KCC will use the EP process to establish minimum standards for emissions on buses operating in Kent, seeking to introduce a targeted approach to improve standards over the term of the EP Schemes.

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.

Initiative: EAQI 4

KCC and Kent's bus operators will actively promote the environmental benefits of the bus through better promotion of the network and the comparable impact of bus use against other modes of transport.

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.

Section 4.8
Role of Innovation and Digital Accessibility

Introduction

Buses must be accessible for everyone, including older and disabled people and those travelling with young children. They are one of Kent's most affordable public transport options, and for many they are the easiest choice. Buses are relied upon by a diverse range of Kent's communities, allowing access to places they might not otherwise be able to reach. For some, buses are the only way to get around, so addressing issues such as reliability and ease of travel is essential. Digital technology can be transformational in these areas.

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed people's behaviours and lifestyles and it is clear that technology has a profound effect on the way society works. Increasingly digital connectivity will continue to change the way we live and work going forward, as new generations enter the workforce and new economic models - such as shared access over private ownership - continue to evolve. Embracing these trends will allow KCC to adapt the implementation of this strategy as needed, to achieve Kent's aims.

Bus services and service information should be accessible to all and we must avoid the creation of a digital divide in which some would have better travel information than others.

Public transport is the most efficient means of moving people over distances that are too long to walk and cycle. It supports good health because it usually involves active travel. It limits Kent's impact on the environment and frees up highway. It opens up opportunities and connects communities.

The quality and accessibility of travel links are fundamental to quality of life in Kent. Therefore there is a continuing need to improve the public transport network now, and plan it well for the future. To give Kent residents the public transport experience they deserve, and encourage more people to choose public transport over cars, services must be customer focused, accessible and affordable, and supported by highly trained staff. Particular attention must be paid to how the complementary modes of walking, cycling and public transport interconnect at transport hubs in towns and villages across Kent.

People with disabilities, who currently make up a significant portion of Kent's population, on average make one third fewer trips than those without disabilities. As the county's population ages, an increasing number of people could face barriers to travel. To counter this, inclusive design must be used across the transport system to ensure it is accessible to all, including on digital platforms. KCC and its partners must continue to make buses accessible to older and disabled people, and provide better customer care and information at bus stops and bus stations so people do not resort to private transport.

Existing challenges and barriers

Technological and innovative solutions are often not prioritised for investment, particularly in a climate where financial resources are limited. However it is increasingly the case that technology offers more efficient or better solutions, whether relating to how local authorities and operators work or the service itself. Recognising this, current Accessibility Guidance says we must consider how digital information is made more accessible, and how increased use of technology can support accessibility levels and improve the service offering generally.

Section 4.8 Role of Innovation and Digital Accessibility (continued)

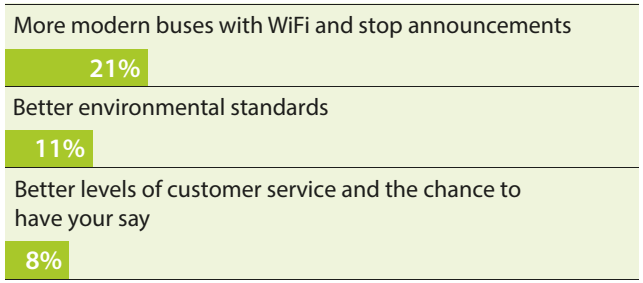
KCC embraces technology but our adoption of it has been sporadic, with initiatives focussed on supporting a particular project or service without forming part of a broader strategy. Through the BSIP, KCC wishes to develop a range of initiatives which will support other actions and position us as an enabler to operators.

Public / Stakeholder feedback summary

Surprisingly, public feedback suggests aspects of provision related to new technology such as Wi-Fi on buses and their environmental impact are not high priorities. However, increased use of innovation and technology does underpin advancements in almost all areas of provision which are identified as important.

For example, enhanced services, more flexible and demand responsive services, reliability and fares are all areas where significant developments need to be supported by the right infrastructure and where a greater use of technology will often support the development of the initiative. Information is very prominently in this respect where real time passenger information is consistently identified as a feature that the public would like to see more prominent and where, in order to make enhancements there is a need for more operators to be better equipped with the right equipment.

Figure 22. Extract from public engagement



Areas for development and future thinking

KCC has developed a range of initiatives which, in many instances, will act as enablers to future enhancements. Such initiatives support operators as they advance their services, which will allow them to consider new schemes and initiatives in the future.

For example, we wish to support operators as they change to a higher minimum standard of electronic ticket machines. These will support developments in the areas of intelligence, fares, ticketing, information and reliability.

We will also look to embed a greater use of technology to support our own service planning and delivery. Specifically, we have identified initiatives around trying to embed the Mobility as a Service (MaaS) concept as part of future provision in the county. Initiatives focussed on the customer interface include next stop audio announcements to improve service accessibility for visually impaired customers.

Initiatives

Initiative: IDA 1

KCC will support operators financially to help them secure enhanced ETMs, associated back-office function and TransXChange and Real Time Information capability. This will support a range of initiatives in respect of Real Time Information, ticketing and reliability.

Kent's many and varied bus operators span a wide profile of electronic ticket machines. Larger group and medium-sized operators often have modern ETMs that support smart and contactless ticketing and provide Real Time Information feeds, while smaller, independent operators often use very basic ETMs without the technology to do anything other than issue tickets.

KCC has collected data from all our bus operators to understand the number and capability of their ETMs. We are seeking funding to bring them all to a consistent, minimum standard so that ticketing and RTI initiatives would be open to every registered service in the county.

Section 4.8 Role of Innovation and Digital Accessibility (continued)

Initiative: IDA 2

KCC will embrace the use of modern technologies and software to support a data-led approach to network planning.

Countywide, data-led analysis of the network has helped us identify accessibility levels and areas requiring focus. This provides a basis on which we can assess future service changes and developments.

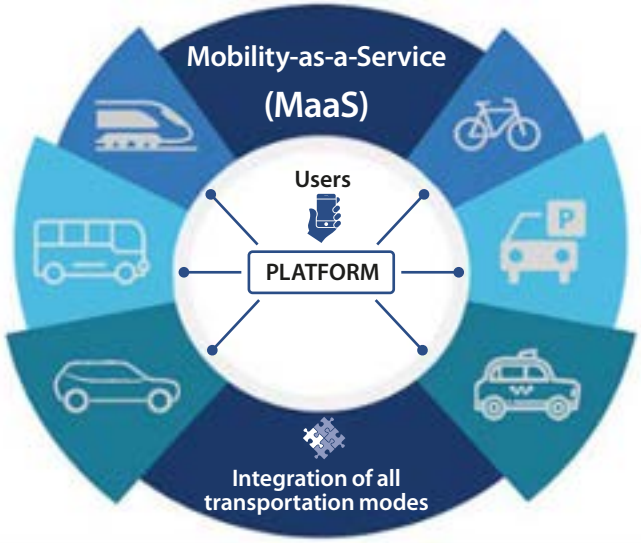
To inform Year 2 and 3 service initiatives, KCC intends to undertake more detailed network analysis. From this we can consider changes to the existing network taking account of over provision and areas that could support higher frequencies, the role of alternative solutions such as feeder services and DRT and the potential to repurpose existing funding streams for sustainability. This approach is demonstrated through a pilot study that was undertaken in the Maidstone areas as part of our BSIP background works. A report is included as Appendix D.

The council is therefore seeking funding to acquire network analysis and planning software. Alternatively, funding could be used to engage consultants to undertake this work on our behalf.

Initiative: IDA 3

KCC will deliver a MaaS pilot scheme in the North West Kent EP Scheme areas. We will look to expand the use of this platform to other parts of the county subject to the pilot providing a multi modal approach to service delivery.

Through our developing Mobility-as-a-Service app, we will help those travelling to, from and within Kent get to their destination in the most efficient and cost-effective way. We will achieve this by including all travel options, from real-time trip information to payment information, centrally and without bias.



We want MaaS to change in the way we consume mobility in Kent by fully integrating all forms of transport including all modes of public transit, bicycle hire, walking routes, car-sharing, carpooling, and more on one app. Our aim is to make MaaS a viable alternative to private car use.

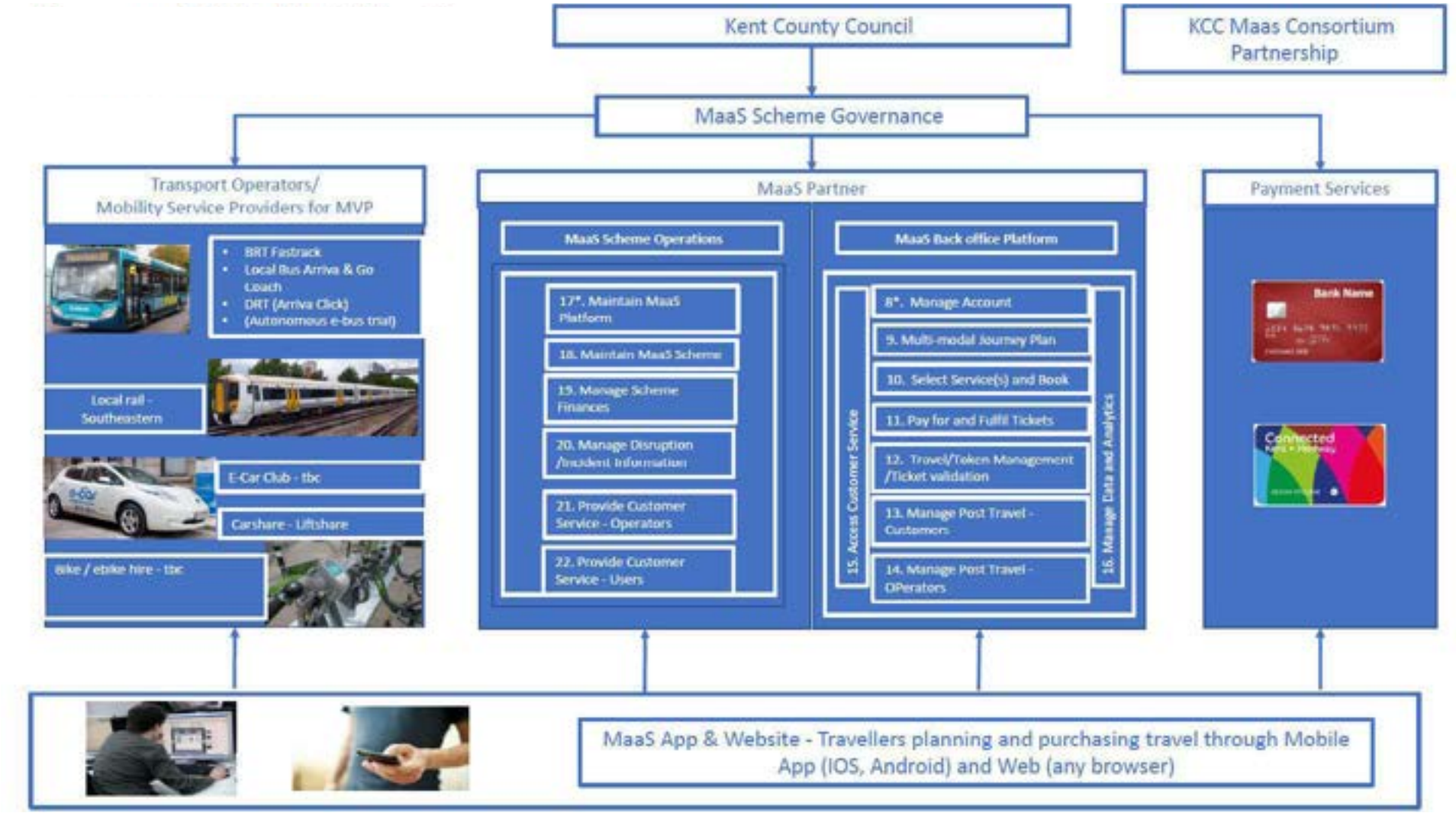
KCC is currently developing a Mobility-as-a-Service platform, 'Kent Connected'. A pilot scheme will launch in Ebbsfleet in 2022, after which it will be rolled out across Kent.

Using Fastrack Kent Thameside as the cornerstone of the platform and building on the Fastrack ticketing app, Kent Connected will organically and seamlessly link wider sustainable transport services into a single platform, offering affordable end-to-end journeys and connected RTI.

These links will expand our customer base by attracting users from other services, and increase the range of services offered to our existing users.

Section 4.8 Role of Innovation and Digital Accessibility (continued)

Figure 23. Proposed Ebbsfleet MaaS structure



Section 4.8 Role of Innovation and Digital Accessibility (continued)

Initiative: IDA 4

KCC will seek to embed the use of new innovation and technology to improve bus passenger experience, e.g. next stop announcement technology, the development of a passenger occupancy tool, audio announcements at bus stops and capital grants for supporting the introduction of RTI displays at strategic bus stop locations.

Supported by a range of other initiatives, KCC wants to see technology embedded in the customer offering both on the bus and outside the vehicle.

Initiatives designed to improve standards of information will focus on ensuring it is not just provided in the form of scheduled timetables but also as real time information, whether that be at the bus stop or through a council formed web portal.

We would also like to explore the provision of live information about available capacity, particularly to wheelchair passengers and parents with buggies about the availability of these dedicated spaces. We wish to incorporate next bus stop announcements on all services to enhance passenger experience and support the visually impaired and we want to encourage operators to fit on-board CCTV systems to assist with actual and perceived passenger safety levels.

Section 4.9
Public Transport Information

Introduction
In accordance with the KCC Information Strategy, which is informed by the framework provided by section 139 of the Transport Act 2000, KCC currently provides public transport information to customers via a number of methods.

Ultimately, all of them are driven by a comprehensive database of information maintained by the Information Team within the Public Transport Department.

Current context and council involvement
Holding and maintaining the data
Information about bus stops is stored in a database called NaPTAN (National Public Transport Access Nodes) which is maintained using a product called Novus, supplied and hosted by Trapeze UK. As well as bus stops, this database covers taxi ranks, rail stations and any other location where the public could access any form of public transport. The council has a statutory duty to maintain NaPTAN information about stops in Kent under section 15 of The Public Service Vehicles (Open Data) (England) Regulations 2020.

Information about bus routes and timetables is currently stored in an application called Routewise supplied by Trapeze UK but hosted by ICT (although we are in the process of upgrading this application to Novus). Bus operators have a legal duty to submit any changes to their services to the council using a standard registration form. All stopping points used by bus operators in their service registrations must already exist in the NaPTAN database.

We provide both of these services on a commercial basis to five other local authorities outside Kent County Council.

Roadside timetable information
We use the routing and scheduling information we hold in Routewise 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 services posted this way are overwhelmingly contracted ones.

The Routewise software will export 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 quite time consuming. This work is done within the Public Transport department, and the finished documents are forwarded to our contractor (Arriva) for printing and distribution at the roadside.

Digital information
The bus service information we hold is also exported to two digital information resources.

The first of these is called Traveline, and it is aimed at the travelling public. Traveline consists of a national body (Traveline Information Limited, referred to as TIL) supported by regional consortia composed of local authorities in that region, which supply it with route and scheduling data. This is fed into a national dataset called TNDS (Traveline National Data Set).

A bulk export of our 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. It also provides real time information where available but does not provide fares data yet.

Section 4.9 Public Transport Information (continued)

The second of these 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. Exported data is hosted locally and is linked to by the BODS website, which acts as an aggregator. Data aggregated on the BODS site includes scheduled data, vehicle location information and fares data.

Under sections 3 to 14 of The Public Service Vehicles (Open Data) (England) Regulations 2020, bus operators have a legal duty to submit data to BODS, but the technical hurdles to doing so can be daunting for smaller companies.

Consequently, as well as supplying data to Traveline, we also act as a BODS data supply agent for a number of bus operating companies across the South East, again commercially. 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.

Currently BODS is in its infancy, having only gone live in January of this year. It is not yet fully populated and does not appear to be much used at present. However, use of BODS is expected to grow and will eventually supplant the Traveline regions as the main source of data supply to the Traveline dataset. Traveline South East (the regional consortium to which Kent belongs) is planning to close its doors once data from BODS becomes reliable, hopefully at the end of the 2021 calendar year.

While not the direct responsibility of the Public Transport department, real time passenger information is available at the roadside in a number of locations around Kent. Scheduling data exported from Routewise (or in some cases supplied directly by bus operators) is fed into a system called ImCity, provided by Dynniq Mobility, then cross-referenced with vehicle location data supplied by the operators' electronic ticket machines to create arrival time predictions. These are displayed to the public via electronic signs at over 50 transport hubs around Kent.

Lastly, independently of the Public Transport department, the council 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.

Section 4.9 Public Transport Information (continued)

The Kent Connected journey planner uses the Google Direction Service, which ultimately takes its data from NaPTAN and the TNDS.

Internally, the Public Transport department 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.

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 South East.

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 replaces. The site is also known to misbehave, failing to load properly when accessed from certain networks, including ours.

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 first Transport Direct and more recently the regional Traveline sites have been forced to close.

The Kent Connected site offers many 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.

Section 4.9 Public Transport Information (continued)

Finally, it should be noted that no option currently available offers a good e-ticketing solution for passengers. Bus operators' websites only offer season tickets, for instance, which is not useful for spur-of-the-moment journeys. They do not offer multi-operator tickets of any kind. Traveline does not offer an e-ticketing solution at all.

Kent Connected offers its own smartcard, but this is not a true e-ticketing solution as it relies on a physical card which is used to buy actual tickets when boarding the vehicle. In addition, it is only accepted by a small number of minor operators.

Public / Stakeholder feedback summary

Surprisingly, feedback through consultation has not identified 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 between 2017 and the present day, passenger advocacy groups such as Transport Focus and Bus Users 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 are not 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 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. Since the current NaPTAN standard for recording stop information does not have a means to record this data, this makes it difficult for disabled passengers to be certain that they will be able to embark or disembark at the stops they need to travel 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.

Areas for development and future thinking

To make digital information more easily accessible, we would like to create an online transport hub, making all the information for the passenger available in one place.

At a minimum, we would seek to include a more inclusive journey planner, interactive and static maps of the bus network in Kent, plus information on stops and services such as accessibility information, timetables, fares and disruption information.

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.

Section 4.9 Public Transport Information (continued)

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. We will therefore work with stakeholders to establish the best and most appropriate means to accomplish this goal.

In order to deliver the above, we have developed a range of initiatives which can be found below. Some of these can be delivered without funding from the National Bus Strategy, but many require funding to either bring into place. To achieve the initiatives detailed below successfully, it will be necessary to work in partnership with a number of bodies.

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.

Initiative: PTII 1

KCC will develop the Kent Connected journey planner in order to provide enhanced journey and route planning functionality.

To create a more inclusive journey planner, KCC's Public Transport department could take over the running of the Kent Connected website. It could then be redeveloped into a more comprehensive public transport planner, adding the options that feedback suggests less mobile customers would find useful, such as the ability to limit walking distances in journey plans or to specify a step-free journey.

The planner could also be improved in more general ways, by featuring links from journey planning results to appropriate fares and real time data that are currently missing. 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 Kent Connected a 'one-stop-shop' for planning and paying for journeys.

Further customisation would then be possible, allowing users to select the quickest, simplest (least connections) or cheapest journey. Ideally,

Section 4.9 Public Transport Information (continued)

the system should integrate rail services, allowing users to plan and pay for multi-modal journeys.

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

Initiative: PTI I2

KCC will provide a one-stop-shop for Kent public transport information including an interactive bus map with pop up timetables, access to e-ticketing, links to bus operator websites, pop up timetables, ticketing and fares information available via web and app platforms.

The portal should also include interactive and static maps, 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.

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 from the journey planner and the interactive map, each stop would be given its own landing page with information such as 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

Section 4.9 Public Transport Information (continued)

timetables, fares, real time passenger information and a link to the journey planner pre-populated for the stop.

Initiative: PTI I3

KCC will develop the use of bus stop QR codes to provide instant access to operators' websites, fares, timetables, RTI, journey planner and other facilities such as links to other websites, tickets and events.

Landing pages could be made easily accessible at the roadside via the addition of a QR code, prominently displayed on the stop itself, which passengers could scan with their mobile phones. The 'what3words' code for the stop could also be displayed alongside this.

As well as providing a convenient link to useful information, this would have the added benefit of confirming to the passenger their exact location, which may provide a safety benefit as well as facilitating correct journey planning.

For instance, passengers arriving at a stop late at night in an unfamiliar area would instantly be able to verify their location, would know whether there would be any further bus services that night and when they would arrive, and what other options were available if not. Integrated journey planning and e-ticketing would allow tickets to be purchased electronically in advance, even for travellers with no physical means of payment on them.

To further boost public confidence in the network, a fault reporting tool could be linked to from each stop's landing page, allowing users to easily report damage to the stop.

Initiative: PTI I4

KCC and Kent's bus operators will establish an agreed minimum standard of information to be displayed at all marked bus stops.

Not all passengers are comfortable with or able to access digital information. Establishing and enforcing a uniform standard of information provision for paper documents, such as roadside timetables, will help to make this form of information less confusing for passengers. Any such standard would be developed in accordance with the RNIB's 'clear text' guidelines, which include guidance on developing documents for colour-blind users.

Versions compatible with the RNIB's 'large print' standard are typically too large to fit standard timetable cases, but could be made available to customers on request.

Beyond the needs of visually impaired users, various other simplifications of the way the data is displayed are possible.

For instance, to make comparison of travel times between services easier, timetables should come with a simplified route track map diagram. Destination finders, which tell the traveller which services go to which destinations, should also be deployed at major interchanges where large numbers of services meet, to save the passenger having to scan every timetable to find the destination they require.

Printable maps, along with the destination finder feature, makes production of travel plans for schools, railway stations and other transport hubs more feasible. Along with the printable maps posted on bus stop landing pages, this would help to connect disparate modes of travel (e.g. bus, rail and ferry) in the minds of customers, as well as highlighting connecting bus routes.

A travel plan would consist of a local map highlighting nearby bus stops along with a destination finder directing the traveller to the

Section 4.9 Public Transport Information (continued)

correct bus stop for their destination. QR codes for each stop depicted could be included to allow travellers to check timetables, plan journeys and buy tickets before travelling to the stop in question.

Travel plans could be posted at every rail station in Kent, linking the bus and rail networks together.

Initiative: PTI I5

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 with events.

The existence of all of the above should be used to promote the bus network. In general, these measures will help to promote confidence in the network and accessibility and convenience for the passenger.

For instance, for the first-time user, the ability to plan the simplest journey and to purchase tickets in advance lowers psychological barriers to entry. Being able to select the cheapest journey will appeal to young people with limited funds. Maps and points of interest will appeal to tourists. Being able to plan accessible journeys or to specify shorter walking distances will appeal to elderly or disabled users.

A system such as the one above should contain something to appeal to every demographic. This can then be used to market specifically to those demographics, encouraging modal shift away from private car use.

Initiative: PTI I6

KCC and Kent's bus operators will look to agree a common identity and approach to the design of publicity relating to all bus services around the county.

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 to 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 relation to the passenger charter should also be included.

Section 4.10
Highways and network management

Introduction

In a perfect scenario, bus operators would be able to 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, as 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.

In its function as Local Transport Authority, KCC has a key role in balancing the above, 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 250,000 roadside drains, 120,000 streetlights, 1,500 bridges, 700 sets of traffic lights and two tunnels. 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 conducted in preparation for Kent's BSIP has established that reliability and punctuality is a key issue for both operators and passengers. 61% of operators ranked it in their top five priorities for the BSIP, with 38% of public respondents including it as one of the top three factors influencing their use of the bus.

Section 4.10 Highways and network management (continued)

As LTA for Kent, KCC already undertakes much activity to support buses in the county through for instance the control of roadworks under the Kent permit/lane rental schemes, the delivery of pro-bus junction and road improvement initiatives, seeking contributions from new developments for bus measures and working with operators and other partners to identify and tackle key congestion hotspots. There is however a lot more that can be done in this important area as bus services become increasingly impacted by congestion levels, access issues and other disruptions, and as Kent's population grows and travel demand and patterns change.

This section details Kent's current position with respect to highway and network management, and proposes initiatives to improve the offer through the opportunities presented by the National Bus Strategy.

Current context and council involvement

As the LTA for Kent, KCC is responsible for the county's 5,400 miles of highway network, enabling transport alternatives to the car, 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. Kent's LTP brings together the authority's transport policies by looking at local schemes and issues as well as those with a countywide or national significance. Within LTP4 KCC has identified bus improvements as a key strategic priority. As the county recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic, as travel patterns change and as wider factors such as cross channel traffic variances due to Brexit have an effect on the county's roads, KCC has embarked on a review of LTP4 on the basis of an intention to establish a new Plan. In any new LTP, KCC will set out policies and proposals that reflect KCC's BSIP and further its delivery. Sitting alongside LTP4 are a number of more detailed plans and strategies such as the Highways Asset Management Plan 21/22 – 25/26, 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
- A technical officer dedicated to the identification and rectification of vegetation issues on bus routes
- Roadworks notification processes in place to ensure bus operators are informed 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

Section 4.10 Highways and network management (continued)

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.
- Major projects delivered to support key bus initiatives e.g. the Bluewater–Ebbsfleet Valley Tunnel supporting the Fastrack BRT scheme in Kent Thameside, and delivery of the Gravesend Bus Hub
- 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 this is a vital area from their perspective in the management and potential growth of their networks. As such, the National Bus Strategy provides an exciting opportunity to renew focus, to review the effectiveness of current workstreams/measures and to introduce new initiatives as funding allows with a view to improving bus reliability across the county.

Existing challenges and barriers

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 the authority strives 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 link-ups 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 conducted by utility companies directly, with only retrospective notice required.

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.

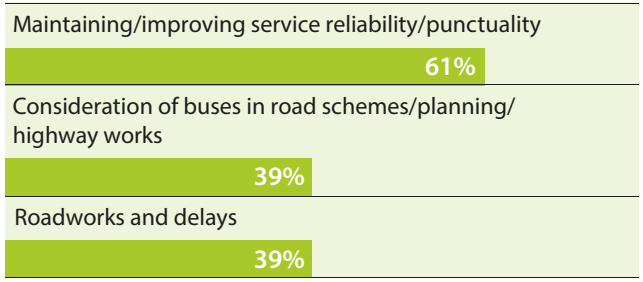
Public / Stakeholder feedback summary

Feedback from KCC's BSIP engagement activity reveals that bus punctuality and reliability are key issues for both operators and the travelling public, so improving the highway network to positively impact these areas is essential. They are fundamental to the perceived value for money for the customer, and they also impact the cost of services for the operator. Therefore improvements in punctuality and reliability will help both operators and passengers.

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. Therefore it is one of the most important deliverables KCC can offer as a partner under the proposed Enhanced Partnership schemes for Kent. 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, three factors relating to highways management and reliability/ punctuality featured in the top five priorities for operators during BSIP engagement:

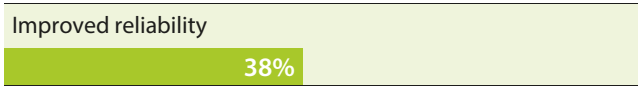
Figure 24. Extract from Public Transport Engagement



Feedback obtained through the BSIP public engagement platform has also demonstrated that reliability is a major factor for passengers (or would be passengers) travelling by bus.

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.

Figure 25. Extract from Public Transport Engagement



Areas for development and future thinking

As part of the formation of EPs in Kent and in conjunction with operators, KCC wishes to deliver a number of initiatives related to highways and network development in order to improve reliability standards across the county. Some of these can be delivered without funding from the National Bus Strategy, but many require funding to initiate.

We want to build on the positive relationships already formed with bus operators to ensure that appropriate and robust processes are in place to firstly identify issues on the highway which are affecting bus reliability, and secondly deliver

solutions to address them. We want to see strong co-ordination between operators and all relevant stakeholders with highways and traffic powers in respect of the control of roadworks, and we want to make use of changing traffic management legislation (Part 6 of Traffic Management Act 2004) to enforce moving traffic offences where appropriate to help with congestion management.

We want to work closely with our district partners to ensure that there is appropriate enforcement of parking contraventions at bus stops and in areas where bus passage can be problematic, and we want to ensure new restrictions are introduced where needed to help bus accessibility. We want to ensure that new developments are accessible for buses where a service is intended to serve the site, with appropriately sized roads, considered junction layouts and bus stop locations which are convenient and easily reached. We want to ensure that any new road schemes delivered by the authority consider the implications for buses from a physical and operational perspective, and whether bus priority or pro bus initiatives can be integrated within their design.

In Section 4.6 we outlined our approach to bus priority which of course can also play a major role in addressing bus reliability issues and increasing journey times. We will react to and consider any changes necessary in response to any statutory change to the network management duties of LTAs, as outlined in the NBS. We hope however that existing processes and workstreams, complemented by the initiatives outlined in this BSIP, will place Kent in a solid position in this respect.

Initiatives

Initiative: HNMI 1

KCC will ensure that new/upgraded road schemes delivered by the authority fully consider the requirements of buses with respect to access and design. In line with the NBS, KCC will also ensure that new/upgraded road schemes fully consider bus improvements or bus priority. If this is not possible, schemes will clearly detail why this is the case. KCC will strongly encourage its partners to follow similar principles for schemes not delivered by the LTA.

As part of its highways function, KCC delivers a number of schemes every year to ensure the county's road network is fit for purpose, serves the needs of Kent's residents and is maintained to a high standard. Schemes may be major in nature, e.g. a new road linking a housing development to the existing network; or more minor, e.g. works to change the configuration of a junction to aid traffic flow. Given the range of KCC's work, the number of staff delivering schemes and the amount of bus operators running services in the county, there has historically been a mixed approach with respect to how schemes are planned, engaged on and delivered depending on the individual circumstances of the project concerned. Whilst this approach worked in the most part, there were often mixed results across geographical areas and schemes in terms of how the needs of buses and other asset areas were considered.

To address this concern, KCC has recently introduced a Technical Approvals Process within its highways activity. The process requires scheme promoters to engage fully and essentially request technical sign-off from all asset owners affected by a particular scheme. Bus stops and bus services have been included as an important asset owner under this process, meaning the impacts of schemes on buses can be fully considered for any project going forward. The above principles also apply for schemes promoted outside of KCC but which require highways approval. KCC will continue to ensure that the needs of buses are considered as part of this new process and that the initiative is refined appropriately as it

Section 4.10 Highways and network management (continued)

develops. The use of the Technical Approvals process can be reviewed through Enhanced Partnership governance structures.

In order to assist both internal and external road scheme project promoters (including new road infrastructure being introduced as part of new development), KCC will shortly be relaunching its Kent Design Guide. This outlines the principles and standards that need to be followed by designers with respect to a range of key aspects of highway design, including information on the requirements that buses require in order to serve new/ upgraded sites in a safe, efficient and accessible manner. Bus stop requirements with respect to spacing, placement etc are also included.

Stagecoach and KCC's Public Transport department have also developed complementary 'Bus Infrastructure Guidance' documents to further emphasise these requirements, which can be provided to scheme promotors alongside the guide. Through our Enhanced Partnerships, and through working with districts under the NBS MOU (see initiative HDI5), KCC will continue to drive this agenda to ensure that future highway design is appropriate and supports bus requirements.

In line with government guidance in the NBS, KCC will also seek to ensure that all new road schemes incorporate benefits for buses or bus priority wherever possible, or explain why this is not achievable.

Initiative: HNMI 2

As part of its network management duty, KCC will actively consider how the punctuality and reliability of buses can be improved through the management of the network in terms of traffic signalling, junction changes, traffic flow control etc. The Kent County model will be used to identify congestion hotspots as part of this process to target where change is required.

In Section 4.6 we considered how KCC and operators will look to identify key congestion corridors on the network which are impacting bus journey times. We will conduct feasibility studies on these corridors to understand if and how the network can be improved through such measures as bus priority lanes or signal priority. Whilst these initiatives could bring major benefits to bus reliability there are often smaller interventions which can be made on a typical bus route that can be beneficial. Through new and refocused partnerships and working groups, and through close liaison with key stakeholders such as district councils, KCC will work with operators to identify these opportunities and deliver improvement schemes. Funding will be requested through the BSIP process which will determine the extent to which improvements can be supported.

Schemes may include:

- Small changes to junction layouts to reflect bus turning requirements
- Promotional campaigns to ensure that buses can run efficiently though traffic hotspots
- Tweaks to signal timings to manage traffic flow
- Consideration to bus stop layout changes to prevent buses being delayed when pulling back out onto the highway.

Section 4.10 Highways and network management (continued)

To support the above process the Kent County Traffic Model will be used to identify the impact that minor changes would have on bus journey times (where this information is available).

Initiative: HNMI 3

KCC will re-purpose and re-launch its Punctuality Improvement Partnerships (PIPS) to ensure that they have the biggest impact on reliability/punctuality on the ground. KCC will work with bus operators to agree an appropriate format for the groups and closely link outputs to Enhanced Partnership targets.

In conjunction with operators and other key stakeholders, KCC already hosts regular Punctuality Improvement Partnership (PIP) meetings which aim to address key issues in the county with respect to bus reliability and punctuality. Whilst the partnerships have delivered some affective schemes, they have tended to become focused on specific issues and operational detail. Under a new Enhanced Partnership approach KCC wishes to work in collaboration with bus operators to review our approach to PIPs with a view to relaunching the partnerships and ensuring they deliver the best outcomes. We would like to see PIPs linked closely with targets introduced in Enhanced Partnership scheme areas and see the meetings forming a key part of the new governance structure. It is felt that the partnerships would benefit from being more strategic in nature, considering key issues affecting bus reliability and seeking resolutions on a holistic basis.

Initiative: HNMI 4

Working with district partners KCC will actively consider the management of parking issues which cause bus routes to be blocked including a) illegitimate parking on existing restrictions and b) potential new restrictions to ease service flow.

Inappropriate parking can have a significant impact on the reliability of bus services and can cause substantial delays to journeys or prevent buses from serving bus stops. Parking restrictions are in place for a reason: in most instances to ensure that the highway is kept clear and safe for all vehicles which need to use it, including emergency service vehicles. At bus stops, restrictions are typically in place to allow buses to align fully with the kerb in order to facilitate fully accessible boarding.

Currently in Kent, enforcement of existing restrictions is undertaken by district councils under a Service Level Agreement with KCC. Whilst there are a number of examples of strong partnerships between districts and KCC, parking enforcement officers cannot observe all restrictions at any given time. Through Enhanced Partnership working groups, KCC will seek to work with district councils to refine the process

for parking contraventions affecting bus stops. Under HNMI9 we are also asking for funding to support this work.

As per HNMI2, KCC will look to work with operators to identify key locations for new restrictions which will help bus accessibility and reliability.

Initiative: HNMI 5

KCC will establish a roadworks review taskforce (held quarterly), including representatives from KCC Highways, bus operators, utility companies, Highways England and any other key stakeholders. The meetings will focus on the link between works on the highway and bus service operation and will enable discussion at a strategic level, with key outputs subsequently picked up by PIPs for delivery.

As noted earlier in this section, there are a number of challenges surrounding roadworks in Kent and how they are managed, co-ordinated, notified and monitored. The demand on Kent's road space is incredibly high and it is not possible to schedule all work in off-peak periods. The rural nature of much of Kent also means that diversions for works can be long and, in many cases, unsuitable for buses.

Utility companies are able to conduct emergency works and retrospectively advise KCC. This can cause co-ordination issues and it is often difficult to predict exact start and end dates, which can create difficulties in terms of keeping bus passengers informed. Feedback from operators has confirmed that this is a major area of concern for them and a significant factor with respect to bus reliability. As such, KCC intends to establish a quarterly roadworks review taskforce which bring together key partners who conduct works on the highway. The taskforce will discuss the link between roadworks co-ordination and bus service operation on a strategic level, consider upcoming major workstreams and identify where processes can be reviewed to ensure the least impact on bus service operation as practically possible.

Initiative: HNMI 6

KCC will continue to support the position of a Soft Landscapes Technical Support Officer for bus routes, to ensure that vegetation issues effecting bus passage are expedited as far as possible. A review will be undertaken on how emergency requests are dealt with.

In order to address issues where overhanging vegetation is affecting bus service operation, KCC already employs a Technical Support Officer who addresses reports from operators in this regard, proactively monitors bus corridors and seeks solutions in a timely manner. Where vegetation is originating from a private property there can be delays as a legal process is required to provide the property owner with the opportunity to address the issue directly. KCC will continue to support this position as it has been identified as a key area for bus operators who are also keen to explore how emergency issues may be expedited moving forwards.

Initiative: HNMI 7

KCC will continue to consider the most appropriate means of enforcing bus gates and bus lanes through liaison with district councils. The potential for KCC to manage a central common back office will be explored as part of this process.

KCC has a number of bus priority schemes already in place within the county. As noted in this plan, further measures are likely in the coming years to align with the requirements of the NBS. In order to ensure safe use of bus only links and bus lanes and that buses have clear access and are not

Section 4.10 Highways and network management (continued)

subject to delay, KCC will be exploring how ANPR enforcement can be deployed across the county. KCC will work with districts through its Enhanced Partnerships to establish an appropriate model, considering the potential for a single back-office system as part of this process. Funding will be requested through the NBS to support the capital costs of equipment installations and the provision of the associated back office function.

Initiative: HNMI8

To support the initiatives in this section, KCC is seeking to use NBS funding to secure dedicated staff resource and software to support highways issues. Posts are likely to include a Major Projects Highway Engineer focused on bus priority schemes and other more major bus projects, a Highway Engineer focused on smaller, more localised interventions to support bus reliability and access, and a Parking/ Roadworks Co-ordination Officer picking up enforcement issues through liaison with district councils and roadworks issues emerging from roadworks review meetings (see HNMI5).

In order to support the delivery of the initiatives in this section and also initiative IPI6 (Bus priority considerations), KCC is seeking funding through the NBS process to secure resource to support our highways initiatives.

The Highway Engineers will be responsible for monitoring punctuality/bus reliability in EP scheme areas and for drawing up new mitigation schemes in conjunction with operators. They will liaise with district councils to deliver parking schemes and consider/deliver potential new bus priority schemes.

The Parking/Roadworks Co-ordination Officers will be responsible for identifying parking enforcement issues through liaison with district councils and operators. Remit will also involve the monitoring of roadworks in terms of compliance to permits to ensure minimal impact on buses, and acting as a key point of contact for roadworks review meetings as described in HNMI5.

Through the BSIP, funding is also being sought to secure software to support the planning of bus diversions with respect to roadworks and to improve the notification process to operators.

Initiative: HNMI9

KCC will work with district councils to undertake a countywide review of parking policy and its relationship with bus usage.

As part of our EPs, KCC will work with district councils to undertake a review of the link between parking policy (i.e. number and cost of car parks) and bus usage. The review will consider the variations between geographical areas and consider outcomes alongside the network gap analysis conducted during our BSIP development.

Section 4.11
Summary of Initiatives

Reference	Network Development	Requires NBS Funding?
NDI 1	KCC will secure all available funding and prioritise its use to support services, alongside BSOG, that have become unsustainable at reduced passenger levels until such time as other NBS initiatives drive growth.	**YES**
NDI 2	KCC and Kent's bus operators will deliver a range of Year 1 service initiatives based on feedback gathered through engagement activity with operators, stakeholders and the general public. Initiatives will be prioritised based on evaluation criteria which takes into account factors such as network gap analysis (e.g. accessibility to town centres), sustainability, value for money and deliverability.	**YES**
NDI 3	KCC and Kent's bus operators will deliver a range of Year 2 and 3 service initiatives which address areas with poorer accessibility levels identified through our Network Gap Analysis. In these areas more detailed analysis will be undertaken which will consider changes to the commercial and subsidised bus network, taking account of over and underserved corridors, the use of DRT and other alternative solutions and the Total Transport Concept, including the relationship with other layers of transport provision such as home to school and patient transport services.	**YES**
NDI 4	KCC and Kent's bus operators will seek to increase the proportion of the population within the 15, 30 and 45-minute catchment of the closest defined town centre for their district by improving corridor performance, service levels, speed and integration, including during off-peak hours.	
NDI 5	KCC will review its criteria for the support of council-funded socially necessary bus services to ensure it continues to reflect the travel needs of the community and is in line with the changing requirements of the NBS.	
NDI 6	KCC and Kent's district councils will produce a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), to ensure that improvements to bus services are fully considered and delivered with consideration of new planning developments.	

Section 4.11 Summary of Initiatives (continued)

Reference	Alternative Delivery Models	Requires NBS Funding?
ADMI 1	KCC will continue to develop Fastrack Kent Thameside to delivery of full network, roll out the service to Dover and give consideration to the future relationship between Fastrack Kent Thameside and Crossrail.	
ADMI 2	KCC will establish a policy to ensure opportunities for BRT are explored, including the creation of a housing development triggerpoint for larger scale developments.	
ADMI 3	KCC will continue to support the community transport sector. We will continue to refine our toolkit to support the sector's growth, and continue to run grant schemes that fund the delivery of new community transport services.	**YES**
ADMI 4	KCC and Kent's bus operators will consider areas where a Superbus approach to network development could be implemented to deliver improvements in infrastructure, fares, reliability and journey times and achieve a 'premium' service standard.	**YES**
ADMI 5	KCC and Kent's bus operators will consider the role that DRT, feeder services and other alternative modes can play in solving rural connectivity issues.	**YES**

Section 4.11 Summary of Initiatives (continued)

Reference	Fares and Ticketing	Requires NBS Funding?
FTI 1	KCC and Kent's bus operators will introduce a multi-operator ticket covering the Kent network and through this will seek to introduce a simpler, more attractive and flexible ticketing offer.	**YES**
FTI 2	KCC and Kent's bus operators will look to identify and deliver specific fares and ticketing schemes, with a particular focus on initiatives which support recovery from the pandemic and access to tourism, employment opportunities and the support of Kent businesses.	**YES**
FTI 3	KCC will support Kent's bus operators to develop their ETM and related back-office capabilities to enable the introduction of innovative and user-friendly ticketing offers including full network acceptance of contactless payments and fare capping.	**YES**
FTI 4	KCC will consider the fares, ticketing and backoffice requirements required to enable the introduction of ticketing solutions covering bus, rail and other modes to support the MaaS concept of service delivery.	
FTI 5	Through our EP Schemes, KCC and Kent's bus operators will seek to support the acceptance of multi-operator tickets on common sections of route.	
FTI 6	KCC will seek to continue to support home to school travel through initiatives such as the Kent Travel Saver, which make journeys more attractive and cost effective for the user.	**YES**

Section 4.11 Summary of Initiatives (continued)

Reference	Infrastructure and Priority	Requires NBS Funding?
IPI 1	KCC will ensure that there is continuous focus on the quality of marked bus stops across Kent. KCC will look to provide high quality boarding and alighting points for passengers as far as possible and continue to drive forward improvements in accessibility and appearance across Kent's bus stop assets.	**YES**
IPI 2	Working with borough, district and parish councils, KCC will seek to deliver improvements in the provision and maintenance of bus shelters across the county, placing particular emphasis on using advances in technology to incorporate environmental benefits.	**YES**
IPI 3	Through working with borough and district councils, KCC will seek to ensure that as Kent's bus network develops it provides appropriate operator facilities such as bus stands and driver amenities.	**YES**
IPI 4	With a focus on integration, KCC will create a hierarchy for bus stops in Kent to identify key locations that have high levels of connectivity, either with other bus services or other transport modes. We will seek to deliver improvements beyond the 'standard' offer at these locations, with bike parking facilities, higher levels of passenger information, etc.	**YES**
IPI 5	KCC will use advances in technology to ensure Kent's bus stops are modern, safe and of a high standard of appearance, to enhance the user experience.	**YES**
IPI 6	KCC will look to evaluate the merits and feasibility of two bus priority schemes per year in each EP Scheme. These will take account of bus congestion modelling identifying pinch points that affect bus journey times, and consider local context and sensitivity, as well as potential network and passenger gain.	**YES**
IPI 7	KCC will support infrastructure and highway schemes to support the development of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) projects in Kent.	**YES**

Section 4.11 Summary of Initiatives (continued)

Reference	Environment and Air Quality	Requires NBS Funding?
EAQI 1	KCC and Kent's bus operators will explore all opportunities to secure funding to improve emission standards on buses operating across Kent, with a particular focus on moving parts of the network towards zero emissions.	**YES**
EAQI 2	KCC will form an air quality corridor hierarchy taking account of Kent Air Quality Management Areas, and use this as the basis on which to prioritise future funding for zero emission corridors.	**YES**
EAQI 3	KCC will use the EP process to establish minimum standards for emissions on buses operating in Kent, seeking to introduce a targeted approach to improve standards over the term of the EP Schemes.	
EAQI 4	KCC and Kent's bus operators will actively promote the environmental benefits of the bus through better promotion of the network and the comparable impact of bus use against other modes of transport.	

Section 4.11 Summary of Initiatives (continued)

Reference	Innovation and Digital Accessibility	Requires NBS Funding?
IDA 1	KCC will support operators financially to help them secure enhanced ETMs, associated backoffice function and TransXChange and Real Time Information capability. This will support a range of initiatives in respect of Real Time Information, ticketing and reliability.	
IDA1 2	KCC will embrace the use of modern technologies and software to support a dataled approach to network planning.	**YES**
IDA1 3	KCC will deliver a MaaS pilot scheme in the North West Kent EP Scheme areas. We will look to expand the use of this platform to other parts of the county subject to the pilot providing a multi modal approach to service delivery.	**YES**
IDA1 4	KCC will seek to embed the use of new innovation and technology to improve bus passenger experience, e.g. next stop announcement technology, the development of a passenger occupancy tool, audio announcements at bus stops and capital grants for supporting the introduction of RTI displays at strategic bus stop locations.	**YES**

Section 4.11 Summary of Initiatives (continued)

Reference	Public Transport Information	Requires NBS Funding?
PTII 1	KCC will develop the Kent Connected journey planner in order to provide enhanced journey and route planning functionality.	
PTII 2	KCC will provide a one-stop-shop for Kent public transport information including an interactive bus map with pop up timetables, access to e-ticketing, links to bus operator websites, pop up timetables, ticketing and fares information available via web and app platforms.	**YES**
PTII 3	KCC will develop the use of bus stop QR codes to provide instant access to operators' websites, fares, timetables, RTI, journey planner and other facilities such as links to other websites, tickets and events.	**YES**
PTII 4	KCC and Kent's bus operators will establish an agreed minimum standard of information to be displayed at all marked bus stops.	**YES**
PTII 5	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 with events.	**YES**
PTII 6	KCC and Kent's bus operators will look to agree a common identity and approach to the design of publicity relating to all bus services around the county.	**YES**

Section 4.11 Summary of Initiatives (continued)

Reference	Highways & Network Management	Requires NBS Funding?
HNMI 1	KCC will ensure that new/upgraded road schemes delivered by the authority fully consider the requirements of buses with respect to access and design. In line with the NBS, KCC will also ensure that new/upgraded road schemes fully consider bus improvements or bus priority. If this is not possible, schemes will clearly detail why this is the case. KCC will strongly encourage its partners to follow similar principles for schemes not delivered by the LTA.	
HNMI 2	As part of its network management duty, KCC will actively consider how the punctuality and reliability of buses can be improved through the management of the network in terms of traffic signalling, junction changes, traffic flow control etc. The Kent County model will be used to identify congestion hotspots as part of this process to target where change is required.	**YES**
HNMI 3	KCC will re-purpose and re-launch its Punctuality Improvement Partnerships (PIPS) to ensure that they have the biggest impact on reliability/punctuality on the ground. KCC will work with bus operators to agree an appropriate format for the groups and closely link outputs to Enhanced Partnership targets.	
HNMI 4	Working with district partners KCC will actively consider the management of parking issues which cause bus routes to be blocked including a) illegitimate parking on existing restrictions and b) potential new restrictions to ease service flow.	
HNMI 5	KCC will establish a roadworks review taskforce (held quarterly), including representatives from KCC Highways, bus operators, utility companies, Highways England and any other key stakeholders. The meetings will focus on the link between works on the highway and bus service operation and will enable discussion at a strategic level, with key outputs subsequently picked up by PIPs for delivery.	
HNMI 6	KCC will continue to support the position of a Soft Landscapes Technical Support Officer for bus routes, to ensure that vegetation issues effecting bus passage are expedited as far as possible. A review will be undertaken on how emergency requests are dealt with.	

Section 4.11 Summary of Initiatives (continued)

Reference	Highways & Network Management	Requires NBS Funding?
HNMI 7	KCC will continue to consider the most appropriate means of enforcing bus gates and bus lanes through liaison with district councils. The potential for KCC to manage a central common back office will be explored as part of this process.	**YES**
HNMI 8	To support the initiatives in this section, KCC is seeking to use NBS funding to secure dedicated staff resource and software to support highways issues. Posts are likely to include a Major Projects Highway Engineer focused on bus priority schemes and other more major bus projects, a Highway Engineer focused on smaller, more localised interventions to support bus reliability and access, and a Parking/ Roadworks Co-ordination Officer picking up enforcement issues through liaison with district councils and roadworks issues emerging from roadworks review meetings (see HNMI5).	**YES**
HNMI 9	KCC will work with district councils to undertake a countywide review of parking policy and its relationship with bus usage.	**YES**

5 Reporting

Ongoing Monitoring and Review

Approach

KCC believes that one of the primary outcomes of the NBS and BSIP process, and one that is achievable without the need for funding, should be the achievement of closer working relationships with a whole range of stakeholders including district council colleagues, bus operators, the wider public and most importantly bus users. This is reflected in our approach to monitoring, reviews, the formation of our customer charter and one of our key principles: 'Put the customer at the heart of everything that we do'.

These closer relationships began with the formation of the BSIP. Although not required by the guidance, KCC has engaged as much as is possible in the time available with the public and in more detail through the Stakeholder Working Groups that have been formed. This form of open consultation will remain live right through to the commencement of EP schemes in March 2022. This will ensure that those already engaged with the process and others can inform the review of BSIP, the allocation of funding, the prioritisation of schemes and the detail in our EP Schemes.

This Pre-Funding Settlement Draft of the Kent BSIP is unapologetically ambitious. Subject to funding, we hope to set similarly ambitious targets as part of the resulting EP Scheme. These will consider network development, reliability, journey times, fares and passenger satisfaction. We plan to establish a transparent process of regular review, supported by the draft Governance and meeting structure that has been developed, to ensure engagement and two-way dialogue with all relevant parties.

Governance

In addition to constitutional requirements for the implementation of EP schemes and the meetings required to directly support them, KCC is using the BSIP process to review the structure of meetings required more generally.

KCC is the lead partner in the Quality Bus Partnership Schemes present in eight of our 12 district council areas. These will be superseded by the EP structure, but we are keen to ensure the more localised focus between KCC, the district council and local bus operators fostered at these groups is not lost in EP meetings which will be multi-district in nature. To support the formation of the BSIP, we therefore replaced the QBP meetings with BSIP focus groups that also include non QBP districts. These will evolve into local EP focus groups, and continue to focus on specific areas such as local operator performance, planning and parking enforcement.

Network and Punctuality Improvement Partnership task groups will be formed. These will be refocused versions of the current PIPs, potentially boosted by schemes design and enforcement resource provided through the NBS process. They will be orientated to support bus operators in all aspects of KCC's and the district council's responsibilities in respect of network management, tackling issues such as bus priority scheme identification and design, network and roadworks management and reliability, parking strategy and parking enforcement.

EP Scheme Passenger Charter Groups will also be formed. These will consist of representatives from a range of stakeholders and user groups and will compliment new communications and passenger complaints channels. They will have the ability to contact the operators directly or KCC, as the EP Scheme 'owner'. In 2018 KCC launched a Bus Complaints Portal to capture feedback on service issues and inform dialogue and resolution with operators. This will be reviewed and re-launched to support transparent reporting to all the above groups, and more generally.

A summary of the proposed Governance and meeting structure is shown below, with outline detail about meeting purposes and content, suggested frequency and likely representatives.

Figure 26. Draft Kent Buses meeting and governance structure

Enhanced Partnership Board (Countywide)	EP Scheme(s) Monitoring Group (One for each EP Scheme)	Network and Punctuality Improvement Partnerships (One for each EP Scheme)	EP Scheme(s) Passenger Charter Group (One for each scheme area)	Enhanced Partnership Local Focus Group (One for each District)
Reps				
TBC Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport (Lead)	KCC Public Transport (Lead), bus operators in the scheme area, district councils, Kent Highways, KCC Environment and Air Quality, schools rep, Kent and Medway CCG, Passenger Focus	KCC Public Transport, bus operators in the scheme area, KCC Highways, district councils	Independent host, KCC Public Transport, bus operators, schools reps, Passenger Focus, Bus Users UK, bus users and public	KCC Public Transport, KCC District Transport Planner, District Council – Planning & Parking Enforcement, bus operators
Role				(replaces QBPs):
Executive Board to oversee the success and fitness for purpose of the EP Plan, EP schemes and downward governance structure prompting review and revision where necessary	Review compliance to EP Schemes targets, identify and review progress of initiatives and service development needs, address feedback from passenger charter groups	Support for bus operation through network management and schemes development (parking enforcement, roadworks management, bus priority measures etc.)	Presentation of EP Schemes compliance, review of passenger charter targets and customer satisfaction, input to EP Schemes Monitoring Group and feedback from 'the floor'	District input to EPs, planning matters, service development
Meeting frequency				
6 monthly	3 monthly	3 monthly	6 monthly	3 monthly

Role of the passenger charter

A passenger charter will give bus users the ability to hold KCC and the bus companies to account when delivering the BSIP. The charter's two principal components are 1) what can passengers expect from their bus services, and 2) how to complain if expectations are not met. Although the charter will not create any new legal rights for bus users, current legal rights when travelling by bus will not be affected by its introduction.

KCC will form one Passenger Charter to cover all bus services and bus operators in Kent. The charter will be formed in conjunction with bus operators, following engagement with our working groups, taking account of guidance from Passenger Focus and other groups and feedback received through EP consultations. It will set and give bus users rights to certain standards of service on all services and journeys in areas such as bus service punctuality, levels of service, cleanliness of vehicles and passenger satisfaction. It will clearly show the date of publication and a 'valid to' date.

The charter will also detail forms of redress for bus users when things go wrong, and set out the channels available to make a complaint. Bus users are encouraged to submit complaints when necessary, and provide comments and suggestions for service improvements. In the first instance, complaints will be investigated by the body responsible for the service that is being complained about. In most instances, this will be the bus operator. In the case of KCC subsidised services, KCC will work closely with the bus operator concerned to fully investigate any complaints received.

To ensure as many bus users as possible know about the Passenger Charter, KCC commits to its wide publication and promotion. As well as the KCC website, it will be published on bus operator websites and displayed on all buses in Kent, and on and bus stops where possible. The charter will also be available in alternative accessible formats on request.

KCC commits to the creation of a Passenger Charter and to conduct ongoing reviews, with consultation on any revised versions. We will work with neighbouring authorities to ensure consistency for bus users where practical.

Monitoring and review

The Governance and meeting structure identified in Figure 26 will be used to monitor achievement of EP targets. However it will also be the used to engage with a range of stakeholders about the relevance and need for review of the BSIP. This will be supplemented by ongoing and then periodic public consultation as part of a more formal review process to ensure that the Kent BSIP remains ambitious and reflective of the needs and aspirations of users, potential users and stakeholders.

This first version of the Kent BSIP is clearly identified as a 'Pre-Funding Settlement' version and we acknowledge that the cost to deliver all of the identified initiatives is unlikely to be affordable within the funding settlement awarded. However the desire of the council, encouraged by the associated guidance, was that local authorities should be ambitious, and this is the position adopted by KCC. Through the BSIP, we developed a methodology for prioritising our initiatives. Once the settlement is understood, this will be used to decide the allocation of NBS funding received.

It is therefore intended that a review of this 'Pre-Funding Settlement' version will start once we know the financial settlement Kent receives through the NBS process. This review will enable stakeholders and the public to help inform how funding is used and which initiatives are

prioritised for delivery. It will also allow the council to undertake more traditional consultation on its 'Post-Funding Settlement Draft'. Finally, it will enable KCC to take the BSIP, the proposed allocation of NBS funding and the prioritisation of initiatives through its normal internal governance channels. These have not been open to officers yet, owing to the timescale for development and submission of this first draft.

It is intended that the Post Funding Settlement Draft of the Kent BSIP can be reviewed, consulted on and adopted to align with the commencement of EP Schemes in April 2022.

Achievement and work towards delivery of BSIP initiatives would be reviewed on an ongoing basis – at least quarterly or 6 monthly – as a standing agenda item in each of the meetings proposed as part of the future Governance and Meeting Structure (see Figure 26). A more formal BSIP review would be conducted at least every 12 months, alongside the EP Schemes review.

6 Overview table

Introduction

Through the BSIP, KCC and Kent's bus operators have developed a range of initiatives and measures that collectively come together with the aim of meeting the aspirations of the National Bus Strategy.

Informed by public consultation, stakeholder engagement, Member input and the professional opinions of KCC officers, some areas are given a greater priority than others, as is demanded by the BSIP process. Similar weighting and consideration will also be applied once funding settlements are understood, in order to allocate the use of available funding.

Ultimately, the Kent BSIP brings together an ambitious range of initiatives which seek to make improvements in all aspects of bus service provision. Our overall aim is to support the bus network as it recovers from the pandemic, and increase the appeal and use of bus services in Kent.

Summary table

Name of authority or authorities:
Kent County Council

Franchising or Enhanced Partnership (or both):
Enhanced Partnership

Date of publication:
31 October 2021

Date of next annual update:
31 October 2022

URL of published report:
kent.go.uk/busfuture

Targets	2018/19	2019/20	Target for 2024/25	Description of how each will be measured (max 50 words)
Target 1 Journey time: (bus speeds)	N/A	24.7Kms/Hour	24.7 Kms/Hour	The average bus speed has been extracted from the Kent Traffic Model route by route and then calculated for the county. We will re-run this analysis when required.
Target 2 Reliability: (service timekeeping)	Nov 19 – 77.7%	Jun 21 – 85%	95%	Data snapshots have been received from those operators who can supply information on the percentage of trips that are regarded as operating 'on time' using the Traffic Commissioners' standard. It is expected that the DfT BODS database would be used to track this performance data in future.
Target 3 Reliability: (service actually operating)	Nov 19 – 98.7%	Jun 21 – 99%	99.5%	Data snapshots have been received from those operators who can supply information on the percentage of scheduled journeys that have actually operated. It is intended to continue this monthly information feed to demonstrate trends going forward.
Target 4 Passenger numbers	55.4 million	53.5 million	58.2 million	Total passenger data has been collected from bus operators in the county with data for each calendar month. It is intended to continue this monthly information feed to demonstrate trends going forward.

Targets	2018/19	2019/20	Target for 2024/25	Description of how each will be measured (max 50 words)
Target 5 Passenger satisfaction	86%	89%	95%	These results have been taken from the Transport Focus Bus Passenger Survey, and its successor survey in future. The measure used is the overall satisfaction with bus journeys in Kent, taking the percentage of those very or fairly satisfied out of five categories.
Target 6 Vehicle emissions	N/A	26.1%	40%	As we journey towards a net-zero economy, a target will be introduced for upgrading vehicle fleets to lower emission levels. Annual operator surveys will inform progress towards at least meeting Euro VI standards.

Targets will be subject to adjustment following funding settlement and will be reviewed as part of the Post-Funding Settlement version of the Kent BSIP.

Delivery – Does your BSIP detail policies to:	Yes/No	Explanation (max 50 words)
Make improvements to bus services and planning		
More frequent and reliable services		
Review service frequency	Yes	Analysis using the Kent Traffic Model against population data, mosaic segmentation and actual patronage data will inform how service frequencies relate to actual and potential demand. The area review for Maidstone is seen as a pilot study with the aim of expanding this across the county.
Increase bus priority measures	Yes	Detailed analysis using the Kent Traffic Model, together with operator data, will highlight the key congestion points affecting buses. We intend to prioritise these into corridors and carry out feasibility studies to inform implementation of bus priorities for two sites per EP Scheme area during the three-year period.
Increase Demand Responsive Services	Yes	DRT has been introduced in Sevenoaks and Ebbsfleet and we intend to expand this under a proposed MaaS scheme. We also intend to introduce a new DRT service in the Dover area. Our Maidstone area study demonstrates how we will explore the role of DRT elsewhere in the County.
Consideration of Bus Rapid Transport networks	Yes	The successful Kent Fastrack services in Kent Thameside are now very well established. It is planned to expand into further new developments with a new operator contract. We also plan to introduce a new BRT scheme between Dover and the extensive forthcoming Whitfield developments.

Delivery – Does your BSIP detail policies to:	Yes/No	Explanation (max 50 words)
Improvements to planning / integration with other modes		
Integrate services with other transport modes	Yes	We are carrying out an interchange analysis to inform where improvements need to be made to assist passengers changing between modes, including both physical infrastructure and information and signage. The proposed MaaS scheme will also integrate bus, rail, car hire, DRT and cycling modes on one platform.
Simplify services	Yes	The deregulated nature of buses and the range of competing operators in parts of the county make this difficult. However, there will be cases where services could be simplified. The proposed area reviews, commencing with the Maidstone Area Study, will review services against passenger flows which will identify where this can be best achieved.
Review socially necessary services	Yes	As part of our area reviews, commencing with the Maidstone Area Study, we will seek to tailor bus services to actual demands following the pandemic, whilst taking into account any gaps from our accessibility analysis resulting from our county traffic model analysis.
Invest in Superbus networks	Yes	One of our operators is keen to work with us on further enhancing a frequent service network to Superbus standards, with infrastructure improvements at bus stops and traffic pinch points, timetable enhancements, fare offers and better marketing of the network.

Delivery – Does your BSIP detail policies to:	Yes/No	Explanation (max 50 words)
Improvements to fares and ticketing		
Lower fares	Yes	Continuation of subsidy towards student travel. Initiatives are planned which include lower multi-operator offers and an extension to the countywide Discovery Ticket and lower evening fares. A recent innovation is a flat fare on buses in Edenbridge, which we will look to expand elsewhere.
Simplify fares	Yes	Initiatives are planned which simplify multi-operator offers under the Kent Connected brand with an extension to the Discovery Ticket and new standard evening fares. The MaaS project would also present fares in a common format. We also want to invest in on-bus readers to facilitate future fare capping.
Integrate ticketing between operators and other transport	Yes	Continuation of all operator Travel Saver Tickets for students. Plusbus tickets are already available to most railheads in Kent. The MaaS project would also place bus, rail, car hire, DRT and cycling modes on a single platform with simple ticket purchase opportunities.

Delivery – Does your BSIP detail policies to:	Yes/No	Explanation (max 50 words)
Make improvements to bus services and planning		
Higher spec buses		
Invest in improved bus specifications	Yes	We will encourage investment in better bus emission standards, on-bus audio-visual announcements, CCTV and mobile charging and enhanced ticketing equipment. Our Public engagement has asked what passengers see as priorities and we will understand this in more detail through our ongoing stakeholder engagement.
Invest in accessible and inclusive bus services	Yes	We will bid for funding to assist in fitting audio-visual announcements on buses in Kent. A survey of interchanges is underway to inform where improvements are needed to improve accessibility and the network analysis will highlight locations with poor access to bus services.
Protect personal safety of bus passengers	Yes	Our interchange analysis will determine where there are issues that need to be considered on passenger safety grounds. We are looking to introduce solar lighting at bus stops and will encourage operators to fit on-bus CCTV systems and include passenger safety in their driver training programmes.
Improve buses for tourists	Yes	As a rural and coastal county, tourism is important to our bus network and the network supports tourism. Our market analysis will include identification of passenger demands, including tourism needs, and our improved bus marketing will feature tourist sites and scenic routes as well as attractive ticketing initiatives
Invest in decarbonisation	Yes	We will actively encourage lower emission solutions as opportunities or funding become available. KCC has submitted a bid for ZEBRA funding for Fastrack services which we see as a spur to expand to other routes. We are looking for funding to convert the remainder of Kent Thameside and two further corridors to zero emissions.

Delivery – Does your BSIP detail policies to:	Yes/No	Explanation (max 50 words)
Improvements to passenger engagement		
Passenger charter	Yes	The principle of a Passenger Charter for Kent has been accepted in principle by the operators and this will be developed during the formation of the Enhanced Partnership Plan.
Strengthen network identity	Yes	The Kent Connected brand is already used for multi-operator smart ticketing and we propose to expand a brand and identity to other areas, including its inclusion on publicity and marketing material and displayed on every local bus in Kent.
Improve bus information	Yes	Following the demise of local Traveline, KCC will develop a one-stop website for comprehensive local travel information, including journey planning and interactive mapping. Our bus stop hierarchy will be used to inform enhanced levels of at-stop information including RTI displays.
Other		
Highway and network management	Yes	Closer links will be forged between operators, KCC Highways and District Councils through a Memorandum of Understanding supported by additional resource. We aim to improve the highway network and the management of it for the benefit of all buses and achievement of BSIP targets.

List of appendices

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

Appendix A – Summary of engagement activity

Appendix B – Letters of Support and Stakeholder Commitments
– Kent bus operators
– Proposed district councils' Memorandum of Understanding

Appendix C – Lake reports
– Priorities and feedback
– Service initiatives

Appendix D – Via Maidstone study

Appendix E – Supporting data

National Bus Strategy

Kent Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

Version 1. Pre-Funding Settlement

October 2021

This publication is available in other formats
and can be explained in a range of languages

24 hour helpline: 03000 412121
Text Relay: 18001 03000 412121

Let's talk
kent.gov.uk/busfuture

Kent County Council
kent.gov.uk