

The Big Conversation: Questions from public meetings held in June and July 2018.

Public Transport Service

“Why don’t you have any control over what bus operators do?”

Since 1985, the operation of bus services has been in the hands of private companies, not public bodies such as Kent County Council.

Under the 1985 Transport Act, a new process was put in place which led to local authority-owned operators and the then national bus company were privatised.

Since this change, we have had no regulatory powers over where services run and we do not have the ability to alter changes made by private companies running these bus routes. Bus operators also do not need to notify us of changes they make to routes and timetables.

The private operator purely needs to deliver services that:

- are commercially viable
- carry the most passengers
- deliver a profit.

The only obligation we have as a local authority is to consider funding for services which are not commercially viable but are deemed as socially desirable. This is the reason why we allocate a budget of £7m to support such services.

“What is the role of the traffic commissioner?”

The Traffic Commissioner regulates the safe operation of operators. If an operator complies with the registration process, the Traffic Commissioner has no market regulation role over the operator.

When a registered route is in operation, the Traffic Commissioner monitors that the operators are running the route reliably, but it has the powers to intervene if the following issues of non-compliance are brought to their attention:

- failing to operate the route
- running one minute earlier than a published timing point
- running more than five minutes late from published timing point.

The Traffic Commissioner for this area is Sarah Bell.

You can find out more about [Traffic Commissioners on GOV.uk](#).

“Are bus operators breaking their contracts when they withdraw/change their services?”

In Kent, 97% of services are commercially provided and not subjected to contractual arrangements with us. We have no regulatory power over these routes.

We commission 126 bus contracts. If an operator provides a poor service or changes a service, we will use the contract performance framework that may result in us removing the operator from the contract.

“Hasn’t the government given new powers to local authorities to run bus services?”

Recent changes by the government made in the Bus Services Act 2017 gave more power to local authorities to allow them to franchise their own services.

While these powers provide the opportunity to franchise local services (for example, Transport for London), these are only applicable to mayoral combined authorities. Kent County Council is not a mayoral combined authority.

Any franchised operation either must be cost neutral or be funded by the appropriate local authority. Therefore, any local authorities looking to franchise would need to be satisfied that it will not place an undue burden on their current budgets and would have the full support of the public.

There is currently no intention for KCC to become a mayoral combined authority.

“Why can’t you subsidise more bus routes?”

We have budget pressures, like all local councils, and are unable to subsidise more bus services in their current form.

Our Big Conversation consultation looks at new ideas that could provide a more economically viable public transport service to more residents in areas where either there are no services, or their current service fails to meet their needs.

“Are KCC planning to refuse the use of the Older Person/Disabled Bus Pass?”

We are not removing the use of the Older Person's/Disabled Bus Pass and have no intention of changing this policy.

As part of the consultation, we have asked a question about whether residents would be prepared to contribute to a service that could be better than what they currently use.

There are some areas within the county that do not have access to a bus service meaning residents may have to pay a lot more to travel to their destination as they are unable to use their bus pass. Their current bus service may also not meet their needs in terms of frequency or destination.

“What is KCC's definition of 'rural'?”

The definition of 'rural' was deemed as those areas that are not served by a commercial service such as Arriva, Stagecoach or smaller operators).

Most of these areas are defined as rural because they are located outside of towns within the county. However, we acknowledge that some suburban areas may not have a commercial service and could be included in this category.

Consultation

“How was the consultation advertised?”

We used a mix of channels and methods to promote the consultation:

- posters and consultation materials were distributed via libraries and Gateways, community wardens, community liaison officers, bus inspectors, and inside selected bus services
- electronic marketing packs sent to KCC teams working with the public, Clinical Commissioning Groups, schools, equalities interest groups, operators, district and borough councils, Kent Chamber of Commerce, Healthwatch and Kent Can – Stronger Kent Communities
- those registered on consultation directory were informed by email
- promotion on our website – www.kent.gov.uk
- press releases issued to local newspapers
- promotion on electronic road signs
- KCC’s social media channels and shared by district and parish councils
- targeted canvassing at bus stations throughout the county.

“The time and locations of the venue for the public meetings were not suitable to me. How can my views be considered?”

Times and dates have been selected based on several factors: location, capacity, physical accessibility, location and availability.

While the events are an opportunity for us to present the ideas that are detailed in the consultation information, these meetings in isolation are not a formal way to take part in the consultation. We require a questionnaire response from residents and other stakeholders which can be completed online at www.kent.gov.uk/bigconversation or via hard copies which can be found in libraries or requested from KCC.

A copy of the presentation has been uploaded to www.kent.gov.uk/bigconversation for those that want to view it.

“What happens once the consultation finishes?”

We will evaluate all responses received from the consultation and propose potential options to pilot across Kent. We have a budget of £500,000 to set up these pilots which allow us to run them from early 2019.

We will hold a Bus Summit to announce these pilots in Autumn 2018.

IDEAS

“What happens when the feeder service is running late, and the connection is missed?

Will there be a long wait at the end of the feeder service until the main route service turns up, particularly if the main route service is unreliable or always late?”

In planning a feeder service, we will always plan for the feeder vehicle to be there at the bus stop before the commercial vehicle.

Both vehicles would know each other's position and, in those cases, where the feeder bus was late, the main bus would wait for their arrival.

Conversely where the commercial bus is late, the feeder will wait for it to take passengers home. These feeder services will be tailored for the needs of the local community.

“What is the difference between Idea 2 and a taxi? “

When a resident contacts a taxi operator, they will be picked up and taken to their desired destination. This will be a private journey and could cost as much as £10 - £15 dependent on location and duration.

Idea 2 will take residents to their desired destination but may pick up other passengers on route. This will mean residents may share the smaller vehicle with other passengers which will bring down the cost of the journey. While residents will have to allow for more time to reach their destination, this sharing of journeys will reduce the fare.

“Will KCC consider other ideas?”

If we receive other ideas throughout the consultation, we will consider these alongside the other ideas we have shared. We encourage any resident, parish council or other stakeholder to propose any ideas they feel could work in their local area.

“Can the proposed smaller vehicles be used by those in a wheelchair or those with a buggy and child.”

All smaller vehicles used on any potential pilots will be compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). This could include a rear wheelchair ramp and seats being removed to allow the space for these passengers.

“How long will a pilot scheme run for and how much support will there be from the council?”

Pilot schemes will operate for a year which will allow for a full evaluation before the successes of the scheme can be determined. We will support the pilot during this period.