
By: Head of Transport and Development, Kent Highway Services
To: Highways Advisory Board - 3 March 2009
Subject: Public Transport Developments, Funding and Initiatives
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report informs members of the principal developments, funding arrangements and initiatives undertaken in the provision of public transport in Kent during 2008/09 and planned for implementation during 2009/10.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Public Transport is experiencing growth in Kent. The County Council has been at the forefront of developing and implementing new partnership initiatives in recent years through Kickstart funding, and has continued to work closely through its Quality Bus Partnerships (QBPs) with operators and district councils to improve local bus services. Passenger numbers have increased by some 20% over the past 5 years. In 2005/06 some 45.7 million trips were recorded, in 2006/07 48.6m trips were recorded and in 2007/08 51.7m trips.
- 1.2 During 2008/09 a number of key initiatives have been delivered and further initiatives are planned for 2009/10. This report updates Members on progress.

2. Principal Developments

2.1 Quality Bus Partnerships

The Transport Act 2000 and the Local Transport Act 2008 provide for the establishment of Voluntary Partnership Agreements between bus operators, district councils and county councils. These are generally known as Quality Bus Partnerships (QBPs) and by the end of 2008 there were four in existence in Kent – Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells, Canterbury and Thanet. On 9 February 2009 an Ashford QBP was signed, a four-party agreement which also included the Ashford's Future Partnership Board. It is also intended to reach agreement for the signing of a Dover QBP by the end of April 2009. QBPs establish close working relationships between the parties to each agreement, and aim to improve the quality and reliability of bus services through the attainment of targets for punctuality, reliability, bus stop access and other improvements. Kent has been particularly successful at establishing QBPs and encouraging investment in Kent which has brought significant improvements in local bus services.

2.2 Bus Stop Improvements

Kent Highway Services, in partnership with Arriva Southern Counties and Stagecoach East Kent, is implementing a programme of improvements to bus stops throughout the county. This will eventually result in every urban bus stop being provided with a 24/7 bus stop clearway (to prevent unlawful parking), a raised kerb (wherever possible) to assist the mobility impaired, a clearly branded bus stop flag, and clear tailored timetable information for the routes

3. Progress to Date

- 3.1. Further to guidance from Department for Transport, the Kent Permit Scheme underwent further design and development during the last three months of 2008. The key areas of change included the production of a cost-benefit assessment, specifically for operational permitting aligned to the stated objectives. In addition, the proposed method of operation had to be adapted to meet with the national interface for electronic transfer of information between works promoters and the highways authority.
- 3.2. As a result of this Scheme development a decision was made to enter into a third mini-consultation with the public stakeholders, including the works promoters. This consultation concluded on 12th December 2008 with an overall positive and supportive response from the stakeholders.
- 3.3. On the 14th January 2009, Kent County Council submitted an application to operate a Permit Scheme within Kent to the Secretary of State for Transport. A copy of the Kent Permit Scheme and application was also sent to the Department for Transport (DfT). The DfT undertake a review and assessment of the Scheme and make the ultimate recommendation to the Secretary of State.
- 3.4. The application letter requested an early meeting with the DfT to discuss the Scheme and the development of the full cost-benefit assessment. This request was met with a positive response and a meeting was held on 12 February 2009 with the Head of the Traffic Management Division.
- 3.5. Early feedback from the DfT in relation to the Kent Permit Scheme content is very positive. The project team will continue working closely with the DfT to support their review and subsequent recommendation for the legal order.
- 3.6. A copy of the provisional Kent Permit Scheme has been published to a public facing website (kent.gov.uk) and a generic email address has been created to receive comments and requests for information (kent.permitscheme@kent.gov.uk). The application document and associated appendix items have not been published; however members of the public, including works promoters can request these documents in writing to Kent Country Council (KCC). Any documents issued will be covered by a legal disclaimer developed through KCC Legal Services.
- 3.7. The project to implement the Kent Permit Scheme has now moved from a design phase and is in the build and test phases (*further details in the next section*).

4. Implementation of the Kent Permit Scheme

- 4.1. The DfT have indicated that the review process for a Permit Scheme should be four months, however to date no other Permit Scheme has been submitted and approved, so this timescale is subject to change as a result of any associated delay through clarification or development.
- 4.2. In consideration to the above timescale, the current planned date to introduce a Permit Scheme into Kent is July 2009. Once Kent County Council has received the legal commencement order from the Secretary of State they will have to provide the works promoters with at least 4 weeks notice before introducing the Scheme. The project will complete readiness checks with the works promoters in preparation for this to ensure the implementation of the Scheme is successful.

- 4.3. The relationship between KHS and the works promoters within Kent remains very positive and although works promoters will be affected by the introduction of a permit scheme, they remain supportive of KCC's approach and openness with the development and introduction.
- 4.4. The National Joint Utilities Group (*NJUG*) will remain an active member of the Kent Permit Scheme Project Board and from March 2009 Kent Highway Services will conduct monthly sessions focused on the Permit Scheme with a Stakeholder Group from the Kent HAUC (*Highway Authority and Utilities Committee*) to maintain the positive working relationships.
- 4.5. The introduction of a Permit Scheme to Kent Highway Services is not constrained by the legal commencement order from the Secretary of State. No fees or fixed penalty notice payments will be made between the Alliance partners and Kent County Council so operational permits are viewed as an internal business process. The monitoring of permit applications, variances and any fixed penalty notices will still be reviewed and assessed. KHS intend to implement an operational Permit Scheme into the Alliance at the earliest opportunity and based on the current project timescale this should come into affect by May 2009.
- 4.6. The project is now delivering the building and testing of IT systems, focusing upon recruitment of the new organisation and production of training and support material. The majority of business processes have been developed and accepted.
- 4.7. The primary risk to the introduction of the Kent Permit Scheme is the DfT review and recommendation to the Secretary of State. The project team will mitigate this risk by maintaining a close working relationship with the DfT and works promoters to ensure the introduction of a Permit Scheme into Kent is managed and successful.
- 4.8. Following the DfT's advice, the final approval will be granted by the Secretary of State.

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Background Documents: None