

**SWALE JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD
15 DECEMBER 2008**

Subject:	Bus Services in Swale
Director/Head of Service:	Director, Kent Highway Services
Decision Issues:	None
Decision:	Non-key
Ward/Division:	
Summary:	<i>This report outlines the current position in relation to bus services in Swale</i>
To Recommend:	This report is for Members' information
Classification:	THIS REPORT IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Introduction

1. This report sets out the current position in relation to bus services in Swale, gives a broad indication of the funding arrangements, explains the effects of the soon to be implemented Kent Freedom Pass in the district, and outlines the opportunities available for improvements to the bus network from Kickstart funding and new developments.

Current Supported Bus Network

2. The majority of the bus network in Swale is operated commercially, primarily by Arriva, which determines its route network and the times of operation. Around 20% of the bus network is supported by Kent County Council (KCC) (revenue support budget) and the Department for Transport (rural bus subsidy grant). The criteria for these supported bus services are to provide for social inclusion; to provide access to one or more of employment, education, healthcare and essential food shopping; to operate with a maximum subsidy of £3 per passenger journey; and to apply a hierarchy of operating periods: Monday-Friday daytime, Saturday daytime, evening, and Sunday. The total gross expenditure on supported bus services in Swale in 2007/08 was £1,078,022, and the predicted gross figure for 2008/09 is £1,217,967. Supported services in Swale are currently:
 - 300 Sittingbourne-Wormshill (Royal Mail Post Bus)
 - 326/327 Chatham-Rainham-Sittingbourne
 - 332 Key Street-Yelstead-Sittingbourne
 - 333/334 Faversham-Sittingbourne-Maidstone
 - 335 Canterbury-Sittingbourne-Maidstone

- 343/348 Sittingbourne-Tunstall-Bredgar
- 344 Borden-Sittingbourne-Conyer
- 345 Sittingbourne-Newnham
- 346 Sittingbourne-Landsdown Road
- 349 Sittingbourne-Great Easthall Farm
- 360 Leysdown-Sheerness-Rushenden
- 364/367 Sheerness-Minster-Warden Point
- 660 Tankerton-Faversham-Stalisfield
- 662 Murston-Sittingbourne-Faversham
- 664 Murston-Conyer-Lynsted
- 666 Ashford-Faversham.

Kent Karrier

3. There is also the Kent Karrier network, funded by KCC, which operates 8 dial-a-ride services with the SUN (Swale Unified Network) fleet of vehicles. This is a membership based scheme for residents of any age with mobility problems, or for any rural residents living more than 500m from bus routes. It provides pre-bookable journeys to key locations in Sittingbourne, Faversham and Sheerness. In 2007/08 the SUN service carried over 11,000 passengers, and there are currently 266 members.

Schools Transport

4. There is currently an issue in respect of the schedule for route 327 in the evening school peak between Rainham and Sittingbourne via Upchurch. This is a subsidised route operated on behalf of KCC by Chalkwell Coaches. Pupils attending schools in Rainham (which is in Medway UA) have a wait of about an hour for the 327 at the end of the school day, but because the bus schedule is geared to the principal flow of pupils from Sittingbourne towards Rainham via Upchurch it would be very difficult to arrange an earlier journey without incurring additional vehicle costs. There are also capacity issues on routes 344/345 from Teynham. These on-going problems have been raised with county members and solutions are being sought, subject to funding.

Bus Service Improvements

5. Arriva were operating from two sites in Swale until February 2006 when the outstation site in Crown Quay Lane, Sittingbourne was closed and all services were concentrated into the existing site at Sheerness. This enabled the bus company to operate a better quality service on local Sittingbourne routes as the Crown Quay Lane site had limited vehicle washing and maintenance facilities. There were also environmental concerns at being sited by the river.

Arriva has also improved route 361 to Queensway. The daytime service is now operated with a minibus and runs three times an hour instead of the previous hourly timetable. A lower return fare to the town centre has also helped to attract new passengers. The bus company has also routed Sheppey services to serve the new Hospital in Barton Hill Drive.

There is now an hourly daytime service on Mondays to Fridays between Sheerness and Maidstone via Sittingbourne town centre, numbered 334, linking Sheppey with Kent's county town. This change has also increased the daytime service between Sittingbourne and Maidstone to twice an hour.

Bus Stop Improvements

6. Kent Highway Services, in partnership with Arriva and Stagecoach, 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 bus stop clearway (to prevent unlawful parking), a raised kerb (wherever possible) to assist the mobility impaired, a clearly branded bus stop flag, and timetable information for the routes serving the stop. Bus stops in the Swale district are included in this programme, and improvements to stops will continue as the scheme is rolled out across the county.

Information

7. KCC has been working closely with Arriva over the proposed changes to schools on the Isle of Sheppey, planned for September 2009. The Swale Public Transport Map is in the process of being produced and should be available soon. This is one of a series of maps showing public transport services in several areas across the county, and will provide a useful source of bus and rail information for the travelling public in Swale.

Kent Freedom Pass

8. The Kent Freedom Pass was introduced as a pilot scheme in Tonbridge & Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Canterbury districts in June 2007. Since then it has been rolled out at schools in several other districts, and will be introduced in Swale in January 2009. The scheme is open to pupils who attend years 7 to 11 inclusive in schools in Kent and who live in Kent. It will not be available to residents of Kent attending the schools in Medway UA, nor to residents of Medway UA attending schools in Kent.

The annual cost will be £50, although the charge for the first pass which will be valid between January and June 2009 inclusive will be just £25. The pass provides free travel at all times of day, every day, on most bus services in the county; there are just a few minor exceptions. The purpose of the scheme is to reduce congestion by reducing the number of cars doing the "school run", to increase sustainable modes of travel, and to encourage young people to choose the bus rather than the car for their education and leisure travel needs.

Kickstart

9. KCC was successful in submitting bids for bus service improvements in Swale in 2005/06 with support from Swale BC. This Kickstart funding from the DfT amounted to £310,000 of investment in route 347 in the Sittingbourne/Kemsley area, providing an enhanced evening service until 8.00 pm, improved roadside bus stop infrastructure and fully accessible vehicles. This investment has proved successful and Government has recently announced that further bids from Transport Authorities will be invited in the near future.

Regeneration

10. The regeneration of the town centre in Sittingbourne presents an opportunity to raise the profile of bus services in the town, and Arriva and other bus operators are consultees in the process. It is hoped the development will improve both the infrastructure for bus stops near the station and access routes for buses, whilst ensuring that customers are still able to board buses close to the High Street shops.
11. The expansion of developments and the regeneration of Queenborough and Rushenden on the Isle of Sheppey, previously restrained by the limited crossing capacity of the Swale, will generate new local bus service requirements. Arriva is actively planning new and revised services, although the apparent slowdown in the housing market would probably result in a delay to any increase in bus services.

Conclusion

12. The overall position of bus service in Swale is substantially improved compared with a few years ago. There has been investment in new vehicles, in roadside infrastructure and in the forthcoming Freedom Pass, and the subsidised bus network that is maintained by KCC for socially necessary services has been sustained without cuts. Further investment in the Swale bus network available through Kickstart funding, and through new developments in the borough, will provide opportunities for growth. Members' support for this is appreciated.

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