

SWALE JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD	Agenda Item: 6
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Meeting Date	Monday 7 th December 2020
Report Title	School Bus Parking in Swale
Cabinet Member	Cllr Richard Palmer, Cabinet Member for Communities
Head of Service	Martyn Cassell, Head of Commissioning, Environment and Leisure
Lead Officer	Mike Knowles (SBC)
Classification	Open

Recommendations	Report for Information Only
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1. Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides information around possible options that could be considered to address problems with school buses parking in the Borough, as requested by Members of the Swale Joint Transportation Board.

2. Background

- 2.1 A previous report was submitted to the Swale Joint Transportation Board in March 2020 following a Member's request for an item to be added to the agenda around school buses parking in Swale Way, Sittingbourne, and other areas of the Borough. Members discussed the issues covered in the report, and requested that a further report be submitted with possible options to be discussed at a future meeting.

3. Issue for Decision

- 3.1 For a number of years, issues have been experienced with one particular bus operator parking multiple buses in different areas of Sittingbourne and the surrounding area.
- 3.2 As detailed in the previous report, It is understood that the depot for this bus operator is located in Sheerness, and to avoid the need to return this substantial number of vehicles back to the depot during the day and then back out to schools at

the end of the day, the operator instead parks the buses in and around Sittingbourne.

- 3.3 Members have asked that this report provides options available to tackle these issues, to provide a basis for further discussion. The reality is, the options available to the Borough Council are limited, but those considered are detailed below, with the various implications for each option.

Installation of Double Yellow Lines

- 3.4 One option for consideration is the installation of double yellow lines to prevent parking at specific locations. This requires the drafting and making of a Traffic Regulation Order, including the formal consultation process and the reporting of any formal objections to the Joint Transportation Board.

- 3.5 Advantages: Once installed, the double yellow lines would be legally enforceable, with the ability for the Council's Civil Enforcement Officers to issue fixed penalty notices to any vehicle in contravention of the restrictions. Signage is not required as part of the installation of double yellow lines.

- 3.6 Disadvantages: The process for Traffic Regulation Orders takes considerable resource, and on average around 12 months from inception to completion. In more urban areas, the Traffic Order may generate a substantial number of formal objections as double yellow lines would restrict any vehicle parking at that location, not just buses. Invariably, double yellow lines merely displace parked vehicles to other locations, as was demonstrated in Swale Way, Sittingbourne. The County Member funded the installation of a 200 metre length of double yellow lines on one side of the road to address the issue of bus parking, and this process then had to be repeated within 12 months for the other side of the road, as buses simply moved to the opposite side.

Installation of Single Yellow Line

- 3.7 An alternative to the installation of double yellow lines, which apply to all vehicles at all times, would be the installation of a single yellow line to control parking at specific locations. Again, this would require the drafting and making of a Traffic Regulation Order, with the formal consultation process and reporting objections to the Joint Transportation Board.

- 3.8 Advantages: As with double yellow lines, the restrictions would be legally enforceable. The advantage of single yellow lines over double yellow lines is that time or day defined restrictions can be introduced. Such restrictions are effective in preventing all day parking by introducing a one hour parking restriction during the day. To tackle the particular issues with bus parking during the day, a restriction between say 10am and 11am Monday to Friday would be effective for isolated areas.

- 3.9 Disadvantages: As with double yellow lines, new restrictions would require a Traffic Regulation Order which would take around 12 months to process. Also, similarly to double yellow lines, the restrictions would apply to all vehicles, so whilst the impact of the restrictions would be less as they only apply for one hour per day, they would disrupt parking by residents in more urban areas. Single yellow lines require the

installation of time plate signage and posts at specified intervals, which adds to the cost of implementation, visual impact and future maintenance.

Provision of Bus Parking Facilities – On the Public Highway

- 3.10 As stated above, the installation of any new restrictions to tackle parking problems invariably moves the problem to other areas, such as adjoining roads or other areas within the town or Borough. One option that could prevent this is the provision of dedicated parking areas for buses to park during the day.
- 3.11 Advantages: The obvious advantage is the fact that displacement of parked vehicles to other areas would be avoided. Areas deemed appropriate for buses to park during the day could be highlighted to the bus operator on an informal basis, or could be marked on site and covered by formal parking restrictions through the use of a Traffic Regulation Order, which could prevent other vehicles from parking in the bays during certain times.
- 3.12 Disadvantages The biggest challenge for this option is locating suitable areas on the highway. The area would need to be away from residential properties, as this would invariably produce substantial and understandable objection from nearby residents. It would also need to be an area where it was safe to accommodate parking by a large number of buses without impacting on traffic movements, sightlines and the overall appearance of the area, and close liaison with the Highway Authority would be required. Areas such as industrial estates would not be appropriate as the vehicles would be parked during the day when traffic around such estates would be at its highest volume. Finally, there would be no guarantee that such parking provisions would be used by bus operators, who may find alternative informal parking areas more attractive.

Provision of Bus Parking Facilities – Off the Public Highway

- 3.13 Although this is a more challenging option, the provision of dedicated bus parking facilities off the highway is far more effective and manageable. As part of their development works, Meadowfield School in Swanstree Avenue constructed a parking area within their grounds to accommodate daytime school bus parking and this is used on a daily basis by the bus operator, resulting in a reduction in the number of buses parking on-street, and no buses parked in the roads in the vicinity of the school.
- 3.14 Advantages: If the facilities were incorporated within school boundaries, they would be more secure than if placed within the highway, possibly at more remote locations. This, together with the reduced transport costs of travelling to and from schools, would be a more attractive option for bus operators. The facilities could be managed by the schools, and with no formal arrangements required could allow far more flexibility in terms of operation.
- 3.15 Disadvantages: The provision of any bus parking within school grounds is reliant on space being available to accommodate a number of buses. Add to this the physical costs associated with constructing parking areas, and unfortunately this option is just not viable for most schools.

- 3.16 When considering any of the above options, it would be beneficial to liaise with the bus operator to gauge whether such measures would be effective and whether any particular issues could be foreseen. The Quality Bus Partnership provides a forum for discussion between the three major commercial bus operators, the County and Borough Council, but operators with a lesser commercial presence (i.e with fewer main bus routes or services operated mainly for schools or under contract to the Council) are not part of the partnership, as is the case with this particular operator. They would therefore need to be approached separately, and this should be undertaken with some degree of caution as this is obviously a contentious issue, and expectations would need to be managed in terms of what local authorities are able to do to alleviate the issues.
- 3.17 Previously, buses have been witnessed parking in the laybys on the A249 between the Key Street roundabout and the Sheppey Crossing. It should be noted that any consideration for waiting restrictions in these laybys would come under Highways England who maintain the A249.
- 3.18 Issues around buses arriving at schools early in the afternoon, waiting for long periods of time and disrupting traffic in some areas, have also previously been mentioned. Whilst this has been discussed at previous Quality Bus Partnership Meetings, there is no simple solution to this issue. Ideally, the provision of drop off and collection points within the school grounds at designated times would greatly reduce these issues, and reduce the need for pupils to cross busy roads, but it is acknowledged that many schools have insufficient room to accommodate these arrangements and with some schools there is a reluctance to encourage moving vehicles on site. This may be something that could be addressed in School Travel Plans.
- 3.19 It should be noted that Officers have not received complaints around school bus parking for some considerable time. It is unclear whether this is an impact of the current pandemic situation, but it is something for consideration when committing resources to particular issues within the Borough.
- 3.20 Inevitably, as stated in the previous report to the Joint Transportation Board, the introduction of isolated waiting restrictions to tackle specific problem areas will displace the buses to other locations and unless alternative parking arrangements can be found it is difficult to envisage a solution to this issue.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the report.

5. Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Improving Community Safety through safer Highways.
Financial, Resource and Property	Cost and Resource to prepare Traffic Regulation Orders, cost of installing lining and signing.
Legal and Statutory	Sealing by Kent County Council.
Crime and Disorder	None at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage.
Sustainability	None identified at this stage.
Health Implications	Acknowledged that these bus services provide essential transport for children living some distance from schools. If buses need to return to depot each day this would negate the environmental impact that the buses are currently having on the highway, but it is acknowledged that increased bus journeys may impact on air quality. If buses are displaced to other residential locations, this could impact on the wellbeing of residents through loss of on-street parking and/or highway safety reasons.

6. Appendices

6.1 None.

7. Background Papers

7.1 None