

The following issues were raised at the December 2023 round of Area Committee meetings to take to the first Enhanced Bus Partnership – Swale Local Focus Group meeting.

Western Area Committee:

- The majority of villages in the Western area had been severely impacted. Rodmersham, Milstead, and Bredgar had no bus services, Tunstall had a limited service to the Kent Science Park and Bapchild services had been reduced from five to one an hour (Stagecoach X3 service). Due to roadworks on the A2, they were often delayed and the last bus service was often cancelled;
- services ended at 6 pm, there was no service in Bapchild on Sundays and a reduced service on Saturdays;
- it was not a useful service as buses were operating during times that were of no use to people working, attending hospital appointments, or hoped to use train services. New services needed to be better timetabled;
- the current option of using a drop-off service was not always suitable as it had to be booked in advance, bus pass holders had to pay and the varying routes could take a long time;
- KCC had not taken advantage of Section 106 funding from the expansion of the Kent Science Park, Sittingbourne which could have been used to support rural communities;
- developers would often put in pilot schemes such as Arriva Click, but they would not stop at villages such as Rodmersham, therefore it was destined to fail as it did not have enough passengers. It also killed the commercial bus service that ran to the Kent Science Park.
- Newington had limited buses with poor timings which did not link up with train times. There was no service in the evening.
- elderly people who liked to be independent were affected by the reduction in services. Not being able to leave the house could affect their mental health;
- bus companies were credited with only 80 pence each time a bus pass was used which impacted commercial services;
- people who regularly attended hospital appointments, or visited relatives or friends in hospital, had to use costly taxis as there was no bus service when they needed it;
- pupils attending schools in Maidstone were affected when the Arriva service stopped. The alternative service, Stagecoach X3, did not always turn up, and not all parents were able to give lifts;
- some people could not get home from the bus station; and
- evening bus services were needed.

Sheppey Area Committee:

Members commented that public transport on the Isle of Sheppey was lacking and there was general support for the implementation of the Enhanced Bus Partnership Swale Local Focus Group.

Sittingbourne Area Committee:

Due to lack of time, the Chair asked that people contact the rep outside of the meeting with any issues they would like raised.

Eastern Area Committee:

- Areas such as Lower Road and Ospringe Road, Faversham were effectively cut off as there were only two buses timetabled per day with the last but at 2 pm;
- Boughton, Faversham was often bypassed by the buses which left school children unable to get to school;
- if residents could not rely on bus services, they would stop using them;
- a breakdown of how much of the funding allocated to KCC by the Government would be spent in the Eastern Area was requested;
- due to the changes to family hubs in Kent, families had to travel further to get to them. If they used the bus service from Bysingwood, Faversham, there was only room for 2 pushchairs which was not enough;
- a Member asked if there were any allocated funds for rural services which had been lost? and
- there was no bus services from Oare, North Preston, Faversham Lakes, Lakeside Avenue into Faversham.

Response to above from Swale Local Bus Forum held on 06 February 2024:

Western Area Cttee

- Cllr Mike Baldock suggested to assist with offering a service to link village to village, providing a hopper service to link villages with town.
- Cllr Mike Mike Baldock suggested if daily services not viable to rural villages, offer a twice weekly service.
- Dan Bruce (KCC) advised Stagecoach working on X3 route issue.
- Dan Bruce (KCC) - Aware of the Kent Science Park S106 issue and reviewing.

Sheppey Area Committee

Following this meeting Cllr Dolley Wooster has greater understanding of BSIP, Enhanced Partnership Board and Local Bus Forum to update Sheppey Area Cttee.

Sittingbourne Area Committee

Member rep had sent apologies, but bus companies were aware of the points raised as they had attended the committee previously.

Eastern Area Committee

- Matthew Arnold (Stagecoach) - Issues with Boughton due to highway improvement works and access to village.
- Matthew Arnold (Stagecoach) - Bus design impacts on allocated pushchair space

- Cllr Mike Baldock suggested if daily services not viable to rural villages offer a twice weekly service.
- Dan Bruce (KCC) Funding allocation not specific to the area but benefit from county wide initiatives like the travel saver pass and free weekend last summer.

Representatives from bus companies offered to attend future meetings of Area Committees if required.