

Maidstone Joint Transportation Board



**3rd
August
2022**

URGENT UPDATE: Maidstone Bus Service Changes

Decision Making Authority	N /A
Lead Director	Phil Lightowler, Interim Director of Highways and Transport
Lead Head of Service	Phil Lightowler, Head of Public Transport
Lead Officer and Report Author	Steve Pay, Public Transport Planning and Operations Manager
Wards and County Divisions affected	Various
Which Member(s) requested this report?	Councillor Chittenden

This report makes the following recommendations: for information only

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Maidstone Joint Transportation Board	3 August 2022

URGENT UPDATE: Maidstone Bus Service Changes

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

- 1.1 A Councillor request for a report from KCC identifying changes to the bus network affecting the District.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The report provides the operating and commercial context affecting the bus industry across the UK including; the impact of the pandemic on bus use, skilled driver shortage, increased fuel cost and other overheads and places this in a local context specifically identifying the impacts on services operating within Maidstone District.
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3. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 The pandemic has had a profound use on Public Transport across the UK. Since the UK went into lockdown in March 2020, a combination of home working, school closures and guidance to avoid the use of Public Transport has resulted in a volatile period of few passenger journeys and operators and local authorities having to react to Public Health Guidance and changing passenger demands.
- 3.1.2 Bus use in Kent, as with rest of the UK has only partially recovered and currently it is estimated that use of buses stands at around 70% of pre-pandemic levels, with the use in the off-peak being closer to half of what it was prior to the pandemic. At the same time, bus operators are facing other financial and operational pressures notably in respect of increasing fuel and driver costs and a shortage of skilled drivers and engineering staff.
- 3.1.3 Throughout the pandemic and to date, levels of service are only being sustained because of financial support being provided by Government, currently in the form of Local Transport Fund (LTF) and the continued payment of concessionary travel (the older persons bus pass and KCC Travel Saver) reimbursement assuming pre-pandemic levels of use.
- 3.1.4 Concessionary Travel Payments are now being made on a sliding scale reducing them to reflect actual use, thus reducing the income received by operators. At the same time LTF finishes at the end September and linked to this, operators have been tasked by the Department for Transport with reviewing their network and reducing it to a sustainable level taking account of all factors, notably the end of support funding.

Commercial response by operators

- 3.2.1 Bus services operate in a de-regulated, privatised environment where operators match service levels and fares to demand and costs in order that services are sustainable. They are not obliged to provide any service or journey empowering them to react to changes to the commercial or operating environment.

3.2.2 To change or cancel a bus service, operators must follow an administrative (registration) process which gives advance notice to the Department for Transport and to the Local Transport Authority. KCC are therefore starting to see the registrations relating to service changes linked to the LTF network review which are likely to come into effect around October. In addition, there are other commercial changes linked to the end of the current school year and likely changes linked to a reduction in KCC's budget for the support of non commercially viable buses. A summary of all major changes in the Maidstone District is attached as an appendix.

KCC position

3.3.1 The financial support of bus journey is a discretionary activity and as a consequence, in recent years many Local Transport Authorities have reduced or stopped funding this area. KCC has managed to protect its supported bus network and funding during this time but the pressures on the budget mean that the Public Transport team are currently working to deliver a range of savings which include a £2.2m reduction in the supported bus budget.

3.3.2 Ordinarily, in response to the withdrawal of a service by a bus operator, KCC would consider if funding could be provided to sustain or replace it, if necessary cancelling the funding of something with lesser priority to afford it. However, the reduction in the bus budget is such that there is not the capacity to consider this and any arguably less vital services are also already proposed for withdrawal.

3.3.2 As such, KCC are not able to directly intervene and replace services that are being affected. The Public Transport team are working with operators to identify opportunities for them to provide replacement services and this is arriving at solutions in some instances. However, the current climate means that alternative services will not be possible in all instances and ultimately the majority of service identified for withdrawal will stop without direct replacement. KCC are maintaining up to date information about all changes and any alternative solutions on the kent.gov web pages.

www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/travelling-around-kent/bus-travel/bus-services-in-kent

4 REPORT APPENDICES

A. Summary of Maidstone Service Changes

5 BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

Appendix A. Summary of Maidstone Service Changes

001	Farleigh	Peter's Village to Malling School	Service withdrawn	Jul-22	The Nu-Venture service 549 will replace the 001 service
4	Arriva	Downswood to Maidstone	The last weekday late afternoon return journey is withdrawn	April 2022	-
5	Arriva	Maidstone to Sandhurst	Withdrawal of the 6:44pm Maidstone to Sandhurst journey and later Monday to Saturday. Day time services are not covered by this contract.	Autumn 2022	-
5A	Hams Travel	Staplehurst to Cranbrook	Service withdrawn	July 2022	Arriva service 5 will provide an alternative solution for residents
13	Nu-Venture	Hollingbourne to Maidstone	Withdrawal of the current Saturday service operating between Hollingbourne and Parkwood (for connections to Maidstone) via Leeds and Langley.	Autumn 22	
58	Nu-Venture	Addington, Ryarsh, Trottiscliffe, Birling to Maidstone	Withdrawal of the whole Monday to Saturday service.	Autumn 22	

59	Nu-Venture	Grafty Green, Ulcombe, Kingswood, Chart Sutton to Maidstone	Withdrawal of the whole service which operates Monday to Saturday between Grafty Green and Parkwood (for connections to Maidstone). Service 89 school journeys from the same area are not covered by this contract.	Autumn 22	
71A	Arriva	New Hythe to Maidstone	Service withdrawn	April 2022	
155	Arriva	Maidstone to Chatham	Kent section of the route leaving Monday to Saturday daytime service for Wouldham, Burham, Eccles and Aylesford withdrawn.	April 2022	A new Nu-Venture 29 service will provide a 2 day a week shopper service Pupils attending Maidstone schools can take a new 529 service. Pupils attending Rochester schools can take the new 638 service, which runs from Wouldham to Peter's Village.
332	Chalkwell	Stockbury, Yelsted to Sittingbourne Schools	Withdrawal of school day only service to Sittingbourne Schools	Autumn 2022	-
558	Nu-Venture	Addington to Maidstone Schools	Service Withdrawn (expected commercial bus changes)	Autumn 2022	-

Detling Shopper	Compaid	Detling to Maidstone	Withdrawal of Monday to Friday shopper bus from Detling Village to Maidstone	August 2022	-
L1	Starline	Kingswood to Lenham	Service withdrawn	July 2022	Changes to L2 and L3 services will provide an alternative
X1 / X2	Arriva	Kings Hill to Maidstone	Withdrawal of the Monday to Friday service linking Kings Hill with Maidstone and West Malling Station, including the link to Maidstone schools	Autumn 2022	-