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Kent County Council

Respondes to the following questions:

- *What can KCC do to help integrate all the public transport services?*

It is not possible to integrate all public transport services in the way the question suggests, as the bus network in England & Wales (outside Greater London) is deregulated. This means in practice that about 80% of Kent's bus network is commercially operated by the main bus operators such as Arriva and Stagecoach, leaving about 20% to be provided by KCC in the form of operating subsidy for socially necessary services. There are some instances, however, where bus and rail coordination (a more accurate word to describe this than integration) works in practice. The most obvious example in West Kent is the operation of route 123 between West Malling station and Kings Hill, which has a timetable based entirely on rail connections at the station in order to provide a link between Kings Hill and rail services at West Malling.

One practical step which KCC has taken during the past year is to persuade Southeastern that the 0747 Ashford to Maidstone East service is absolutely critical for school pupils travelling to schools in Maidstone. There used to be frequent occasions when this service was cut, or operated non-stop between Ashford and Maidstone, leaving school children stranded. Now Southeastern / Network Rail's joint control centre knows that this train must operate, even if it means making changes to other services as a result. On the whole this service has been much more reliable, ensuring that pupils get to their schools in Maidstone on time.

- *What can KCC do to encourage more innovative transport services?*

KCC has taken a substantive initiative in respect of rail services in Kent. In April 2011 the County Council produced a 'Rail Action Plan for Kent' which set out the key recommendations for the new rail franchise, which was then expected to commence in April 2014. Many of these new initiatives have been incorporated in the new timetable which the Southeastern 'Direct Award' franchise will introduce in January 2015. These include a round-the-coast High Speed service linking many of the East Kent coastal towns with each other and with St Pancras for the first time; some journey time improvements on the North Kent route; a much better spread of intervals between trains on

the route from Maidstone East to Ashford; and through services in off-peak periods between Maidstone East and Canterbury West.

KCC also succeeded in persuading the Department for Transport to make a significant change which would ease some of the problems affecting commuters in West Kent. Working in partnership with East Sussex CC, other local authorities and local businesses in both counties, KCC and ESCC persuaded the DfT to change its original proposal to bring Thameslink services to Tunbridge Wells as a replacement for Cannon Street services there. Instead, the DfT agreed with KCC that the most important destination for Thameslink services in Kent would be Maidstone East rather than Tunbridge Wells. As a result, from May 2018 Maidstone East will be served by a direct half-hourly service, calling at West Malling for Kings Hill, Borough Green & Wrotham, Otford, Swanley, Bickley, Bromley South, Elephant & Castle, Blackfriars, City Thameslink, Farringdon, St Pancras (and north to Kentish Town, West Hampstead and Luton).

This new Thameslink service will be operated by brand new Class 700 trains, and will provide a direct link between the county town of Kent and four key City stations. Furthermore, from 2019 interchange at Farringdon to the new Crossrail services will offer a new route to Heathrow and the West End with just one change of train. The service will operate throughout the peak periods (i.e. to London in AM peak and from London in PM peak), and during a part of the off-peak periods. This will represent a substantial improvement for Maidstone commuters to and from the City as well as offering a new rail route to London which will have the added benefit of starting at Maidstone and therefore providing an empty train with plenty of seats at the start of its journey.

It is also hoped that this new City service will substantially remove the extensive rail-heading which occurs today between locations along the Maidstone East line and those on the Tonbridge / Sevenoaks line by commuters needing access to a direct City rail service. This in turn should ease the congestion on that route.