

**Strategic Planning,
Sustainability and Transport
Committee**

10 July 2018

**The Big Conversation on rural transport in Kent
consultation**

Final Decision-Maker	Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee
Lead Head of Service/Lead Director	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Tay Arnold, Planning Projects and Delivery Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

Kent County Council (KCC) is running a consultation on rural transport titled 'the Big Conversation'. This consultation is countywide and runs from 13 June to 8 August 2018. KCC define the purpose of the Big Conversation as 'We want to find out if there is an innovative and sustainable way of providing transport to rural communities in Kent and we want to explore our ideas with you.' There is a questionnaire as well as a series of public meetings as part of the consultation.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the responses set out in paragraphs 1.12 to 1.17 of this report be agreed as a basis for the Councils response to Kent County Council

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Committee (please state)	
Council (delete as appropriate)	
Add more committees as appropriate, depending on where your report is going	

The Big Conversation on rural transport in Kent consultation

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Kent County Council (KCC) is running a consultation on rural transport in the county titled 'the Big Conversation.' This consultation runs and runs from 13 June to 8 August 2018. The consultation includes 11 public meetings across Kent, with one being held in Maidstone on 19th July. The consultation documents are held here: <https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/travelling-around-kent/big-conversation>

1.2 KCC define the purpose of the consultation as:
"We want to find out if there is an innovative and sustainable way of providing transport to rural communities in Kent and we want to explore our ideas with you... Against a backdrop of ever decreasing funding for local councils KCC want to maintain, and where possible, improve accessibility for those without an alternative means of travel in rural areas. This will help tackle social isolation and provide the right transport solution for the right customer need, at the right price."

1.3 To do this they want to:

- Make better use of existing transport resources.
- Integrate services with the wider commercial transport network.
- Help to protect future services.
- Make best use of technology.
- Work with our partners and communities to find the best solutions.

1.4 The four areas they wish to receive feedback on are the use of public transport and the journeys taken; priorities for a sustainable rural transport service; thoughts on the 3 initial ideas they have developed; and any additional information that needs to be considered when shaping the services for the future.

1.5 The three ideas they are seeking feedback on are: Feeder Services; Bookable flexible bus services; Taxi-bus style services.

1.6 The idea of **Feeder services** is defined by KCC as:

"For some rural communities it may be possible to provide feeder services, using either a small bus or a taxi to provide a service which would connect rural communities with an existing commercial bus service for the onward journey.

Feeder services would be timetabled with convenient stops along the route and would have a reliable connection with an existing commercial bus service. They would connect with the existing commercial bus both going to and returning from a destination. For example, a small minibus serving three

villages connects with Bus A four times a day and does the same for the return journey.

These new connections would be made either at an existing bus stop or a newly created one. Passengers could wait on the feeder vehicle for their connecting bus to arrive. We envisage the users being able to purchase a ticket that could cover the whole journey (feeder service and existing bus service)."

1.7 The idea of **Bookable flexible bus services** is defined by KCC as:

"In some rural areas it may be possible to provide a bookable bus service using small vehicles such as minibuses.

A bookable bus service would collect passengers from designated points within a community and could be used to access a range of destinations in a given area. This could range from a single point or pick up from home. Passengers would make a booking via phone or internet, provide journey details and the service would inform them of when they could be picked up for their journey. Bookings could be made seven days, one day or even hours in advance.

Such a service would bring together all the bookings in a given area to make the journeys as efficient as possible. Therefore, passengers would need to be flexible with the time and length of their journey. Additional time will need to be allowed for fixed time appointments e.g. doctor's appointment. Bookable buses are used in other parts of the UK to provide rural communities with a bus service. This could mean the needs of residents can be tailored for a local community. However, where appropriate, journeys will be shared.

There are number of possibilities for how bookings could be made, for example, by telephone, mobile app and online.

1.8The idea of the **Use of taxi-bus style services instead of a bus** is defined by KCC as:

KCC makes significant use of taxis as part of its network of home to school transport and there is an opportunity to make greater use of these vehicles. There is the potential for KCC to work with its operators to provide rural taxi-bus services.

Instead of a bus or as a new transport link, there could be a taxi-bus - a smaller vehicle, such as people carrier or minibus. The taxi-bus would run to an agreed timetable and route and would stop at agreed points in each community it serves.

In order to better cater for the low numbers traveling, the taxi-bus, like a normal bus service, would charge individual fares for different journeys along the route and would accept a range of payment methods (cash and card).

1.9 The key features of these three ideas are summarised by KCC as:

	1. Feeder services	2. Bookable flexible bus services	3. Taxi-bus style services
Frequency	Timetabled	Changes based on bookings with more flexible pick up points	Timetabled

Destination	Connecting service	Variable (within set options)	Fixed
Journey length and time	Fixed but longer than a direct service	Will change dependent on combined bookings	Fixed
Booking	Not required	Advance booking via the phone or internet required	Not required
Changing vehicles	Must change with guaranteed onward connection at a bus stop	Not required	Not required

1.10 It should be noted that KCC is also suggesting that if any of these ideas were implemented then they may be provided by someone else, either a commercial operator or community transport operator

1.11 The questionnaire is made up of 20 questions, however certain ones are only intended to be completed by individuals and therefore are not applicable to organisations. For these questions, draft responses are outlined below.

1.12 Q5. Please select from the list below up to three most and least important features for a rural transport service.

Most Important: Is linked to a wider bus and train network; The price is cheaper than a one-off taxi journey; Provision for disabled access

Least Important: You could book within 1 hour's notice; Seats can be booked in advance.

1.13 Q6a. Please add any comments you have on 'Idea 1 - Feeder services'.

This proposal will be less convenient and will take longer than current 'regular' bus services. This will impact on the number of people choosing to travel by public transport rather than by car, potentially impacting on air quality and increasing congestion. For those individuals who do not have an alternative they may choose to travel less frequently leading to increased isolation. If this idea is progressed it is important that individuals are able to purchase one ticket for the entire journey, even if the two halves of the journey are from different providers, to avoid further inconvenience to the passengers. There is insufficient information in the consultation booklet of how passengers will be assisted in changing vehicles and how disabled access will be provided. The consultation document also lacks clarity on how the changeover bus stop will work, particularly if the feeder vehicle will need to wait at the bus stop for the connecting bus (as proposed in the consultation document) and its impact on other motorists as well as other commercial buses using those stops.

1.14 Q7a. Please add any comments you have on 'Idea 2 - Bookable flexible bus services'.

It is unclear from the consultation booklet how 'bespoke' this option would be as it references both designated pick up points as well as picking ups from home. Equally it is unclear how many bookings would be encompassed in each journey and therefore the impact this would have on journey time. Equally would there be a minimum number of bookings leaving individuals unable to travel. It is also unclear how the level of the service being provided could be monitored to ensure an appropriate level standard is provided. If this idea is to be progressed it is vital that a variety of booking options are provided to ensure that those who without good access to online facilities are not discriminated against. If a quick and convenient service can be provided this option has the potential to improve links in rural locations and encourage new users as well.

1.15 Q8a. Please add any comments you have on 'Idea 3 - Use of taxi-bus style services' in the text box provided below.

The use of smaller vehicles presents several issues which require further exploration and mitigation. Clarity needs to be provided regarding how capacity issues would be overcome. Equally it is important that access to rural bus services are ensured for those with disabilities, if they are required to book in advance it is important that sufficient vehicles are available to provide the service. This proposal does have the potential benefit however of smaller vehicles being better suited to some rural roads. We would also like to see electric vehicles considered, or other measures to improve air quality.

1.16 Q10. We have completed an initial Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) for the potential pilots. If you have any comments about the Equality Impact Assessment, please provide them here.

The EqIA would need to be revisited once further details are known on how the proposals would function. It is important that these impacts are analysed at a local level as not all rural areas are the same and therefore the impacts will differ.

1.17 Q11. Thank you for taking part in the Big Conversation – your feedback will help us to shape the future of rural transport in Kent. If you have any further comments or other ideas, we would like you to share them with us

It is vital that the comments received as part of this consultation are used to guide the options taken forward. Further consultation will be required once details on the proposals are further developed. This consultation should be carried out at a local level and include the borough council.

2. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

2.1 That the Committee agree the responses outlined in paragraphs 1.12 to 1.17 of this report and that they form the basis of the council's response to Kent County Council's consultation.

2.2 That the Committee could decide that no response to Kent County Council's consultation.

3. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The option in 2.1 is the preferred option, since submitting a consultation response will ensure that the Council's viewpoint can be taken into account.

4. RISK

4.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk management Framework. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.

5. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

5.1 Subject to the Committee's agreement, the council's response will be submitted to Kent County Council by 8th August 2018.

6. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate priorities. However, they will support the Council's overall achievement of its aims as set out in section 3 [preferred alternative].	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning & Development
Risk Management	Already covered in the risk section	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning & Development
Financial	Responding to this consultation can be done within existing resources	Paul Holland, Senior Finance Manager
Staffing	Responding to this consultation can be done within existing	Rob Jarman, Head of

	resources	Planning & Development
Legal	There are no specific legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report	Cheryl Parks, Mid Kent Legal Services
Privacy and Data Protection	Responding to this consultation as recommended would not have specific implications for privacy and data protection.	Cheryl Parks, Mid Kent Legal Services
Equalities	Responding to this consultation as recommended would not have specific or differential implications for the different communities within Maidstone.	[Policy & Information Manager]
Crime and Disorder	N/A	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning & Development
Procurement	N/A	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning & Development