

# Provision of local bus services

A review by the Overview Scrutiny Committee  
June 2004



**Contents****1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Terms of Reference
- 1.3 Context of Review
- 1.4 Evidence Gathering
- 1.5 Conclusions
- 1.6 Recommendations

**2. Background**

- 2.1 Local Bus Provision
- 2.2 Rural Transport Partnership Scheme
- 2.3 Quality Bus Partnerships
- 2.4 Local Bus Service registration and bus service operations grant
- 2.5 Rural and Urban Bus Challenge schemes

**3. Outcome of Review**

- 3.1 Punctuality Survey
- 3.2 Kent County Council
- 3.3 Arriva
- 3.4 Gravesham Access and Gravesham Age Concern
- 3.5 Alternative

**Appendix 1 - Summary of Evidence**

**Appendix 2 - Results from Bus User Survey**

**Appendix 3 - North West Kent Karrier Dial-a-Ride schedule of fares  
Gravesham Post Bus Timetable**

**Appendix 4 -**  
**(1) News releases**  
**(2) Additional reading**  
**(3) Other Agencies**

## 1. Executive Summary

1.1 The Overview Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of local Bus Services. A Task Group consisting of five members of the Scrutiny Committee carried out the review. A member, James Oliver, from Gravesham Youth Forum was co-opted onto the Task Group to bring a young persons perspective to the review.

1.2 The Terms of Reference of the Review were:-

- To examine the provision of bus services in the Borough of Gravesham, including availability, delivery and quality of the service;
- To identify what measures are needed to improve them in terms of speed, frequency and reliability;
- To consider County and local transport plans and policies in regard of current and future delivery of urban and rural bus services and how these plans fit in with central government's ten year Transport Plan which has an aim that "everyone should live within 13 minutes walk of at least an hourly bus service";
- To examine whether the governments proposed changes to the current bus service registration rules would bring about the development of innovative, flexibly routed, demand responsive services to meet the needs of the urban/ rural communities in the borough.

1.3 The context in which the review was undertaken was a perceived lack of reliability in the provision of bus services in the borough.

1.4 Three evidence gathering sessions were held with witnesses from Age Concern, Gravesham Access, Arriva and Kent County Council. A survey amongst local bus users was also undertaken.

1.5 Conclusions:

- Gravesham Council has little or no influence on the provision of commercial bus services in the borough, though the establishment of a Quality Bus Partnership may go some way to addressing this situation;
- More money means more services and better buses. More money comes from more passenger revenue or more subsidy. More passenger revenue requires more and better services. A classic "catch 22".
- Improved communication is need between user groups, Arriva and Kent County Council through the setting up of some sort of liaison group between all interested parties;
- Gravesham is perceived as receiving a good level of service from Arriva in its urban areas;
- Alternatives are of the demand led, pre-booking, dial-a-ride type of service. Is there a demand for this type of service in the borough? Can this type of service survive without being subsidised? Can this type of service be self financing with fares that people can afford?
- Does a service like the Gloucestershire County Council taxibus, using 8 seater people carriers, offer a way forward. This two and a half year pilot scheme starts in August 2004 and if it is successful will be expanded to cover a wider area.

- 1.6 Recommendations to Cabinet are:-
- 1.6.1 **Establish a liaison group that would bring together user groups, parish councils, bus service providers, the police, community groups and Kent County Council to exchange information on transport issues.**
- 1.6.2 **Arriva be requested to consult with Gravesham Borough Council on issues surrounding changes to the timetable of any service operating within the Borough.**
- 1.6.3 **Where a bus route is 'easy access', Arriva be asked to keep the use of non easy access vehicles to a minimum.**
- 1.6.4 **That the Cabinet write to the Department of Transport with concerns that there are franchise agreements with other transport providers e.g. train operators but there are no such agreements with bus service providers. Therefore they operate as they wish and can withdraw services with nothing more than the required 56 days notice.**

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Local bus service provision

Local bus services in Gravesham are provided by Arriva (Redroute Buses run a number of schools, evening and Sunday services under contract to Kent County Council) on a purely commercial basis. Unlike the privatised railways, bus companies do not bid for a franchise to run services. As the provision of bus services is a commercial venture, services can be withdrawn for sound business reasons only.

Kent County Council gives financial support to 20% of the bus services in Kent, the other 80% are provided by commercial operators. The counties spending on bus services is nearly £6m per year made up of £4m from Kent County Council and about £2m from central government grants.

Kent County Council has a duty under the Transport Act 1985 to support the provision of socially necessary services. The services that Kent County Council funding supports are ranked as follows:-

- Journeys carrying school children;
- Journeys carrying workers;
- Journeys enabling health and welfare needs;
- Journeys for other purposes on Monday to Saturday daytime;
- Journeys for other purposes on Sundays and evenings.

The majority of contracts for these services are fixed price where the operator carries the passenger revenue risk. This encourages the operator to grow the business. The other type of contract is a revenue guaranteed contract. This contract is for services like "park and ride" where councils need to match fares to local car park charges. In these cases the passenger revenue risk lies with the county.

The government has an aim that everyone (100%) should live within 13 minutes walk of at least an hourly bus service. The average figure in Kent is 64%, this rises to about 75% in Gravesham.

Kent County Council produced a "Bus Strategy for Kent" in 2001, this document describes the council's duties under the Transport Acts of 1985 and 2000 and goes on to outline policies and objectives on

urban and rural bus transport. It also describes many of the community transport schemes currently running in Kent. The document is under review.

## 2.2 Rural Transport Partnership Scheme

The Rural Transport Partnership Scheme is run by The Countryside Agency and seeks to support community based transport initiatives which secure a long term improvement in rural people's access to jobs, services and social activities.

The support comes in the form of grants that are available to any organisation that can identify and delivery transport projects. The Rural Transport Partnership Scheme runs initially until 31 March 2004.

## 2.3 Quality Bus Partnerships

The 1999 Transport Bill empowers the adoption of Quality Bus Partnerships between the public and private sectors and sets a framework for Bus Quality Contracts at a later date. Kent County Council is pro-active in these concepts and has the support of the residents in Kent in this work. Kent County Council seeks to develop at least one Quality Bus Partnership each year.

The principle of such arrangements is that the county council, in partnership with the appropriate district council, will fund improvements to the highway infrastructure and bus operators will provide enhanced services with a level of "commercial risk". Quality Bus Partnerships have already been established in Maidstone and Thanet.

The county council is in the short term developing a partnership with Arriva and Gravesham and Dartford Borough Councils to continue the development of a high quality bus network for Kent Thameside which will include Fastrack. Developers may have a role to play in any such partnership if private sector investment will produce a clear benefit to the wider Kent Thameside public transport network.

The development of Quality Bus Partnerships should expand the sphere of influence that the county council has on the provision of local bus services. Under the terms of these partnerships specific service reliability targets can be set. A typical target that could be set would be that 95% of services arrive not more than five minutes late or one minute early from their scheduled times.

## 2.4 Local bus service registration and Bus Service Operators Grant

The Flexible Future, a Department of Transport consultation paper, was published in August 2002 and sent to over 70 individuals and organisations in the UK with an interest in the registration of local bus services.

The views of interested parties were sought because there were strong indications that the fuller use of flexible routing and demand responsive services, particularly to meet the needs in rural areas, was being inhibited by the current rules of bus registration.

In general terms, the existing registration rules require bus services to operate for the most part along predetermined routes to a fixed timetable.

## 2.5 Rural and Urban Bus Challenge Schemes

### Rural Bus Challenge Scheme

In 2001/02 £20.5m was awarded to 58 projects under the rural bus challenge which supports over 200 projects throughout rural England, including taxi-bus and other demand responsive services.

Urban Bus Challenge Scheme - £46 million over 3 years

The Secretary of State hopes that local authorities will pay particular attention to opportunities (which may be suggested by bus operators and bus users) to provide bus services to places which have no such service at present. He similarly

hopes that local authorities will have regard to the scope for enhancing public transport networks, including connections between public transport modes and for the provision of feeder services, for example by community transport providers, connecting to existing "conventional services" as a way of improving links between poorly served areas and transport networks.

Urban Bus Challenge fund will not be eligible for replacing withdrawn commercial services.

The Local Transport Plan for Kent 2002/06, in its annual progress report for 2003, details three demand responsive bus services funded by the Rural Bus Challenge Fund running in Kent. These are Deal Area Responsive Transport (DART), Swale Unified Network (SUN) and Shepway Kent Karrier.

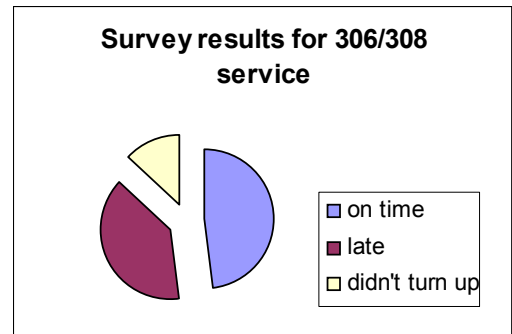
Kent County Council also supports the Postbus in Gravesham (timetable reproduced in appendix 3) and a Dial-Ride service that covers the Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley areas.

### 3. Outcome of Review

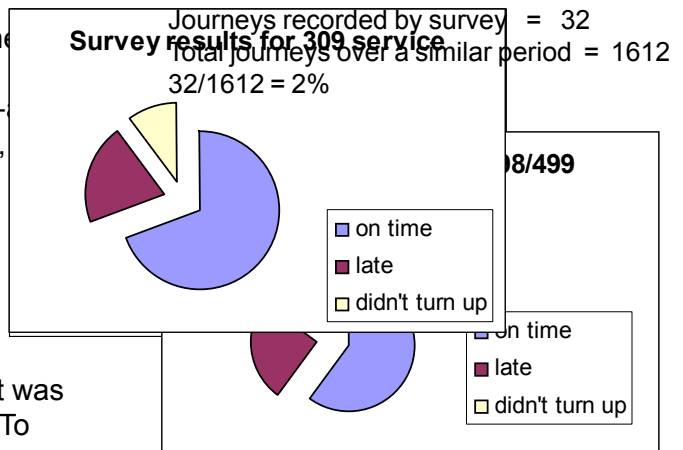
#### 3.1 Punctuality Survey

At the outset of the review an attempt was made to get the views of bus users. To this end a simple diary requesting the user to record their next seven journeys was prepared. These diaries were sent to a random sample of residents with bus passes and others were placed in leisure centres, age concern offices, the tourist information office, outlying housing offices and the authority's free newspaper. The diaries had a freepost return address.

The response was disappointing, the recorded journeys on specific services being only a small percentage of the total number of those specific services that were run over a similar period of time. However, the results are shown in chart form below.



Journeys records by survey = 46  
 Total journeys over a similar period = 960  
 $46/960 = 4.8\%$



Journeys recorded by survey = 32  
 Total journeys over a similar period = 1612  
 $32/1612 = 2\%$

Journeys records by survey = 40  
 Total journeys over a similar period = 2134  
 $40/2134 = 1.9\%$

Journeys recorded by survey = 29  
 Total journeys over a similar period = 840  
 $29/840 = 3.5\%$

A service was recorded as late if it was more than 5 minutes later than its scheduled time.

Arriva have asked that the report reflect that some of the delays recorded by our survey may well have been due to circumstances beyond their control such as congestion on the A2 and M25, accidents and roadworks which have knock on effect on bus services between Dartford and Gravesend and within the borough itself. Arriva's records, for example, show that on twelve occasions during the period of the survey services did not run because Arriva did not have serviceable buses or drivers available. The 306, 308 services and the linked 309 service were affected by road works in Seal during October 2003.

The Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) monitors the compliance of local bus operators with their registered timetables on behalf of the Traffic Commissioners. This monitoring is carried out in response to a complaint or if there has not been any monitoring for some time. When a complaint is received monitoring of that service will take place with the additional monitoring of 2 or 3 other services in the same area. Where there has been no monitoring for some time several operators will have some individual services monitored over a period of a few days. Two VOSA monitors are available to carry out surveys in the South East (Kent, Surrey and Sussex). The information gathered from these surveys is fed back to the Traffic Commissioners. It is not available to the public.

The Traffic Commissioners use a non statutory "window of tolerance" to judge compliance with the registered timetable with the criteria that 95% of services should be no more than 1 minute early or 5 minutes later than their scheduled time.

The Traffic Commissioners will then seek an explanation from the bus operator as to why there have been delays. If the explanation is unsatisfactory the Traffic Commissioners can issue a warning. If

the delays continue a further warning can be given. Persistent failure to meet the registered timetable can lead to a public inquiry with the result that the bus operator can be fined a percentage of their bus operator's grant. This grant is essentially a rebate of most of the fuel duty.

Traffic congestion is not considered to be an acceptable excuse for delays. Bus operators are expected to carry out their own monitoring and register amended timetables where necessary if congestion is an ongoing problem.

Many of the bus service users who completed diaries included comments on the bus service as a whole and two of these are reproduced below. (All the comments that were received are reproduced in appendix 2).

"I say give us back the buses as they used to be London Transport, Green Line, Maidstone & District. This last week two days running I came out of Darenth Valley Hospital before 4pm and had to wait till nearly 4:45 for a 490 Valley Drive bus. I call it disgusting".

"I have found all the routes (489, 480, 499, 498) on time taking into account road works at Northfleet and on the whole I am very satisfied with the service that I am provided with plus my half price ticket is very useful. Thank you."

### 3.2 Kent County Council

Kent County Council has the responsibility for submitting bids for government grants for the provision of new services. These bids are drawn up in partnership with Arriva.

One such bid was to the Urban Bus Challenge Fund. This application relates to the provision of low floor buses on the 495/496/498/499 services in the Riverview Park and Kings Farm areas of Gravesham. The proposal is for 7 new low floor buses to bring four services an hour to both these areas. Arriva is putting in £240k and the bid is for an additional

£320k. The bid has to be submitted by the end of September for a decision in December and implementation in April 2004. The bid is looking for support from Gravesham for funds for raised kerbs, improved bus stops and the possibility of real time information being available at certain stops.

During the course of the review it was announced that this application had been successful.

The other responsibility that Kent County Council has is the funding and support of socially necessary bus services in the county. The maximum subsidy for these services is £3 per passenger. The subsidy for each service was usually run for a period of four years, which meant that a quarter of all such contracts were renewed each year as part of a rolling programme. There were only a small number of subsidised services in the Gravesham area. The running of subsidised services was open to a competitive tendering process which meant that commercial bus service providers other than Arriva could bid and if successful their buses would be seen in the area. Red Route buses were an example of this.

The question of meeting the government target of everyone being within a 13 minute walk of at least an hourly bus service was raised. This target was seen as an aspiration, unfortunately the government gave no money towards additional services.

There was funding available in the current financial year for the rolling out of a programme of improving bus stops in the town centre and some urban areas to display bus service information electronically.

When asked about consultation with user groups Mr Joyner, Transport Planning Manager, replied that Kent County Council do not have formal consultations with these groups. There is no public liaison group in the Gravesham area. In other

authorities where such liaison groups exist there is a much better exchange of information on local transport issues.

As the transport authority KCC, through its Passenger Transport Unit, has to be informed by bus operators of any changes to their services. These changes can vary from service schedules to the complete withdrawal of a service. The minimum period for notification of change is 56 days.

Kent's Passenger Transport Unit has no automatic mechanism for notifying Districts and Boroughs of these changes. Some authorities are more proactive than others in seeking out this information. A local authority having some form of public transport liaison forum can be very helpful in this situation.

Details of these changes have to be sent to the Traffic Area Network (TAN) where they are posted on their website under Notices and Proceedings. However the level of detail of service changes available under Notices and Proceedings is not always complete and further delving into the original registration is sometimes required to elicit the full story. TAN also makes the information available by post (subscription £91) or free of charge via e-mail.

Recommendation:

**Establish a liaison group that would bring together user groups, parish councils, bus service providers the police, community groups and Kent County Council to exchange information on transport issues.**

### 3.3 Arriva

Arriva is run on a commercial basis and relies on the revenue from fares. Where the revenue is insufficient to cover costs, and where a local authority has tendered a route, funding is provided by that authority.

Arriva provides services in Gravesham from its garages in Northfleet, Dartford and Gillingham.



The question was raised about the change in frequency of some services from half hourly to hourly and associated reliability problems. One particular service was the 308 which runs from Sevenoaks to Bluewater and has a one way journey time of 1hr 35mins. Mr Spalding said that increased car use had reduced passenger revenue and on a purely cost basis the service had been reduced to hourly. He went on to say that it was very difficult to keep passengers informed about what is going on, particularly in outlying areas. The introduction of electronic indicator boards would go some way to addressing this problem but it was unlikely that this type of equipment will be available for all bus stops.

Currently 50 per cent of Arriva's fleet are low floor easy access vehicles. A bus has a lifespan of about 15 years and as a new 29 seat bus costs around £80,000 the renewal process has to be carried out at a measured pace. The government has set a target for all local buses to be easy access by 2015 (for double deckers the target is 2016). Arriva hopes to meet this target before 2015.

The size of the bus on a particular route is related to demand. Arriva has a small number of 29 seater easy access buses. The company prefers to have designated routes as 100 per cent easy access buses rather than a mix of easy and non easy access vehicles. This means Arriva can advertise these routes as such and passengers know what type of bus to expect.

Mr Tullet the operations manager of Arriva's Northfleet garage said that he ran 60 vehicles from the depot. There were seven vehicles on stand by to cover breakdowns and servicing. At any time, out of his total fleet there would be two buses off every week for MOT testing and four buses would be off every day for servicing. There was no spare capacity.

Mr Tullet was asked about the unreliability of the 493/496 service through Kings Farm. He replied that these services were

regularly vandalised and recently two drivers had been injured by flying debris. Arriva has a 24 hr contract with Autoglass for the replacement of windows. Kent police were tackling the problem which occurred mostly after 3 o'clock in the afternoon but during school holidays attacks could happen at any time of the day.

Due to the ongoing problems of vandalism and other breakdowns it was not always possible to replace a bus with one with similar facilities. Mr Tullet believed that "any bus was better than no bus".

Recommendations:

**Arriva be requested to consult with Gravesham Borough Council on issues surrounding changes to the timetable of any service operating within the Borough.**

**Where a bus route is 'easy access', Arriva be asked to keep the use of non easy access vehicles to a minimum.**

#### 3.4 Gravesham Access and Gravesham Age Concern

Both Mrs Davies of Age Concern and Mrs McBean of Gravesham Access agreed that the elderly and the handicapped want to be independent and are embarrassed at holding other people up in their efforts to board a bus. Many areas in the borough that had large populations requiring wider easy access facilities were not served by appropriate buses.

Mrs McBean attend regular meetings of the Access Group and the Group extends an invitation for a representative of Arriva to attend. To date only once has this invitation been accepted. Copies of the minutes of the meetings are sent to Arriva.

Mrs Davies said that the opening and closing times of the day centre meant that her clients were travelling on buses full of school children and often had to stand.

Finally, Mrs Davies and Mrs McBean were asked what their ideal would be and they gave the following list:-

- The "Dial-a-Ride" service subsidised by Kent County Council gives priority to rural areas. It is also twice as expensive as the equivalent bus fare;
- All existing routes should have accessible buses with the new style buses being the norm;
- Improved communication;
- Run more buses between 3 and 4pm;
- Consultation with groups such as Age Concern and Gravesham Access;
- A more even fare system;
- A re-education of young people on safety issues and increased awareness of the needs of the elderly and infirm.

Note: Every three years, as part of the best value process, a general user satisfaction survey is carried out. In 2004 this survey, of 3200 postal addresses in the borough, included some more general questions, two of which sought information on public transport.

The survey posed the question:  
'Thinking generally, which of the things below would you say are most important in making somewhere a good place to live?'

(Respondents were asked to select up to 5 from a list of 23)

#### Respondents aged 65 and over

Health services	68.9%
Level of crime	65.1%
Road & pavement repairs	59.1%
Clean streets	39.2%
<b>Public transport</b>	<b>35.2%</b>

#### Respondents with a limiting disability

Health services	66.2%
Level of crime	64.5%
Road & pavement repairs	45.3%

Clean streets	38.8%
Affordable decent housing	34.9%
<b>Public transport</b>	<b>32.4%</b>

The survey then posed the question:

'Thinking about this local area, which of the things below, if any, do you think most need improving?'

(Respondents were asked to select up to 5 from a list of 23)

#### Respondents aged 65 and over

Road & pavement repairs	72.2%
Level of crime	62.2%
Clean streets	51.7%
<b>Public transport</b>	<b>40.0%</b>

#### Respondents with a limiting disability

Level of crime	65.2%
Road & pavement repairs	58.7%
Clean streets	46.3%
<b>Public transport</b>	<b>26.5%</b>

### 3.5 Alternatives

On 20 January 2004 the Transport Minister, Tony McNulty, announced that "from 23 February bus operators will be able to register more flexible bus services to meet the needs of local communities".

The news release went on to say that three new types of bus service will be possible (whether operated commercially or under subsidy), with individual journeys pre-booked by passengers in advance. These are:-

- The "many to one" service – picking up individual passengers from a location specified by them (perhaps their home), and taking them to a single, fixed destination;
- The "one to many" service – the above example in reverse. Passengers are picked up from fixed boarding points and taken to disparate destinations, on demand;
- The "many to many" service – this offers maximum flexibility, allowing the service to pick up passengers from various locations, on demand, and taking them to

disparate destinations (within a defined geographical area of operation), again on demand.

The proposals will also cater for the registration of services that are a hybrid of all three service types.

The Bus Service Operators Grant will be extended to flexibly routed local bus services in England.

Alternatives to the fixed route, fixed timetable commercial service delivered by Arriva and others, are of the pre-booked, demand led type of service. To maximise the potential of these services there needs to be an efficient IT and communications system in place to facilitate easy and quick booking.

In Kent there are currently three demand led services:-

- Deal Area Responsive Transport (DART) services are a community drive combination of scheduled and dedicated demand responsive dial-a-ride services;
- Swale Unified Network (SUN) comprises a car hire and a wheelchair accessible minibus dial-a-ride service;
- Shepway Kent Karrier is a new dial-a-ride service for Shepway residents.

Kent County Council also provides a dial-a-ride service that covers the Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley area.

This services has two membership criteria;

- Anyone living within the area with a mobility problem;
- Anyone in a rural location, with or without a mobility difficulty who lives more than 500 metres from a standard bus service.

Membership costs £5.

There are 77 members, 27 of whom live in Gravesham. In the financial year 2003/04 to January there had been a total of 1716 journeys averaging 48 per week in the whole area covered by the service.

The service operates seven days a week from

08.00 – 18.00 Monday to Friday, 09.00 – 18.00 Saturdays and Sundays. A breakdown of the cost of fares on this service are reproduced in appendix 3.

Gloucester County Council has just been awarded £730,900 from the government to fund three taxi-bus schemes in rural areas. A taxi-link is a public transport system, using 8 seater people carriers, for people living in rural areas. This scheme will run as a two-and-half-year pilot project from August 2004 to March 2007.

Preference is given to pre-booked passengers but the IT System (Mobisoft) allows real time bookings to be taken and relayed instantaneously to the vehicles, so if spare capacity exists the driver can respond immediately. However, in reality as much pre-booking as possible will be encouraged.

The press release goes on to say that “the proposal is for three separate services and if all three trials are successful alternatives to conventional subsidised fixed bus routes, it is hoped they will become a realistic proposition for the county council to subsidise once the funding expires”.

Other initiatives include local community provided volunteer transport such as the Meopham community bus scheme which has been running for over 20 years.

## Appendix 1

### Overview Scrutiny

Review: Provision of Local Bus Services

Venue: Civic Centre, Gravesend -  
2 December 2003 - 4.00pm

Present: Councillor R Parker  
Councillor K Jones

In Attendance: Mrs S Whatmough, Head of  
Democratic Services  
Mr D Finch, Corporate Policy  
Officer

Interviewees: Mrs Annette Davies -  
Gravesham Age Concern  
Mrs Priscilla McBean -  
Gravesham Access

### Summary of evidence

Mrs Davies of Age Concern said that the opening and closing times of the day centre meant that her clients were travelling at the same time as the school children. This meant that buses were full and many of those travelling to the centre had to stand. She added that the state of the buses left a lot to be desired. Having said that, the staff were always polite, courteous and helpful.

Mrs McBean said that accessibility was her major concern. Many of the old style buses had restricted access through narrow gangways and with 2 or 3 steps to negotiate. This was difficult enough for mums with pushchairs and people with shopping bags, let alone the old, the infirm and those in wheelchairs.

The older smaller style of buses were more often than not used on outlying routes.

The elderly and the handicapped want to be independent and are embarrassed at holding other people up in their efforts to board the bus. Many areas in the borough that had large populations requiring wider easy access facilities were not served by appropriate buses.

Mrs McBean attends regular meetings of the Access Group and often invites a representative from Arriva to attend. To date only once has her invitation been taken up. A copy of the minutes of the meetings are sent to Arriva.

Mrs McBean also said that events in the town centre, such as the French Market, cause buses to be re-routed and changes where the bus stops which can cause difficulties for those requiring the bus to stop as near the town centre as possible.

Mrs Davies thought the bus service a lot better than it was though there was room for improvement. The current availability of service meant that some members of the community were not able to access the day centre. Age Concern has its own transport but can only cater for 44 out of the 100 who visit the centre. The service she runs goes out 4 times a day, 5 days a week. 58% of the cost of this service comes from a KCC grant, the balance comes from fundraising.

The interviewees when asked what their ideal would be gave the following list.

The 'Dial-a-Ride' service subsidised by KCC gives priority to rural areas. It is also twice as expensive as the equivalent bus fare.

All existing routes should have accessible buses with new style buses being the norm.

Improved communication.

Run more buses between 3pm and 4pm.

Consultation with groups such as Age Concern and Gravesham Access.

A more even fare system.

A re-education of young people on safety issues and increased awareness of the needs of the elderly and infirm.

## Overview Scrutiny

**Review:** Provision of Local Bus Services

**Venue:** Civic Centre, Gravesend – 7 January 2004

**Present:** Councillors: P Mersh  
R Parker  
K Jones  
C Meredith  
M Singh  
W Dyke

Mr Oliver representing Gravesham Youth Forum (GYF)

### In Attendance:

Mrs S Whatmough, Head of Democratic Services  
Mr D Finch, Corporate Policy Officer

### Interviewees:

Mr M Spalding, Commercial Manager, Arriva Southern Counties  
Mr D Joyner, Transport Planning Manager, KCC  
Mr M Hodges, Transport Management, KCC

## Summary of evidence

### Introduction:

Mr Spalding gave a brief overview of Arriva and its role in providing bus services in the Gravesham area.

Arriva is a public limited company (plc) and has operations providing train and bus services through Europe as well as in the United Kingdom.

When the National Bus Company was broken up in the mid 80s some parts were subject to management buy outs and others were sold to groups of one sort or another. These disparate elements were then brought together via the Cowie Group which devolved into Arriva.

Arriva operates outside London and holds the necessary Operators' Licence issued by the Traffic Commissioner which enables them to register bus services to run largely where and when they choose.

The company is run on a commercial basis and relies on revenue from fares. Where that revenue is insufficient to cover costs, and where a local authority has tendered a route, funding is provided by that authority.

Arriva provides services in Gravesham from its garages in Northfleet, Dartford and Gillingham. The company will soon be providing extra London services which will be focussed on their Dartford garage. The Northfleet garage will then become the focus for the local area.

Mr Joyner outlined the County Councils role in public transport.

Under the Transport Act the County Council has a key role in promoting and funding non-commercial, but socially necessary bus services in Kent.

The maximum subsidy for these services is £3 per passenger. Permission has to be sought from Members of the County Council to exceed this figure.

KCC also seeks to establish Quality Bus Partnerships in Kent. This is a partnership between the County Council, the appropriate local authority and the commercial bus service provider. Currently there are two such partnerships in Kent; Thanet and Maidstone.

KCC is also responsible for submitting bids for Government funds for the provision of new services. These bids are submitted in partnership with Arriva. One such recent bid was for new low floor easy access buses to increase the frequency of services on the 495/496/498/499 routes in Gravesham. KCC works closely with Arriva and many other agencies such as access groups and Age Concern.

Mr Hodges added that the subsidising of socially necessary services was usually over a 4 year period which meant that, as part of a rolling programme, a quarter of all bus contracts in Kent were renewed every year.

Gravesham residents got a very good service from Arriva as it was an essentially urban area compared to say Shepway and Sevenoaks that were more rural.

The total funding for subsidising services was £5 million per year, £1.8 million of which came from central government and was available until the 2005/06 financial year. There are only a small number of subsidised services in the Gravesham area.

**Questions:**

**Gravesham is rural as well as urban and since the change of the 308 service from a half hourly to hourly service there have been problems with delays and non arrival of buses.**

The service was half hourly for many years. Increased car use has reduced the number of passengers and on a purely cost basis the service has been reduced to hourly. Passengers can be alienated if the hourly service is unreliable but unfortunately it is very difficult to keep people informed of what is going on. A real time information system is being developed which will bring electronic indicator boards to bus stops. It is unlikely that this equipment will be available for all stops.

**Is it possible to look at the re-scheduling of buses, particularly evening services, to compensate for the reduced hourly service?**

Removing an evening service will not result in an extra service during the day.

**What will happen to the 308 evening service when government funds run out?**

One service from Kent will have to be chopped if the level of this evening service is to be maintained.

**Red Route buses cover some services. How did this come about?**

Red Route tendered for a KCC subsidised evening and Sunday service and was the lowest tender. Arriva also tendered but were unsuccessful.

**How are we going to meet the government target of everyone being within a 13 minute walk of at least an hourly bus service?**

This is an aspiration. The government gives no money towards additional services to achieve this goal.

**How are routes chosen to have easy access buses?**

The size of the bus on a particular route is related to demand. Arriva has a small number of smaller buses (29 seats) that have easy access. (Arriva prefer not to mix non easy access buses on any route, but prefer to have designated routes as 100% easy access buses, so these routes can be advertised as such). However, if there are particular issues raised by users concerning the deployment of easy access buses then Arriva are open to discussions.

**What consultation do you have with user groups?**

Do not have formal consultations with these groups. There is no public liaison group that serves the Gravesham area.

**Has the subsidy for services increased over the last 4 years?**

The money for basic services has not changed. Bids for money from the Urban and Rural challenge funds have been used for such things as dial-a-ride schemes. Bids under the "Kick-Start" initiative have to be commercially viable so that the service can continue after the funding period expires (usually 3 years). A recent bid was for an increase frequency service with new low floor buses on the 495/496 and 498/499 services. This bid was for £320,000 with KCC putting in additional funds of £200,000 and Arriva £240,000 for the new vehicles.

**Do all your buses have wheelchair access?**

No, currently about 50% of our fleet are low floor easy access vehicles. A bus has a lifespan of about 15 years and as a new 29 seat bus costs around £80,000 the renewal process has to be carried out at a measured pace. The government has set a target for all local buses to be easy access by 2015 (2016 for double deckers). In Gravesham, Arriva hopes to meet this target before 2015.

**What plans do you have for the Northfleet depot?**

Arriva are committed to providing bus services in the area for the long term. There are no plans to close the depot. However, if an alternative site was proposed Arriva would be happy to explore any such proposal.

**What is your role in Fastrack?**

Arriva are very supportive of Fastrack and, whilst not part of the steering group, they are regularly consulted and are able to submit their views. Approval has been received from government for the building of the track and it is hoped to start building the track at the Dartford end of the network shortly.

**What progress has there been on the introduction of new technology?**

The buses in the Northfleet depot have the "real time information" equipment installed. Funding has been allocated in this financial year for the rolling out of the programme of improving bus stops in the town centre and some urban areas to display bus service information electronically.

**What benefit have we seen in the increase in rural funding?**

The 305 service, is a new service brought about by this funding. Other benefits have been the 308 evening service and services on the 311 route.

**Can we be assured that none of the funding for Fastrack will be to the detriment of local services?**

Yes, the money for the building of the track is ring fenced.

**Do you try and link bus services to the train timetable?**

Yes, there is some linkage between bus and train services. This is focussed on town centre services where there is a reasonable frequency of service. Less frequent services are not linked as more bus passengers can be inconvenienced by a late running train than vice versa.

**Are you able to make discounted fares available to students?**

Travel before 9am is charged at the standard fare. After 9am discounts can be offered. Unfortunately, reducing fares does not, from past experience, bring about a sufficient increase in passenger journeys to restore the reduction in fares revenue.

The Connexions card for 16, 17 and 18 year olds that is issued by Capita through KCC is recognised by KCC.

Mr Oliver pointed out that the Connexions card had been very poorly promoted to such an extent that many of the students he and the GYF had surveyed were completely unaware of its existence.

Connexions card holders can travel at child rate fares after 6pm Monday to Friday and all day at weekends and Bank Holidays but it was commented that a number of routes did not have any services on these days or times so many potential passengers were unable to benefit.

**Some services at school times were full of children. Was it not possible to lay on special buses at these times?**

Yes, but at some cost. It is cheaper to buy tickets for children to travel on existing services. Segregating the children gives them a very poor and limited experience of public transport. Integrating them with other passengers in the public transport system may mean that they would consider it as an option in future years.

## Overview Scrutiny

**Review:** Provision of Local Bus Services

**Venue:** Arriva Southern Counties, Northfleet Depot  
6 February 2004 – 3pm

**Present:** Councillors: P Mersh  
R Parker  
A Webb

**In Attendance:**  
Mr D Finch, Corporate Policy Officer

**Interviewees:**  
Mr A Tullet – Operations Manager

### Summary if evidence

#### Introduction:

Mr Tullet said that he ran 60 vehicles from the depot. There were seven vehicles on stand by to cover breakdowns and servicing. There were two buses off every week for MOT testing and four buses off every day for servicing. Mr Tullet added that there was not an everlasting supply of replacement buses. He had had difficulties with the unreliability of certain types of vehicles. The replacement of buses was to a certain extent dependent on their resale value and ironically certain types of newer vehicles were worth less to the company than some older ones. He had recently had eleven replacement buses made available to him but they had to undergo refurbishment and repainting. He hoped to bring these into service as soon as possible. It was not always possible to replace a vehicle with one that was as equally suited to the route. This meant that sometimes a broken down easy access, low floor bus could not be replaced with a similar specification vehicle. Mr Tullet held the view that any bus was better than no bus at all. There was no spare capacity.

Mr Tullet has the responsibility for the day to day running of the bus services and sorts out the problems as and when they arise. He does not have much input into policy, funding, planning, consultation and publicity. These decisions are the responsibility of Arriva Southern Counties head office in Maidstone.

#### Questions:

**The 493/496 services through Kings Farm are very unreliable.**

These services are regularly vandalised. Recently two drivers have been injured by objects thrown through the windscreen. Arriva has a 24hr contract with Autoglass for the replacement of windows. Kent police are trying to tackle the vandalism. The attacks take place in the Sun Lane area mostly after 3 o'clock. On school holidays the attacks can happen at any time of the day.

**The hourly Valley Drive service has not been turning up leaving people waiting for 2 hours.**

There have been difficulties with the mechanical reliability of buses used on this route. There has been some restructuring to free up alternative and more reliable buses for this route. However these buses have to be refurbished before they can be brought into service.

**Do you carry out much consultation or publicity when fares are increased?**

No, this all comes from head office.

**Do you have punctuality figures, number of passengers/day?**

These figures would have to be requested from head office or the traffic commission.

**The 480/490 service is advertised as a route with easy access buses but frequently a old style "hopper" type of bus is used which makes life difficult for wheelchair users, those with pushchairs and the elderly.**

There has been a problem with damage to vehicles and with the limited availability of alternative vehicles it is not always possible to replace like with like. I believe that it is better to put on any rather than no bus.

**There seems to be an enormous number of notices on buses these days.**

In an effort to keep bus users informed all current notices are placed on all buses because they may be used on other routes.



**Many drivers don't carry tickets for the card validation machines.**

These machines are very susceptible to vibration and as a result are very unreliable. Most drivers prefer tickets off the roll. The validation machines cost more money than they save.

**Appendix 2**

Service 306/308 Sevenoaks – Meopham – Gravesend – Bluewater.

Date	Time		Date	Time		Date	Time	
24 Oct	13.12	Late	6 Oct	09.25	Late	29 Sept	10.15	
22 Oct	10.42	Late	6 Oct	13.12	Late	29 Sept	13.15	
17 Oct	12.20	Late	6 Oct	10.15	Late	25 Sept	10.42	Late
17 Oct	10.32		6 Oct	13.15		24 Sept	10.10	Didn't turn up
17 Oct	11.40		3 Oct	10.03		24 Sept	10.40	Didn't turn up
15 Oct	9.26	Late	3 Oct	13.12	Late	24 Sept	08.25	Didn't turn up
15 Oct	10.00		3 Oct	08.25	Late	22 Sept	09.08	Late
15 Oct	10.42	Late	1 Oct	10.12	Didn't turn up	22 Sept	11.12	Late
14 Oct	10.40	Late	1 Oct	10.35		19 Sept	14.38	
14 Oct	10.15	Late	1 Oct	15.57		17 Sept	08.25	Late
14 Oct	13.15		1 Oct	09.30		12 Sept	09.30	Didn't turn up
13 Oct	10.40	Didn't turn up	1 Oct	11.12	Late	9 Sept	10.42	Didn't turn up
10 Oct	08.25	Late	1 Oct	08.25	Late			
8 Oct	13.26	Late	30 Sept	10.10				
8 Oct	10.03		30 Sept	09.57				
8 Oct	13.12	Late	30 Sept	11.20				
8 Oct	08.25	Late	30 Sept	16.03	Late			

In the above table a service is recorded as 'late' if it is 5 or more minutes later than its scheduled time.

Total recorded journeys 46      Late 22      Didn't turn up 6

Journeys recorded (over 20 days) 46

Total 308/306 journeys (over the same 20 days) 960

Recorded journeys as % of total 5.1%

Service 309 Singlewell – Gravesend – Swanscombe – Bluewater.

Date	Time		Date	Time	
27 Oct	11.42		05 Oct	09.40	Late
27 Oct	10.16		04 Oct	10.16	
25 Oct	12.42		03 Oct	09.16	
25 Oct	11.16		01 Oct	12.42	Late
23 Oct	11.42		01 Oct	09.16	
22 Oct	11.16		29 Sep	11.42	Didn't turn up
21 Oct	11.42		29 Sep	09.16	
21 Oct	09.16		27 Sep	11.42	Late
11 Oct	11.16		27 Sep	09.16	
10 Oct	11.42	Late	26 Sep	11.20	
08 Oct	10.16		24 Sep	13.42	Didn't turn up
07 Oct	11.42		24 Sep	09.16	
07 Oct	10.16	Late	23 Sep	10.55	Late
06 Oct	12.42		16 Sep	09.20	
06 Oct	11.42	Didn't turn up			

In the above table a service is recorded as 'late' if it is 5 or more minutes later than its scheduled time.

Total recorded journeys 29      Late 6      Didn't turn up 3

Journeys recorded (over 20 days) 29

Total 309 journeys (over the same 20 days) 840

Recorded journeys as % of total 3.5%

## Service 493/495/496 Pepper Hill – Gravesend – Christianfields/Kings Farm

Service	Date	Time	Service	Date	Time	Service	Date	Service	Date	time
495	24 Oct	09.15	495	2 Oct	13.25	493	18 Sept	493	18 Sept	08.00
495	14 Oct	09.17	493	2 Oct	10.15	Late	17 Sept	493	17 Sept	08.00
495	13 Oct	11.17	495	30 Sept	09.17	Didn't turn up	17 Sept	493	17 Sept	17.40
495	13 Oct	15.17	495	30 Sept	09.37	Late	17 Sept	495	17 Sept	09.00
495	10 Oct	14.10	495	30 Sept	09.45	Late	17 Sept	493	17 Sept	08.00
495	9 Oct	13.30	495	29 Sept	15.37	Late	17 Sept	493	17 Sept	17.40
495	8 Oct	10.00	495	26 Sept	17.47	Didn't turn up	15 Sept	493	15 Sept	08.00
495	6 Oct	18.00	495	26 Sept	18.01	Late	15 Sept	493	15 Sept	08.00
495	4 Oct	08.20	495	24 Sept	09.02	Didn't turn up				
495	3 Oct	09.40	495	23 Sept	09.17	Late				
495	3 Oct	10.30	493	19 Sept	08.00					
495	3 Oct	13.27	493	19 Sept	08.00					
495	3 Oct	15.30	493	18 Sept	08.00					

In the above table a service is recorded as 'late' if it is 5 or more minutes later than its scheduled time

Total recorded journeys 32 Late 14 Didn't turn up 7

Journeys recorded (over 19 days) 32

Total 493/495/496 journeys (over the same 19 days) 1612

Recorded journeys as % of total journeys 2%

## Service 498/499 Bluewater – Gravesend – Riverview Park

Service	Date	Time	Service	Date	Time	Service	Date	Service	Date	time
499	21 Oct	14.50	498	29 Sept	08.04	499	20 Sept	499	20 Sept	10.50
499	15 Oct	09.02	498	26 Sept	11.20	498	19 Sept	498	19 Sept	06.45
499	15 Oct	12.05	498	26 Sept	09.25	499	19 Sept	499	19 Sept	19.04
498	13 Oct	12.20	498	26 Sept	15.50	498	18 Sept	498	18 Sept	06.45
498	10 Oct	15.20	498	26 Sept	08.04	499	18 Sept	499	18 Sept	19.04
499	8 Oct	09.05	498	25 Sept	09.25	499	18 Sept	499	18 Sept	14.50
499	7 Oct	11.45	498	25 Sept	15.05	499	18 Sept	499	18 Sept	17.30
498	3 Oct	08.04	498	24 Sept	09.11	498	17 Sept	498	17 Sept	06.45
498	2 Oct	08.04	498	24 Sept	16.15	499	17 Sept	499	17 Sept	19.04
499	1 Oct	09.05	498	23 Sept	09.11	498	16 Sept	498	16 Sept	06.45
499	1 Oct	12.05	498	23 Sept	15.05	499	16 Sept	499	16 Sept	19.04
498	1 Oct	08.04	498	22 Sept	12.15	498	15 Sept	498	15 Sept	06.45
498	30 Sept	08.04	498	22 Sept	15.45	499	15 Sept	499	15 Sept	19.04
						499	15 Sept	499	15 Sept	17.30

In the above table a service is recorded as 'late' if it is 5 or more minutes later than its scheduled time.

Total recorded journeys 40 Late 10 Didn't turn up 6

Journeys recorded (over 22 days) 40

Total 498/499 journeys (over the same 22 days) 2134

Recorded journeys as % of total 1.9%

## Comments on bus services

"I understand that the route I live on (136,416,417) is sparsely populated but I don't see why this means you are able to cut out buses or allow them to run late. The bus service is awful. I'm fed up with it."

"I say give us back the buses as they used to be London Transport, Green Line, Maidstone & District. This last week two days running I came out of Darenth Valley Hospital before 4pm and had to wait till nearly 4.45 for a 490 Valley Drive bus. I call it disgusting."

"I have found all the routes (489,480,499,498) on time taking into account road works at Northfleet and on the whole I am very satisfied with the service that I am provided with plus my half price ticket is very useful. Thank you."

"This (499) is the worst service I've ever known on this route. I've been here 30 plus years to catch the bus in Landseer Rd you can stand there an hour, at age 76 this is a bit much for people like me as there is no shelter here and we sometimes get wet through. It should be every half hour but sometimes doesn't arrive at all. One morning there was no bus for 2 hours. This route is disgusting for a bus service."

"Evening service needs to be looked at. Very irregular service (499,498)"

"I walk from Mulberry Road in the mornings to the Battle of Britain to get bus because if it doesn't turn up I am late for work, so by going to the Battle I can get the 495. I do feel there should be a few 493 buses during the day as on my days off if the 499 is running late or doesn't turn up, you can be at the bus stop for an hour"

"Excellent service (495,499,498). School hours overcrowded"

"495,499 need more support for disabled. Need more easy ramp buses"

"490 and 480 normally a good service"

"Every time I go to Gravesend, I always seem to catch a bus that changes drivers. Apart from this

the drivers whether they are male or female are very helpful. They always wait until the passengers sit down before leaving."

"The 136 is the only bus that serves Chalk village. Poor service for older people waiting in cold weather. Please let's have more frequent service."

"The only bus that serves Chalk village (136) and it is sometimes on time, but more often not on time and is such a cold area in the winter to wait. I am sure more elderly people would use this bus if it was more frequent."

"I am very happy with travelling on this route (490). Have never had any reason to complain."

"I use the buses twice a week, I have no worry. But if the school children are sitting on the seats I have to stand with a bad leg I can't stand for long."

'480,490 school children leave the bus with rubbish on the floors. Often I wait for the next bus, because the one I should get is full up by the time it gets to the Lion Garage. Extra bus would be nice if possible. Drivers are normally alright.'

"I am complaining about the 499. We have only got 1 bus and you are always cutting one out. I have waited an hour and a half. Sometimes not only me but others. I am 81 standing at the bus stop all that time and no shelter near the ambulance station. There is a shelter near Safeways doing nothing. I think it's the worst bus service we ever had. I only wish there was competition that would show you"

"Route 309 is the most neglected route in Gravesend. This route from Gravesend to Valley Drive is not a money spinner but there is a social need for a regular and reliable service. All too frequently buses do not run at all leaving passengers with at least 1 hour to wait and sometimes 2 hours or more. Especially when the non runner happens to link up with the scheduled gaps in the timetable in the afternoons. Most of us would settle for an hourly service if only it was a regular service with no cancellations."

"The bus no 309 service is just not sufficient at hourly intervals and the cut off after 2pm into town. It is the same for the return journey and only 3 more before the end of service at 6.46pm. at one time we had a full service during the day, half hourly that was taken away when Bluewater

opened.....why are the public like myself not receiving a reasonable adequate daily bus service into our simple home town Gravesend? The restrictions are difficult and I haven't mentioned 'no service on Sunday'"

"I would like to see a more local bus service for Meopham every half hour to eliminate the late running of buses due to the very long distance they travel especially weaving its way through Swanscombe, when I am sure another more local bus could cover this route. Then to travel as far as Sevenoaks using the most broken down old buses which very often break down thus loosing the one and only one an hour bus."

"(495) Since the cutbacks in Feb it has taken us twice as long to get back from town as previously. There have been many occasions when a bus has not turned up. As a result of this, the next bus is always full up, people have been left behind. It would seem that the buses used are too small for the number of passengers being carried. Complaints to Arriva have been pointless, various excuses have been offered. No action has been taken too resolve the problem."

"(480/495) It is about time these buses were sorted out and we were given a better service. I know quite a few people who are sharing taxis rather than wait for a bus that doesn't run. If you phone the bus garage to complain you are only given some silly excuse."

**Appendix 3**

**NWKK Dial - A -Ride Zonal Fares**

Joyce Green / Temple Hill											
B Stone / Swanscombe											A = £2.20
B Dartford Centre / St Vincents / Fleet Estate											B = £3.30
B B Wilmington / Joydens Wood											C = £4.80
C D B Hextable / Swanley / South Darenth / Horton Kirby											D = £6.30
C C D C Longfield / New Barn / Hartley											E = £7.40
C B B C B Bean											F = £8.50
D E D C B C											
D D D C B C											
C B C D E D C											
D C D E D C											
D C D E D C											
D C D E D C											
D C D E D C											
D C D E D C											
E D F F D E F											
E D E F F D E F											
E E F F E C D											
F F F F E C E											
B A B C D C											
D D D C B C											
<b>Revised from 23 02 03</b>											

## Gravesend Post Bus Timetable

### Gravesend/Fairseat/Gravesend

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Run

#### Monday to Friday

Gravesend Do	1000	1000
Fairseat Village		1015
Stanstead, Black Horse P.H.		1020
Berry's Maple Cottage		1025
Green Man P.H.. Via Hodsoll Street		1035
Goose Farm, Hodsoll Street		1040
Gravesend Railway Station		1055
Gravesend Do	1000	1105

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Run

#### Monday to Friday

Gravesend Do		1300
Gravesend Railway Station		1305
Fairseat Old Village		1330
Stansted, Black Horse P.H.		1335
Berry's Maple Cottage		1340
Green Man P.H.		1350
Goose Farm, Hodsoll Street		1355
Gravesend Railway Station		1410
Gravesen Do	Arrive	1420

Gravesend Do	Depart	1535
Fairseat Old P.O.		1600
Stanstead, Black Horse P.H.		1605
Berry's Maple Cottage		1610
Green Man P.H.. Via Hodsoll Street		1620
Goose Farm, A227		1625



**Appendix 4****1. News Releases**

20 January 2004 - All aboard for a flexible future.  
[www.dft.gov.uk](http://www.dft.gov.uk)

21 January 2004 – Extra £20million for rural buses [www.dft.gov.uk](http://www.dft.gov.uk)

21 January 2004 – Rural bus link will drive communities forward  
[www.gloucestershire.gov.uk](http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk)

**2. Additional reading**

A Bus Strategy for Kent – Transport Management Unit, Kent County Council

Local transport Plan for Kent 2001/02 to 2005/06 – Widening Travel Choices – Buses  
[www.kent.gov.uk/sp/planning/LTP/buses.html](http://www.kent.gov.uk/sp/planning/LTP/buses.html)

External funding for Public Transport – Kent County Council  
A report by the Head of Transport Management to the Highway Advisory Board on 13 January 2004.

Social Exclusion and the Provision of Public Transport.  
Chapter 7 - The Adequacy of Public Transport  
Chapter 8 - Transport Provision  
[www.dft.gov.uk](http://www.dft.gov.uk)

**3. Other Agencies with an interest in local transport provision.**

Countryside Agency  
[www.countryside.gov.uk](http://www.countryside.gov.uk)

The Council for the Protection of Rural England.  
[www.cpre.org.uk](http://www.cpre.org.uk)

Community Transport Association  
[www.communitytransport.com](http://www.communitytransport.com)