

GETTING AROUND IN ESSEX: A BUS AND PASSENGER TRANSPORT STRATEGY

STRATEGIC PROPOSALS

Proposal 1: Working in Partnership

1. We want to be able to work closely and effectively as a partnership, to identify priorities together and deliver both this strategy and a really good service across Essex. We are proposing to:
 - set up a Bus Strategy Delivery Board that brings bus stakeholders together in Essex. This will entail:
 - a senior group which meets quarterly and oversees development and delivery of our Essex Bus Strategy, chaired by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation and including senior representatives from bus operators, local authorities, highways professionals, community and passenger groups;
 - a working group (drawn from these member organisations) to support that strategic group and which is responsible for delivery of the change, meeting every month; and
 - Specific task groups as necessary, potentially on reliability/punctuality and infrastructure; and geographically specific groups to look at community bus partnerships and local issues.

Proposal 2: Customer Quality Commitment

2. We want to be able to give customers a clear commitment on the service that they can expect and the improvements we will make. This will include commitments on:
 - frequency and reliability;
 - customer focused high quality services, respecting passengers' needs and including an effective customer complaints process;
 - live, real time information on bus location and route planning;
 - high vehicle standards, including the sitting environment, cleanliness, Wi-Fi;
 - a regular review by area of overall performance, identifying any opportunities for growth, issues and solutions; and
 - a commitment to supporting local community travel groups in identifying local growth opportunities.

Proposal 3: Better, Well Used Services

3. We want a service that better serves existing customers, provides new services that attract new customers and offers a really effective alternative to the car. We are proposing to:
 - link transport operators into the local highways panels to enable a jointly agreed and prioritised pipeline of infrastructure measures;
 - undertake a joint marketing approach, under a single common brand to grow bus use
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 - maximise the inclusion of bus infrastructure, bus service provision and supported bus travel into Development Frameworks, encouraging bus travel with new developments, including through planning consent; and
 - identify the ECC procured services capable of being moved into commercial operation, to enable taxpayers money to target those services which cannot operate commercially.

Proposal 4: Support for Valuable, but not commercial, services

4. We want the part of the bus network that is contracted for by Essex County Council and funded with taxpayer money to support the right people at the right times and to do so as cost effectively as possible. Taxpayer funded services largely address home to school transport, rural and evening and Sunday passenger needs but also include some peak time and day time services in rural areas. We propose to:
 - progressively move contracts to a position where operators have an incentive to increase the number of passengers on a route by enabling them to keep revenue from fares;
 - include a 'taper' option for operators bidding for contracted services, so they can demonstrate a commitment to grow services and so the cost to the tax payer declines over time;
 - restructure contracts so they are more flexible and for a minimum five year period, enabling bus operators to invest in buses, drivers and in growing passenger numbers;
 - move to a specification of outcomes, in terms of services delivery for an area or corridor (working with local groups), rather than on a specified route by route basis;
 - re-plan contracts so contracts in each area are re-let to a clear and simple timetable;
 - identify how we might combine the commercial and supported networks, NHS transport, community link (Essex County Council's in house fleet) and community transport to provide a better, integrated and more efficient service;
 - explore the merits of quality partnerships and quality contracts, where they might bring overall benefits; and
 - encourage a healthy supplier base for contracted service provision, welcoming new, innovative and high quality supplier entries into the market.

Proposal 5: Good Customer Information

5. We want to be able to give bus passengers consistent real time information, accessible planning, supporting apps and an engaging social media presence.

We propose to:

- develop consistent, real time, customer planning capacity and information on bus routes, timetables, live bus information, including personalised information and alerts, and overall performance feedback; and
- Enable communities and individuals to identify potential new bus routes and needs.

Proposal 6: Tailored solutions

6. We want to see what services we can provide to people who live where a traditional bus service (a single large vehicle on a set timetabled route) is prohibitively expensive and inflexible. This tends to be in rural areas where population is more dispersed. We propose to:

- work with communities, operators and taxi firms to identify where tailored local schemes can be more cost effective; and
- identify where we can replicate our successful demand responsive services.

Proposal 7: Ticketing

7. We want customers to pay a fair price for a good journey. We propose to:

- look at developing a clear, transparent and simple mechanism for fare pricing, which still allows operators to set levels themselves. This could include an upper price limit and some form of banding/zoning; and
- develop a proposal for an integrated smart ticketing system that would enable customers to use a single smart ticket on any bus including ECC contracted services of all types; and
- explore commercial opportunities for other concessionary fares i.e. lower cost travel for groups who would benefit most.

Proposal 8: Focussed local planning

8. Essex is a diverse county. A one size fits all approach won't deliver the outcomes we want. We want to develop services that meet the needs of communities. We are proposing:

- joint reviews with local authorities, community groups and operators to look at each area, identify the opportunities for a better network, including routes and frequency, identify potential community bus pilots, identify specific issues and develop customised local solutions, understand the demand for transport in the area and how we meet it;
- explore further the opportunities for integrating dedicated mainstream school bus services in the wider commercial transport network;
- take a revitalised approach to Travel Planning, identifying key nodes, such as businesses, shopping centres, schools, colleges, day centres, health centres, hospitals and working with them to incentivise, build and grow bus travel;

- to use digital information from communities to identify demand for new bus routes, including buses into the Park & Ride; and
- support the growth of key commuter and inter urban routes in the commercial sector to provide a strong base for the broader network.