



UPDATE ON THE PEGASUS SCHOOL BUS PROJECT

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL LOCAL COMMITTEE (GUILDFORD)

30th MARCH 2006

KEY ISSUE

This report sets out details of the Pegasus School Bus Project and outlines future developments.

SUMMARY

Pegasus is a high-quality, secure and bespoke home-to-school transport service for primary schools, offering a credible alternative to encourage modal shift away from the private car and to reduce congestion at the school gate. This differs from “yellow bus” schemes in other parts of the country which focus on secondary schools. A 5 year pilot focussed on the Guildford area has begun with a phased introduction of 20 routes, envisaged to serve 12-14 schools. The buses are owned by the County Council and operated by a private contractor. The vehicles are multi-purpose and fully-accessible, being potentially available for other public transport purposes which may be procured by the Council, schools or others at off-peak times, weekends and school holidays.

Report by

Surrey Atlas Ref.

SENIOR LOCAL TRANSPORTATION
MANAGER

N/A

GUILDFORD B.C. WARD(S)

COUNTY ELECTORAL DIVISION(S)

ALL

ALL

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to agree:

- (i) that the report be noted.

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

- 1 The Pegasus Project was originally conceived as a scheme to deliver up to 150 school bus services in several parts of the county, through a Private Finance Initiative process. This did not reach fruition and instead officers were authorised by the Executive on 6 January 2004 to procure a contracted solution for a smaller pilot scheme in the Guildford area. At that time the County Council had been advised that government capital funding would be available. Disappointingly and after a great deal of effort by officers providing the economic justification for the scheme, the government decided not to support the allocation of Major Scheme funding. However, the Minister recognised the local importance of the scheme and by way of endorsement suggested that the Council consider alternative funding sources. On 26 April 2005 the Executive decided to support the scheme with the required capital and revenue funding.
- 2 In 2004 vehicle manufacturers were invited to tender for the supply of 22 low floor single deck buses of a design suitable for undertaking various transport functions. Three bids were received and a contract awarded to East Lancashire Coachbuilders, working in conjunction with Alexander-Dennis of Guildford.
- 3 Five bids were received from established bus companies for the Operating Contract, which includes provision of drivers, escorts and control staff and responsibility for vehicle maintenance, fuelling and insurance. The contract was awarded to First Beeline of Bracknell, part of First PLC, the largest bus/train operator in the UK. First have much experience in the operation of bespoke school bus services.

SCHOOL TRANSPORT SERVICE

- 4 In order to achieve a step-change in parental perception and to overcome concerns regarding children travelling by bus to primary schools, the services (marketed as “Ride Pegasus!”) have these attributes:
 - **High Quality:** To be seen as a service of first choice for parents, schools and pupils and to be seen as a “caring” service on behalf of the community.
 - **Dedicated:** Restricted to authorised users – no “stranger danger”. All children issued with Pass, following advance receipt of payment if applicable. No cash payable on board. Opportunity exists to introduce Smartcards and electronic passenger manifest at a later date, subject to funding.

- **Escorted:** Children under surveillance and control of specially-selected and suitably-trained/vetted Escorts and drivers, who are allocated a specific route. Children escorted into school and formally handed over together with a passenger manifest. On return journey, handed over only to authorised adult at each alighting point, unless parental authorisation received to allow child to make own way home. Supervised boarding and alighting.
- **Secure:** To be seen as being as closely comparable as possible to the private car, giving parental confidence. Boarding and alighting points as close as possible to child's home. Guaranteed, numbered seat.
- **Reliable:** Dependable and punctual service within normal operating constraints.
- **Interactive:** Parents have direct Hotline/email access to Control Centre to obtain information, to advise in advance known child absences or variations to normal travel/child collection arrangements. Pegasus also has the Council's "Suretime" Real Time Information system (satellite tracking) which enables the Control centre to monitor the position of each bus and to predict arrival times. Such information will also be available to parents and schools via the Suretime website. There is two-way radio communication with the buses, backed up by the escort's mobile phone.

VEHICLES

- 5 Eleven buses are in stock with a further eleven to be delivered in March 2007, or before. Eventually, 20 will be in service each school day, with 2 spare buses. They are fully-accessible with low floors and kneeling suspension. There are 39 fully-belted coach-style seats of which 37 are forward facing and suitable for children.
- 6 The buses are fitted with full safety features, including Fire Suppression Kits and have Real Time Information displays, external and internal CCTV for security, CD/DVD players to play suitable entertainment and educational material, public address system, space for wheelchair user, electronic destination displays, baggage space and the latest environmentally-friendly engine technology.
- 7 There is a unique "Ride Pegasus" eye-catching and highly visible livery and internal colour scheme.

FARES

- 8 For those children not statutorily-entitled to free travel, the cost equates to £1.50 per day for over 8 year olds and £1 per day for under 8s with all siblings receiving a 50% discount. Fares are paid termly or half-termly in advance.

PROGRESS SO FAR

- 9 Phase 1 commenced on 3 January 2006 with six buses and routes to Tillingbourne School at Chilworth, serving areas such as Abinger Common, Holmbury St. Mary, Abinger Hammer, Shere, Peaslake, Gomshall, Albury, Bramley, Wonersh, Cranleigh, Shamley Green and Shalford. Subsumed into this network were three conventional school coach routes. 173 children are carried. Already, 21% of these are children who previously went to school by car. Further enquiries for travel are being received as more children encourage their parents to allow them to use the services. There has been much positive feedback from children, parents and the school.
- 10 Two of the buses are being used during the day on the Accessbus network of bus services operating from various areas into Guildford, Woking and Epsom. This represents a saving for the Council over the former contractual arrangements.
- 11 Private Hire work is being developed including marketing the product to schools for sports activities and class outings. A proportion of the revenue obtained by the contractor from such activities accrues to the County Council. St Thomas of Canterbury School is using Pegasus buses to take children to swimming lessons, including two in wheelchairs who can travel with their peers for the first time.

FUTURE PROGRAMME

- 12 Four additional school routes are expected to start from 19 April 2006. These will serve Worplesdon Primary, St Thomas of Canterbury and Pirbright Schools.
- 13 By April 2007, another 10 routes should be started. The selection of these will be developed during this year, subject to establishing adequate potential demand and obtaining acceptable access and parking arrangements at or near the schools.
- 14 A pragmatic approach has been necessary for the selection of schools and service design. Some of the schools identified five years ago during the planning for PFI initiative are no longer considered appropriate for Pegasus services, due to changing demand patterns and demographics, access difficulties and other circumstances.
- 15 The County Council and First Beeline will continue to develop off-peak work opportunities for the vehicles. The buses will form a valuable off-peak resource for the County Council's new Transport Co-ordination Centre.
- 16 A programme of evaluation of the school services will be put in hand to monitor their effectiveness, especially in terms of modal shift achieved on the home to school run.

CONSULTATIONS

- 17 The project has been implemented in consultation with the Executive Member for Transportation, the schools and parents involved and Safe Routes to Schools officers of the Local Transportation Service

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 18 There are none in terms of the Local Committee as this is a centrally-funded initiative. The Executive has authorised funding for the 5 year pilot project (2006-2010): £3.935m Capital for vehicles, Real Time Information, depot facilities and other equipment. There is a maximum net revenue implication of £4.916m, although this may actually be less depending on take-up for Phases 2 and 3 and the level of income derived from the developing off-peak “third party” work.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 19 The project is targeted at reducing school run traffic congestion and as a means of breaking future adult dependency on the private car for repetitive routine daily journeys. There are environmental benefits of reduced CO2 emissions and less fossil fuel depletion by fewer cars on the road. Calculated per billion passenger kilometres, travel on public transport is 9 times safer than use of the private car. It will improve parental perceptions of school transport and aims to develop self-reliance and confidence in children.

CONCLUSIONS

- 20 Even after a short time, Pegasus is achieving modal shift and a reduction of congestion at the first school to be served and there are indications that this will be expanded upon at the next schools to be added in April 2006. The experience being gained by both County Council and First Beeline staff will prove invaluable as the project grows and its operations become more complex.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

SCC Executive Reports & Minutes 6 Jan. 2004
25 April 2005