

Future Bus Service Public and Stakeholder Consultation

Context

This section sets out the rationale for the public and stakeholder consultation on the future network proposals.

The consultation is necessary to:

1. Ensure the bus network is financially sustainable when financial support from Government to compensate for depressed levels of patronage and revenue caused by for the Covid pandemic ends. This is a requirement set by Government for Local Transport Authorities receiving Bus Recovery Grant.
2. Account for and respond to the significant financial challenges faced by bus operators that are increasing operating costs.
3. Respond to changing travel habits post pandemic.
4. Consider and assess potential for investment in certain areas and initiatives to improve bus services and grow patronage.
5. Help the expansion of the Digital Demand Responsive Transport offer, giving residents a more flexible transport offer than a conventional bus service.

The consultation will ask residents and stakeholders for their views on the following proposals:

- a. Investment in bus services and supporting infrastructure where we can demonstrably grow bus patronage.
- b. Continuation of targeted funding to further stimulate patronage recovery for identified bus services, alongside reshaping and right sizing other bus services to better reflect reduced and forecast levels of patronage.
- c. Accelerating the introduction of more Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) to offer a more innovative, flexible and improved public transport offer to residents in identified areas.

Consultation Outline

1. Investment Opportunities

As an authority, we are investing significant funding to improve bus services in the county. This supports our Greener Futures agenda and our new Surrey Transport Plan. This investment is focused on:

- Increasing the number of zero emission vehicles.
- Helping buses to arrive on time through more bus priority measures, a key issue for existing and potential bus users.
- Helping residents make better informed journey choices by expanding our Real Time Passenger Information displays and improving information available online.

This section looks at where we might invest in routes and infrastructure, potentially increasing service frequencies, the aim being to grow bus patronage.

This is important because, whilst the Government has yet to allocate funding for our Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), we still need to demonstrate that our plans and proposals will, for example, grow patronage and improve journey times. This means we need to work with bus operators in areas where we think patronage growth is most likely to be derived and consider whether we should invest in those routes.

Making sure buses arrive on time and reach their destination on time are important, as it gives residents confidence in when using or considering the use of buses. Bus priority measures, such as bus lanes, bus gates, clearways, etc, help bus operators plan and delivery efficient timetables, and if people know they can get a bus when they need it, more people will see buses as a viable travel option.

Alongside bus priority measures, we are also expanding our Real Time Passenger Information system, with more displays on street and better information on-line, so residents know when buses are due with good levels of confidence.

We also want to support routes where we are investing in zero emission vehicles. This will make these routes greener, more reliable, more efficient and more attractive to existing and potential users.

These areas we are prioritising for investment are:

- The east of Surrey, focusing on Reigate, Redhill and access to Gatwick Airport.
- Guildford and Woking, including the surrounding areas where routes start or terminate at the town centres.
- The Blackwater Valley, including access to Frimley Park Hospital.
- The wider Elmbridge area, including links into and out of London, as well as Sunbury, West Byfleet, Weybridge and Chertsey.
- The north west of Surrey, focusing on Sunbury and the surrounding area, including access to Heathrow.

The consultation will ask:

- If residents understand why we are focusing on these areas.
- If residents can prioritise areas for future investment.
- What improvements residents might want to see to improve bus journeys.
- If residents believe improvements in these areas will encourage more residents to use buses and to do so more.
- If there are any suggestions of other changes they might want the Council to consider making.

2. Maintaining or Changing Bus Services

As the Local Transport Authority, we need to look in detail at the overall bus network, considering where to invest and where to manage the increased cost of running bus services given the significant pressures of wage, fuel and other inflationary factors. As a result of these pressures, bus operators are telling us they need more financial support to keep some bus routes running in their current form, or to keep bus routes from being reduced, and in some cases, from being withdrawn all together. This is a national problem. We have worked in detail with all operators to understand the financial position of all routes in Surrey and where the pressures are most acute.

In considering the current level of patronage, the levels of cost needed to operate bus services in future, alongside where individual bus services fit into the overall bus network, we will set out the proposals for:

- Keeping services as they are.
- Changing services to improve the overall offer.
- Changing services to reduce frequency, time or days of operation.

Broadly, we are looking to support bus services and their operators where we, and the operator, believe that patronage may recover close to pre-pandemic levels, or where there is a current high level of demand at specific times of day or to specific destinations, such as schools and hospitals.

However, there are some routes that we are being told are unlikely to ever recover to the levels of use seen before the pandemic. In these instances, we may look to amend the bus service to better reflect how people are travelling now and in the future.

For each of the above, residents will be presented with details of the bus route affected and whether any changes are being proposed in response to reduced patronage and/or rising costs.

The consultation will ask:

- Whether they use any of the services listed.
- Whether they understand and agree with our approach.
- What the proposals would mean for them.
- If they have any alternative suggestions to the proposals.
- Any comments they would like to make.

3. Expanding Digital Demand Responsive Transport

Building on the existing Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) scheme recently implemented in the north of Mole Valley, known as Mole Valley Connect, we are looking at the potential to expand this type of DDRT to other areas of the county.

The Mole Valley Connect service has been extremely popular and seen a wide range of people using it. This ranges from people making shopping trips, attending medical appointments through to younger people accessing leisure facilities. Overall a broad group of people is using this DDRT scheme.

As with Mole Valley Connect, new DDRT schemes will offer a door-to-door service for residents in a defined area who can book trips via an app, on-line or by telephone. The services will initially use low emission minibuses before moving to zero emission electric minibuses. DDRT gives a wider level of choice in terms of when to travel, for example, operating for more hours of the day and in some cases on more days of the week compared to some conventional bus services.

The new DDRT schemes will focus on areas where the timetabled bus network is more limited, the aim being to provide a more flexible transport offer than current conventional bus services. Therefore, where a new DDRT scheme may provide a better travel offer for residents, we are proposing that those bus services be replaced with a DDRT scheme.

Introducing new DDRT schemes of this type can:

- Support the existing bus offer by providing more hours of operation, for example, a DDRT evening service.
- Provide a transport alternative should the timetable service be reduced, as covered in Section 2 above.
- Provide a new and flexible transport alternative where a conventional bus service might be withdrawn.

Potential locations for new DDRT are:

- Tandridge.
- South Guildford and North Waverley.
- South Waverley.
- Surrey Heath, Windlesham and Runnymede.
- Reigate and Banstead.

Residents will be provided with a rationale for why we would focus on these areas, as well as being shown a list of the bus services that may be reduced (as per Section 2) or replaced by DDRT.

The consultation will ask:

- If they understand why we are proposing focusing on these areas.
- If they know what DDRT is and whether they might use it instead of or alongside the current bus offer.
- What the proposals will mean for them.
- Whether they have any suggestions or comments they would like to make.

Engagement Approach

Our engagement approach aims to raise wide-reaching awareness of the Future Bus Service Review by using the following methods:

- The Surrey County Council public facing website will feature initial and advance information on the review and its principles together with the Review Questionnaire. This advance information will appear following consideration of the matter by Cabinet on 25 October 2022 in preparation for the consultation go-live.
- The review and opportunity to respond by completing the on-line questionnaire will be supported by a dedicated email inbox to handle responses to the consultation, The consultation is set to go live on 3 November 2022 and will run until 6 January 2023. Whilst we will encourage respondents to give us their views by completing the on-line survey, there will be the opportunity for residents and stakeholders to submit their views by letter or email.
- Surrey Bus Operators will share web links and information the review via their own individual websites, helping to reach existing bus passengers.
- Advanced media briefings will ensure the media coverage accurately reflects what we are looking to achieve and how residents and stakeholders can access information and, importantly, respond. All opportunities for media briefings during the consultation will be taken to continue to promote the consultation and secure responses from residents and stakeholders.
- Social media will play a key role in engaging with residents, particularly those in hard-to-reach groups such as young people. We will aim to promote the review through social media, such as Facebook and Twitter posts, County Council online newsletters, online advertising on the Council's website, plus editorial copy for District, Borough, Parish and Town Council newsletters, whilst seeking to generate coverage through local commercial press.
- Our bus operators will also use their social media platforms to share and publicise details of the review
- The Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth will send a briefing to all County Councillors, Borough and District Council Chief Executives, Surrey Members of Parliament, neighbouring Local Authorities and Parish/Town Councils.

- Questionnaire booklets explaining the review, including a hard copy of the response questionnaire will be produced in standard and easy read formats. Both will be available to residents and stakeholders.
- Hard copy questionnaire booklets will be distributed to various outlets including:
 - Libraries
 - Borough and District Council offices
 - Citizen Advice Bureaus
 - Bus operators for distribution on buses
 - The County Council's Contact Centre
 - Surrey Coalition and Disability Empowerment Network
- We will continue to engage with colleagues in Children, Families and Learning and the Twin Track Team on any changes that may impact children and young people accessing their place of learning. We will also engage directly with Headteachers, where the review identifies specific services used by pupils to access education.
- We will engage directly with the Surrey Coalition of Disabled people and Disability Empowerment Network Surrey, ensuring that disabled people in Surrey have a clear opportunity to have their say.
- The Community Partnerships and Engagement Team will be briefed to assist in promotion, consultation and community feedback. We will aim to engage with Surrey businesses, voluntary and faith groups,
- Posters will be placed in buses, posted at key bus stops, sent to Libraries and GP surgeries to assist in raising a wider awareness of the review and give details on where to obtain further information and how to respond.

In addition to the above, we aim to commission a project to consider how young people engage with bus services. This will involve using case studies and demographics together with route change proposals to report on the potential social and economic effects of changing bus services.

Post Consultation

The consultation will run from 3 November 2022 to 6 January 2023. We plan to report the findings of the consultation to Cabinet in February 2023 for consideration, alongside recommendations for the Future Surrey Bus Network, inclusive of an expansion of Digital Demand Responsive Transport services.

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