

KCC's Public Bus Services in Kent Consultation: Withdrawal of the 409 in Hextable, Swanley and Crockenhill Report

Summary

KCC is proposing to withdraw the 409 commuter service between Hextable, Swanley and Crockenhill from 1 January 2012. KCC considers that the 409 commuter service scores poorly against the criteria that it has set for continuing support. In particular, the 409 duplicates part of the route provided by the 477, which operates on approximately a one bus per 30 minutes schedule throughout the day. A proposed response to KCC's consultation is set out below. This suggests that:

- KCC and Arriva consider whether it is necessary, and whether opportunities exist, to amend the 477 timetable so that it is integrated with the timetable of the most frequently used trains at Swanley Station;
- KCC formally confirm with Arriva that they have no intentions to materially change the 477 service and continue to keep this issue under review;
- KCC continue to subsidise any commercially-marginal early morning and evening routes of the 477; and
- KCC and Arriva consider whether additional 477 services could be provided in the morning and evening peak periods.

Recommendation

That the draft response is agreed and sent to KCC as Sevenoaks District Council's representations on the proposed withdrawal of the 409 in Hextable, Swanley and Crockenhill.

Background

Following a reduction in its budget for supported bus services, KCC is proposing to withdraw part or all of 14 bus services that it supports from 1 January 2012. The only service affected by these proposals in Sevenoaks District is the 409 commuter service between Hextable, Swanley and Crockenhill, which the County Council proposes to fully withdraw. The 409 commuter service operates in the morning (6-8am) and evening (5-7pm) peaks. The buses affected are the 10 that run daily between Swanley and Hextable, with 4 starting at Crockenhill, and the 9 buses that run between Hextable and Swanley, with 4 continuing to Crockenhill. The 409 school services are not affected by this proposal.

KCC considers that the 409 commuter service scores poorly against the criteria that it has set for continuing support. The analysis in the 'Bus Service Withdrawals' document for the 409 (appendix B) states that the subsidy per passenger is currently £9.07, greatly in excess of KCC's maximum target of £3 per passenger journey. The 409 also duplicates part of the route provided by the 477, which operates on approximately a one bus per 30 minutes schedule throughout the day. The 477 is primarily a commercially run service, operated by Arriva with a number of KCC supported services operating in the early morning and late evening. Following discussions with Arriva, it is understood that the 477

is operating on a sound commercial basis and there are no current plans to alter the service.

District Council Members in Hextable, Crockenhill and the three Swanley wards have been consulted on these proposals (between 12 July and 14 August 2011). Whilst one objection to the principle of cuts in bus budgets was received, no objections specifically referring to a need to retain the 409 service were received. Some Members commented that the bus is rarely used but that KCC should commit to continuing to support the early morning and evening services of the 477 that it currently subsidises. It was also suggested that the 477 timetable be integrated with Southeastern's train timetable at Swanley Station. These comments have been taken into account in the draft response.

Consideration of the Environment Select Committee

The Environment Select Committee considered a report on this issue on 6 September 2011. It recommended that, in the context of the withdrawal of the 409, Arriva and KCC should consider how reported existing overcrowding on the 477 could be tackled. An amendment to the proposed response has been made following the Environment Select Committee and is included in the following section.

Proposed Response

Sevenoaks District Council note that the only supported service affected by these proposals in Sevenoaks District is the 409 commuter service between Hextable, Swanley and Crockenhill, which the County Council proposes to withdraw. It is understood that the 409 school services are not affected by this proposal.

It is noted that the 409 service does not score well against the criteria that KCC have set for continuing support. In particular, it is noted that the service duplicates the 477, which operates on approximately a one bus per 30 minutes schedule throughout the day. The 477 is primarily a commercially run service, operated by Arriva, with a number of KCC supported services operating in the early morning and late evening.

The loss of the 409 would reduce the frequency of bus services, in particular between Hextable and Swanley Station, in the morning and evening peaks. This may lead to more people driving to Swanley Station. SDC suggest that consideration is given to whether any additional 477 buses could be operated over this section during the morning and evening peaks, either operated commercially by Arriva or with some support by KCC. This consideration should take account of reported existing overcrowding issues on 477 services. In addition, it is suggested that KCC and Arriva consider whether it is necessary, and whether opportunities exist, to amend the 477 timetable so that it is integrated with the timetable of the most frequently used trains at Swanley Station.

A key justification for the County Council proposing to withdraw the 409 service is that it duplicates the 477 service, operated, predominately on a commercial basis, by Arriva. This is also likely to be a key factor in the relatively low patronage and high cost of supporting the 409. However, it is vital that if the 409 is

withdrawn then communities are not left without bus services by any changes to the 477. SDC understand that Arriva have no plans to materially change the 477 service at present. It is suggested, however, that KCC seek formal confirmation of this and keep the issue under review. It is also important that KCC continue to subsidise any commercially-marginal early morning and evening routes of the 477 to provide communities in this area with accessibility to jobs, shops, service and other public transport links.