

MAIDSTONE QUALITY BUS PARTNERSHIP

AGREEMENT

28th June 2012

A Voluntary Partnership Agreement between Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council and Arriva Southern Counties

Continuing the partnership to achieve quality local bus services in the Maidstone Borough

1. Statement of Principles

Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council and Arriva Southern Counties share the common objectives of:

- 1.1 Creating a public transport network acknowledged by local residents, visitors and the business community as an increasingly attractive alternative to private car use.
- 1.2 Seeking increased use of local bus services to assist in achieving a sustainable and self-sufficient transport system, capable of meeting the needs of the 21st century, enriching the quality of life in the Maidstone Borough, attracting investment, and enhancing work and leisure opportunities.

All three parties to this protocol acknowledge that these objectives require high quality reliable public transport that can only be delivered through working in partnership, with a commitment to co-ordinated investment and complementary initiatives.

MAIDSTONE QUALITY BUS PARTNERSHIP

Signed this _____ day of _____ 2012

Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment,
Highways and Waste, Kent County Council

Stephen Paine, Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport
and Development, Maidstone Borough Council

Kevin Hawkins, Regional Commercial Director, Arriva
Southern Counties

Important Note:

This is a Voluntary Partnership Agreement in accordance with the provisions of the Transport Act 2000 as amended by the Local Transport Act 2008. As such it is an agreement in which each of the parties is a voluntary partner.

Section 46 of and Schedule 2 to the 2008 Act amend the Transport Act 2000 ("the 2000 Act") to introduce new provisions about "voluntary partnership agreements" (VPAs) and other "qualifying agreements". These provisions came into force in England on 9 February 2009.

These amendments to the 2000 Act made by the 2008 Act introduce a statutory definition of a "voluntary partnership agreement" (VPA). A VPA is a particular type of voluntary agreement, and is defined in the 2000 Act as any voluntary agreement under which:

- a local transport authority, or two or more local transport authorities, undertake to provide particular facilities, or to do anything else for the purpose of bringing benefits to persons using local services, within the whole or part of their area, or combined area, and
- one or more operators of local services undertake to provide services of a particular standard.

It is envisaged that most voluntary agreements that are entered into by local transport authorities and operators will fall within the definition of a VPA. It is important to note that an agreement must involve at least one local transport authority in order to satisfy the definition of a VPA.

(Source: Local Transport Act 2008, Improving local bus services: Guidance on voluntary partnership agreements – Department for Transport, February 2009)

Therefore, nothing in this agreement is designed or should be concluded as being legally binding on any of the parties, or in any manner being restrictive to the commercial or operational activities of Arriva Southern Counties or any other organisation.

2. Framework for Action

- 2.1 A Quality Bus Partnership for Maidstone was signed between Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council and Arriva Southern Counties in 2000. Significant improvements to the local bus network in Maidstone have been achieved through this partnership and it is therefore recognised that committing to a further partnership can contribute to the delivery of an attractive public transport network capable of competing with the private car. It is envisaged that the partnership will entail a joint commitment to invest and to upgrade facilities and operations, together with improved and imaginative marketing, which can contribute to the growth of passenger journeys and increase modal shift from car to bus travel.
- 2.2 The projected business development and housing growth in Maidstone during the next decade will provide opportunities for the provision of high quality public transport services, enhancing the Maidstone Borough and encouraging sustainable transport options whenever possible.
- 2.3 The Maidstone Quality Bus Partnership will build on the long-standing excellent relationship which has existed between the three partners to this protocol during the past decade, which has itself resulted in substantial investment in new vehicles and bus route infrastructure and improvements to frequency.

3. Agreements of this Protocol

The three parties to this protocol agree to:

- 3.1 Work together to implement a substantial improvement to bus operating infrastructure, including stops, shelters, passenger information, accessibility and ticketing.
- 3.2 Work together to increase the proportion of the Maidstone depot bus fleet operated by low-floor, easy-access, environmentally friendly vehicles, to ensure that the aims, measures and targets of the agreement are delivered.
- 3.3 Identify, through market research and similar consultative measures, opportunities for the introduction of new or revised local bus services, which would increase the use of public transport.
- 3.4 Identify, through market research and similar consultative measures, the means to increase the quality and availability of public transport services in the Maidstone Borough.
- 3.5 Co-ordinate the development of the public transport network with land use planning to maximise the opportunities for local bus services, especially in locations where significant housing development is planned as part of the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy.

- 3.6 Co-ordinate the public transport network with other forms of transport to achieve maximum travel opportunities for the Maidstone Borough, subject to commercial viability, recognising the provision of rail services in the area.
- 3.7 Work together to publicise, improve and enhance the facilities and service offered by the Maidstone Park and Ride.
- 3.8 Include the Maidstone Borough within the emerging Punctuality Improvement Partnership for Kent. This will include utilising the abilities of the Kent Urban Traffic Management Centre to minimise the journey times of buses through the urban areas, and ensuring the inclusion of bus routes in the winter gritting schedule.
- 3.9 Work with Parish Councils within the Borough of Maidstone, and with other representative organisations, to exchange information and assist in the improvement of infrastructure and local transport information.
- 3.10 Develop Real Time Information (RTI) and mobile telephone applications as methods of providing bus timetable information to the public.

4. Maidstone Borough Council and Kent County Council will:

- 4.1 Continue to plan and introduce, where possible, bus priority and other measures, to improve the timing, punctuality, reliability and route options offered by local bus services.
- 4.2 Support new or improved public transport infrastructure and/or services where appropriate through Section 106 funding from new developments, to provide an accessible local bus service for journeys to and from the nearest town centre, with the intention of integrating such new services within the local bus network.
- 4.3 Seek funding from public and private sector sources for public transport facilities in support of investment and other measures taken by Arriva Southern Counties to improve local bus services.
- 4.4 Secure, implement and maintain suitable attractive and appropriate arrangements for the provision of information and roadside furniture (stops and shelters) to a standard agreed between the partners; Kent County Council to be responsible for damaged bus stop posts and raised borders or hardstanding, and Maidstone Borough Council to be responsible for maintenance of its shelters.
- 4.5 Assist in identifying new market opportunities for local bus services and support new initiatives to encourage greater use of public transport, including Green Travel Plans for employers and education establishments.

- 4.6 Work together to ensure that the Maidstone Park and Ride is operating efficiently and offering as attractive a service as possible, given budget constraints.
- 4.7 Give advance notice of roadworks affecting bus services and make every reasonable endeavour to safeguard bus access in cases of road closures, diversions and adverse winter weather conditions (Kent County Council).
- 4.8 Provide any other relevant infrastructure to improve bus access to stops (Kent County Council); and provide personnel resources for bus stop clearway site visits and parking enforcement of clearways (Maidstone Borough Council).
- 4.9 Ensure that parking policy reflects the aim of the Councils' transport policy to increase modal shift from car to bus by imposing realistic parking charges in town centres.
- 4.10 The KCC Transport and Safety Policy Team will undertake the responsibility of organising and administering the meetings of the Partnership.

5. Arriva Southern Counties will:

- 5.1 Work and consult with both Maidstone Borough Council and Kent County Council over the design, planning and implementation of a viable and sustainable network of local bus services, establishing appropriate co-ordination with other public transport services.
- 5.2 Work with both Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council to contribute to the delivery of Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3) and Growth without Gridlock and provide input to future transport strategies so that the benefits of improvements introduced through this protocol can be measured in terms of performance indicators.
- 5.3 Introduce, where commercially viable, improved local bus services in response to the introduction of bus priority measures.
- 5.4 Seek to maintain all services in the Maidstone Borough area with minimum lost mileage and to a professional standard. As a minimum standard Arriva Southern Counties will aim to achieve the standards of operation set by the Traffic Commissioner.
- 5.5 Continue to invest, where commercially viable, in new, fully accessible and low emission vehicles, as well as presenting existing vehicles in an attractive manner.
- 5.6 Work with Kent County Council to introduce new ticketing options (including Smartcard products) and consult with Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council on any significant proposed fare changes.

- 5.7 Continue to develop higher standards of training and education amongst staff, including an understanding of passenger transport operation and customer care.
- 5.8 Provide adequate management and supervision of services to uphold standards as well as being able to deal with emergencies and other unforeseen circumstances quickly and efficiently.
- 5.9 Be responsible for timetable displays for all Arriva bus services in Maidstone. Kent County Council will be responsible for timetable display cases and bus stop flags and for timetables displays for Kent County Council-tendered services provided by other operators.
- 5.10 When services are disrupted by road works, ensure that the public are adequately informed of alternative arrangements by means of information on stops and buses and via Traveline.

6. Headline Aims of the Quality Bus Partnership

All three parties to the protocol agree to work together to achieve the following Headline Aims of the QBP:

(A1) Percentage increase in number of passenger journeys since 2008

A large increase in the number of passenger journeys across Maidstone since 2008 has been due to a number of factors, principal among them being the introduction of free travel on local bus services for the elderly and disabled in 2008 and the launch of the Kent Freedom Pass in Maidstone in June 2009. The target figures predict a modest growth in passenger journeys on the high baseline in 2008.

Target is 2% pa increase during the five year partnership

(A2) Increase in passengers expressing overall satisfaction with service provided since 2008

Bus passenger satisfaction rates would be expected to grow alongside the planned improvements that the QBP would seek to implement during the next three years.

Target is 2% pa increase during the five year partnership

7. Detailed Targets

The Headline Aims of the QBP will be tackled by working towards the more detailed targets set out below. All three parties to the protocol agree to work together towards achieving the following targets through the five year partnership:

(T1) Percentage of services operating on time

Poor punctuality is due to many factors, including the increasing number of vehicles on the road and inconsiderate parking and loading at bus stops. We need to focus on better enforcement of illegal parking at bus stops and more rigorous monitoring of why and when delays happen, so that problems causing late running can be resolved.

Target is 1% increase in punctuality relative to changes to levels of congestion (punctuality defined by the Traffic Commissioner as not less than 1 minute early and not more than 5 minutes late).

(T2) Number of stops with raised boarders and bus stop clearways

Raised boarders give better access at bus stops, especially for passengers with limited mobility and for parents with children in buggies. The provision of more bus stop clearways is paramount, and these will continue to be introduced at urban bus stops where appropriate as soon as resources permit.

As and when resources permit Kent County Council is committed to providing this high level of bus stop improvement measures on the following Arriva services serving Maidstone:

- (i) Routes 6 and 7 (Maidstone to Tunbridge Wells)
- (ii) Routes 71, 101 and 176
- (iii) Routes 82 and 85

To complete the bus stop infrastructure improvements on the above routes during the life of the partnership.

(T3) Number of departure stops with timetable information

The provision of clear and accurate timetable information at the majority of bus stops is an essential part of public transport provision, and the operator invests a considerable amount of time and money in maintaining bus stop timetable displays. Further, Kent County Council has recently commenced a programme to improve the provision of timetables at bus stops across the County. These complimentary ongoing initiatives should enhance the attractiveness of local bus services, and increase patronage.

Target is a 5% annual increase in the number of bus stops displaying up to date timetable information in Maidstone Borough until 90% has been achieved.

(T4) Bus stops with new or replacement shelters

The provision of shelters at all principal pick-up stops is an important facility for encouraging an increase in bus passengers. Combined with the elements of roadside infrastructure described above, a bus shelter provides essential protection from inclement weather, especially for the elderly, for those who are less mobile, and for parents with young children. There is a reasonable level of bus shelter provision in Maidstone Borough at present, and the Borough Council will continue to be responsible for the maintenance of bus shelters.

Maidstone Borough Council will, as resources become available, especially through developer funding from new housing growth areas, increase the provision of bus shelters at the busiest pick-up stops in the Borough.

(T5) Conversion of local town routes to low-floor easy-access vehicles

The parties to this agreement aspire to the delivery of low-floor easy-access buses across the Maidstone services which currently have step-floor vehicles, and Kent County Council will facilitate this improvement through various highway works as soon as resources permit.

Target is for 98% of Arriva bus services (excluding 'School Day Only' services) in Maidstone to be operated by low floor buses by the end of the five year partnership

(T6) Percentage of drivers with NVQ Level 2 in Road Passenger Transport

The investment provided by the operator in its workforce reflects their commitment to a reliable, customer oriented service, and is to be welcomed and encouraged

Target is 100% by 2013, in line with new legislation.

(T7) Annual Percentage increase in number of passenger journeys on the Maidstone Park and Ride services.

Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council and Arriva will work together to publicise, improve and enhance the facilities and service offered by the Maidstone Park and Ride.

Target is a 2% annual increase in passenger journeys over the five year partnership.

(T8) Annual Percentage increase in number of passenger journeys on individual routes targeted for investment

As resources allow, Kent County Council will invest in improved roadside infrastructure as described in Target (T2). This will be accompanied by a marketing campaign to increase awareness of the service, and the increased marketing introduction of new/improved vehicles where resources allow.

Where such improvement projects are implemented, the number of passenger journeys will be monitored for two years after the service 'relaunch'.

Target is 5% increase in passenger journeys over the first two years following a route improvement.

(T9) Increase in passengers expressing satisfaction with service provided on individual routes targeted for investment

As resources allow, Kent County Council will invest in improved roadside infrastructure as described in Target (T2). This will be accompanied by a marketing campaign to increase awareness of the service, and the increased marketing introduction of new/improved vehicles where resources allow.

Where such improvement projects are implemented, passenger satisfaction will be monitored for two years after the service 'relaunch'.

Target is 5% increase in passenger journeys over the first two years following a route improvement.

8. Additional Improvements to the Bus Network

All three parties to the agreement will work towards the following additional improvements to the bus network insofar as the provision of funding permits:

- 8.1 Arriva Southern Counties and Kent County Council to ensure that service quality and reliability are maintained.
- 8.2 Kent County Council to ensure that service performance of financially supported services continues to be monitored.
- 8.3 Maidstone Borough Council to negotiate Section 106 developer contributions for public transport infrastructure, information and services.
- 8.4 Kent County Council to carry out an audit of all remaining bus stops as part of the Roadside Infrastructure Unit contract.

- 8.5 Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council to ensure that facilities for Arriva buses to serve, and terminate in, Maidstone Town Centre are maintained at all times.
- 8.6 Maidstone Borough Council will ensure that the requirements of public transport are considered in any proposals arising from the development of the Council's Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy
- 8.7 Kent County Council to consider the inclusion of bus services in Maidstone in plans for any future extension of Real Time Information (RTI) in the county.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 This agreement sets out some benchmark aims, measures and targets which form the basis of a new Quality Bus Partnership for Maidstone. Provided there is commitment from all three parties to the agreement, the bus passenger network in the Borough of Maidstone should enjoy significant new initiatives, improvements and investment in the immediate future.
- 9.2 This agreement will also establish the foundations necessary for further bus service improvements envisaged in association with regeneration and new housing growth sites, linking these areas with their nearest town centre and rail station.