

Date 21/1/2019
Our Ref: PT/CKS
Your Ref:

Essex County Council
Strategy and Transformation
Integrated Passenger Transport Unit
County Hall
CHELMSFORD
Essex CM1 1QH

Dear Cllr Davies,

Re: CBC – Bus Scrutiny Panel Letter – 27th November 2018

Thank you for your letter of 27th November, in which you ask for responses on several areas of bus operation within the town, following the Colchester Borough Council Scrutiny Panel Bus Review meeting of 16th April 2018.

I have used your initial letter as a framework by which to respond, which I hope will make it easier for the panel to correlate responses to the specific questions raised. The headings and bullet points below are therefore from your original narrative, ECC's comments are added italicised afterwards.

To understand the strategic role and benefits of bus operations and how buses can best serve the Community.

- **With regard to the Bus Blueprint, what are the current goals, deadlines and long-term targets for the group?**
 - *The Colchester Bus Blueprint has a number of headline themes, which collectively cover most aspects of the bus business and operational environment. Specific theme areas comprise; Vision, ticketing, business engagement, current services, new developments, car parking provision & pricing, marketing of bus travel, town centre bus hub infrastructure and route / stop infrastructure.*
 - *The group has already worked collaboratively on a number of projects including;*
 - *participation in the 2017 Catch The Bus Week campaign,*
 - *development of a quality bus partnership on bus route 88 (Colchester to Halstead {Great Yeldham}),*
 - *introduction of a much improved range of multi-operator ticketing products based on the Colchester Borough Card,*
 - *the review and implementation of town centre bus stopping arrangements,*
 - *involvement with Colchester Business Community's 'Our Colchester' process,*

- *working with other service providers such as Colchester General Hospital and several higher educational establishments on bus related activities.*
- *The next major activity that the group is looking to work towards is the development of a more comprehensive partnership arrangement between the bus operators and both the Borough and County Councils, with the aim of improving the quality, reliability and environment for bus services across the town. Work will start on this during 2019.*
- *We also hope to introduce a series of passenger infrastructure upgrades, to complement the initial review of town centre bus stopping arrangements undertaken in 2018 – however this will be partially dependant on Colchester's proposals for town centre pedestrianisation.*
- **What discussions have taken place to link services and those provided by Community360?**
 - *There are no formal plans to link main stream bus services with those provided by Community 360.*
 - *Community Transport is a very important element of the overall transport service mix for Colchester. However, they do have different client bases. Conventional bus services deal with the mass transit of large numbers of people along fixed routes across the borough for local journeys and inter-urban corridors. In contrast the services of Community 360 offers bespoke travel to provide accessibility for residents unable to use conventional bus services. As a result they tend to offer bespoke door to door services, which are not easily combined with bus routes.*
 - *In principal it might be possible for an organisation like community 360 to take on some of the more lightly used local bus services, making use of the Section 22 permits that allow not for profit organisations to carry the general public. To have a significant effect this would require a significant change to the way community transport services are run. There are also serious licensing issues, following a change of view by the DfT in July 2017 over what constitutes a 'not for profit' operation and which is currently the subject of ongoing legal dispute at a national level. Until this situation is resolved it will be difficult to extend community transport functions beyond their current scope.*
- **What steps are being taken to encourage new bus users when new housing developments are built?**
 - *Wherever appropriate the ECC Strategic Development Engineers seek to secure the infrastructure to enable development to be served by passenger transport. For larger sites, this normally means ensuring the site spine road is adequately dimensioned both in terms of its width as well as horizontal and vertical alignment. ECC also tries to secure*

improvements to existing bus stops as well as new stops, the latter generally being on larger sites.

- *ECC can also encourage the developer to approach the local bus service operator(s) to procure an improvement(s) to an existing service(s) or a new service.*
- *The County Council's Sustainable Travel Planning Team (STPT) may also recommend the inclusion of Travel Planning conditions which require developers to provide a Residential Travel Information Pack to the occupants of each dwelling built as part of new residential sites across Essex. A Residential Travel Information Pack should be a promotional brochure which endorses and encourages the use of local bus services and all other sustainable modes. In addition to the packs, developers are also usually required to provide sample bus tickets. The STPT works closely with developers and local bus operators to secure tickets and/or vouchers for relevant services.*
- *For larger developments (250 dwellings and above) the STPT recommend the inclusion of a full Residential Travel Plan in addition to Travel Information Packs. A Travel Plan will include the appointment of a Travel Plan Coordinator (TPC), who's job it is to engage with residents and offer information, support and guidance around local public transport services and other sustainable modes. Another duty of the TPC is to offer and conduct Personalised Travel Planning which will help identify routes and journey plans, including bus services.*
- *As part of both the Travel Plan and Travel Information Packs residents are signposted to www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk and other online resources. We also work with the bus operators to provide hardcopy timetable information, particularly for new bus services.*
- **What is your view on the consultation regarding the Bus Services Act 2017: accessible information and Bus Services Act 2017: bus open data?**

In order to aid understanding, please find below some initial scene setting followed by ECC's current thoughts on the above;

- *What is 'open data'?*
 - *The DfT's Open Data ambition is to have a system that creates clear roles/responsibilities for the provision of data by bus operators for local transport authorities and data aggregators. This means: (1) introducing standards for accurate bus data, supporting operators to choose digital processes over analogue and (2) makes it easier for passengers to make informed travel decisions.*

- *What does it enable to be done differently from now?*
 - *The DfT's initial intention in their Summer 2018 consultation was to have Operators referencing their data to a DfT portal*, facilitating access to the below information:*
 - *Route and timetable information by end of 2019.*
 - *Basic fare and ticket information by end of 2020.*
 - *Real time information by end of 2020.*
 - *Complex fare and ticket information by end of 2022.*
- **As opposed to a centralised model, the DfT has proposed a distributed model for data. This means that the publication of data is at source (i.e. by the operators), helping to protect the provenance and integrity of the data. ECC's interpretation, is that the DfT portal will be an index of URLs that would point the user to the Operator's hosted file. Although this has yet to be made clear: more information is expected 'sometime' in January 2019.*
- *Does ECC think it's a good idea or not?*
 - *Broadly ECC supports the proposals for operators taking a more proactive role in making key data available to the public. However, the relatively short timescales proposed by DfT are of concern and the ability to supply accurate and up to date fares data across the whole range of service operations, which can be very complex, is also a matter of concern.*
- *How will it benefit users?*
 - *Making more and better data related to timetables, fare and reliability open to the public should help to encourage people to try using the bus and help improve their profile. In Essex both the operator and the council are usually prompt with current data submissions (timetables) and on the whole offers an accurate dataset, but elsewhere around the Country LAs have not been as diligent. It is likely therefore that 'visible' benefits will be more noticeable elsewhere.*
- *What are the main risks?*
 - *There are a number of risks associated with such activities, including, but not limited to;*
 - *Operators may not see the benefit and therefore not actively participate.*
 - *There's a concern from ECC, that data will no longer be checked/validated by an external body and instead simply be left on a portal for people to use.*
 - *Lack of clear data standards and guidance to support Operators - especially those who have no dedicated 'data staff'.*
 - *A further risk is that data will not be provided with enough lead time for other functions to be undertaken timely e.g. roadside, publicity, public engagement etc.*
 - *Real time information is another area of concern, for whilst operators will be obliged to provide Advanced Vehicle*

Location (AVL) data to the Local Authorities, there's a cost to do this on both sides and this could actually be complex to facilitate if the DfT do not provide clear guidance (as different systems will be procured by the Operators, increasing the workload for ECC immensely).

- *Fares. From our view, this is one of the weakest areas of the consultation - the amount of fares and the complexity of them means we need a robust data standard. A European standard (NETEX) has been mooted but only a handful of UK 'experts' are sufficiently knowledgeable in it. So in ECC's view, it is risky to be placing tight deadlines (by 2020) on Operators to get themselves mobilised for this.*
- *What is ECC doing to help/assist/promote with the operators/public?*
 - *We are currently awaiting the follow up report (Jan 2019) before formally reaching out to Operators to plan the way forward in more detail.*
- **What is the assessment criteria for supported services?**
 - *As the Local Authority, we are generally the transport provider of last resort, with regard to the provision of services that commercial operators are unwilling or unable to provide within their current business model. There are steps within the ECC policy, which outlines the circumstances under which ECC might step in to provide bus services and the levels of prioritisation that may be afforded to various types of service, within ECC's limited bus service budget.*
 - *This information is provided more fully within the ECC Local Bus Policy 2015 please click on the link below;*
<https://www.essexhighways.org/uploads/files/local%20bus%20service%20priority%20policy%202015%20to%202020.pdf> .

Punctuality of Services

- **What technology would assist the transit of buses in central Colchester?**
 - *Technology (such as 'green wave' systems for traffic lights or AVL allowing buses to be tracked and service to be actively managed) can assist the movement of buses through urban centres. However, the underlying issues for bus traffic in Colchester, in common with other mature urban landscapes, is the need to establish effective modal priority within the road network. This would facilitate faster and more reliable bus journey times, making them more attractive to potential service users. The potential for passenger growth would be likely to encourage investment in bus service frequency and quality, creating a virtuous circle. A reallocation of road space and prioritisation at key junctions is achievable from a technical perspective, however some difficult decisions with regard to highway priorities is the real key to*

unlocking the benefits of sustainable modes including buses throughout the Borough. The issue is therefore volumetric rather than technical in nature.

- **At the meeting, it was mentioned that grouping of services for destination in the High Street may assist with congestion and new services, are there plans to introduce this?**
 - *The first stage of bus service reallocations within the town centre quadrant as a whole was introduced on 21st October 2018. This saw ECC/CBC/Essex Highways and the bus operators work together to introduce a revised suite of bus stopping arrangements. This has led to a reduction in the number of services calling at previously over-used stops and reallocations at other stops designed to provide more evenly spaced headways between services calling at individual stops around the town.*

Increasing Bus Usage

- **What is Essex County Council doing to challenge the current perception of bus travel?**
 - *If this question is referring to the age of the vehicles and likelihood of increased services, this is an element which rests largely with the parent groups of the largely national bus operators which operate in Colchester. The level of investment that they are likely to secure from their groups will be highly dependent however on the perceived return on investment that is likely to be secured. So if the subsidiary companies are able to demonstrate that there are well founded partnerships in place with the local planning and transport authorities, approval for investments in new and/or additional vehicles for example may be more easily secured. Conversely if a particular town is seen as somewhere that is unsupportive of its bus network and/or it fails to make it an operationally sound place to function, then additional funding will be difficult for them to secure and could in times of economic difficulty make the town a prime target for service retrenchment or even withdrawal.*
 - *Through the Bus Blueprint we have secured agreement on and introduced (in July 2018) a wider range of multi operator ticketing options, designed to attract new users to the bus network in Colchester and to provide greater value for money for some existing users.*
 - *ECC has worked with a range of parties to introduce various highway improvements across the Borough, which seek to make the operating environment for buses easier within the town centre and beyond. There will however need to be political support for larger measures to bring more meaningful benefits for the buses operating throughout the Borough.*

- *We have lead on a successful bid, along with CBC to secure funding for the retrofitting of a number of vehicles with enhancements to reduce the level of emissions that these vehicles emit into the environment, which is recognised as being a positive step towards addressing the AQMAs that are present within the town.*
- *Allied to the above point, the reallocation of services to stops around the town centre will also have contributed towards a reduction in the part which buses could have been seen as playing in contributing to town centre congestion – the freer flowing vehicular movements will have a consequential impact on air quality also.*
- *The Bus Blueprint Group and the bus operators themselves also work with and through the Colchester Travel Plan Club in extolling the virtues of sustainable travel and promoting ticketing offers to employees of travel plan club member organisations.*
- *ECC is piloting some activities with younger persons in order to understand the perceptions that this age group has of passenger transport and seeking to understand / address the hurdles that are presented by the individuals themselves and information gleaned from psychometric studies that have been undertaken. It is anticipated that the learning from these activities will enable us to reconsider how passenger transport promotional activities are undertaken in the future.*
- *ECC would also be very interested to understand how CBC proposes to promote the use of sustainable modes and challenge/redress negative perceptions within its areas of influence.*
- **What family fares are in place on supported services, and what else is Essex County Council doing to encourage families to use buses?**
 - *ECC has a county wide Family Sunday Saver ticket and the recent uplift to the Boroughcard range of products brought in through the Colchester Bus Blueprint also has a daily family ticket for either inner zone only or for the whole of the Boroughcard area.*
 - *ECC is working with operators, on the aspiration for introducing an Essex Saver Family Ticket – hopefully within 2019.*
 - *ECC also introduced a Park & Ride Family Ticket in 2018.*
 - *The marketing sub group of the Bus Board will also be working on a range of activities designed to encourage additional usage of the bus network, by both new and existing passengers and their families / friends.*
- **What is the current uptake in terms of businesses for the Colchester Park and Ride service, and what are the targets for the service?**

- *We currently work with 2 large companies and a few smaller ones, the uptake is quite slow but its early days. We are constantly making contact and showcasing our offers to prospective employers.*
- **What are the obstacles for introducing multi-operator travel cards?**
 - *In simplistic terms, the normal major obstacle to be overcome when seeking to introduce a new range of ticketing products is that of revenue apportionment – providing a mechanism that satisfies the operators that they are getting their reasonable share of revenue collected through the sale of these products viz a vis the amount of travel benefit enjoyed by the users of their services.*
 - *In reality Colchester residents are able to enjoy the benefits of a number of multi-operator and indeed multi-modal ticketing products.*
 - *Essex Saver tickets allow unlimited travel throughout the County on all but a few selected ‘special’ services.*
 - *Essex Sunday Saver tickets are a cheaper version of the above, affording travel on Sundays only.*
 - *There are a range of Boroughcard Tickets, with adult and child tickets available for various time periods from one day to a year – there is also a family ticket and the product range is available for both the ‘inner’ area (broadly the main built up area of Colchester) and the ‘outer’ area which additionally includes a range of outlying villages and towns, some of which are beyond the Borough boundaries. The scheme covers the main 3 operators in Colchester as well as being available on ECC contracted bus services (click on the link for further information). <https://www.firstgroup.com/essex/tickets/ticket-types/colchester-borough-card> The Boroughcard scheme is administered by First Essex Buses on behalf of all participating operators. First are currently planning a refresh of the Boroughcard marketing materials and developing a publicity campaign to promote its awareness.*
 - *There is also the plus bus ticket, which can be added to rail tickets for a variety of time periods – this is added on to the passenger’s rail ticket at the time of purchase and can be used by local residents in order to access the rail station at the start of their journey – equally it applies to visitors / commuters to the town who would use the ticket to facilitate access from the rail station to their final destination within a defined zone.*
 - *Within the Colchester Blueprint we have also secured inter-availability of tickets for passengers using the dual operator Quality Bus Partnership Route (Service 88).*

Reducing Emissions

- **Could you confirm what proportion of the buses operating in the Borough of Colchester at Euro6 standard?**
 - *Approximately 35% of the vehicles operated by the main 2 operators in the town will be either Euro VI or operating to Euro VI standard (through the fitment of retrofit kits) in the near future. More precise information in this regard should be sourced from the operators themselves.*
 - *The retrofit kits referred to above are as a consequence of 2 successful funding bid applications for Central Government monies, made under the umbrella of the Colchester Bus Blueprint, bringing together a partnership working between ECC, CBC, First Essex Buses and Arriva Southern Counties.*
- **Do you have plans to assist the introduction or trial electric buses in the Borough?**
 - *At present there are no plans to introduce electric buses into Colchester. That said it is known that the parent groups of some of our operators do have such trials elsewhere and may have plans for rolling out these technologies over time. Information on specific operator plans should be sought from them directly.*

Communicate with passengers when services are cancelled or altered

- **Could you outline the latest developments in technology, which would improve information for members of the public?**
 - *The major bus operators in the town enable passengers to track the progress of their bus by means of 'apps' downloaded onto mobile phones and tablets. Some of these are operator specific, whilst others carry information for all operators.*
 - *The bus operators have asked ECC through the Bus Blueprint group to facilitate their access to the Real Time Passenger Information Screens, present at many bus stops, for reporting last minute cancellations to services.*

Improving dialogue between bus companies and Colchester Borough Council, Councillors and members of the public

- **What consultations do you conduct with members of the public regarding removal of services, or introduction of new services?**
 - *ECC always consult on changes to their contracted services, such consultations are widely publicised.*
 - *The majority of the network (circa 85%) is however operated commercially by the various bus companies. They will have a range of mechanisms for interacting with the travelling public over changes to their services – ECC has no jurisdiction over how, when and with whom*

such activities are undertaken. Information should be obtained directly from the respective operators.

- **Is there a named contact available for Councillors, when information on bus services in a locality is required?**
 - *The Councillors should in the first instance check on Traveline, all changes that have been applied to the Traffic Commissioner for approval, will normally appear here in advance of the changes coming into effect.*
 - *Bus operator websites are also a useful place for Councillors to find out about operator consultations and impending service changes as well as potentially receiving other information such as those relating to service disruptions, diversions (eg due to roadworks) and new products.*
 - *ECC members are also able to make use of the Member Enquiry system.*
 - *Any issues that cannot be satisfactorily resolved through one or other of the above courses of action can be directed towards the Integrated Passenger Transport Unit mailbox Passenger.Transport@essex.gov.uk – the enquiry will be directed to an appropriate officer to generate a response.*

Yours sincerely



Helen Morris
Integrated Passenger Transport Unit
Essex County Council

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