



# Getting around in Essex

A bus and passenger transport strategy summary



Essex County Council



Working in partnership with



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## Introduction

Buses are important to Essex: to all of us, our friends and family, our communities, the businesses we work for and for the overall strength of our economy. Buses enable people to travel to work, school and college, for leisure, entertainment, shopping and to access important services like health appointments. They enable families and friends to stay in touch, and people to live independently without using a car. They help keep traffic off our roads, reduce pollution and bring communities together. They are flexible and good value when they are well used.

Buses help Essex's economy to grow by enabling people to move about without adding to congestion on the roads. This is true for all buses: from urban, rural and school buses to non-conventional transport such as Community Transport or 'Demand Responsive' transport.

Essex County Council recognises the importance of buses to Essex. This strategy sets out how we plan to grow and improve the bus network and how you can have your say on our proposals.

This consultation paper does three things:

- **Section One**

Sets out why buses are important to Essex, how the current network of buses operate, and where they operate.

- **Section Two**

Sets out how we want to make the bus network stronger: delivering a higher quality service and carrying more passengers. This section suggests some ideas for how we might do that.

- **Section Three**

Asks for your views on Essex's bus services and your ideas for what would help improve them.

This is the summary version of the full strategy. The full strategy is available at [essex.gov.uk/busreview](http://essex.gov.uk/busreview) and in all libraries.



# Section One

## Buses are important to Essex

### Buses make life better for people

- 1.01 Buses make people's lives better and have wide benefits for society as a whole. They also contribute to the seven outcomes that we want for people in Essex.

### Buses support our economy

- 1.02 Buses are, by far, our largest provider of public transport in Britain. In 2010 there were over 5 billion bus trips in Great Britain; almost three times as many trips than by rail and underground put together. Over a billion of those trips were made by people travelling to or from work.
- 1.03 In 2012, Essex residents caught the bus 45 million times.<sup>1</sup> The bus sector itself provides jobs and economic benefits to our county. In 2011, around 3,000 people were employed in the local bus sector in Essex, spending an estimated £5.1 million in the economy.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.04 Buses also support the vitality of city centres. A strong bus network supports shopping, cultural and social activities. It gives people easy and convenient access to leisure and entertainment. People in Essex use the bus to make shopping and leisure service trips which contribute an estimated £660 million to the local economy every year.
- 1.05 Even if you don't use a bus, you can benefit from those who do. Buses help manage congestion, giving a better journey for those who have to travel by car or lorry in order to deliver goods and services. They also support a strong local economy of shops, leisure centres, cinemas, pubs, theatres and restaurants.
- 1.06 The successful and established Park and Ride services to the centre of Chelmsford contribute to the vitality of the city and the delivery this year of the Colchester Park and Ride service will begin to do the same for Colchester.

### Buses in Essex

- 1.07 In Essex around 85 per cent of the bus network is provided commercially. Commercial operators set their own bus routes, maintain their own buses and run their services as their commercial interests dictate. Around 15 per cent of the bus network is supported by Essex County Council. The Council runs a tender process and pays for services with money from taxpayers and fare payers. Some of these have to be provided by law, such as home to school transport for qualifying children (£26m); concessionary fares (£20m); looked after children (£1.2m); and adult social care (£5m). The Council also has responsibility for around £1m of Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) which is statutory and is based on fuel consumption. Bus operators also receive BSOG direct from the Department for Transport for their commercial services.
- 1.08 Other services are discretionary, such as those (largely run in the evening, on Sundays or in rural areas) where a commercial service isn't currently viable (£8.3m) and Community Transport schemes (£1.2m). These services deliver a range of benefits from helping to reduce congestion at peak times, giving communities transport links and travel opportunities that wouldn't otherwise exist, and helping to get patients to hospital appointments.





## What passengers say

- 1.09 We have some feedback on what passengers think. Overall satisfaction rates for those who travel on Essex buses are generally good at 83 per cent, but this does put Essex at the bottom compared to the other authorities who were surveyed.<sup>3</sup> And although our ‘very dissatisfied’ rating is small at 4 per cent, it is double that of some other authorities.
- 1.10 42 per cent of bus users are travelling to or from work or education, 29 per cent are going shopping, 13 per cent are visiting friends or relatives, 5 per cent are on a leisure trip and 10 per cent are doing something else.
- 1.11 Just under half of those who use buses (49 per cent) are choosing to do so because it is either cheaper or more convenient than other methods of travel. 51 per cent have no choice – the bus is their sole means of getting around.
- 1.12 The issues that people raise most often when asked how their service could be improved are:
- Design, comfort and condition of the bus.
  - Punctuality: people want buses to be on time.
  - Drivers: people want their drivers to interact positively with them as customers and to be considerate of them as passengers.
  - Information: people want better real time information at all points in their journey.
  - Frequency and routes: people want frequent buses on convenient routes.

## What about those who don't use buses?

- 1.13 We have lots of information to show why people choose to travel by bus, but we don't have much information on why people choose not to travel by bus.
- 1.14 For some it will be an obvious reason, such as there is no appropriate bus service to take them where they want to go and it is easier to travel by car. For others the reasons may be more complex and include convenience, a perceived lack of quality, or concerns about reliability or bus driver behaviour.

## Conclusion

- 1.15 Buses are very important to our lives in Essex. They deliver a lot of benefits – both to those who use them and those who don't, as well as to the broader economy. There is potential for them to do more for us, our communities and businesses. Existing passengers have identified areas in which they would like to see the service improve.
- 1.16 The next section in the strategy sets out what we intend to do to make some of these changes.

# Section Two

## We want to make bus travel better, easier and the way that more people get around

2.01 We want to deliver a long term strategy for improving passenger transport (bus, minibus, taxi and community transport) services in Essex.

### Our proposals

2.02 This section sets out our proposals. This is a long term strategy and whilst there are some changes here we can deliver relatively quickly, many will take some time and be a sustained joint effort.

#### Proposal 1: Working in partnership

2.03 We want to be able to work closely and effectively as a partnership, to identify priorities together and deliver both this strategy and a really good service across Essex. We are proposing to:

- Set up a Bus Strategy Commissioning Board that brings bus stakeholders together in Essex.

#### Proposal 2: Customer quality commitment

2.04 We want to be able to give customers a clear commitment on the service that they can expect and the improvements we will make. This will include commitments on:

- Frequency and reliability.
- Customer focused, high quality services, respecting passengers' needs and with responsive customer complaints handling.
- Live, real time information on bus location and route planning.
- High vehicle standards, including the sitting environment, cleanliness and Wi-Fi.
- A regular review by area of overall performance, identifying any opportunities for growth, issues and solutions.
- Supporting local community travel groups in identifying local growth opportunities.

#### Proposal 3: Better, well used services

2.05 We want a service that better serves existing customers, provides new services that attract new customers and offers a really effective alternative to the car. We are proposing to:

- Link transport operators into the local highways panels to enable a jointly agreed and prioritised pipeline of infrastructure measures.
- Undertake a joint marketing approach, under a single common brand to grow bus use.
- Maximise the inclusion of bus infrastructure, bus service provision and supported bus travel into development frameworks, encouraging bus travel with new developments, including through planning consent.
- Identify the Essex County Council procured services capable of being moved into commercial operation, to enable taxpayers' money to target those services which cannot operate commercially.



#### **Proposal 4: Support for valuable, but not commercial, services**

2.06 We want the part of the bus network that is contracted for by Essex County Council and funded with taxpayers' money to support the right people at the right times and to do so as cost effectively as possible. Taxpayer funded services have traditionally largely addressed home to school transport, rural, evening and Sunday passenger needs. They also include some peak time and day time services in rural areas. We propose to:

- Progressively move contracts to a position where operators have an incentive to increase the number of passengers on a route by enabling them to keep revenue from fares.
- Include a 'taper' option for operators bidding for contracted services, so they can demonstrate a commitment to grow services and so the cost to the taxpayer declines over time.
- Restructure contracts so they are more flexible and for a minimum five year period, enabling bus operators to invest in buses, drivers and in growing passenger numbers.
- Move to a specification of outcomes, in terms of services delivery for an area or corridor (working with local groups), rather than on a specified route by route basis.
- Re-plan contracts so those in each area are re-let to a clear and simple timetable.
- Identify how we might combine the commercial and supported networks, NHS transport, Community Link (Essex County Council's in house fleet) and Community Transport to provide a better, integrated and more efficient service.
- Explore the merits of quality partnerships and quality contracts, where they might bring overall benefits.
- Encourage a healthy supplier base for contracted service provision, welcoming new, innovative and high quality supplier entries into the market.

#### **Proposal 5: Good customer information**

2.07 We want to be able to give bus passengers consistent real time information, accessible planning, supporting apps and an engaging social media presence. We propose to:

- Develop consistent, real time, customer planning capacity and information on bus routes, timetables and live bus information, including personalised information and alerts and overall performance feedback.
- Enable communities and individuals to identify potential new bus routes and needs.

#### **Proposal 6: Tailored solutions**

2.08 We want to see what services we can provide to people who live where a traditional bus service (a single large vehicle on a set timetabled route) is prohibitively expensive and inflexible. This tends to be in rural areas where the population is more dispersed. We propose to:

- Work with communities, operators and taxi firms to identify where tailored local schemes can be more cost effective.
- Identify where we can replicate our successful demand responsive services.

## **Proposal 7: Ticketing**

2.09 We want customers to be able to make clear choices about how they travel based on clear and consistent fares information and a fair price for a good journey. We propose to:

- Look at developing a clear, transparent and simple mechanism for fare pricing, which still allows operators to set levels themselves. This could include an upper price limit and some form of banding/zoning.
- Develop a proposal for an integrated smart ticketing system that would enable customers to use a single smart ticket, mobile phone or other means of payment, on any bus including Essex County Council contracted services of all types.
- Explore commercial opportunities for other concessionary fares i.e. lower cost travel for groups who would benefit most.

## **Proposal 8: Focused local planning**

2.10 Essex is a diverse county. A one size fits all approach will not deliver the outcomes we want. We want to develop services that meet the needs of communities. We are proposing:

- Joint reviews with local authorities, community groups and operators to look at each area. These will identify the opportunities for a better network, including routes and frequency; potential community bus pilots; customised local solutions to address specific issues and understanding the demand for transport in the area and how we meet it.
- Further opportunities for integrating dedicated mainstream school bus services in the wider commercial transport network.
- A revitalised approach to travel planning, identifying key nodes such as businesses, shopping centres, schools, colleges, day centres, health centres and hospitals, working with them to incentivise, build and grow bus travel.
- To use digital information from communities to identify demand for new bus routes, including buses into the Park and Ride.
- Support the growth of key commuter and inter urban routes in the commercial sector to provide a strong base for the broader network.

## **Conclusion**

2.11 These eight areas are our first set of shared priorities. Section Three now asks you for your views.

## References

- 1 Bus passenger statistics, *Passenger journeys on local bus services: Great Britain, annual from 1950*, Department for Transport, accessed 2014
- 2 Employment area statistics, Office of National Statistics, accessed July 2014
- 3 2013 Bus Passenger Focus Survey, <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/publications/bus-passenger-survey-full-report-autumn-2013>



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