

Ashford Borough Council

Report of the Chairman of the Transport Forum – 14th May 2010

1 Introduction

1.1 A Meeting of the Transport Forum was held on the 14th May 2010.

The Borough Council Members present were:-

Cllr. Feacey (Chairman);
Cllrs. Mrs Bell, Packham, Wedgbury, Wells, Woodford

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (iii) Councillors Mrs Bell and Packham attended as Substitute Members for Councillors Godard and Cowley respectively.

Also Present:-

Cllr. Heyes

Ray Wilkinson – Engineering Services Manager – ABC
Kirsty Liddell – Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer – ABC

The External Representatives were:-

F Burt – County Square Management Office
C Ellen – Kent County Council Public Transport
R Geliamassi – Stagecoach
M Gibson – Southeastern
J Houghton – Network Rail
V Kenny – Ashford Town Centre Partnership
T Olatunji – Passenger Focus
S Whybrow – Ashford Independent Taxi Driver Association
S Williams – Eurostar

2 Apologies

2.1 Apologies for absence had been received from:-

Cllrs. Cowley and Goddard
Y Leslie – Southern

3 Declarations of Interest

3.1 Councillor Feacey declared a Code of Conduct Interest (Personal but not Prejudicial) as he was the Managing Director of Energyshift Ltd who worked with members of the taxi trade.

4 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 4.1 Councillor Feacey advised that he wished to add an extra item to each agenda to approve the minutes of the previous meeting and to discuss any matters resulting from the previous meeting.
- 4.2 Mr Gibson advised that the timetable changes were implemented, with a few minor amendments which had involved the 'tweaking' of timings to improve connections, as had been circulated at the previous meeting. They had been advised by the Department for Transport (DfT) that there would be no significant changes to timetables during the next three years after which time there would be consultations held on the current franchises.
- 4.3 A Member raised concern over the validity of tickets for the High Speed One (HS1) service. He had experienced issues with ticket barriers not accepting tickets that were valid for the service. On another matter he had also experienced issues when travelling to Gravesend whereby tickets had not been accepted by the automatic ticket barrier and it had taken staff a long time to assist him. He was concerned that this was not providing an adequate service and highlighted issues for disabled passengers.
- 4.4 Mr Gibson advised that when travelling to St Pancras or Ebbsfleet via the High Speed service passengers should purchase an upgrade before boarding and as such tickets should be marked as valid or not valid for HS1. He advised that he would look into the issue of tickets and asked the Member to provide him with the date and time of the incident in Gravesend and he would investigate the matter with the Station Manager.
- 4.5 A Member enquired as to whether the HS1 service could stop at Wye, as several commuters had commented that being able to access the HS1 service directly would avoid unnecessary waiting times that occurred when travelling from Wye to Ashford to access the HS1 service. Another Member was concerned that there was no fast service to Tonbridge; he felt that it was a step in the wrong direction.
- 4.6 In reference to the latter point Mr Gibson advised that the service specification was based on the requirements from the DfT. There was a large number of smaller stations in Kent and over the past 20 to 40 years there had been a significant rise in passengers travelling from the smaller stations. The infrastructure restricted an increase in services; the lines were the most congested in the UK and did not have additional capacity. Unless they were advised otherwise by DfT then the services would remain the same. Mr Gibson advised that if the HS1 service were to stop at Wye then that would increase the journey time of the service. He would however look at the demand from the area. It was important to note that if more stops were added then the service would become less of a high speed service.

5 Industry Updates & Discussion

Bus Services

- 5.1 Mrs Ellen from KCC advised that that the number 13 service would include the Chartfield Estate within 28 days and was now a branded service. The E-Line service was now running normally after delays due to road works in Willesborough and was also now a fully branded service. Within 8 to 10 weeks

the service would include Repton Park, however this was dependant upon works being completed at Drovers Roundabout. There would be a year long trial starting from 21st June 2010 whereby the 523 service would stop at Headcorn Station.

- 5.2 A Member questioned how the addition of the Chartfield Estate to the route of the number 13 service would impact on journey times. Mrs Ellen advised that that there would be an additional 15 to 20 minutes added to the service to allow for the addition.
- 5.3 Mrs Geliamassi advised that she had taken over the role of Operations Manager at Stagecoach. There had been tremendous growth on the A, B, C and E Line services. The A Line service had shown a 284% increase on the previous year with the B Line showing a 385% increase. There had been significant growth to the local network and they would focus on improvements to the C Line service which had experienced issues relating to congestion. An extra vehicle had been added to this service to alleviate issues being experienced. There had been growth year on year which indicated that the public were responding to the improvements to the public transport provided in the Borough. She also advised that there had been less growth in the rural areas.
- 5.4 Concern was raised about how buses would access Repton Park as there had been issues with parking on the estate. Mrs Geliamassi advised that a review had been carried out which showed that they could access the site and had raised no safety concerns. However if there were any issues experienced when accessing the estate then action would be taken.
- 5.5 Mrs Kenny advised that in relation to Traffic Regulation Order Amendment 16 further consideration had been asked for in respect of loading bays in Bank Street, talks were talking place with partners to progress this.
- 5.6 It was agreed that a report be bought back to the Transport Forum detailing the additional users to the number 13 service. It was also agreed that figures be presented to the Forum detailing the growth in numbers of children and pensioners using bus services in the Borough.**

Eurostar

- 5.7 Mr Williams advised that it had been a challenging start to the year for Eurostar which had been related to the adverse weather conditions experienced throughout the UK. An independent review had been carried out with the recommendations currently being implemented. He advised that there would be a change in ownership of Ashford International Station. High Speed One would take ownership with Eurostar managing the station – this would not mean a change to the day to day running of the station. He would circulate the update that former Chief Executive Richard Brown had given to the Secretary of State. Nicolas Petrovic had taken over the position of Chief Executive in early 2010.
- 5.8 A Member questioned whether there would be an addition of a service from Ashford to Paris or Belgium? He felt that now the HS1 service was running from Ashford International it would be advantageous to Eurostar to start more journeys from Ashford. Mr Williams advised that at the present time there were no firm plans however they kept the situation under review. The majority

of passengers travelled capital city to capital city and this was reflected in the current timetables.

- 5.9 Members welcomed the reinstatement of the Brussels service, but questioned how popular it was. Mr Williams advised that it was not as popular as they had envisaged but there were no plans to change the arrangements at the present time.

5.10 It was agreed that the update from former Chief Executive Richard Brown to the Secretary of State be circulated to Members of the Transport Forum.

Southeastern

- 5.11 These were contained under item 4.

Network Rail

- 5.12 Mr Olatunji announced that Ashford International Station had been nominated for the Station of the Year Award.

- 5.13 Mrs Houghton was thrilled that the Station had been nominated.

Taxis

- 5.14 Mrs Whybrow drew attention to the letter contained within the agenda papers. She advised that the issue with signage had been ongoing for many years and there had been no offer of help from County Square. A major concern for the taxi trade was the proposed changes to the Station. Upon attending the exhibition of the plans she was shocked to discover that the taxi rank had been moved to the Eurostar side of the station whilst the buses remained on the Domestic side. The taxi trade were concerned that they had not been kept informed of developments. She would be attending a meeting with the Chief Executive of Ashford Borough Council about the issue and would potentially make contact with Meridian TV and the National Press to highlight the issue further. There was also concern that the plans would make the station less accessible for disabled individuals.

- 5.15 Mrs Houghton advised that Network Rail owned the land in question and she had only discovered the plans for the station when walking through the entrance hall. She advised that the plans were an aspiration they had not been agreed. They had written to Ashford's Future raising their concerns over the scheme. She assured the Forum that as far as the plans for the station went it was not a done deal!

- 5.16 Mrs Geliamassi felt that the focus appeared to be on aesthetics not use.

- 5.17 A Member, who had previously observed the Ashford's Future Board, agreed with the comments and advised that he had raised the same issues when the plans were discussed at a Board Meeting. In addition to the points already raised there were a number of other concerns: buses would have a tight turning circle; there was not a drop off zone in front of the station; the disabled access was not easy to access and when the consultants had been asked who they had consulted they had responded by saying they had 'widely consulted'.

- 5.18 Mrs Whybrow had been advised by the consultants that they had intended to start work in June. Mr Bowsher from the consultancy company used by Ashford's Future had sent people to speak to taxi drivers but they had been advised that both buses and taxis would be located on the Eurostar side of the station. She felt it was important that they needed to be located on the same side of the station and that the consultation had been misleading.

6 Campaign for Free Off-Peak Travel for Kent's Over 60s

- 6.1 The Chairman drew attention to the item regarding Free Off-Peak Travel for Kent's Over 60s and invited comments from the Forum.
- 6.2 A Member advised that few things in life were free and whilst he could understand the reasons for wanting to implement such a proposal it would burden the tax payer and he felt unable to support it.
- 6.3 Another Member agreed with views of the previous Member and queried what the costs would be? Mrs Ellen advised that it would work in the same way as the free bus passes which were reimbursed.
- 6.4 Mr Gibson advised that in Greater London a free travel scheme was financed by a precept on council tax, which amounted to approximately £150 to £200 per household.
- 6.5 There was considerable discussion regarding yearly rail cards which were currently available that offered a third off travel. There was also discussion regarding the student card that was available for bus journeys – Mrs Ellen explained that a fixed fee was paid for the card for the year and then the journeys taken using the card were then reimbursed, however it was not the full fee but a percentage of the cost.
- 6.6 There was a suggestion made that the over 60's rail cards that currently offered a third off be changed to offer 50% off.
- 6.7 **The Transport Forum notes the request but did not necessarily agree to support the scheme.**

7 Date of Next Meeting

- 7.1 The Chairman advised that he hoped to get a representative from Kent Highway Services to attend the next meeting.
- 7.2 It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on Friday the 26th November 2010.

Councillor P Feacey
Chairman – Transport Forum

Joint Transportation Board

15th June 2010

Campaign for Free Off-Peak Rail Travel for Kent's Over 60s

The Council has received a representation from a Mr Harry Farrow who is campaigning for free off-peak rail travel for Kent's Over 60s. He is seeking written support from Local Authorities and is planning to go to Downing Street and to the Railway Companies in the autumn with his campaign. As you will see from the enclosed papers he has already received written support from numerous Local Authorities including KCC, Swale, Shepway, Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling, Dartford and others.

The Transport Forum considered this issue at its meeting on the 14th May 2010 and whilst noting the request from Mr Farrow did not necessarily agree to support the scheme (please see notes attached previously for full debate).

The Forum is asked to:-

- 1. Consider the papers submitted by Mr Farrow.**
- 2. Consider whether Ashford Borough Council should pledge its written support to Mr Farrow in his campaign. (County Members should note that KCC already has).**

FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM

Freedom Pass for the Over 60's on the Railway Petition

Harry Farrow
45 Pavilion Drive
Kemsley
Sittingbourne
Kent
ME10 2SZ
01795 421918

19-4-2010

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Harry James Farrow and I have written to you previously. Thank-you for your response to which I am grateful for. As you know I am trying to get free off peak rail travel in Kent and into London. Of which the benefits would be innumerable for people such as getting back to work, attending hospital appointments, visiting family/friends and keeping cars off the road. A lot of the best workforce are over 60 so why not give them some incentive to get back to work.

I have written support for Free off peak rail travel for the over 60's from Kent County Council, Shepway, Staplehurst, Swale and Folkestone Town Councils. **MAIDSTONE TON/MALLING DARTFORD**

I am not a charity and I'm not requesting financial support. I have found that there is such an indifference between Councils in the backing of my campaign. Why is this the case? We all live in the same country so why not help one another. I realize what the cost implications of this will be but surely we will cross that bridge when we come to it. When I have the Councils support I will go to the Railway Companies again.

I will be going to 10 Downing Street to hand in 10,000 signatures.

We have one life so let us live it – Please support me .

Thank-you again for taking the time to read my letter.

Yours sincerely *Mr H Farrow*

Mr. H. J. Farrow.

FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM

Freedom for the Over 60's on the railway

Mr H. J. Farrow
45 Pavilion Drive
Kemsley
Sittingbourne
Kent
ME10 2SZ
Tel: 01795 421918

I am very disappointed by the response I have received from various councils to my request for their support in my campaign for a railway freedom pass for the over sixties.

The standard response seems to be that the over sixties prefer to use buses. I agree, but only for local journeys. Longer distances are more problematic. For instance, I went by bus from Kemsley to Bromley and it took over three hours and when I was planning a bus journey to Lewisham I was told to allow 5½ hours. Both journeys would have taken about an hour from Sittingbourne railway station!

I have heard countless tales about elderly people who have had horrendously long journeys by bus, when their journey could have been made much easier with the help of a rail card. Let me give you a couple of examples.

A pensioner I know had an operation and subsequently visited Medway Maritime Hospital to have his stitches out. He couldn't drive himself and couldn't afford the train fare, so he went there and back by bus. It took him two hours either way. When he got home he was quite ill.

A woman I know had regularly to visit Kings College Hospital in London. She does not drive and could not afford the train fare. Members of her family had to take time off work to ferry her to and from Camberwell. With a freedom pass she could have got to the hospital in 1½ hours.

I could go on and on.

How on earth can councils tell me that people prefer to use buses? It just doesn't ring true and I suspect has more to do with local authorities not wanting to fund rail travel, which doesn't make sense since they are willing to fund bus passes!

People in London who are over sixty receive freedom passes that can be used on the railways and I will continue to campaign until the people of Kent receive similar benefits.

Yours sincerely *Mr H Farrow*

Mr H Farrow
45 Pavilion Drive
Kemsley
Sittingbourne
ME10 2SZ

County Hall
Maidstone
Kent ME14 1XQ
Fax: (01622) 694085
Tel: (01622) 694310
e-mail: paul.carter@kent.gov.uk

3 February 2010

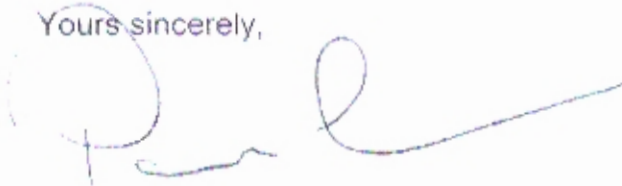
Dear Mr Farrow,

RE FREE TRAIN PASSES FOR THE OVER 60'S

Thank you for your letter dated 23rd January regarding the possibility of offering free train passes to the over 60's. I understand that you have been working closely with David Hall on this issue and I hope that David has been able to guide you as to who to lobby.

You have Kent County Council's support on this issue and I wish you every success.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Carter
Leader of Kent County Council

Town and Cinque Port of Sandwich

Mrs. Tracey Ward
Town Clerk

Telephone: 01304 617197

Fax: 01304 620170

Email: tracey@sandwichtowncouncil.gov.uk
www.sandwichtowncouncil.gov.uk



Town Clerk's Office
Guildhall
Cattle Market
Sandwich
Kent
CT13 9AH

25th September 2009

Dear Mr Farrow,

Fighting For Freedom

Thank you for your recent letter which was reported at a town council meeting on Monday 21st September.

At the meeting, the town council resolved to provide written support for your campaign for free train travel in Kent for the over 60's.

Please therefore accept this letter as support from Sandwich Town Council.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'T. Ward'.

Tracey Ward
Town Clerk

Harry Farrow
Fighting For Freedom
45 Pavilion Drive
Kemsley
Sittingbourne
Kent ME10 2SZ

STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL

14th October 2009

Parish Office
Staplehurst Village Centre
High Street, Staplehurst
TONBRIDGE, Kent
TN12 0BJ

Mr H Farrow
Organiser – Fighting for Freedom
45 Pavilion Drive
KEMSLEY
SITTINGBOURNE, Kent
ME10 2SZ

Parish Clerk
Mrs JS Bassett

Tel
01580 891761

email
staplehurst1@btconnect.com

website
www.staplehurstvillage.org.uk

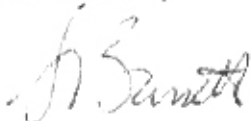
Dear Mr Farrow

Fighting for Freedom

Thank you for your letter received on 7th September and I apologise for the delay in responding to you. This Council considered your campaign at their meeting on 21st September and asked me to write in support of your endeavours in this regard.

Councillors agreed with the principle of your campaign when they understood that residents over 60 within London Boroughs already have free use of busses and trains. They agreed that such inequality does need to be addressed and wished you well in your endeavours to address this.

Yours sincerely



Mrs JS Bassett
Parish Clerk

YES

FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM.

FREEDOM FOR THE OVER 60's ON THE RAILWAYS.

I have written before about this campaign to get free travel for pensioners on the railways during off-peak times and weekends. When I did write the article the campaign was in its early stages. It was started by a man from Sittingbourne, a Mr. Harry Farrow. I thought it was a good idea and backed him. I did think that it was a bit of a long shot, especially since the government wants to limit the use of our bus passes, but I now believe it could happen. The way I see it is that the government gives millions of pounds in subsidies to the private railway companies, millions of pounds of tax payers money that is, now all the government has to say to the railway companies is, "If you want to keep receiving subsidies, then fill up your empty carriages with pensioners during off-peak times." Well we ought to get something back for our money not give it to the shareholders. Mr. Farrow is now getting quite a lot of support, but most of his campaigning he is doing it alone, he could do with a lot of support. He is limiting his campaign to the Kent county at the moment, he is almost a one man band, but he has a lot of support from several councils in Kent, which is a good thing, but not all at the moment. He has appeared on Meridian News and has had several write up's in local papers.

Mr. Farrow points out in one letter that the standard response seems to be that the over 60's prefer to use buses, which he agrees with to a certain extent for local journeys, but for longer distances it is more problematic. For instance, he went by bus from Kemsley to Bromley which took over 3 hours and when he was planning a bus journey to Lewisham he was told to allow 5 1/2 hours. Both journeys would have taken about an hour from Sittingbourne railway station. He also mentions about people who have to travel to London Hospitals. It costs too much by rail and almost impossible by bus, so they have to rely on friends or relatives to take them there by car. He says "Many pensioners I know would go to football matches but with train fares and gate prices, it is out of their reach. With my campaign for free rail travel they would only pay to get into the ground, which would get more people involved. Apart from going to football matches, the over 60's in many ways would have a better life, for example visiting family and friends and getting back to work, as a lot of pensioners would do, but as rail travel is so expensive, pensioners are limited in what they do. The areas currently operating free-facilities are London, Northern Ireland, West Midlands and Yorkshire. Why not the rest of the country?" I think that such inequality does need to be addressed. I do admire him for all the work he is doing to get this well off the ground and the progress he has made over the past year.

His flyer, which he is fortunate enough to get printed for him, and goes to various towns to give out, says:-

TO ALL THE OVER 60's WHO WOULD LIKE TO JOIN MY CAMPAIGN FOR FREE OFF PEAK RAIL TRAVEL AROUND KENT AND INTO LONDON....

During the day at off peak periods, many trains run with empty carriages. I am campaigning for the over 60's to be able to take advantage of those empty trains by being given free off peak rail travel around Kent and on the lines into London. To date, I have had a lot of support from the general public to my campaign, however, I need those supporters to help me by writing to the address listed below and formally backing my campaign. Without the help of those who will benefit from free rail travel, the campaign will be killed off. I didn't want that to happen. If you share my dream of proving free off peak rail travel to the over 60's, please help by putting pen to paper right away.

You can write to Harry Farrow, 45, Pavilion Drive, Kemsley, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 2SZ.

And Mr. D. Hall, K.C.C. Head of Transport, 1st. Floor, Invicta House, County Hall, Maidstone, ME1 1XX.

And write to our council, Cllr. Phil Filmer, Transport Portfolio Holder, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, ME4 4TR.

And you can also write to your M.P. at The House of Commons, Westminster S.W.1.

Well what do you think? Do you think that it is a good idea? I think that it could work.

Why not get pen to paper and give Harry your support. You have nothing to loose.

Over-60s rail petition to target 10,000 names

A CAMPAIGN to get free train travel in Kent for over-60s is gathering pace.

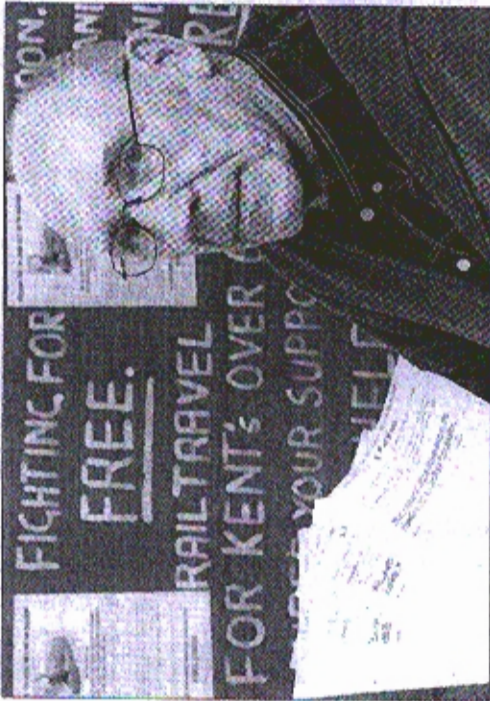
Harry Farrow has collected 6,000 signatures since he started the petition in June last year and has won written support from councils, politicians and even football clubs from around the county.

Now he is pushing for 10,000 signatures before taking his campaign to Downing Street.

Mr Farrow, 63, of Kemsley, said: "I was going to go to Number 10 when I got 6,000 signatures, but I don't think it's a good idea going up there before an election.

"I'm aiming to go there in September and 10,000 will signatures will have more of an impact - I don't know how much further I can go.

"So far I've handed out 1,500



Harry Farrow has collected 6,000 signatures in support of free rail travel for over-60s

PH/645032

leaflets and I've got letters of support from Green Party MEP Caroline Lucas, the Conservative's prospective parliamentary candidate for Sittingbourne and Sheppey Gordon Henderson and Kent County Council, as well as Port Vale,

Blackburn Rovers and Oldham Athletic football clubs.

"The over-60s in Kent already have bus passes, but I want to extend our travel options to include free train travel in Kent after 9.30am.

"Free train travel would also encourage the over-60s to seek work. The government has made it clear that its preferred option to solve the pensions crisis is to encourage people to work until they are 70, and this would help them to do this."

If you would like to sign the petition, call Mr Farrow on 07952 226808 or visit Ne Plus in Sittingbourne High Street, or the Sheerness Time Guardian office in Sheerness High Street, which have copies of the petition for people to sign.

Campaigner calls for free rail travel for pensioners

A CAMPAIGNER who has compiled a 5,000-signature petition calling for free travel on Kent's rail network for the over 60s has taken his campaign to County Hall.

Retired decorator Harry Farrow, from Sittingbourne, has also written to Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Prince Charles, asking for their help in giving senior citizens free use of the railways after peak hours.

He wants the scheme to be adopted by Southeastern Rail and run alongside the current free bus passes which are available across the county.

Mr Farrow, 63, said a similar scheme is in operation in both London and the Midlands, and he sees no reason why it could not operate in Kent as well.

Petition

He waited outside the Maidstone headquarters of Kent County Council and handed his leaflet to councillors and council officers.

Mr Farrow said: "I had a very good reception. People seemed to like what I had to say."

He was accompanied by Sittingbourne KCC member Mike Whiting, and also met head of transport David Hall. Both expressed their support.

"The free bus passes are all very well," he said, "but to go further afield takes a lot of time, and sitting on a bus

BY NICK AMES

for more than 40 minutes to get to Faversham or Gillingham is not an option most older people will want to take consider.

"So I thought, as it is the case that using the London pass you can get from Dartford to Watford or into the Buckinghamshire countryside for nothing, why could something similar not operate in Kent?"

"Many trains are empty after rush hour, so this would not affect anyone adversely. I was pleased so many councillors agreed with me, and I intend to keep going."

Mr Farrow has sent his petition to supporters in Medway and written to district and parish councils across the county, including Walmer and Sandwich.

He said: "When I started out, people said I should work from the bottom up, but I wanted to do it my way, so I wrote to Prince Charles, who sent a letter back wishing me well."

"I feel so strongly about this that I will deliver the petition to the Prime Minister in the near future."

"Other people have advanced their causes in that way, so why not me?"

A spokesman for the rail company said it was constantly looking at ways to maximise use of public transport and all options were taken into consideration.

• Email: yours.wale@kosmedia.co.uk



SUPPORT: Campaigner Harry Farrow with KCC councillor Mike Whiting

FIGHT TO GET ELDERLY FREE RAIL TRAVEL

A CAMPAIGNER will hand a 5,000-signature petition calling for free travel on Kent's rail network for pensioners in to 10 Downing Street.

Retired decorator Harry Farrow, from Kemsley, has also written to Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Prince Charles asking for their help in giving senior citizens free use of the railways after peak hours.

He wants the scheme to be adopted by Southeastern Rail and run alongside the current free bus passes which are available across the county.

Mr Farrow, 63, said a similar scheme

EXCLUSIVE

BY NICK AMES

is in operation in both London and the Midlands and he sees no reason why it cannot operate in Kent as well.

"The free bus passes are all very good and I use the bus to get into Sittingbourne, which isn't that far," he said.

"But to go further afield takes a lot of time and sitting on a bus for more than 40 minutes to get to Faversham or Gillingham is not an option most older people will want to take on.

"So I thought as it is the case that using the London pass you can get from Dartford to Watford or into the Buckinghamshire countryside for nothing, why can't something similar not operate in Kent?"

Mr Farrow has been collecting signatures in the Sittingbourne area, has sent his petition to supporters in Medway and has written to district and parish councils across the county.

"I got a note back from Folkestone asking how they could help and if I needed funds," he said.

"Well I don't need any funds, but the support is welcome. Tonbridge and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Free rail travel fight on track

Thousands sign petition for train passes

Report by Stephen Waite

stephen.waite@kmmmedia.co.uk

A ONE-MAN crusade for free rail travel for the over-60s is gathering pace and support.

Determined Harry Farrow, 64, of Pavilion Drive, Kemsley, has sent nearly 200 letters and collected about 4,000 signatures for his petition.

He plans to take his campaign to Downing Street once he collects 5,000 signatures.

"I've had a great response," he said. "Ninety-nine per cent of people are all for it. The one per cent are the cynics."

He continued: "It's just horrendous to get anywhere. Buses are OK if you are going into town and staying local but not if you want to go further.

"Free rail travel for pensioners should not be a postcode lottery. It should be available to everyone regardless of where they live. My brother-in-law is from south London and had a travel card - but here they will not even let pensioners get on a bus before 9am.

"Think how many pensioners would be able to continue work if they weren't paying £100-per-week fares to go to London."

Mr Farrow will hold a protest outside County Hall in Maidstone tomorrow while wearing a sandwich board

hand out flyers in the High Street, which he has already done in Sittingbourne, Sheerness and Faversham. He also plans to visit all the major towns and cities in the county, but there is just one problem: he has to rely on public transport to get to them.

He said: "I'm just one man and I cannot afford to go by train."

To offer Mr Farrow a lift to the places he wants to visit, call the *Gazette* on 01634 236330.

Fighting for freedom: Harry Farrow with

Harry's petition calls for free over-60s' rail travel

by Hayley Robinson
hrobinson@thekmggroup.co.uk

A CAMPAIGNER is urging Islanders to sign his petition to get free train travel in Kent for the over-60s.

Harry Farrow has collected 4,000 signatures since he started the petition more than five months ago, but says he wants a total of 5,000 signatures before taking his campaign to Downing Street and PM Gordon Brown.

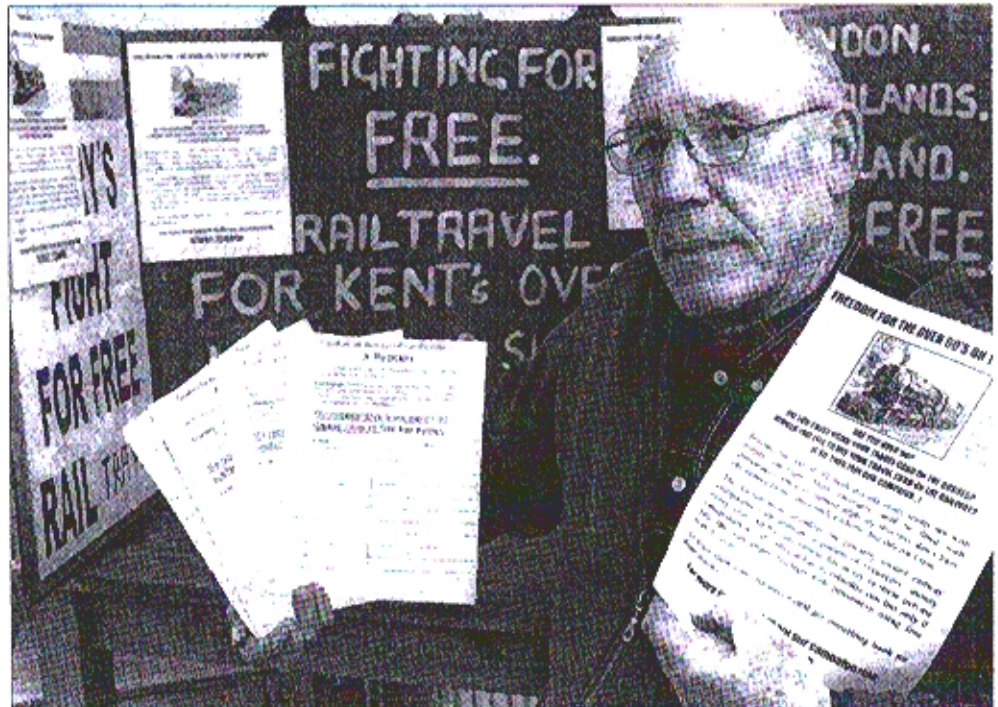
Mr Farrow, 64, from Kemsley, said: "The over-60s in Kent already have bus passes but I would like to extend our travel options to include free train travel in Kent after 9.30am.

"During the day at off-peak periods many trains run with empty carriages. These carriages could be filled with pensioners.

"Free train travel would also encourage the over-60s to seek work. The government has made it clear that its preferred option to solve the pensions crisis is to encourage people to work until they are 70 and this would help them to do this.

"Another benefit of free train travel is that it would encourage people to leave their cars at home to travel, which in turn would help reduce pollution."

If you would like to sign the



Harry Farrow is campaigning for free rail travel in Kent for the over-60s

Picture: Andy Payton PD1645033 Buy this picture from www.timesguardian.co.uk

petition, either call Mr Farrow on 07952 226808 or visit the Times Guardian offices, where a copy of the petition will be on the front counter for people to sign.

What do you think of Mr Farrow's plan? Is it workable or will the train companies dismiss it out of hand? Let us know your thoughts by

emailing timesguardian@thekmggroup.co.uk or by writing to Letters, Sheerness Times Guardian, 44 High Street, Sheerness ME12 1NL.

FREEDOM FOR THE OVER 60'S ON THE RAILWAY



TO ALL THE OVER 60'S WHO WOULD LIKE TO JOIN MY CAMPAIGN FOR FREE OFF PEAK RAIL TRAVEL AROUND KENT AND INTO LONDON...

During the day at off peak periods many trains run with empty carriages. I am campaigning for the over 60's to be able to take advantage of those empty trains by being given free off peak rail travel around Kent and on the lines into London.

To date I have had a lot of support from the General Public to my campaign, however, I need those supporters to help me by writing to the address listed below and formally backing my campaign

Without the help of those who will benefit from free rail travel, the campaign will be killed off. I don't want that to happen. If you share my dream of providing free off peak rail travel to the over 60's, please help by putting pen to paper right away.

Yours sincerely

Harry

HARRY FARROW

Address to which you should send your letters of support:-

**Mr D Hall, KCC Head of Transport, 1st Floor, Invicta House,
County Hall, Maidstone ME1 1XX**