

Joint Transportation Board – Update from Stagecoach South East

- At the start of the pandemic, we reduced service levels down to around 40% of normal with the focus on serving key workers and access to essential shopping. The significant gap between cost and revenue is being underwritten by government for an indefinite period.
- We have been working closely with the public transport team at KCC throughout - their support has been invaluable.
- We were able to agree with KCC that the 0930 restriction for use of concessionary passes could be relaxed for the majority of the lockdown; this enabled the elderly to access priority shopping slots which had been introduced by most supermarkets.
- We were also pleased to be able to support NHS staff by offering free travel for a time.
- Cleaning regimes have changed with all buses receiving full touchpoint cleaning on a daily basis - additionally sanitation kits are now provided on each bus for drivers to use as necessary.
- Face masks are now a mandatory requirement when using our services; we continue to be challenged by customers to "deal" with those who aren't wearing facemasks but our position is that we inform and educate rather than enforce - enforcement is not our responsibility and we don't want to put our drivers into confrontational situations.
- Since 1st September, we are operating 100% of our pre-Covid service with some additional school services provided by other operators shadowing key journeys; sales of KCC's Travelsaver passes are around 55% of last year so we have been looking closely at numbers and redeploying buses quickly as we begin to understand where demand is to ensure that we can move everyone. This is no different to the start of any school year; this time, though, it has been more of a challenge given the significant changes to travel habits (and we think that people will migrate back to bus as confidence builds). We remain concerned at the number of children being taken to school by car, probably as a result of unhelpful messaging about avoiding public transport.
- From a low of around 15% at the start of lockdown, passenger numbers are now recovering such that we are now at around 60% demand when compared with last year.
- We weren't able to introduce the planned improvements in partnership with Visit Kent and Chapel Down to service 2 with extension to the vineyard but are intending to introduce this in spring 2021.
- Roadworks have been an issue yet again; the current J10 works together with gas works on Hythe Road have impacted our punctuality, particularly on service C, with knock-on effect where vehicles move to other routes and drivers have scheduled breaks.