

Public Transport Briefing Note:

KCC Travel Saver Scheme : 2023/24

July 23



Context

The KCC Travel Saver schemes offer a subsidy to parents and reduces the cost of bus travel against the cost of operator tickets. The KCC Travel Saver is available for students in schools years 7 - 11 and the 16+ Travel Saver is the equivalent scheme for post 16 learners.

Using Government funding provided to support KCC's Bus Service Improvement Plan, this year the cost of passes is being frozen at current year prices with the intention of promoting the bus as the means of getting to and from school.

Applications will open in the week commencing 3rd July and this year will be made using a new application system that has been developed with our card provider. The new system will bring benefits in terms of reliability, user experience and timelines.

This note provides Members with key information about the 2023/24 schemes and also advises of the position in respect of the status of the bus network which continues to struggle post pandemic, leading to changes to some bus services.

KCC Travel Savers : 2023/24

The KCC Travel Saver schemes offer a subsidy to parents and reduces the cost of bus travel against the cost of operator tickets. Using Government funding provided to support KCC's Bus Service Improvement Plan, this year the cost of passes are being frozen at current year prices. 2023/24 pass costs are as follows;

Travel Saver (Full Cost) : £450

Travel Saver (Reduced cost for children in receipt of Free School Meals) : £120

Travel Saver (Sibling offer - 3rd and 4th passes for free) : £900

Travel Saver Care (for children in Care and Young Carers) : Free

16+ Travel Saver : £500

16+ Travel Saver (for post 16 Young Carers and Care Leavers) : Free

Members are advised of the following key information;

- Applications will open in the week commencing 3rd July and will need to be made by 13th August to be sure of passes being available in the first week of term.
- Customers can pay up front or through a series of (up to) 8 instalments taken between August and March. In most instances, paying by instalments carries a £10 admin fee.
- All students can travel free of charge in the first week of term whilst they collect their pass.
- This year applications will be made using a new system which will bring benefits in terms of reliability, user experience and timelines. As a new system, all applications will need to be made as new and parents will need to set up an account and provide new details including a photograph for the passholder.
- Financial and other challenges affecting bus operators are leading to some service changes and cancellations. Whilst these are not expected to be of the same scale and last year and KCC Public Transport are working to provide replacements services in most instances, this is leading to some volatility. Parents concerned that their service could be impacted are advised to check the KCC website for updates but are encouraged to apply for their Travel Saver. In the event that passes are applied for and then not needed owing to a service change, refunds will be made available.

Service changes

The industry in Kent and across most of the UK remains de-regulated and as such there is nothing that KCC can do to prevent operators from making changes which some are having to do reflecting increased costs and reduced bus use.

Public Transport believe that we are now aware of all likely changes for September and where there is a school impact and where the number of users is likely to support a service on an ongoing basis, we are using Government funding to provide replacement services. The department are working through changes to Stagecoach services in Ashford and Folkestone and are looking to protect any schools impact in these areas. In all other instances, if services are currently operating and not identified as subject a change then it is assumed that they will operate as current from September.

Public Transport will continue to provide information about these changes through monthly bulletins, focussed briefing notes relating to more major changes and through a summary which is being maintained at; <https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/travelling-around-kent/bus-travel/bus-services-in-kent>

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