

Essex County Council
Cabinet Office
County Hall
Chelmsford
Essex CM1 1QH



Cllr Chris Pond
Forest Villa,
7 Staples Road,
Loughton, Essex,
IG10 1HP

Date: 24 November 2015
Our Ref: RH/CP
Your Ref:

Dear Cllr Pond

Getting Around in Essex – Contribution to Transport for London

I am grateful to you for your time recently to discuss the important issue of the proposed withdrawal of the £0.58m annual contribution that Essex County Council taxpayers make to Transport for London for bus routes 20 and 167. As you know, the proposed withdrawal of funding is in no way intended to suggest that these services are anything less than highly valued.

I can reassure you that should any changes be proposed to either the 20 or 167 there would be a full consultation, engaging with passengers, communities, councillors and other stakeholders. We fully recognise the importance and high level of use of these routes. As you also know, there is no imminent proposal for change. We will continue to work closely, as we have done so far, with TfL. Our wish would be that, due to their high use and value, there would continue to be no change. However, we recognise that there is no guarantee of this. We will therefore work with TfL to give early indication of any potential change and ensure that a full range of options aimed at preserving service levels as far as possible be pursued. As discussed this could include a range of options from route changes to a back stop option of a fully tendered route.

In the event of changes being proposed to one or both routes, ECC would use its best offices within the financial constraints to work to ensure any replacement routes met the following criteria:

- the routes would provide an equivalent level and diurnal span of service between Debden (A1168), Loughton (via A121), Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell and the London terminals;
- work with TfL to continue to provide integrated smart ticketing. Any review of fares would be done with a view to mitigating the risk of any sudden or large fare increases;
- review the position on concessions, seeking to match existing practice as closely as possible, within financial constraints;
- full accessibility would be maintained and vehicle capacity matched as closely as possible to demand;
- Work with TfL to ensure telematics services were integrated.

In the event of a commercial operator wishing to take over the route(s), ECC would use its best offices with TFL to ensure a London Service Permit was issued only to an operator who proposed to provide a service substantially in line with the above specification.

On your specific points,

- The consultation did refer to the potential changes in the contribution, but I accept that it could have been made clearer what was intended. The change was of a different nature to the rest of consultation – which was about service changes. Because there is no proposed change to these services, and therefore nothing of substance on which to consult, it did not naturally fit into the main consultation. As discussed above, if there were to be any changes proposed, there would be full consultation.
- I apologise that the shorthand reference to the services in the Cabinet paper omitted to set out key parts of the routes. I can fully reassure you that the advice and the evidence underpinning the decision were based on the full route.
- We recognise the significant loss in benefits a full withdrawal would cause and, as I have said, we would work to ensure we had well considered replacement options should that be proposed.
- I recognise the impact change could potentially have on travel to school. Again, we can reassure current passengers that there are no imminent changes proposed. They would be fully consulted if there were change proposed.
- The potential impact of the withdrawal of the contribution was included in the overall EQIA for the re-plan of the network. However, that is necessarily high level and does not reflect the individual impacts of individual changes. Having said that, as previously discussed, there are currently no proposed changes to the service and our intention would be that that continues. If there were, an EQIA would be required and would form part of the consultation process.

I hope this is sufficient reassurance that we will work to ensure a continuing service for these routes and that the full and proper process would be followed if any changes were proposed.

Yours Sincerely

Cllr Roger Hirst
Cabinet Member for Transport, Planning and the Environment