

FLEXIBUS SUMMARY REPORT EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL JUNE 2024



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FOREWORD



SUMMARY

1 SUMMARY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

East Sussex County Council received a grant from the DfT to implement the <u>East Sussex Bus</u> <u>Service Improvement Plan</u> (BSIP) of £41.4m. £2.5m of this was allocated to delivering Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) services in East Sussex. The funding cover 2 years (fiscal years 23/24 and 24/25).

The National Bus Strategy, <u>Bus Back Better</u>, makes it very clear that DDRT is seen as an important component of bus service provision in rural areas.

Flexibus services started on 9 May 2023 (initially with 5 zones, with all 10 zones operational by the end of May 23).

1.2 SERVICE PROVISION

Flexibus covers over 1,500 km² of East Sussex which is just over 90%. Flexibus also provides connections to areas outside of East Sussex including Burgess Hill, Haywards Heath, (providing connection to the Brighton mainline which includes Thameslink services) East Grinstead and Tunbridge Wells.

Most hospitals in East Sussex (Eastbourne District General is not currently served) are covered and two outside of East Sussex are also covered (hospitals in Haywards Heath and Tunbridge Wells).

The Flexibus service provides connections to the wider public transport network including links to most of the rail stations in East Sussex as well as stations in Hassocks, Burgess Hill, Wivesfield, Haywards Heath and Tunbridge Wells.

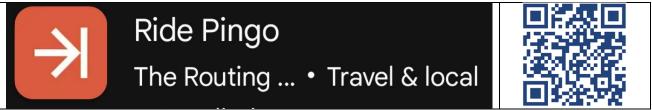
1.2.1 OPERATING HOURS

Flexibus services operate 6 days a week, Monday to Saturday (excl Bank Holidays) and operate from 7am to 7pm.

1.2.2 BOOKING

Flexibus services can be booked through the Ride Pingo App (available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year) or through the call centre on 01273 078 203 (available 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday).

Figure 1-1 – Ride Pingo App for Flexibus Bookings



1.2.3 COVERAGE

Flexibus operates over:

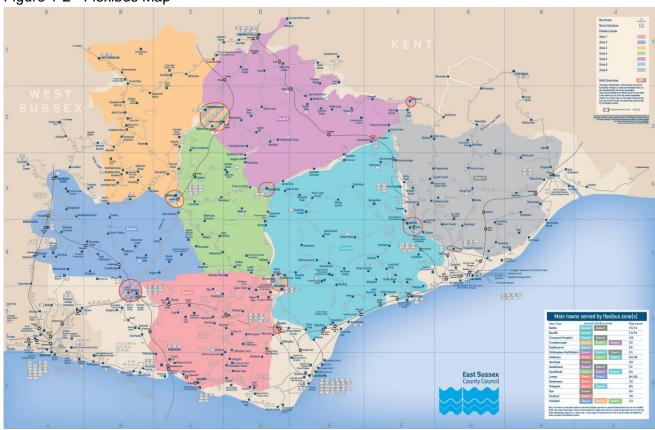
- 7 zones
- Over 1,500 km²

Covering over 90% of East Sussex

- 50 km² outside of East Sussex
- In West Sussex & Kent Burgess Hill, Haywards Heath, East Grinstead, Tunbridge Wells
- Providing a connection to the Brighton mainline station and rail services.

See Figure 1-2 to see the map of service coverage.

Figure 1-2 - Flexibus Map



Map is available online as a pdf: East Sussex Flexibus Zones Map

Or as an interactive (pan and zoom): East Sussex Bus Map (cartogold.co.uk)

1.3 SUPPLIERS

The Flexibus services are delivered through the following suppliers:

- **Digital Platform**: The Routing Company
 - Customer app (Ride Pingo)
 - o Driver app
 - Dashboard (Online management system)
- **Drivers**: Operators
 - o Community Transport Lewes Areas (CTLA),
 - East Surrey Rural Transport Partnership (ESRTP)
- Vehicles: London Hire (leased)
- Call Centre: WeMOVE
- Operational Support / Management of the Service: WeMOVE



KEY IMPROVEMENTS

2 KEY IMPROVEMENTS

2.1 CUSTOMER APP DEVELOPMENT

We have worked with the digital platform provider to make improvements to all that they supply with a focus on regular and substantial improvements to the customer app.

2.2 VEHCILES OPERATING OVER MULTIPLE ZONES

When we launched the service in May the digital platform required at least one vehicle to operate in each zone and that the vehicle was constrained to that one zone 9e.g. it could not operate in other zones even if there was little or no demand in the zone they were set to operate in).

In late October, The Routing Company launched functionality that would allow vehicles to operate in any or over all zones. This has had a significant impact on the Flexibus service provision with the ability to utilise vehicles more effectively.

2.3 SUPPLY MEETING DEMAND

The ability of vehicles to operate over multiple zones has allowed us to reduce the vehicle supply (by 25%) while still maintaining effective and adequate service provision in all zones while continuing to see steady growth in passenger demand. It has resulted in significantly higher rates of vehicle use than prior to the implementation of this functionality and significantly reduced the cost per passenger trip.

2.4 IMPROVED TRIP OPPORTUNITES

In early December 2023, we implemented zone merging. 6 zones were merged into 3 zones (3 sets of 2 zone mergers) which has resulted in more attractive trip destinations for people living in these zones.

This has had the most significant impact on zone 6 where previously, before the merge, the main town destinations were Hawkhurst and Heathfield. After the zones (5 and 6) were merged, people living in zone 6 could use the service to get to Tunbridge Wells (including the hospital) and Crowborough.

eastsussex.gov.uk



DATA

3 DATA

3.1 USAGE

There have been over 23,000 passenger trips completed to mid-June, with over 30,000 trip requests. Of the 23,000 trips over 4,000 have been shared and over 500 have been wheelchair users.

A summary of the Flexibus service date can be found in Figure 3-1 to Figure 3-11 below (data shown is to 19 June 2024).

Figure 3-1 – Flexibus Passenger Data



23,000



Passenger trips per week

600



Peak passenger trips per day

150



Unique Users

1,364



30,000

requests



510

wheelchair passengers



4,000

shared trips



Figure 3-2 –Passenger trips per week

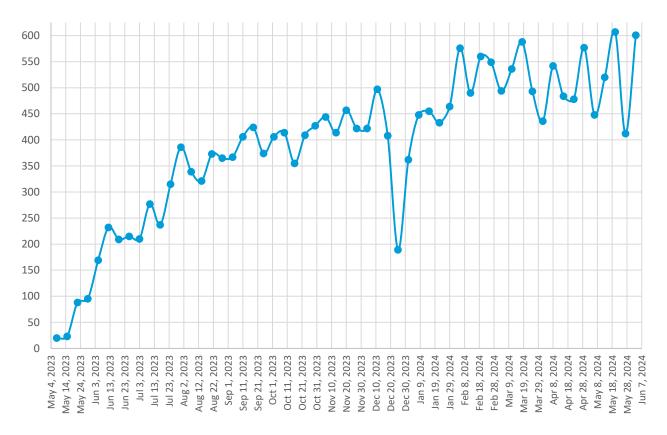
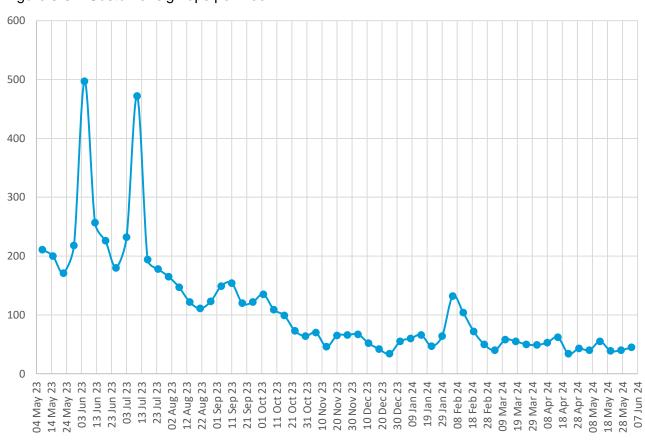
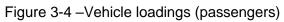
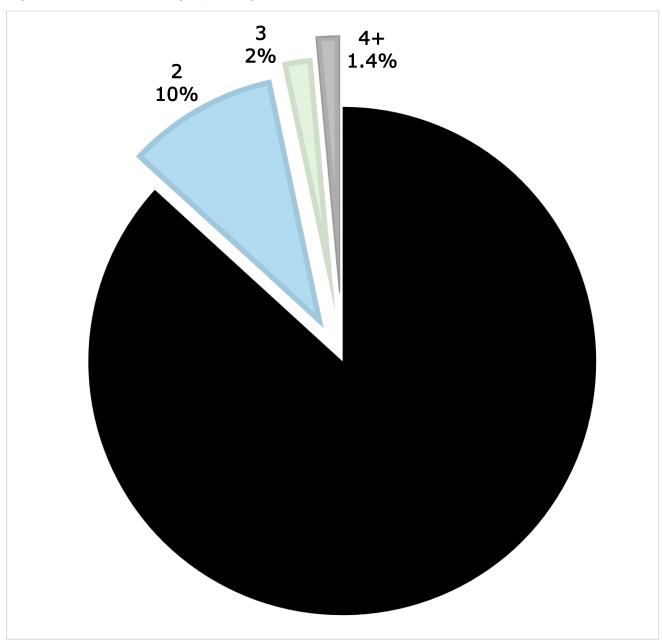


Figure 3-3 – Customer sign ups per week







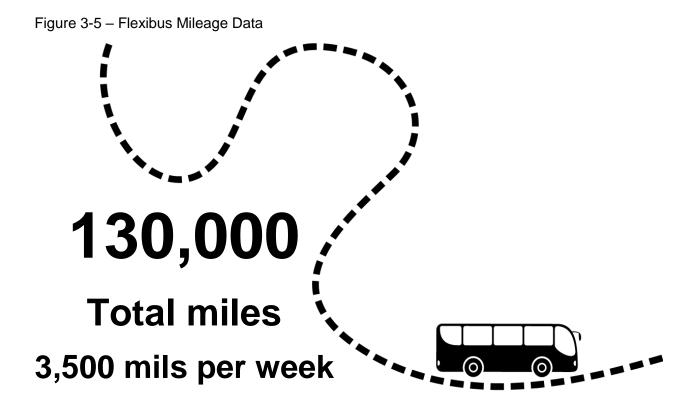
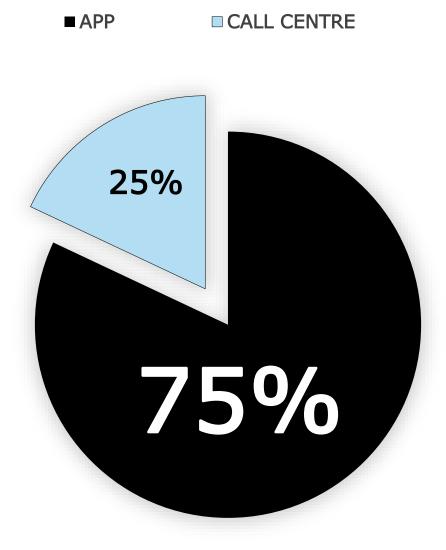
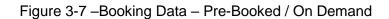


Figure 3-6 -Booking Data - App/Call Centre





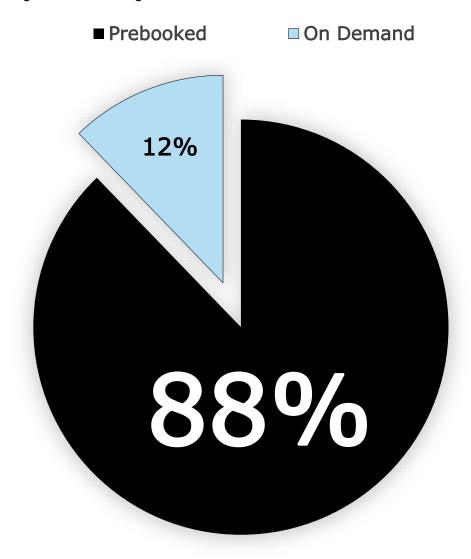
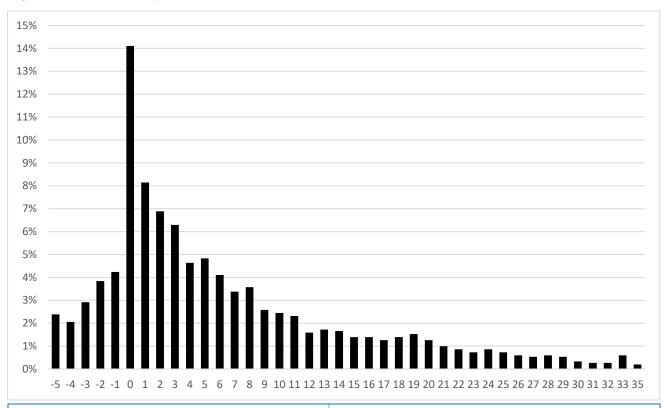
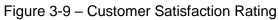


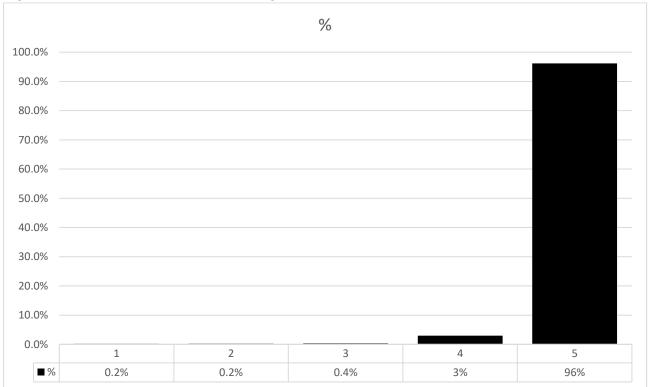
Figure 3-8 – Punctuality Data



On time	66%
Within 5 mins	71%
Within 10 mins	82%
Within 15 mins	88%
Within 20 mins	92%

Note: Customers receive update notifications through the app letting them know when their vehicles will be arriving and updating them if there is a delay to their booking.





Rating	Count	
1	19	
2	20	
3	33	
4	272	
5	8,715	
Total	9,059	

Figure 3-10 – Trip Time

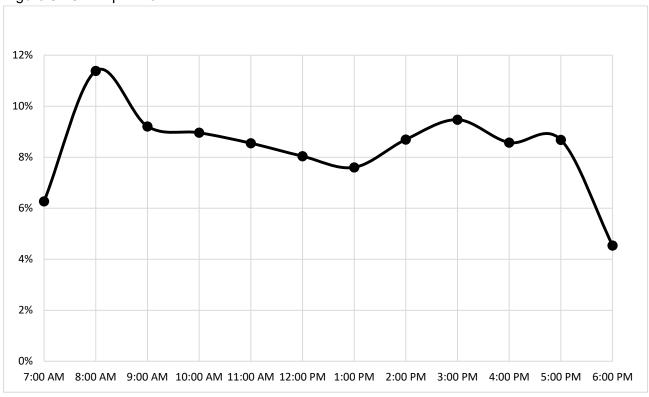
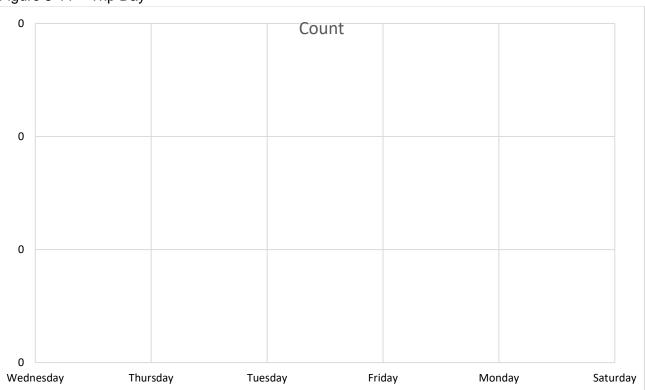
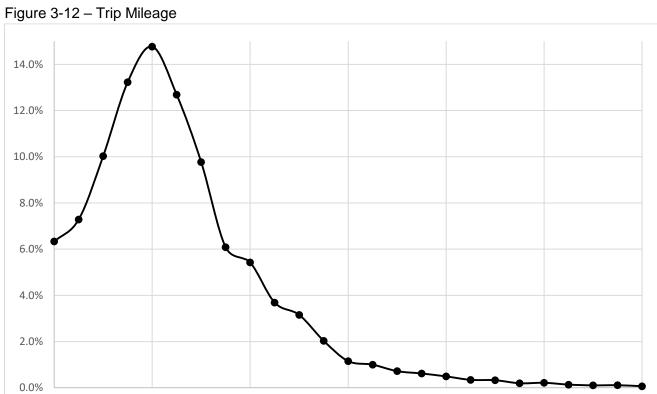


Figure 3-11 – Trip Day







MONITORING & EVALUATION

4 MONITORING & EVALUATION

4.1 RURAL SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS WITH DEMAND RESPONSIVE TRANSPORT

Significant improvements for rural areas with our new FlexiBus DDRT service, which brings 95% of rural residents within 30 minutes travel time of key destinations, 12 hours a day, 6 days a week.

Making public transport provision more comprehensive, especially in our rural areas with demand responsive 'FlexiBus' services.

4.2 OPPORTUNITY TO TRAVEL: OUR BUS NETWORK

East Sussex's bus network combines traditional fixed route scheduled services with demand responsive services, between them reaching across the whole county.

Figure 4-1 is a map of the network showing scheduled services, which include dense urban bus networks, town networks and longer-distance inter-urban services connecting the major towns with the smaller towns and villages. East Sussex includes large rural areas where our innovative digital demand responsive service, FlexiBus, provides flexible public transport for residents and visitors (as shown in Figure 1-2.



Figure 4-1 - Bus Network Map

4.3 OPPORTUNITY TO TRAVEL: DEMAND RESPONSIVE TRANSPORT

Our 2021 BSIP set out our plans to use digital demand responsive transport (DDRT) to provide public transport in areas, especially rural areas, where there are gaps in the fixed route network.

FlexiBus is the local digitally driven, on-demand bus service provided by East Sussex County Council and operates in areas that are not well-served by the existing bus services. Users are able to book a service via the Ride Pingo app or by calling the service centre. Services run from 07:00 to 19:00 Monday to Saturday and can be booked for up to nine passengers per trip – depending on availability. FlexiBus serves a total of seven designated zones as displayed in Figure 1-2.

Our ongoing monitoring and evaluation work is assessing the impact and benefits of the investment in FlexiBus, based on detailed passenger trip mapping being completed for ESCC by Podaris. This will allow us to calculate the cost per passenger trip of operating the service, and the return on that investment for ESCC and our residents.

Figure 4-2 - Key Outcomes

DDRT provision covering **90%** of East Sussex Delivering:

Improved accessibility to towns
and services (health, retail, social, education, employment)

Social and Economic Benefits £X_{m pa (TBC)}



Value for Money (VfM) Y:1 (TBC)

CO₂ Reduction Z Tonnes per Year (TBC)



4.4 OPPORTUNITY TO TRAVEL: BUS, RAIL AND COACH INTEGRATION

As well as being able to connect buses with each other for onward travel, there is also high importance that the bus network has integration with other modes of transport, especially rail stations.

Figure 4-3 shows the area from where residents can reach a station within 30 minutes travel time by either scheduled bus or FlexiBus.

Figure 4-3 – Conventional and flexible bus services rail integration - within a 30-minute bus journey of a station



Source: Podaris/WSP. Contains OpenStreetMap data

Considering just scheduled services and **excluding FlexiBus**, 69% of urban residents and 16% of rural residents are within a 30-minute bus journey of a station, shown in Figure **4-4**

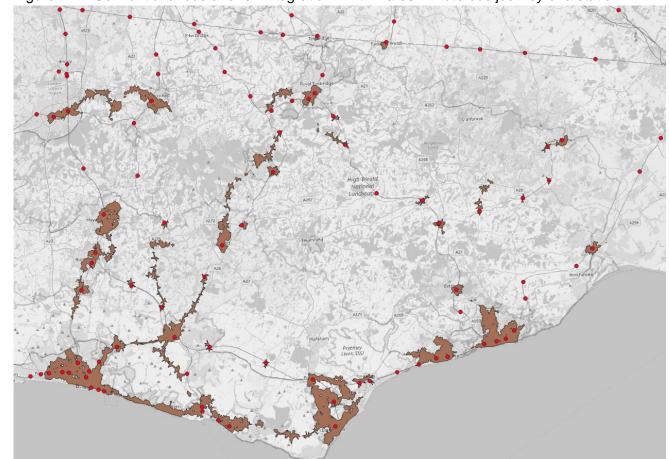


Figure 4-4 - Conventional bus and rail integration - within a 30-minute bus journey of a station

Source: Podaris/WSP. Contains OpenStreetMap data

4.5 OPPORTUNITY TO TRAVEL: CONNECTING PEOPLE TO PLACES

Our Bus Connectivity Assessment, which sits below this BSIP and informs our ongoing network development work, seeks to answer the question of what our bus service provision means for people getting to key destinations (work, education, healthcare, leisure opportunities), and what proportion of the population can reach key destinations by bus within 30 minutes.

We have assessed the journey opportunities which our bus network provides to residents and visitors, in terms of access to the following key destination types:

- Access to business
- Access to healthcare
- Access to work
- Access to education
- Access to retail
- Access to leisure opportunities
- Access to other modes of transport

We have assessed what proportion of East Sussex residents can travel to these destinations within 30 minutes by bus in the morning peak hour, or on a direct bus route at any time of the day. We have also compared average times to travel to these different destination types by bus. We have completed this analysis looking only at fixed route services, and also looking at both fixed-route and FlexiBus demand-responsive services. The introduction of FlexiBus DDRT services, covering most rural areas of the county, has led to significant improvements in access for rural residents. Considering only fixed-route bus services, rural residents have noticeable poorer bus access to most destination types, reflecting the network, with many rural areas not served at all or only by infrequent buses, making a 30-minute trip difficult or impossible. With FlexiBus, however, rural access matches and in some cases exceeds the access available on fixed-route services in urban areas.

Table 4-1 – Bus Connectivity Summary

	Access to	RURAL Population within 30 mins by bus (%) (fixed route only)	RURAL Population within 30 mins by bus (%) (fixed route and FlexiBus DDRT)	URBAN Population within 30 mins by bus (%)
Business	Business Parks and Industrial Areas	43%	88%	89%
	Dentists	27%	84%	83%
Healthcare	Hospitals	3%	64%	33%
пеаннсаге	Pharmacies	29%	85%	87%
	GPs	44%	87%	87%
	Town Centres and Cities	9%	76%	64%
Work	Offices	5%	68%	61%
	Banks	10%	76%	68%
	Primary Schools	47%	87%	89%
Education	Secondary Schools	12%	67%	49%
Luucation	Further Education	3%	50%	27%
	Universities	0%	0%	11%
Retail	Shopping	19%	84%	86%
	Restaurants	61%	92%	92%
	Cinemas	3%	42%	38%
Leisure opportunities	Play Spaces	56%	92%	93%
орроналисс	Playing fields	54%	90%	88%
	Parks	22%	83%	83%
	Ports and Ferries *	0%	0%	6%
Other modes	Airports **	0%	0%	0%
of transport	Bus Stations	4%	64%	14%
	Interchanges	16%	75%	68%

^{*} Access to ports and ferries relates to the Newhaven-Dieppe ferry

^{**} Access to Gatwick Airport is not possible from East Sussex within 30 minutes by bus, nor by any direct bus route

4.6 FINANCIAL OVERVIEW AND MONITORING

There has been continual monitoring and evaluation of the service, both in terms of service provision and in financial performance. We have, wherever possible, taken steps to improve the service, reduce costs and increase revenue. The table 2 below illustrates the high level breakdown in costs of operating the service.

Table 2: Overview of costs to operate the Flexibus service

Costs	Year
Driver	62%
Vehicle	13%
Fuel	12%
Misc Costs	3%
(Sub Total) Vehicle Operation Costs	90%
Digital Platform	4%
Call Centre & Service Management	6%

The financial overview table is supported by a detailed flexibus cost tracking spreadsheet where all elements of costs and revenue are regularly tracked and reviewed.



ACCESSIBILITY TARGETS

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS OVERVIEW

5 MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS OVERVIEW

5.1 PHOTOGRAPHY







The brief for this photoshoot was to create a bank of images that show Flexibus in a dynamic and straightforward way, and could be used in a variety of designs, starting with the launch campaign - as well as future promotions and advertising.



5.2 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING



- Over 4.5 million impressions across 11 Flexibus social media ad campaigns since launch in May 2023
- Most viewed campaign so far: Flexibus £1 Christmas offer
 - 1.4 million impressions
 - Reached 10k passenger milestone during this campaign
- Most new riders generated: Free ride coupon campaign
 - Broke 500 weekly riders target during this campaign





5.3 LEAFLET DISTRIBUTION

50k leaflets distributed to homes, libraries and community spaces in Flexibus zones





5.4 PRINT ADVERTISING

- Print ads throughout the year in twelve local publications
- Location specific ads in magazines for Conquest Hospital and Princess Royal Hospital, listing what zones serve them
- Ad and 500-word editorial the East Sussex WI Handbook, (right) combined with a concessionary bus pass ad to indicate it can be used on Flexibus.



5.5 POSTERS

Posters distributed to libraries and community spaces in Flexibus zones.



5.6 FLEXIBUS PROMOTIONAL VIDEOS

Two videos have been produced and used in the promotion of Flexibus during the first year.

The first focussed on endorsement from the Lead Member for Transport, Councillor Claire Dowling, speaking about what Flexibus is and where it could take you. The second was a more customer based video showing people booking and using the service.



Both have been used in social media ad campaigns and have had a combined total of over **178k ThruPlays** (plays of at least 15 seconds)

Councillor Dowling video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RpUKyiBwJaA

Flexibus promotional video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDWUpnXMLXU

5.7 PRAISE FROM SOCIAL MEDIA



Used several times in Zone 5.

It is a life-changer!!

We used this service on Wednesday. Fantastic service.

Well done to all involved!

This service is brilliant picked up and dropped off at our address, £2 any trip highly recommend, used it to get to Lewes when the train was cancelled on Tuesday. Highly Recommend.

My young adults booked and used it today, absolutely brilliant we have not had a bus along our road in years. Saved me having to get the car out for them.

Did section of the 1066 walk from Pevensey to Herstmonceux today and used the new **@EastSussexCC #flexibus** service. Brill! Pick you up where and when you want, drop you where you want. Can book return 30 minutes before.

Cheerful drivers, new buses. Public transport reinvented!

5.8 PRAISE FROM THE RIDER SURVEY

In April 2024 we requested feedback on the service via a survey sent to users who have registered on the RidePingo app.

It has been a life saver for me as I suddenly found I am unable to drive for health reasons. Apart from using service to get to shops I use it to get to and from my grandchildren 3 times a week.

All the drivers are so friendly and helpful it has been a wonderful service, thank you.

I think this is a fantastic service, which is allowing me to make journeys I wouldn't otherwise be able to do.

I was a visitor to Lewes, and had come to visit Charleston in Firle and the church nearby also connected to the Charleston artists. I have chronic fatigue and the Flexibus made the whole trip possible. I found it all so user friendly.

Your service is a wonderful blessing for the elderly, infirm & isolated people. Hitherto, I was unable to travel any distance unaccompanied due to my poor sight. Now I enjoy a freedom which I was unable to access for the past 25 years. I am deeply grateful.

It's a fantastic service, and the drivers are extremely helpful and courteous.

I think it is an excellent idea and will make many of us less isolated, especially in the winter.

Has changed my family's life as we live in the countryside with no nearby bus routes, and Flexibus allows my non-driving nan, who's late husband used to do the driving about, to visit us often!

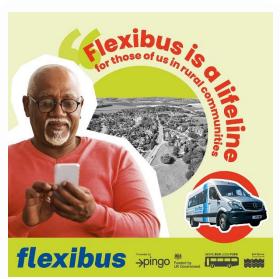
I feel that is giving a crucial lifeline to many people, old, young and disadvantaged in rural areas that have either no or very limited access to public transport

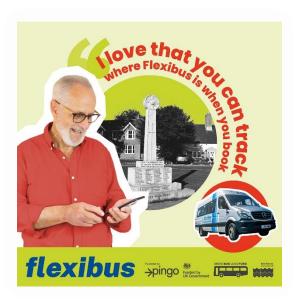
5.9 UPCOMING ANNIVERSARY CAMPAIGN

Using the positive feedback we have collected since the launch of the service; we have created a user-advocacy based campaign to celebrate the one year anniversary.

This has been delayed until July due to pre-election period restrictions but will run with new design assets and advertising locations throughout July and August 2024.















FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

6 FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

6.1 EXTENDING THE SERVICE BEYOND MARCH 2025

During 2024/25 we will consider how best to use funding streams to maintain the FlexiBus service beyond the existing BSIP funding period of the service (which is 31 March 2025), in order to avoid any "cliff edge" service withdrawal. We have agreement in principle from the DfT to defray some BSIP funding into 2025/26 to continue to support FlexiBus.

6.2 GREATER FLEXIBILITY OF TRIP DESTINATIONS

We will enhance our demand responsive service, to increase the range of trips passengers can use it for and to improve operational efficiency. We will look to enhance the service, to allow for trip demand that is across current zone boundaries (not currently permitted), by merging all current zones into one zone. This will also allow for more efficient vehicle and driver deployment. While we will allow passengers to make trips which cross current zone boundaries, we will either introduce a limit on the distance for a single passenger trip or introduce higher fares for longer trips in order to maintain a manageable balance between the passenger demand and the availability of vehicles to carry more than 1 passenger at a time, as we have designed FlexiBus for local trips rather than long trips across the whole county.

6.3 NEW DESTINATIONS

We will explore adding new key destinations to the FlexiBus service including the possibility of the inclusion of Eastbourne District General Hospital.

6.4 VEHICLES

New FlexiBus vehicles are to be delivered in July 2024.

6.5 ADDITIONAL VEHCILE PROVISION

We will pilot the use of private hire taxis as additions to the existing 'core' FlexiBus fleet, where this does not exclude passengers on accessibility grounds.

The changes outlined above in paragraphs 6.1 to 6.5 will be made within our existing BSIP funding allocation.

6.6 FUTURE BSIP PLANS (FROM 2025 ONWARDS)

We will continue to improve our FlexiBus service and develop it in line with demand. We will increase resources when needed so that it can play a larger role in the overall public transport network, carrying more passengers and reducing the subsidy required per passenger trip. If demand requires it, we will look to expand the service from the current 8 core vehicles.

We will consider replacing fixed-route services with the FlexiBus service, where it is more economically advantageous to do so and while also maintaining or improving access for passengers to key destinations.

We see FlexiBus as a fundamental part of the future public transport network, providing access for rural residents to employment, education, services and leisure opportunities – as well as

supporting the visitor economy. Over time it is possible that changes in car ownership and land use patterns lead to increased demand for public transport in rural areas that may permit more conventional scheduled / fixed route services but with improvements in technology (including the introduction of AI) DDRT services are almost without question going to play a key role in future public transport provision in East Sussex.

6.7 LONGER TERM TRANSFORMATION

2025-2029: the shared mission of ESCC and the bus operators remains to ensure that East Sussex residents and visitors enjoy the highest possible quality bus services that provide a frequent and comprehensive choice, reduce congestion and make a positive contribution to better air quality and decarbonisation. If patronage continues to grow, we are optimistic that we will be able to work towards an increasingly commercial network, where public support is focused on areas where it remains especially difficult to operate commercially-viable services due to structural features – especially in our more sparsely populated rural areas.

We therefore have longer term aspirations to develop both our conventional and flexible bus network so that all services meet the following service standards by 2029 (subject to commercial viability or revenue funding):

Table 6-1 - Longer term flexible bus service improvement aspirations

Туре	Area Operated Rural / Urban	Days of operation	Minimum hours of operation	Minimum provision = core buses operational
Flexible	Rural (93% coverage of East Sussex)	7	M-F 0700-2200 Sa 0800-1800 Su 0900-1700	10 buses + taxi 6 buses + taxi 5 buses + taxi

We will review existing DRT services with a view to converting some (back) to fixed route / scheduled services, where increases in demand justify this, and will look to extend the DDRT network where this is the most cost-effective way of providing key shared transport provision.



TARGETS

7 OVERVIEW TABLE

7.1 TARGETS

66% increase in the number of passenger trips from 600 (Jun 2024) to 1,000 by March 2024.

