

Report to: Place Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 20 March 2025

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Review of the Flexibus Service

Purpose: Review the evaluation of the use and success of the Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) 'Flexibus' service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) The Place Scrutiny Committee is recommended to consider the report in Appendix 1 and note the progress that has been made in the delivery of the Flexibus Service.

1 Background

1.1 East Sussex County Council (ESCC) received £41.4m from the Department for Transport (DfT) for the East Sussex Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). £2.5m was allocated to Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) services, branded as Flexibus.

1.2 The Flexibus service launched on May 9, 2023, covering 90% of East Sussex and extending to neighbouring areas, providing crucial connections to hospitals and rail stations.

1.3 Operating hours are 7am to 7pm, Monday to Saturday (excl bank holidays), with bookings available via the Ride Pingo app or a call centre.

1.4 The service is delivered through a network of suppliers: The Routing Company (digital platform), Community Transport Lewes Areas (CTLA) and East Surrey Rural Transport Partnership (ESRTP) (drivers), London Hire (vehicles), and WeMOVE (call centre and operational support).

1.5 The BSIP funding for the Flexibus service provision has been extended to the 31st of March 2026.

2 Key Improvements and Evolution

2.1 Significant improvements have been made, including

- Customer app enhancements
- The ability for vehicles to operate across multiple zones.
- Zone merging, culminating in a single-zone operation in August 2024
 - Which has significantly improved service efficiency and customer satisfaction, eliminating arbitrary border restrictions.

2.2 The ability for vehicles to operate over multiple zones has allowed for a 25% decrease in the number of vehicles needed, while maintaining a high level of service.

3. Monitoring and Evaluation

3.1 Flexibus has significantly:

- Improved rural accessibility, bringing 95% of rural residents within 30 minutes of key destinations
- Enhanced access to essential services, with a substantial increase in residents within 30 minutes of town centres and GP surgeries.
- Improved integration with rail services, with a significant increase in residents able to reach train stations within 30 minutes.
- Improved access to key destinations, including business, healthcare, education, and leisure, particularly for rural residents.

3.2 Value for Money analysis shows a Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR) of 3.02 for Flexibus, indicating high value for money.

3.3 The Flexibus service has seen:

- strong passenger growth has been observed, with over 42,000 trips completed to date, and a high level of passenger satisfaction
- majority of bookings are made through the app and are pre-booked
- high punctuality and positive customer feedback.

3.4 Data is provided in the full-service review report provided as Appendix 1 and covers many aspects of the service, including weekly ridership, customer sign ups, vehicle loading, and customer satisfaction.

4. Marketing and Communications

4.1 A comprehensive marketing strategy has been implemented, including social media campaigns, leaflet distribution, print advertising, posters, promotional videos, and community outreach.

4.2 Social media campaigns have reached over 4.5 million impressions, with successful campaigns like the £1 Christmas offer and free ride coupon campaign.

4.3 Positive feedback has been received from social media users and rider surveys, highlighting the service's impact on accessibility and quality of life.

5. Future Developments

5.1 Continued focus on operational efficiencies, including

- Improved trip aggregation and vehicle utilisation
- Exploration of transitioning to zero-emission vehicles and smaller, more agile vehicles.
- Piloting the use of private hire taxis to supplement the core Flexibus fleet.
- Investigate the use of AI and machine learning

5.2 Integration of Flexibus into future BSIP plans and the contracted (subsidised) public bus network, potentially replacing fixed-route services where economically advantageous (low passenger numbers).

5.3 Targets have been set for passenger growth, with a goal of 780 weekly passenger trips by March 2026.

6. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 6.1 Flexibus has significantly enhanced public transport accessibility in East Sussex, particularly for rural residents.
- 6.2 The service has been optimized through continuous improvements and adaptations.
- 6.3 Positive feedback and data demonstrate the service's value and success.
- 6.4 Future plans focus on sustainability, efficiency, and integration into the broader transport network.
- 6.5 The Place Scrutiny Committee is recommended to consider the report in Appendix 1 and note the progress that has been made in the delivery of the Flexibus Service and the significant social and economic benefits it has delivered to East Sussex residents.

RUPERT CLUBB

Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Contact Officer: Craig Lamberton, Team Manager – Passenger Transport Team

Tel. No. 01273 337 525

Email: craig.lamberton@eastsussex.gov.uk

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

[National Bus Strategy 'Bus Back Better'](#)

[East Sussex Bus Service Improvement Plan](#)