

Transport and Travel Update - February 2021

Trouble viewing? [View this email in your browser.](#)



Transport and Travel Update



Bus Operator Contact Details

If you want to find your nearest bus service or plan a journey on public transport, please visit www.essexbus.info or [Traveline](#).

Follow [@Essex_PT](#) on Twitter for public transport information.

Due to constant changes that our bus operators are making we are asking you to check their websites and social media for up to date information. We have made a list available on the [Passenger Transport](#) page on the Essex Highways Website.

Update on how passenger transport reacted to 2020

Overview of Passenger Transport

Passenger Transport has been significantly impacted by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. It has also operated as a key service, enabling key workers to get to work; children to get to school; people to access healthcare, to shop and to exercise and to socialise within social distancing rules.

Both central and local government have put significant resource into supporting the network and there is an in-principle commitment to continue to do so while social distancing requirements remain in place. In addition to this, many of Passenger Transport officers have been using their skills in other areas of ECC to support those residents greatly affected by the pandemic.

The first period of national lockdown from the end March to the end May saw an extremely challenging period for the bus network with stringent 2m social distancing requirements on

services and a strong 'avoid public transport' message from central Government. This was followed by a slight relaxation in social distancing requirements which provided further capacity for the re-opening of non-essential retail in June and introduced the mandatory wearing of face coverings.

Park and Ride and Ugobus

Park and Ride services were shut shortly after full national lockdown was introduced and passenger numbers dropped significantly. ECC worked with suppliers to ensure the site could be used to respond to Covid-19 demands whilst not in use.

Ugobus are ECC's in-house fleet and primarily deliver adult social care transport but also some local bus and home to school transport. Reductions in demand from these core transport services during Covid has seen Ugobus deployed to support other activities. This has included supporting the distribution of food parcels; distribution of PPE, distribution of IT and sports equipment and supporting new demands brought on by Covid-19.

Community Transport

Community Transport schemes across Essex have been unable to carry out their usual essential services for our most vulnerable members of the community. They have however continued to make a valuable contribution from the start of lockdown. This includes providing deliveries of hot meals, click and collect shopping, medications, parcels and making important welfare phone calls to prevent isolation.

Some funding has been made available from Parish Councils to maintain essential shopper buses and the schemes have supported both ECC and the NHS to provide transport for key workers. Vehicle adaptations to include Perspex screens, PPE, hand sanitising on buses, and deep cleaning vehicles has ensured the services are safe to use during this time. Inevitably there have been some redundancies and a difficulty to retain volunteers along with some staff being furloughed.

Heading into 2021

Given the uncertainty over future demands on services, ECC are seeking to remain as flexible as possible – supporting additional Covid-19 work and addressing Covid specific issues while seeking to run as much 'normal service' as possible shaped around demand. The key risks ahead are:

- Significant long-term damage to the bus network and a slow return to pre-Covid patronage
- A significant financial pressure across the commercial network resulting in service curtailment or withdrawal

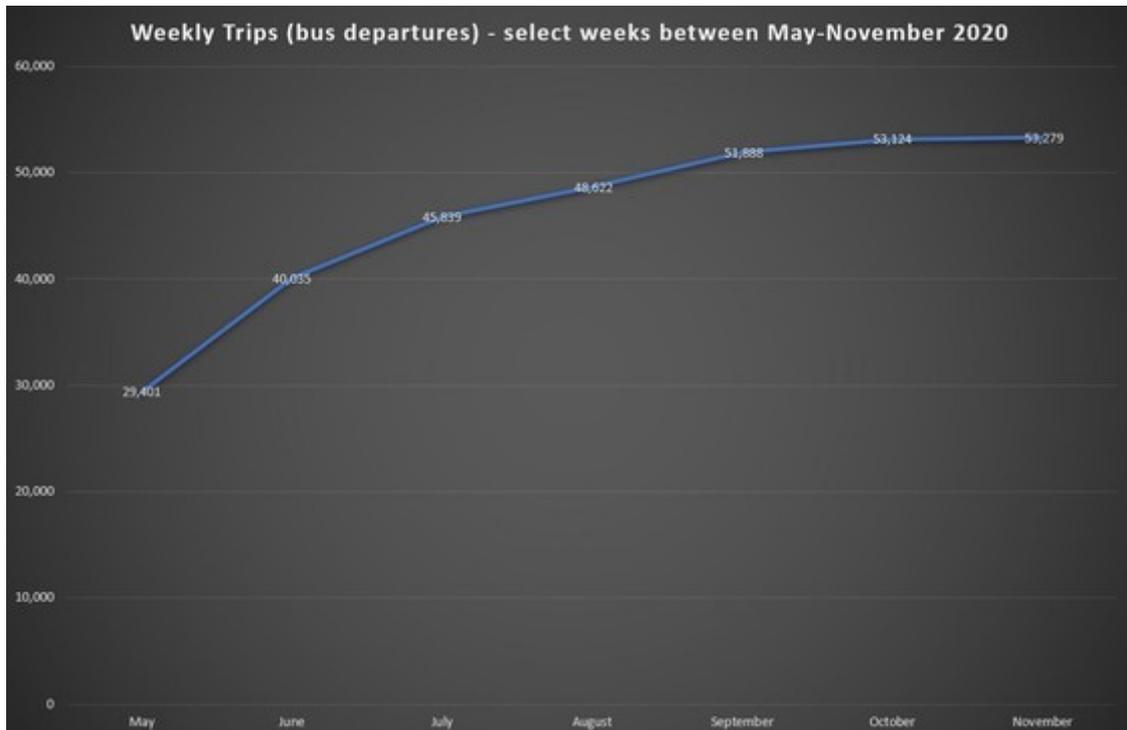
Essex's Bus Network 2020

It has understandably been the most volatile year for bus changes ever recorded. It has meant that Bus Passenger News lost its purpose over 2020, due to the temporary and ever-changing timetables that operated. Our message has always been to keep it simple: check with your Operator just in case the temporary timetable has altered in order to meet changing demands.

Early 2021 is similar in the sense that we begin the year with a seven working day notification period...however, our dataset (which we always maintained for traveline) is vastly more comprehensive than that of May 2020's levels.

You can see how the bus departures in our dataset rose from a May level of around 49% coverage before plateauing around the 50,000 trip mark (which is 89% coverage compared to pre-pandemic levels of February 2020).

Weekly Bus Trips in Essex - May to November 2020. Showing increase from 29k journeys (May) to over 50k by November.



In September 2020, with the return of schools, Local Authorities were asked by Central Government to find sufficient capacity on the commercial bus network to ensure children could get to school. Given that the social distancing requirements reducing the capacity of a bus by over 50%, this was a significant challenge. A large percentage (around 20%) of journeys had been closed off and dedicated to school journeys to help children continue to be able to access schools. ECC worked urgently with operators and schools to agree an approach and our operators responded quickly and positively.

With the return to schools in mind, a growing concern was the large-scale switch to car away from bus as parents chose to drop their children at school. Through the [Stop.Swap.GO!](#) digital behavioural change campaign, ECC launched a ['Getting to School or College Information Service'](#) that provided a one stop shop for information on walking, cycling and bus use. This included all the advice on travelling by bus and bespoke Park and Stride maps for schools. Overall, the initial return to bus for school journeys appears to have been around 70% which is a significant achievement in very challenging circumstances.

2021 will continue to challenge the bus industry, but there is hope that we are now through the worst of the pandemic, and that network coverage can increase closer to pre-pandemic levels once again.

Park and Ride update

Chelmer Valley Park and Ride Temporary Closure

A decision has been taken to suspend the Chelmer Valley Park and Ride service from Saturday 30 January 2021 due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation.

The suspension of the service is in response to strict government guidance urging people to stay in their homes and only travel when absolutely necessary, to prevent the spread of Coronavirus as well dramatically reduced numbers of people using the service.

The service will remain closed until further notice.

Roadside Publicity & Real Time Displays update

Roadside Publicity

A timetable for Friday showing bus times for various routes. The routes are color-coded: red, blue, green, and yellow. The times are listed in columns for each route.A timetable for Saturday showing bus times for various routes. The routes are color-coded: red, blue, green, and yellow. The times are listed in columns for each route.

You will have noticed that the timetables at your bus stops have not been updated during 2020 - to date, this is obviously due to the operators running emergency timetables and the short notice they can give to do so.

It would not have been viable or cost effective for us to keep updating this information on a weekly basis so the decision was made to ask members of the public to check their operators website for the current information.

The plan was to do a countywide refresh in January 2021 but under the current circumstances this will not be possible for us to complete.

Once the Bus Network has stabilised then we will look into this again and we have redesigned the timetables that will be placed at your bus stop, see picture.

In the meantime we are asking for your help to let us know if any of your frames are damaged or missing from your stop, to do this you can go to our [Report it Tool](#) on the Essex Highways website, and give us as much information as you can about what has happened and the location of the stop.

Real Time Displays

Normally the bus operators send their service registrations to Essex County Council, then we copy these into our registrations system. From here all the timetables for all the services in Essex, are sent to our real time system and the **Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI)** signs.

At the same time the bus operators send their live locational data for their services to the real time system. If the real time system does not receive the live locational data from the operator, then the timetable information for the service will be shown on the displays.

However, due to the Covid-19, when the Traffic Commissioner gave the dispensation to all

the bus operators to change the timetables at short notice, it was not possible for ECC to keep updating all the changes into the real time system within such short notice.

Therefore, our real time contractors, JMW, offered a solution, to take the locational information directly from the operators and feed it on to the RTPI displays. This means that currently the RTPI sign are only showing the live locational information provided directly by the operators.



Your help is always welcome!

We focus our efforts in continuously monitoring our displays. However, it is not possible for ECC to regularly patrol all the sites, therefore we rely on reports from members of the public, subcontractors and colleagues, in order to identify those faults that are not registered by our system.

So, here is how you can help: If you ever notice a faulty RTPI display that would require our attention; you can contact us via: the [Report it Tool](#) on the Essex Highways website, your support will be very much appreciated.

At ECC we are always eager to deliver only the best service to the people in Essex.