

“Could not improve any more - what more could I want?”

Passenger comment, October 2006 surveys



# The first six months

A report by the Fastrack Delivery Executive



## Chairman's Introduction

Just over 12 months ago I was invited to chair what was then known as the Fastrack Project Board. Having been involved with the project for some time I knew that Fastrack as a concept was firmly embedded in all of the statutory planning documents and Kent County Council through its Local Transport Plan was well advanced with a £15 million piece of infrastructure. There was the potential to deliver a bus rapid transit scheme that could flex and develop alongside the development of the area; stretching road capacity to enable regeneration. However whilst plenty of people were willing the project to succeed, there was a huge array of seemingly intractable problems.

It is therefore with great delight that I introduce this report on the first six months of Fastrack operation. It required a lot of hard work as well as innovative thinking to get us to where we are today. But the result has been staggering. Passenger numbers are some 50% above expectations, there is a very high level of customer satisfaction and the scheme is attracting interest from around the UK. Of greater importance to the stakeholders in Kent Thameside is the clear demonstration that a bus rapid transit system can deliver the high quality, attractive public transport system vital for successful regeneration. A year ago Fastrack was just a concept - now there is reality, and with it, real confidence that Fastrack can be further developed over time to deliver all that is expected of it.

The success is a testament to the hard work, commitment and dedication of many individuals and partner organisations. It is a success of which we can all be justifiably proud. Yet this is just the beginning - work is already underway on the future planned growth of the network.

For now though, I present this report on the first six months of operation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Jordan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Stephen Jordan  
Chairman,  
Fastrack Delivery Executive

Much has been achieved on the Fastrack project over the past year - most notably, the launch in March 2006 of the first Fastrack service, Route B, operating between Dartford and Gravesend. Put simply, Kent Thameside now has the UK's first non-guided modern Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system.

This report summarises the achievements to date and results of recent passenger surveys, and describes what is planned for the coming year and beyond.

## Why Fastrack is needed

Kent Thameside is one of the leading growth areas in the Thames Gateway. The area has huge development potential that will bring up to 50,000 new jobs and 30,000 new houses over the next 20 to 30 years. To be successful and sustainable a viable, realistic alternative to private car use for local journeys must be delivered.

Fastrack is the new bus rapid transit system that will transform local travel and is critical to the success of Kent Thameside. An area facing such growth over a relatively long period of time demands a transport system that can grow and adapt. Use of rubber-tyred vehicles that run on a normal road surface means that routes can be readily adjusted to suit the progress of construction, always providing the optimum service patterns to serve both new and existing communities. This makes Fastrack the ideal solution for Kent Thameside, and potentially also provides a model for other growth areas in the UK.



Fastrack dedicated busways ensure a punctual and reliable service



A core Fastrack network of some 40km is planned. Overall, half of all Fastrack routes will operate on dedicated 'track' - a dedicated busway where no other vehicles will operate - with a further 25% on specially reserved lanes alongside traffic on existing roads.

Whilst some 9,000-12,000 new homes and 10,000-15,000 new jobs rely on Fastrack being in place Fastrack will also be of great benefit to existing residents, workers and visitors. Some 37,000 people already live within 400m of a planned Fastrack route (over 25% of the current Kent Thameside population).

In summary, Fastrack must deliver a transit system that:

- contributes to a visibly high quality environment in Kent Thameside through the provision of leading edge vehicle, shelter and route design;
- is provided for at the outset of every major new development in the area;
- is fully integrated with other modes of public transport including simplified fares structures to allow for easy interchange between different forms of public transport;
- is always perceived as a transit system that is unified and has a strong brand;
- is accessible to all by being conveniently located near to walking or cycle routes, no step up or down into the vehicles, timely route information and secure waiting and storage areas; and
- will have priority over other road users to ensure a punctual and reliable service.

# Fastrack review

## What we have achieved

- Launched the UK's first non-guided modern BRT system.
- Passenger numbers growing since 'day 1' to now exceed forecasts by well over 50%.
- Achieved a 95% overall customer satisfaction rating ('Excellent' or 'Good' rating).
- Established the Fastrack Delivery Executive ("FDE") as a small non-incorporated body, but with the drive, focus and commitment to ensure delivery of Fastrack. The FDE is a 'virtual owner' comprising senior representatives of local authorities and private sector partners acting together in accordance with an agreed Statement of Commitment and Understanding.
- Clearly demonstrated that BRT can attract and retain new passengers, with surveys indicating 19% having switched from previous car use.
- Successfully integrated a new BRT system into the Kent Thameside area with minimal adverse impact on other key local bus routes.
- Introduced the first branded and comprehensively marketed fare zonal fare system in Kent.
- Implemented real time information across the system, including the most extensive use of high bandwidth wireless communication technology in any bus based transport system in the UK.
- Established a strong and visible brand now widely recognised across the Kent Thameside area and beyond, through an efficient and effective promotion and marketing campaign using a wide range of print, radio and web-based media.
- Established an excellent working relationship with Fastrack operator Arriva that has underwritten the success to date, reflected in a shared commitment to high quality service delivery and a real sense of pride amongst all members of staff.
- Become an example of 'best practice', with visitors from across the UK coming to view Fastrack in operation.
- The start on site of major private sector-funded developer contributions to Fastrack.



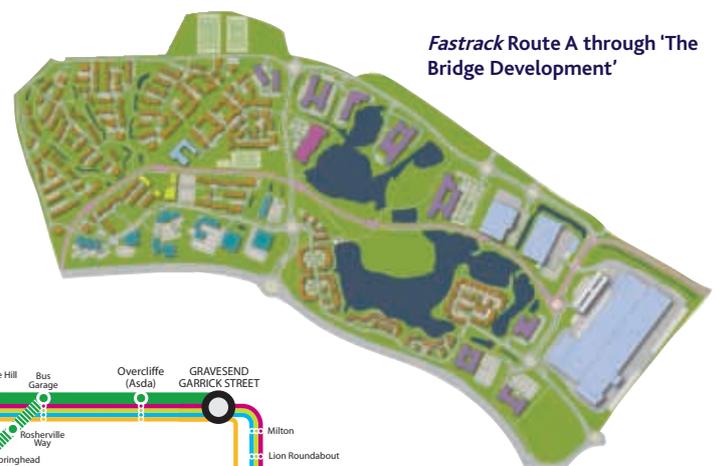
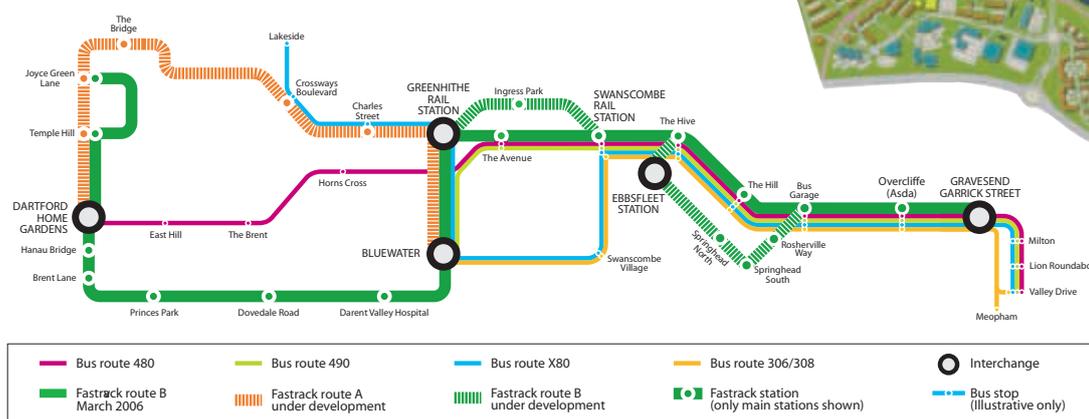
# What we plan to achieve over the next 12 - 18 months

- Implement two further sections of Fastrack busway (known as Everard's Link and Thames Way) adding a further 2.5km of busway and priority lanes to the network. Everard's Link will provide a new dedicated Fastrack link into the Ingress Park development and by-pass a congestion 'hot spot'. Thames Way will deliver priority lanes and busway on the A226 between Gravesend and Ebbsfleet Valley. Full funding has already been secured, and both schemes are programmed for construction during 2007.
- Integrate the busways and infrastructure being built as part of The Bridge development to the north of Dartford into the Fastrack network. A joint venture between Dartford Borough Council, Prologis and Wimpey, the developers are investing over £20 million to fully-fund provision and operation of Fastrack Route A, including construction of a Fastrack only bridge across the M25 and real time information in all residential and commercial units throughout The Bridge.
- Encourage off-vehicle ticket sales and purchase of longer period tickets, together with further simplification of the fare zone system, as a precursor to introducing off-vehicle ticketing throughout the Fastrack network to speed boarding, reduce overall journey times and improve reliability.

- Maintain and, if possible, increase the current high levels of customer satisfaction.
- Undertake further work on developing innovative operating arrangements for the future development of Fastrack in accordance with our Strategic Business Case.
- Working with London & Continental Railways and Eurostar, deliver an efficient and effective Fastrack local link to Ebbsfleet International Station for the start of Eurostar services in late 2007.



## FASTRACK AND EXPECTED KEY LOCAL BUS ROUTES



*Fastrack Route A through 'The Bridge Development'*

# Fastrack key performance indicators

Six-month period March - September 2006

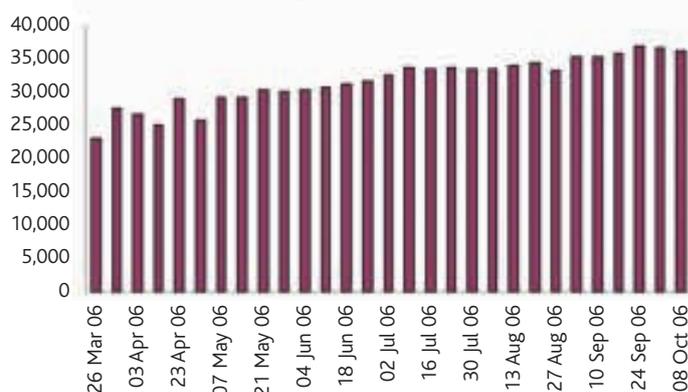
<b>Customer satisfaction</b> (customers rating overall Fastrack experience as 'Excellent' or 'Good')	<b>95%</b>
<b>Operated mileage</b> (average weekly scheduled miles actually operated)	<b>99.7%</b>
<b>Passengers carried</b> (six month period March - September 2006)	<b>806,000</b>

## Fastrack passenger numbers have exceeded all expectations.

Passenger for the first year of Route B operation numbers were forecast at just under 1.1 million, which equates to an average 21,150 per week. 23,000 passengers were carried in the first week and numbers have grown steadily since to reach around 35,500.



## Passengers per week



## Nearly all scheduled mileage has been operated.

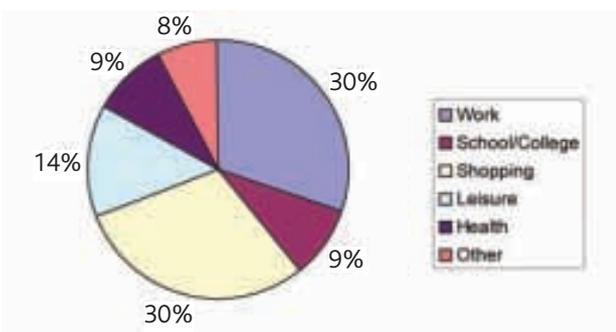
At 99.7% the percentage of scheduled mileage operated is believed to be amongst the highest for any bus service in the UK. (England average = 98.7%, DfT Bus statistics June 2006). The little mileage that has been lost has been solely due to traffic disruption on the non-busway section, and no mileage at all has been lost as a result of a driver not being available.

## A huge hit with passengers!

When asked to rate 'overall Fastrack experience' over 95% rated Fastrack as 'excellent' or 'good'. Nearly 5% rated it as 'fair', and only 2 out of the 507 passengers surveyed (less than 0.5%) gave Fastrack a 'poor' rating.

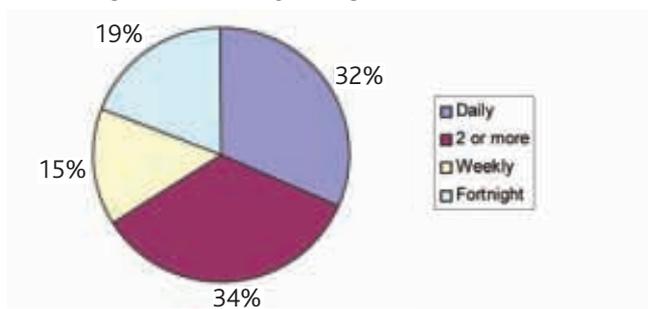
# Fastrack passenger surveys

## What is the purpose of your Fastrack journey?



Passenger surveys were carried out between 7am and 7pm on 19 October, with 431 questionnaires completed. A further 76 questionnaires not completed on the day were received subsequently, making a total of 507 responses. This represents approximately 9% of Fastrack usage on a normal weekday. Customers were invited to complete 14 multiple choice type questions. The charts and notes below summarise responses to the key questions in the context of our overall objectives.

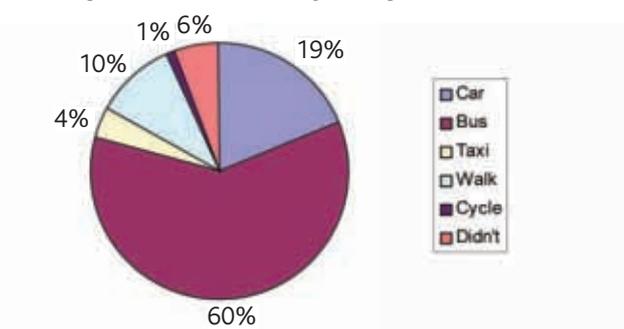
## How often do you make this journey on Fastrack?



Nearly 40% of passengers are using Fastrack to go to work or school/college. The second highest reason for making a trip was shopping, which reflects the Fastrack connection into Bluewater shopping centre. The Fastrack connection to Darent Valley Hospital is also well used, reflected in the 9% health trip purpose.

66% of passengers surveyed said they used Fastrack at least twice a week, with 32% using it daily. This suggests a high degree of satisfaction and reliance on the Fastrack service.

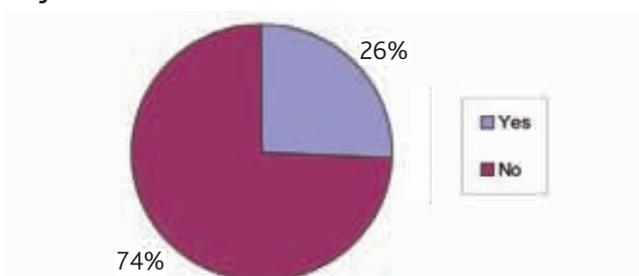
## How would you have made this journey before Fastrack?



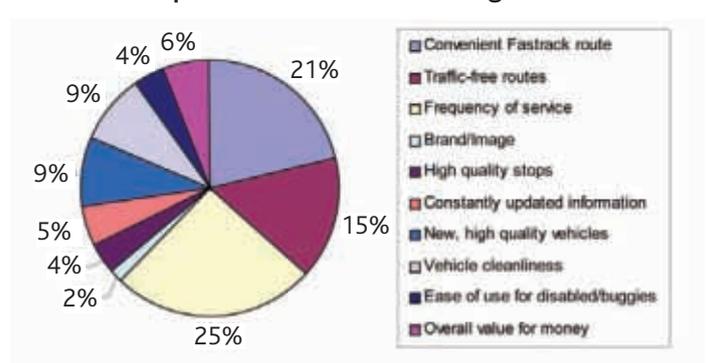
The survey indicates that 60% of passengers have transferred from other bus routes - not unexpected as for much of its length Fastrack Route B replicates a previous service. However the 19% of respondents stating they would have used a car prior to Fastrack being available is particularly encouraging - a strong indication that Fastrack can successfully attract users from private transport to mass public transport. This success is confirmed by 26% of respondents stating a preference for Fastrack despite having a car available to make their journey.

The top three reasons that respondents choose to use Fastrack are frequency (25%), convenience (21%) and traffic free routes (15%).

## Did you have use of a car but chose Fastrack instead?



## Your 3 most important reasons for choosing Fastrack?



The FDE acknowledges the contributions of all the partners and suppliers that have contributed to the early success of Fastrack, and particularly the efforts of Kent County Council as local highway and transport authority and Arriva as operator.



#### FUNDING FROM



## Fastrack into the future

By any measure the start of Fastrack has been a huge success. But it is just that - a start - there remains a great deal more work to be done and challenges to be faced.

Our Fastrack Strategic Business Case sets out how we see Fastrack maturing over the next twenty years or so as development really takes off. The plan is to nurture Fastrack through the challenging early years to the point where a single network-wide franchise can be let.

Currently there is much debate around bus regulation/ de-regulation. For us there is too much at stake for Fastrack to fail and we need certainty of delivery. So our plans assume a regulatory framework that will permit award of a long-term single operator contract - only in that way can we appropriately transfer Fastrack risk from the public to the private sector. But it has not been done before in the context of a BRT system.

We will need to hold our nerve. For example, there is already pressure to open new busways to other bus services that must be resisted. And route changes next year to serve Ebbsfleet, vital in the overall regeneration context, will almost certainly in the short-term result in reduced overall Fastrack patronage. In facing these challenges ahead we look to the continued support of our stakeholders and of government.

In one sense the Fastrack journey has well and truly begun. But in another, it's only just beginning...



## STOP PRESS a Fastrack million!

As this report goes to print, Fastrack has carried its millionth passenger - four months earlier than forecast. To celebrate, passengers were invited to enter a prize draw with a trip to Paris on Eurostar and a month's free Fastrack travel on offer. Lucky winner Doris Johnson of Temple Hill, Dartford is pictured below at Ebbsfleet International station receiving her prize. From late 2007, Fastrack will provide connections to Ebbsfleet International and Eurostar services to the continent.



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