



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

17 August 2022

Cllr David Brazier
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport
Kent County Council
Sessions House
County Hall
Maidstone
Kent
ME14 1XQ

Dear David

Ahead of my call with the Leader of Kent County Council (KCC) tomorrow, and the KCC Scrutiny Committee, I must be clear that the current situation facing parents with children who rely on taking the bus to school is critical. I would therefore be grateful if you were to assess further some of the risks for parents and communities of the significant reduction on bus services available for many communities for the forthcoming academic year.

As you are aware this issue has caused concern for many families for a number of weeks. I am very appreciative of the steps taken by Kent County Council to help ensure the short-term survival of some routes, including the 230 between Penshurst and Fordcombe with Tonbridge. This is only a short-term improvement and it gives everyone 12 months to work together on a long-term solution.

Unfortunately, many communities are without a solution, even in the short-term. With just two weeks before school term-time families continue to get in touch with me on a daily basis worried and concerned about how they will get children to school in September.

While I appreciate that not all of the decisions to remove bus services have been taken by KCC, and that some have been the decision of the local bus operators on commercial grounds, it has become apparent that KCC have the power to reinstate a bus through financial support if it wishes too, as we have seen with the 230.

You will remember the concerns that I raised in my letter to you on 14 April where I responded to the KCC consultation underway at the time and warned of the impact that removing these routes would have. I am disappointed that KCC have continued with its plans, despite these concerns remaining and becoming increasingly immediate.

The situation affecting the corridor between Wrotham, Borough Green and Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells is an example of where KCC needs to offer significant changes to its current plans in order to successfully ensure children can get to school in a couple of weeks. It is one that I wrote to you about on 2 August, and am yet to receive a response to. This is regarding the withdrawal of the TW10, TW11, T3, and T13 routes.

I am aware under current proposals KCC plan on extending the 222 to cover those areas that will be without a bus. Unfortunately, this is simply not enough, as one bus cannot cover the same ground that four routes previously did. The 222 will not serve communities such as Platt or Wrotham Heath that were previously served by either the TW10, TW11, or T13, and will not travel through to Tunbridge Wells, instead it will otherwise stop at Tonbridge. One single decker service, due to the bus needing to travel along Long Mill Lane, will not be able to adequately serve communities that were previously served by four buses. It is imperative that KCC reinstate these services or develop a plan that will be sustainable in the long term, not just for the County Council, but first and foremost, for residents. The reduction in core services across this corridor also threatens to make the existing services overcrowded, if parents do not drive their children to school instead.

Member of Parliament for Tonbridge and Malling

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In relation to other services, as I did in April I want to be clear from the outset about the need for long-term planning. While it is welcome that the S41 service will run between Edenbridge and Sevenoaks until October 2022, the concern at what happens afterwards remains. Parents will still be worried about what transport will be available for their children in only just over a month's time. This is a vital service that will isolate many if the withdrawal goes ahead in October.

There have been many other routes where concerns have been raised with me, including the E1 that operates around Edenbridge. This bus is a lifeline for many, and without it KCC will be cutting residents off from services that they rely on to keep each community within the town connected. At a time when it is more important than ever to encourage residents to use the shops and facilities in the heart of Edenbridge, the loss of the E1 will only add to these issues.

Similar concerns relate to the 58 bus which served villages from Trottiscliffe in the west, through West Malling and East Malling to Maidstone, and has seen some of our rural communities completely lose their bus routes now.

I also understand that the Government have made it clear that Bus Service Improvement Funding (BSIP) can be used to support existing services. This is positive news and I would like you to know that Kent County Council would have my full support should you decide to use BSIP funding to fund these important routes that may otherwise be withdrawn.

Kent County Council have two weeks to make sure that residents minds are put to rest and that children are able to get to school and that residents are able to reach vital services and I expect a solution that works for residents to be found.

It is imperative that the needs of residents are understood and are prioritised, and I would be grateful for an urgent update on those services that I have referenced above, as well as the many others that are at risk.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Tugendhat". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'T'.

TOM TUGENDHAT