

## **Report of Local Transport Officer - 27 May 2020.**

### **Buses & Coaches.**

With the aid of a special Government support grant, bus services continue to operate at reduced frequencies and capacities (*i.e.* about 10 on a single decker and 20 on a double decker) be available for use in order to maintain social distancing. Locally, *First* continues to operate the timetable introduced on 6th April. However, following the minor relaxation of the 'Lockdown' rules from 18th May to encourage people to go to work, where they can do so safely, it is expected that service levels will be expanded. Information will be provided once known. In the longer term, it is difficult to see the current model (outside London and Northern Ireland) of most services being operated commercially, *i.e.* without subsidy, can survive. A letter from the Managing Director of First Bus is attached, together with an update from First Eastern Counties.

After a brief period running a basis core network, National Express ceased running all services on 5th April, closing London Victoria Coach Station. No government funding is available to coach operators, despite their loss of all income from school services, National Express contracts, excursions, tours and private hires. Already some national names, *e.g.* Shearings, National Holidays and David Urquhart Tours) have been wound up, the future of hundreds of small firms must be in doubt. Will there still be enough businesses left to provide home-to-school transport when schools return?

### **Trains.**

Nationally, all train services (except those of the few 'open access' operators) are now run as government 'cost plus' contracts. Reduced services apply across the country, although train lengths remain the same, or even longer because again only about 20 to 25% of seats are now available. Locally, 'regional' services remain on their pre-Covid19 timetables, but services to/from London have been reduced. As the employment market, especially in London, opens up, service levels will increase. Fortunately, all Greater Anglia's new regional, Intercity and Stansted Express trains are now in service, so capacity should not be too much of a problem, but none of the new 'outer suburban' trains are yet running, which may cause problems.

Network Rail is taking advantage, where it can, of reduced passenger train frequencies to bring forward maintenance and enhancement projects. This is one reason why Greater Anglia is reviewing its timetables on a weekly basis.

The rail freight market has changed focus, with more emphasis on moving medical supplies and perishable food.

### **Local Transport Guide.**

In such rapidly changing times, it is a matter of judgement when to publish an updated edition of the comprehensive *Guide to Local Public Transport*. I will, however, attempt to keep the more focussed *Summary of Bus Services* up to date.

### Letter from Managing Director, First Bus.

Following recent guidance from the Government I want to update you on what we're doing to keep our services running for essential travel and key workers. I also want to share the changes we're making to keep customers and colleagues safe whilst on board, and the steps you can take to help everyone travel safely.

#### **Keeping Everyone Safe**

First Bus has responded to government advice to enable social distancing on public transport and with immediate effect you'll start to notice additional steps being taken to ensure a safe journey for everyone.

Our buses will be operating at a reduced capacity with around 1 in 4 seats being available. The Government has advised that people only make essential journeys and where possible travel off peak to avoid busy times, but you still may see 'Bus Full' signs as some services reach their revised capacity more quickly.

Occasionally a bus may not stop, most likely as it has reached its reduced seating capacity. If the bus does stop, but is near capacity, the driver will only allow one person to board for every person that gets off, so you may need to allow extra time for your journey and be prepared to wait.

In addition, you will also see further measures in place to help enable you to comply with social distancing guidelines. These include:

- New capacity signs by the entrance of each bus
- Seat signs and stickers to clearly show where you should and shouldn't sit to maintain a safe distance
- Reminders to be considerate of other passengers
- No longer allowing standing

#### **What can you do to stay safe?**

You can help us by changing your behaviour in line with the reduced capacity. This might include:

- Only travelling by bus if your journey is essential
- Planning your travel in advance, avoiding peak periods
- Wearing a face covering when on board
- Sitting in a window seat, leaving an empty row of seats in front and behind
- On our double deckers, consider sitting upstairs (if you are able)
- Paying with contactless or purchasing your ticket in advance on our App
- Using the correct change if you must pay by cash
- No longer eating or drinking whilst on board
- Leaving windows open to aid ventilation

#### **Keeping you informed and updated**

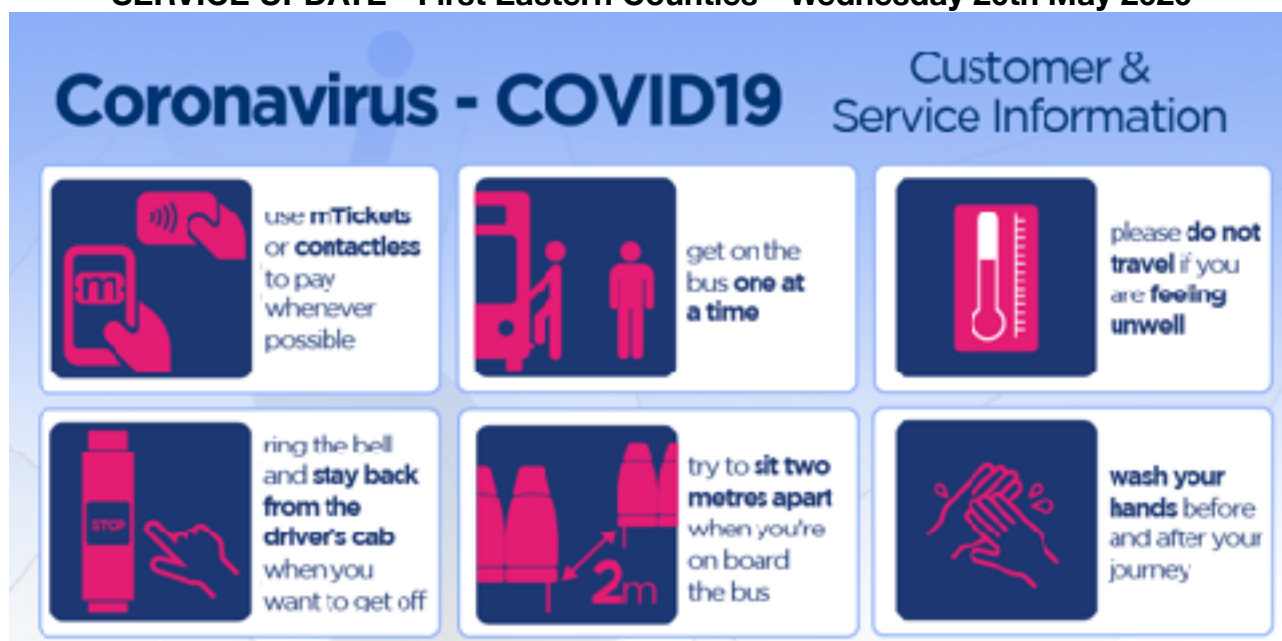
We are working hard to ensure that our website, social media feeds and colleagues are updated with the latest information, as quickly as possible.

Our telephone lines remain open if you do need to talk to us. Our operating hours are 9am-5pm Monday to Friday. Outside of these hours you can contact us via the contact form on our website. Our team will be monitoring Twitter at the weekends between 9am and 5pm and on weekdays between 7am and 7pm.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Stay safe, Giles Fearnley, Managing Director, First Bus

## SERVICE UPDATE - First Eastern Counties - Wednesday 20th May 2020



Revised timetables are operating on bus services across the First Eastern Counties Network in order to meet the needs of those making essential journeys. We're currently working on plans to increase services in the next few weeks and timetables for these services will be made available on this page as soon as possible.

Following on from Government's publication of its 'safer transport' guidance for operators this week (12 May 2020), we are introducing additional measures across our fleet of buses to ensure the safety of our colleagues and customers during Covid19. You can find full details on our ['Safer Bus Travel'](#) page.

As we're expecting more people on board our buses as businesses return to work, we're closely monitoring passenger numbers on individual journeys to allow us to add additional seats if these are needed by running larger or additional buses in order to allow for social distancing. You can feedback to us on any specific issues relating to your journey with our [online form here](#).

At First Eastern Counties, your safety is our top priority. In the wake of the evolving impacts of coronavirus, we are working with the Government and wider industry to ensure we are following the latest advice to keep you safe on our buses.

Recent days have seen bus passenger numbers continue to reduce as people choose to stay at home or walk and cycle to their destinations. This comes as the Government has advised against non-essential travel and contact as it introduces new measures to deal with the rising number of coronavirus cases and as a result, we are reviewing our operations on a daily basis.

We are committed to providing services so that those who need to make essential journeys, like health service and emergency workers, can continue to do so.

**Changes to Concessionary Pass validity:** In order to make it easier for vulnerable and elderly people to access essential services at this difficult time we are accepting concessionary passes for travel at any time of the day on any of our services. This change has been made working in partnership with all of our local county councils and will be effective until further notice. The arrangements will be subject to review on at least a monthly basis.