

Dear Council contact,

## **Bus Service Updates as Lockdown Lifts**

As the provider of a significant number of local bus services within your area, I am writing to update you on the services that Hedingham continues to provide for those who require travel, as well as on what is needed to ensure that we can continue to provide an efficient service for these passengers.

Safety is our priority and we continue to adapt our procedures in line with government advice to instil confidence in our passengers and thus encourage safe travel. We have implemented a cleaning regime which targets touch points every day and we give our buses a full clean every week. We are using a cleaning product with virus-killing properties in both the daily and weekly cleaning schedules and advise passengers to carry hand sanitiser for use before and after travel to minimise the spread of germs whilst on board.

We have also introduced screens for the drivers' cabs and require passengers to wear face coverings (except in cases where exemptions apply) and to adhere to the social distancing advice publicised on the buses. We recommend that passengers sit in window rather than aisle seats to impose a greater distance between those seated and those using the aisle to enter and exit the vehicle. We are requesting that those able to mount stairs on double deckers do so, with a view to leaving the downstairs area free for passengers with more limited mobility. We have also used tape to prevent passengers from sitting within 2 metres of the driver or in seats that face each other.

Additionally, we are asking for tickets to be purchased via our East Anglia Buses app or contactless payments where possible. In cases where customers need to use cash, we request that they provide correct change to reduce the risk of infection through cash-handling. As stated, this information is available on board buses and further advice can be found on our website: [www.hedingham.co.uk](http://www.hedingham.co.uk)

Due to these social distancing guidelines, we are only operating our buses at 50% capacity and have introduced a 'When to Travel' feature on our website so that passengers can plan their journeys based on up to date information on passenger loadings for their desired departures. We hope that this will inspire confidence that they will be able to find a seat on a journey that suits them. Current guidance from the Department for Education is that school only buses will be safe to load to their full capacity from September and we are currently planning with the county council to ensure all children will be able to travel safely when schools re-open.

Social distancing regulations and a general drop in passengers have meant that passenger numbers are only at about 30% of the levels we were experiencing prior to the pandemic. We are therefore

reliant on government support to enable us to provide near normal timetables for passenger convenience and safety. The funding arrangements organised by the government involve ensuring that local authority contracts and concessionary income continue to be paid, with additional funds being provided to bus operators directly by the government to enable us to cover service costs. This mechanism has allowed us to respond in an agile manner with lockdown easing. However, we will need DfT funding to continue until passenger levels return to normal, or we will be unable to continue the range of unsubsidised services that we have provided hitherto.

Hedingham has resumed normal service levels in the Halstead, Sible and Kelvedon areas and in Clacton and Colchester normal service has also been resumed on nearly all routes. We have continued to work closely with Essex County Council to re-establish these timetables and the arrangements are working well. However, we are hopeful that passenger numbers will return to pre-COVID levels and that most bus routes will become commercially viable again so that their costs will be covered by passenger revenue.

Whilst we appreciate the need for caution, we are concerned that the recent 'avoid public transport' message may have long term negative impacts, with increased traffic jams and a worsening of air pollution. Despite education remaining largely closed and a greater number of people working from home, weekday car use is already at over 85% of normal levels and continues to increase. We are concerned that we will struggle to operate our services punctually from September, thus potentially adding to people's reluctance to use public transport, if congestion is as bad as the rise in second-hand car sales suggests it could be. We need your support for continued bus priority as well as car parking restrictions in congested places if we are to be able to maintain vital services.

These are challenging times, but we are working hard to enable customers to travel safely and with confidence on our buses.

Thank you for your support and please do not hesitate to contact us at [services@hedingham.co.uk](mailto:services@hedingham.co.uk) if you would like more information.

Yours sincerely,



Jeremy Cooper  
Managing Director