

## **Background: Arriva Southern Counties and Kent Country Council**

### **Joint Runner- Up for the Award for Outstanding Innovation in Public Transport**

Kent County Council (KCC) is the local government body for the county of Kent in England. Of particular significance in the context of Fastrack are KCC's responsibilities for regeneration and economic development within the county, and its role as local transport authority.

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### **Project: Fastrack Bus Rapid Transit**

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Fastrack brings together the best of public/private sector joint working, bus operation and technology to deliver an innovative Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) solution to the challenges of local transport demand within the Kent Thameside, a major UK growth area.

Kent Thameside is located in North Kent just outside the eastern boundary of Greater London, and includes the towns of Dartford and Gravesend. It forms part of the Thames Gateway, the UK Government's regeneration initiative aimed at alleviating the shortage of homes in south-east England through sustainable regeneration of previously used land. Key catalysts for the regeneration of Kent Thameside are Bluewater, one of Europe's largest retail and leisure destinations; and Ebbsfleet International Station on the UK's first high speed rail line which links London with continental Europe. Although relatively small in population (currently 187,000) and area (57km<sup>2</sup>), the regeneration of Kent Thameside has national significance with around £2 billion of planned investment.

The objectives for Fastrack are intrinsically linked with this regeneration. Studies showed that the scale of planned development could only happen if there was a major shift towards use of public transport rather than a conventional approach to transport based on the use of the private car. A viable, realistic mass transit alternative for local journeys was needed, sufficiently flexible to grow and adapt to regeneration taking place over many years and delivered sufficiently early to influence the travel behaviour of new residents moving in.

In an innovative approach to policy integration and forward thinking, Kent County Council (transport authority), Dartford and Gravesham Borough Councils (local planning authorities), and private sector landowners and developers have together formulated and implemented policies to meet these objectives; and then, with operator Arriva, have successfully delivered the first phases of Fastrack in advance of the development and patronage that necessitates it, overcoming the challenges of the UK's complex deregulated bus market.

Launched on time and to budget in March 2006, the first two Fastrack lines have exceeded expectations and set a new standard for BRT in the UK. Arriva operates a fleet of 26 modern buses on a 25km network. Currently over 50% of the network is dedicated busway and priority lanes, but this proportion will rise to over 75% when the 40km final network is in place. High quality infrastructure, information technology and innovative operating arrangements are all wrapped up in a distinctive brand.

The Bridge development, a 1,500-home mixed use development near Dartford, is one example of what has been achieved through this innovative approach. The planning agreement with developer ProLogis has delivered a range of innovative features: around £20m of Fastrack infrastructure; ongoing operation of the service for at least 17 years; free travel for all residents, with no house or commercial unit occupied until Fastrack was fully operational; and, a 'real time' information screen in every home.

But Fastrack is not just about future regeneration. As intended, it has already improved the current public transport offer, connecting existing communities with local towns, hospitals and railway stations, providing an attractive, reliable service and enjoying very high levels of user satisfaction.