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Transport – Update on return to school arrangements with effect from September 2020

Background and Latest News

We are working closely with both Oxfordshire County Council (for the free school transport buses) and Thames Travel to plan for all students to return to school full time in September. Set out below are details of the routes that we operated until schools were closed due to the COVID 19 outbreak on 23rd March.

Route	Operator	Calling at
DC02 (a) (ESUK Bus Number 5)	Heyfordian Travel in conjunction with Culham Bus Club – through OCC School Transport Team Free School Transport Bus	Appleford, Culham, Sutton Courtenay, Didcot Girls' School, St Birinus School
DC02 (b) (ESUK Bus Number 9)	Heyfordian Travel in conjunction with Culham Bus Club – through OCC School Transport Team Free School Transport Bus	Long Wittenham, Sutton Courtenay, Milton, Didcot Girls' School, St Birinus School
94S	Thames Travel - through OCC School Transport Team Free School Transport Bus	North Moreton, South Moreton, Aston Upthorpe, Blewbury, Upton, West Hagbourne, St Birinus School, Didcot Girls' School
BB1A	Thames Travel	Iffley, Kennington, Radley, Abingdon, Drayton, Steventon, St Birinus School, Didcot Girls' School
BB1B	Thames Travel	Berinsfield, Burcot, Clifton Hampden, Abingdon, Drayton, Steventon, St Birinus School, Didcot Girls' School
BB1C/D	Thames Travel	Abingdon, Drayton, Steventon, St Birinus School, Didcot Girls' School
BB2	Thames Travel	Berinsfield, Dorchester, Shillingford Bridge Roundabout, Benson Marina, Crowmarsh Gifford, Wallingford, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, St Birinus School, Didcot Girls' School
BB5	Thames Travel	Chilton, Harwell Campus, Rowstock, Harwell, Didcot Girls' School, St Birinus School
BB4	Thames Travel	East Hanney, Grove, Wantage, Ardington Turn, West Hendred, East Hendred, Rowstock, Milton Heights, Didcot Girls' School, St Birinus School

Up until now **only the DC02 buses have operated as dedicated transport. All the Thames Travel bus routes have been public service routes available for use by the general public** (albeit there has been limited use by the public in practice as the routes have been geared specifically to our needs).

The latest information from government, via Thames Travel, is that on public services buses it will be possible to have one passenger per double seat provided no passengers sit face-to-face. The effect of this however will be to limit the seating capacities of buses on registered local services to 45-65% of normal seating capacity. As a result, in order to meet the potential demand on the Thames Travel BB routes, instead of operating the normal 7 buses there would have been a need to operate at least 14 buses. This would have had the impact of doubling the costs and making these routes uneconomic to run. In addition, quite apart from the cost implications of doubling the number of buses, Thames Travel have advised us that they simply would not be able to source the 7 additional buses in any case.

Government guidance on how dedicated school transport services should run is different. As students on dedicated school services cannot mix with the general public and tend to be consistent the need to apply social distancing rules on dedicated school transport will not apply from the autumn term.

Plans from September

Oxfordshire County Council organised free school transport (DC02a, DC02b and 94S)

We anticipate that these routes will run largely unchanged from 2019/20 albeit it is possible that there will be minor modifications to the timetables (please look out for latest timetable information which will be published on our website before the start of term as well as the details on the OCC website). OCC set the policy on student eligibility for free school transport. Any student aged 8 to 16 is eligible for free travel to the nearest suitable school if it is over the statutory walking distance of 3 miles. Full details of the policy contact details and how to apply for free school transport are available on the OCC website below, along with details of the current timetable.

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/travelling-school>

Oxfordshire County Council contact details:

Telephone: 01865 323500 or 01865 815175. Email: mainstream.schooltransport@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Students must have an OCC issued bus pass to use the routes below for free school transport. This is important. The school is not able to issue passes for OCC provided transport. It is really important that, if in doubt about whether or not your son or daughter qualifies for free school transport you contact OCC direct as they are the body that will determine eligibility.

If your child is eligible for free school transport OCC will liaise with you directly. They have advised us they will be writing to all parents over the summer holidays with bus passes being issued directly by OCC. For students entitled to free school transport using public services passes will be delivered to school for issue on the first day.

Thames Travel BB Buses operating as dedicated school transport from September 2020

As indicated above it is not operationally or economically practical to run the BB buses as public service buses from September. As a result a decision has been made in partnership with Thames Travel to de-register these routes and operate them as dedicated school transport with effect from September. This has the following implications:

- All the BB routes will be able to operate as normal as social distancing requirements will not apply from September on dedicated school transport.
- The services will be more costly to run as Thames Travel cannot get a government rebate on fuel duty that the routes were previously eligible for as public services.
- All passengers must purchase a pass in advance of travelling. It will not be possible at any time for a student to turn up at a bus stop and simply pay the driver for a single / return journey.

If passed onto customers the cost of de-registering and operating these routes as dedicated services would have resulted in the price of passes rising by up to 20%. We appreciate the extra burden this would have put on families at this difficult time so have agreed, for the 2020/21 academic year, to increase the level of subsidy our schools put into these services in order that the ticket prices for students can be kept at 2019/20 levels.

For the 2020/21 academic year, term season tickets are as follows:

- Didcot Schools Inner (covering Steventon, Harwell Village and Milton)
- South Oxon Zone (see map at <https://www.thames-travel.co.uk/maps-guides/>)
- Route BB1A covering the entire BB1 route including the section not in the South Oxon Zone

All three pass types can only be purchased online and can only be purchased from Thames Travel (not the school). We would recommend you liaise directly with Thames Travel to ensure you purchase the pass most suitable for you.

Tickets and further information will be available from:

- Thames Travel on <https://www.thames-travel.co.uk/>.
- Alternatively, telephone 01865 785400 or email office@thames-travel.co.uk.

We anticipate that most routes will run largely unchanged from 2019/20 albeit it is probable that there will be minor modifications to the timetables (please look out for latest timetable information which will be published on our website before the start of term as well as the Thames Travel website for final details in due course).

Currently planned changes to routes are as follows:

- The BB1A will operate non-stop between Abingdon town centre and our schools in Didcot. All Passengers from South Abingdon, Drayton, Steventon and Milton Heights should use the BB1
- The BB1B will not operate in 2020/2021 with the bus starting in Abingdon as a BB1. All passengers from Berinsfield should use the BB2

Keeping safe when travelling on the dedicated school buses

Should you decide to use the school buses from September it is important that all students help to ensure the journey into school is as safe as possible for both themselves and their fellow passengers. Below are some key points to remember:

- If you live close to school and consider it safe to do so we encourage that students walk or cycle to school. If you decide to drive your child to school, we ask that you consider dropping them off away from the school site to complete the last part of the journey on foot in order to manage congestion and safe access to school if you are able to do so. The bus services are provided should you need to make use of them however.

- Students should wash or sanitise their hands when leaving home in the morning before getting on the bus
- Students should queue in an orderly fashion when waiting to get on the bus. They should keep socially distant from students outside their year group, unless part of the same household, where possible.
- Students should sit on the bus with members of their year group or members of the same household where possible
- When arriving at school students should wash their hands or use sanitiser on arrival. Sanitiser will be available in every classroom and should be used when starting student guidance time each morning.
- Use of face coverings on the bus is strongly encouraged although bus drivers will not be refusing travel if a student does not have a covering (as it is recognised that some students may have health conditions that prevent the use of coverings) All students will be expected to remove face coverings on arrival at school.
- Students need to follow the instructions of duty staff at the end of the school day prior to boarding the buses for homeward journeys. There will be organised queuing and boarding within year groups.

Please check the school websites for updated timetables and any further guidance over the summer holiday period. However, in the meantime if parents have any further queries they can get in touch with us by emailing transport@ridgewayeducation.com. Please do remember however that free school transport entitlement or bus pass queries should be sent to OCC and purchase of tickets on BB routes can only be made directly from Thames Travel.

13 July 2020