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Fastrack success - cars are left at home!

Kent Thameside's new Fastrack bus rapid transit system, launched earlier this year, is already having a huge impact on travel behaviour. More than a quarter of passengers surveyed recently said they had chosen to travel on Fastrack despite having a car available. And nearly a fifth said they would previously have used a car for the journey being made.

The survey results are revealed in 'Fastrack - the first six months', a report being launched today at the Thames Gateway Forum by the Fastrack Delivery Executive (FDE). The report reviews the launch and operation of the first phase of Fastrack, delivered with public funding and running from Dartford to Gravesend via the Bluewater shopping and leisure centre. The report highlights that passenger numbers have exceeded expectations by over 50%, and that customer satisfaction and system reliability are both extremely high.

Stephen Jordan, FDE chairman, commented: *"These early indications are even better than we could have hoped for. Credible and integrated public transport that will tempt people away from the car for local journeys is vital for the successful regeneration of Kent Thameside. The early success of this first phase is most encouraging and clearly demonstrates that a high quality attractive bus rapid transit system really can do the job".*

But the FDE and its delivery partners are not resting on any laurels. Work is already underway on three further sections of busway and priority lanes. These include a major, fully private sector-funded Fastrack route already under construction as part of The Bridge development by ProLogis.

The Bridge is the first major mixed-use regeneration project in the Thames Gateway and will transform a 264-acre brownfield site into a vibrant new community for Dartford. Fastrack will link all areas of The Bridge itself and will also take residents into Dartford town centre, to neighbouring railway stations and to local amenities such as Darent Valley Hospital and Bluewater.

The new route will be operational before the first homes are occupied in 2007, and will have many innovative features to encourage use of the Fastrack service including screens in every home displaying constantly updated 'real-time' arrival times.

The FDE is also already looking further into the future to ensure delivery of the 40km planned final network that will connect developments right across Kent Thameside. Fastrack will be at the heart of Land Securities' Ebbsfleet Valley development and will also integrate with Ebbsfleet International station. From 14 November 2007 when High Speed 1 opens, Eurostar international services will bring Kent Thameside to within 2h 05m of Paris, 1h 41m of Brussels and 1h 10m of Lille. From 2009, when high speed domestic services start running to and from Ebbsfleet International, journey times to the centre of London will be just 17 minutes. Fastrack will be providing efficient and effective local connections with the local rail network, linking Ebbsfleet International with the north Kent rail line at Greenhithe and Gravesend.

Fastrack, the first modern bus rapid transit system designed to serve a UK growth area, is no longer just a concept – it's well and truly happening and with it, the Kent Thameside Delivery Board has proved that rapid transit schemes can enable successful regeneration in the Thames Gateway and beyond.

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