

# Increasing Essex County Council Bus Lane/Bus Gate Enforcement from Spring 2017

---

## Frequently asked Questions

### 1. What is ECC doing?

Essex County Council (ECC) has been investing in enhanced bus gate and bus lane enforcement since Spring 2017. This enhanced enforcement is based on a more extensive introduction of unattended cameras and means that drivers who contravene bus lane and gate restrictions in Essex in future will be much more likely to receive a Penalty Charge Notice.

### 2. What is a bus gate/bus lane?

A 'bus gate' is usually a very short length of road, sometimes physically restricted, through which only scheduled buses and other authorised vehicles are allowed to pass through.

A 'bus lane' is usually a longer stretch of road, which is segregated into a separated and marked lane for buses and one or more parallel lanes for all other traffic. Both are enforceable.

### 3. Why is ECC increasing bus lane enforcement?

As the county's population and economy grows, traffic levels are increasing too. Regrettably, this means that levels of bus lane contraventions are also increasing. This has an impact on bus punctuality, and leads to less reliable bus journey times, as well as more risks to pedestrian safety. More broadly, keeping bus lanes free for their intended use will support the promotion of sustainable modes of transport, making bus travel more attractive and helping to reduce congestion in the areas where bus lanes are located.

### 4. Where is enforcement being prioritised?

Bus gates and lanes are already enforced by Essex Police and automatically, at a limited number of sites that already have ECC cameras installed.

Increased camera-based enforcement by ECC has started with the bus lanes/gates which have the highest number of contraventions, causing the most problems to bus services and safety. Duke Street, Chelmsford was the first bus gate to receive enhanced enforcement measures, as the bus gate under the station viaduct was being illegally used by up to 400 vehicles a day. Increased enforcement is being followed up at other key locations.

## **5. How are drivers being warned about this increased enforcement?**

Additional enforcement will not start until the required camera equipment and all necessary road signs and other visible notifications such as road markings, are in place. Existing road signs and road markings will be checked and, if necessary, enhanced. We will also provide local information to occupiers adjacent to the location of the enforced sites.

ECC would like to change the behaviour of those who drive illegally through bus lanes and gates to ensure they use the appropriate routes and thus do not compromise the reliability of the bus network. To achieve this, ECC will start the enhanced enforcement with a 'grace period', during which time identified offenders will be sent a warning letter but without a penalty actually being levied. Once the grace period has ended and a charging period started, offenders will be sent a Penalty Charge Notice without being sent a warning letter.

It should be noted that the bus gates and lanes should already be being complied with. There are no new restrictions being introduced, nor are we adding to the number of bus lanes or gates. Instead, we have recognised that more robust enforcement is required

## **6. What are the enforcement hours for Essex County Council's bus lanes/gates?**

The majority of Essex bus lanes operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, unless signed differently – for instance New London Road in Chelmsford, which has limited operating hours. For most of the bus gates and lanes it means that drivers are not permitted to use them, even in off-peak hours.

## **7. Why does ECC operate bus lanes/gates?**

Buses help Essex's economy grow by enabling people to move about without adding to congestion on the roads. It is estimated that a full bus could remove as many as 40 cars from the road at one time. They are a critical part of the sustainable travel approach that Essex County Council is leading.

Bus lanes and gates have been introduced over the years in order to improve bus service punctuality and journey time reliability as we seek to reduce over-reliance on cars, provide greater choice over journeys and minimise congestion. Bus lanes also improve safety, as they reduce the likelihood of accidents between cars and pedestrians by removing cars and many other vehicles from the location. This is particularly important, for instance at railway stations, where there may be many pedestrians crossing the road to make their way between a bus stop and the station.

For bus users, confidence in the services comes from improved reliability as buses suffer fewer delays at pinch points – in turn, this encourages more people to use buses, which makes the whole bus network more sustainable for the long-term and reduces congestion caused by cars.

In some locations bus lanes are also used to stop rat-running and inappropriate short-cuts being used, giving local residents quieter, safer roads.

The aim is to maintain the reliability and attractiveness of the bus network, encourage more sustainable travel and help wider road network management and traffic flow.

### **What will the penalty be?**

The penalty in Essex for contravening a defined bus lane is a £60 fine. This is reduced to £30 if paid within 14 days. However it is increased to £90 if not paid within 28 days (correct as of May 2017).

ECC would far prefer to see no infringements of the bus gates and lanes and consequently no penalties levied.

### **8. Who is the enforcing authority?**

Essex County Council. People who have infringed a bus lane or gate will be sent a letter which is a Penalty Charge Notice, which will include photos as evidence. Video evidence will also be available.

### **9. How are the bus lanes/gates going to be enforced?**

Enforcement by Essex County Council is carried out through the use of unattended cameras – ANPR cameras (Automatic Number-Plate Recognition) for still pictures, and CCTV to provide video imagery. Cameras will be installed as each site is brought to readiness; the necessary road signs and road markings will also be checked, updated and added to as necessary.

### **10. Will buses carry enforcement cameras on-board?**

No. Fixed roadside still and video cameras are being used.

### **11. Are there any exemptions to the enforcement, for instance taxis or disabled drivers?**

Exempted classes of vehicle will vary according to the particular bus gate or lane and this will be signed locally as appropriate. Exempted vehicles will also be detailed in the Traffic Regulation Order published for each site.

Mobility scooters and powered wheelchairs are not permitted to drive in bus lanes. For more guidance go to GOV.UK's information on driving:

[www.gov.uk/mobility-scooters-and-powered-wheelchairs-rules/driving-on-the-road](http://www.gov.uk/mobility-scooters-and-powered-wheelchairs-rules/driving-on-the-road)

### **12. How many Essex bus lanes/gates are going to get this type of camera enforcement?**

The number of sites set to receive enhanced enforcement will be subject to survey to reveal the number of vehicles using the bus lane/bus gate illegally and other contributing factors used in the decision-making process.

### **13. What about emergency vehicles using the bus gates or lanes?**

Emergency vehicles are permitted to use the bus gates or lanes without hindrance or penalty. These provide reliable and faster routes for blue light services to respond to incidents.

**14. Will drivers be sent a penalty charge if they drive through a bus gate if it is being used as a diversion, for instance in an emergency?**

If planned works on the highway requires a diversion through a bus gate or bus lane, then the restriction and enforcement will be temporarily suspended.

If a police officer is directing traffic through the gate, for instance as an emergency unplanned diversion during an accident, then all traffic will be allowed through. In such cases a PCN may still be issued, but there will be a mitigating reason that can be represented during an appeal, if records show the route was being used as an official diversion.