

Meeting:	Decision Session for Executive Member for Transport
Meeting date:	22 April 2025
Report of:	Director of Environment, Transport and Planning
Portfolio of:	Cllr Ravilious, Executive Member for Transport

Decision Report: City Centre Sustainable Transport Corridor

Subject of Report

1. This report presents the Project Initiation Document (Annex A) for the City Centre Sustainable Transport Corridor and requests approval to proceed to public consultation on proposals for delivering improved bus journey time and reliability between York Rail Station and Stonebow/Tower Street (the corridor).
2. The City Centre Sustainable Transport Corridor is to be delivered using UK Government Bus Service Improvement Fund (BSIP) money. £2m is allocated from the City of York Council funding award with a further £200,000 from the York and North Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority Bus Grant funding for the 2025-26 financial year. The City Centre Sustainable Transport Corridor is a placeholder name only for the project.

Benefits and Challenges

3. Ensuring bus journeys are competitive with private cars from a journey time perspective is essential to encourage more people to travel using public transport and to reduce traffic congestion on our roads. More people using public transport more frequently significantly helps to reduce congestion; one double decker bus can remove up to 75 cars from the road.

4. Buses experience significant delays in central York. Bus operators have a requirement to meet traffic commissioner windows of tolerance 95% of the time with journeys being less than one minute early and up to 5 minutes late. Where there are regular delays, operators are required to amend their timetables accordingly, this creates longer journey times and results in buses waiting at timing point stops when they have had a clear run through a busy area. By removing delay to buses we can speed up journey times and make buses more reliable and attractive to residents and visitors alike.
5. Timeliness, incorporating punctuality, journey time and waiting time is the biggest determining factor between a good and a great bus journey¹. Buses need to be reliable for people to have sufficient confidence for them to be a genuine option for getting to work, attending appointments or going to sporting events, the theatre – anything with a defined start time. Reliable buses mean that people don't need to make allowances like getting an earlier bus to ensure they reach their destination on time, thereby significantly improving journey times and confidence in using the bus. More reliable services will result in more people using the bus.
6. Private vehicle movements significantly impact the central corridor between York Rail Station and Stonebow/Tower Street. Surveys undertaken show that over 7000 vehicles, not including buses, travel along the eastern section of Micklegate on a weekday between 7am and 7pm. Longer queues at traffic lights increase bus journey times and have wider operational impacts, such as buses not being able to turn right out of Coppergate when traffic is waiting at the pedestrian crossing on Low Ousegate.
7. The key challenge in this case is that space is constrained and there isn't sufficient room to install bus lanes; the approach that has been applied in many other parts of the city. Bus lanes on key approach routes to the city centre help bus services operate swiftly and effectively but they are still subject to significant delays in the city centre itself. A range of options to improve bus reliability and bus journey times are being considered by officers and WSP as principal designer on the project.

¹ Making great bus journeys Your Bus Journey survey – key driver analysis November 2024, Transport Focus

8. Improving bus journey times and reliability in York City Centre not only benefits local services but makes longer distance services more attractive and improves wider bus connectivity into the city. Coastliner services for example operate between Leeds and Scarborough/Whitby and incurring delays in the centre of York further increases the end-to-end journey times on the route.
9. Measures to improve bus journey times and reliability that seek to reduce traffic in the City Centre can support regeneration projects such as Castle Gateway and enable new opportunities to enhance public space within the city and create an improved environment for walking, wheelchair use, wheeling and cycling. Depending on the outcome of public consultation, new opportunities to enhance the environment, revive the economy and improve public realm on Micklegate could be possible. Additionally, there are opportunities for greater prioritisation of active travel along Skeldergate and North Street, and improved pedestrian linkage between the footstreets area and Micklegate,
10. The project, again, depending on feedback from the consultation, could enable footpaths to be widened, bus stops to be improved, new crossing points to be installed, green spaces to be created, collisions reduced and air quality on the corridor to improve.
11. The Council wants businesses in the city to thrive; addressing the issues identified in the paragraphs above is challenging, but by enabling access to the areas where people need to get to, ensuring delivery and servicing access to businesses is maintained but still improving the wider environment of York City Centre, there can be positives for businesses across the central corridor.

Policy Basis for Decision

12. The Council Plan has seven priorities; the City Centre Sustainable Transport Corridor will contribute towards the following priorities:
13. Health & Wellbeing. The project could have significant road safety benefits along the corridor as well as enabling more active travel and improving air quality.

14. Sustainability. Reducing bus journey times on the Rougier Street – Micklegate – Tower Street corridor will make bus travel more attractive, enabling a shift away from car use, which will in turn reduce congestion in the city. Mode shift towards public transport also strongly contributes towards reducing carbon emissions from transport and helps the Council meet its net zero target.
15. Economic. A safer environment for pedestrians, wheelchair users, wheelers and cyclists will help to connect the eastern and western sides of the river, linking the footstreets to Bishophill and increasing footfall on Micklegate and Tower Street.
16. The project is included within the Council's Local Transport Strategy and its accompanying implementation plan. Delivering bus journey time improvement within the City Centre is an integral part of the Council's BSIP and forms part of the programme of works agreed with the Department for Transport as part of the BSIP1 funding award.

Financial Strategy Implications

17. The cost of consulting on the project is covered within the Councils BSIP1 funding allocation from the UK Government. The cost of delivering a final project will be informed by the results of the consultation. £2m is allocated from the City of York Council BSIP1 funding award with a further £200,000 from the York and North Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority bus grant funding for the 2025-26 financial year. Initial design work is working to the £2.2m budget.

Recommendation and Reasons

18. **Recommendation One:** Approve the Project Initiation Document at Annex A.
19. **Reason:** To confirm the core objectives of the project and the parameters and scope to which officers will deliver the project to.
20. **Recommendation Two:** Approve the carrying out of a public consultation on a series of potential measures to reduce bus journey times, improve bus reliability on the Rougier Street – Micklegate – Tower Street corridor, and to improve walking, wheelchair user, wheeling and cycling infrastructure and delegate authority to the Director of Environment, Transport and Planning to finalise details of the design to form the basis of that public consultation.
21. **Reason:** To ensure the views of the public and stakeholders inform the final project design and to allow outline design work to be completed to form part of the public consultation.

Background

22. Making the buses run on time – tackling slow journeys, delays and unreliability is a core priority within the Council's adopted BSIP. The George Hudson Street – Micklegate – Ouse Bridge corridor is identified as being in the worst 20% congested routes on the First Group network within the BSIP. As well as being one of the most congested bus corridors in the city it is comfortably the busiest. 1079 buses a day travel across Ouse Bridge. The Council has committed, through the BSIP to develop City Centre bus priority proposals with bus operators. The Department for Transport subsequently allocated £2m to deliver city centre bus reliability improvements to the Council through the BSIP process.

23. The Local Transport Strategy (LTS) consultation (key points outlined in the consultation section of this report) provided a clear steer on transport priorities for people across York and beyond. There are ten objectives within the Local Transport Strategy, improving bus journey times and reliability plus enabling walking, wheelchair user, wheeling and cycling improvements contributes to all of them, in particular the following three;
- a) Improve the local environment by reducing air pollution and noise
 - b) Enhance the reliability of the transport system
 - c) Protect the city's heritage and enhance public spaces.
24. 88% of respondents to the LTS consultation agreed or strongly agreed with the vision for public transport, which is;
Improve Public Transport - we will improve public transport so that all areas of the city have good and reliable public transport access. Key to this will be extending the bus network, ensuring effective and reliable early and late services when people need them, and upgrading high frequency bus services – in some cases into bus rapid transit services or possibly light rail transit systems. We will also work to upgrade heavy rail services where they play a local role or support our other policies. Not only will this result in a 50% or greater increase in bus patronage by 2030, it will also enhance the viability of public transport and protect its future
25. There are a range of identified issues for bus operations along the Rail Station to Tower Street corridor that adversely impact upon bus reliability and journey times, these are;
- a) **Delays at traffic lights.** The three sets of traffic lights within 370m at Rougier Street/Station Rise, George Hudson Street/Micklegate and Lower Micklegate/Skeldergate/North Street delay buses travelling through the corridor.
 - b) **Tight turn at Low Ousegate.** The turn at the junction of High Ousegate and Low Ousegate is tight and the volume of vehicles navigating this area means buses often have to stop to let other vehicles through when the pedestrian crossing is not in operation.
 - c) **Right turn out of Coppergate.** The volume of vehicles using Clifford Street means that buses often struggle to exit Coppergate to make the right turn onto Clifford Street.
 - d) **Tower Street/Skeldergate Bridge Junction.** There is no current way for buses to turn here which results in buses

looping around Skeldergate and incurring delays exiting Skeldergate onto Skeldergate Bridge.

- e) **Constrained waiting areas.** Some bus stops on the corridor provide sub-standard waiting areas (i.e. no shelter, limited space) due to pavement width constraints.

26. Similarly, there are a range of identified issues along the corridor for pedestrians, wheelchair users, wheelers and cyclists, including;

- a) **Narrow pavements.** Some pavements along the corridor are narrower than ideal for the volume of users – in particular on Low Ousegate and Clifford Street.
- b) **Difficulty in crossing the road.** Through the Big Transport Conversation various points along the corridor were highlighted by respondents as being challenging to cross the road and requiring improvement. This was one of the major issues highlighted in the consultation.
- c) **North Street/Skeldergate.** North Street and Skeldergate are on road sections of the National Cycle Network and identified in the LCWIP as a key strategic active travel corridor; the road layout and environment is currently challenging, especially for less confident and disabled cyclists, and could be improved to enable more people to cycle along this strategic part of the cycle network.
- d) **Micklegate.** There is minimal cycling infrastructure along the length of Micklegate which is a key approach to the City Centre. There are opportunities to alter the road layout to improve public space and provide a safer environment for cyclists.

27. Based upon the strategic context and identified issues officers, with WSP as principal designer, have been working on design options to deliver bus reliability and journey time improvements and are also looking at wider opportunities along the corridor. These design options are now at a stage where initial conversations are being held with key stakeholder groups to help understand their views prior to any public consultation. It cannot be stated strongly enough that nothing has been confirmed with regards to the design and operation of this scheme at this point in the process and that the initial conversations that are being held will be used to inform final options to be put to public consultation. Public consultation will then inform final project designs.

28. Design work is progressing with the two following core principles in mind;
- a) Retain vehicle access to all existing parking spaces and loading bays.
 - b) Prioritise the movement of sustainable modes of travel and be led by our transport hierarchy.

Consultation Analysis

29. Extensive consultation into understanding existing issues and the future direction of transport in York was undertaken as part of our Big Transport Conversation in 2023/24. Reliability (buses arriving on time with space available) was the most commonly identified issue identified with the bus network by respondents. 72% of respondents agreed with the principle of providing more priority routes for buses and only 17% of respondents said that more bus priority would not lead them to use buses more.
30. Initial stakeholder conversations have begun to introduce the concept of bus reliability and journey time improvements on the Rougier Street – Micklegate – Tower Street corridor to groups across the city. The outcomes and information from these conversations will inform any project design(s) to be proposed as part of a public consultation.
31. This report seeks approval to undertake in depth public consultation to help shape the project. The outcomes from that public consultation will be reported to Executive along with a request to approve funding to deliver the project, should a satisfactory design be achievable, in due course.

Options Analysis and Evidential Basis

32. **Option 1** (Recommended) –Agree the proposed PID.
33. The proposed PID outlines basic project parameters including objectives and governance arrangements (Annex A).
34. **Option 2** – Amend and agree the proposed PID. Officers have not suggested any amendments as Annex A fits strategically with the funding allocated to the project but there is opportunity for the Executive Member to suggest changes should they be deemed necessary. The PID is a living document and can be amended to reflect changing project conditions if required.

35. Any option that does not include public consultation on is not recommended. The views of anyone who is interested in the proposals will be vital in shaping a final project design and to help the project team understand any issues that people or business may face as a result of any proposed project design.

Organisational Impact and Implications

36. The report has the following impacts and implications:

a) ***Financial***

The cost of the consultation is fully covered by the UK Government Bus Service Improvement Fund 1 award to the Council.

b) ***Human Resources (HR)***

There are no implications as a result of the recommendations in this report.

c) ***Legal***

The Council is under a duty contained in section 16 of the Traffic Management Act 2004 to manage its road network with a view to securing the expeditious movement of traffic on that network, so far as may be reasonably practicable while having regard to their other obligations, policies and objectives. This is called the network management duty and includes any actions the Council may take in performing that duty which contribute for securing the more efficient use of their road network or for the avoidance, elimination or reduction of road congestion (or other disruption to the movement of traffic) on their road network. It may involve the exercise of any power to regulate or coordinate the uses made of any road (or part of a road) in its road network.

In exercising functions under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, the Council must consider the criteria within Section 122 of that Act 1984 and, in particular, the duty to make decisions in accordance with s.122 so far as practicable having regard to the matters in s.122(2) to “secure the expeditious, convenient and safe movement of vehicular and other traffic (including pedestrians) and the provision of suitable and adequate parking facilities on and off the highway.

The matters set out in s.122(2) are:

- i. The desirability of securing and maintaining reasonable access to premises;
- ii. The effect on the amenities of any locality affected and the importance of regulating and restricting the use of roads by heavy commercial vehicles, so as to preserve or improve the amenities of the areas through which the roads run;
- iii. The strategy prepared under section 80 of the Environment Act 1995 (national air quality strategy);
- iv. The importance of facilitating the passage of public service vehicles and of securing the safety and convenience of persons using or desiring to use such vehicles; and,
- v. Any other matters appearing to the local authority to be relevant.

d) Procurement

No procurement is required to implement the recommendations of this report.

e) Health and Wellbeing

There are no implications as a result of the recommendations in this report.

f) Environment and Climate action

There are no implications as a result of the recommendations in this report.

g) Affordability

There are no implications as a result of the recommendations in this report.

h) Equalities and Human Rights

There are no implications as a result of the recommendations in this report. Information gathered as part of the proposed consultation will inform an Equality Impact Assessment.

i) **Data Protection and Privacy**

The data protection impact assessment (DPIAs) screening questions were completed for the recommendations and options in this report and as there is no personal, special categories or criminal offence data being processed to set these out, there is no requirement to complete a DPIA at this time. However, this will be reviewed following the approved recommendations and options from this report and a DPIA completed if required.

j) **Communications,**

This project will require significant communications work throughout, using already identified resource. The project team has been in regular contact with communications and engagement plans drawn up should this proceed to public consultation and towards implementation.

k) **Economy**

There are no implications as a result of the recommendations in this report.

Risks and Mitigations

37. At this stage in the project the main risk is reputational. Holding extensive conversations with key stakeholders and then moving into in depth public consultation will help the Council understand the views of people in the city and beyond and respond to them accordingly.

Wards Impacted

Guildhall Ward, and Micklegate Ward.

Contact details

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Background papers

City of York Council BSIP
City of York Council Local Transport Strategy
City of York Council Local Transport Strategy Implementation Plan

Annexes

- Annex A – City Centre Sustainable Corridor Project Initiation Document