

Council

15 December 2022

Report of the Executive Member for Transport

Bus Services and the Bus Service Improvement Plan

The first instalment of government funding to City of York Council has now been paid over.

The first meeting of the Enhanced Partnership stakeholder forum has taken place, and been given an assurance that the Operational Board will publish agendas and minutes to provide transparency of decisions that are being taken on behalf of the Partnership. At the inaugural meeting of the stakeholder group it was agreed that we intend to build strong links with the various operational sub-groups that cover issue such as ticketing, punctuality, stop infrastructure, and routes. We also wish to find ways to ensure that a broad spectrum of local people can be involved, including York Bus Forum, Disability Forum, student representatives, parish councils, businesses etc.

The challenges facing bus operators have been well aired recently, with patronage still down on pre-covid, costs of fuel and drivers significantly higher and congestion made worse by peak leisure use of private cars particularly in York city centre in recent weeks with major impacts on journey times. Many of the proposed BSIP Enhanced Partnership measures are designed to improve accessibility both in terms of physical access and information. The plans for example also include a feasibility study of a new city centre shuttle service and provision of audio-visual announcements on buses and at bus stops. Plans are being made in the New Year for resident input on the nature of a trial shuttle service.

A paper on measures to 'stabilise' the local bus network is being discussed by the Executive on the same day as this council meeting, with a proposed approach to aim to minimise route losses through judicious use of extra funding support available through BSIP. As recently reported, this approach has enabled a reprieve to service cuts that were announced from this week for the 412 Wetherby to York (via Rufforth and Tockwith) service and the Saturday no 13 services from Haxby to York and Copmanthorpe. The move will cost £18,500 for the 6 months until March but hopefully 'buy time' for use levels to recover. BSIP funds are earmarked for discounted youth fares, tap on – tap off

fare savings, and other improvements to passenger experience but clearly maintaining and enhancing existing services is a crucial goal that has to come first. The current £770k budget for supported services will face significant challenge in the face of increased operator costs and continuing driver shortages. These are all aspects where operators, the council and the EP stakeholder forum will need to work together as much as possible to help us to achieve the 'Bus Back Better' ambition.

City centre issues

In order to respond to the post covid changes in travel patterns, a bus network study has been commissioned to consider how best to optimise access to public transport and minimise costs and delays. The outcome of this will be a key element of our Transport Strategy and help to shape projects such as the Castle Gateway programme and changes that might be needed to prioritise bus movements on key corridors. Some decisions have to be progressed in the meantime – Coppergate changes and the proposed crossing from St George's Fields car park over the inner ring road are on the Executive Member Decision Session agenda for Dec 13th as small but important contributions towards reducing the hostile pedestrian environment that is still far too dominant at the edges of our city centre. The changes to café licences are also on the agenda for this meeting, as an important commitment to better accessibility as a standard, meeting the recommendations of the new Access Officer who we have recently appointed.

Active Travel

At the November Executive Meeting some difficult decisions had to be taken on the most strategic approach to taking forward the ambitious Active Travel Programme. In part this was a consequence of seeking to provide quality permanent routes along corridors which had originally been identified as possible short term covid recovery measures. Having completely reviewed scoping documents and priorities in February this year, the outcome of high level feasibility work suggested £36m worth of programme with an available budget of £2.1m, alongside the additional £1.4m Transforming Cities funding for Tadcaster Rd (which will be going ahead in 2023). In addition to small schemes such as Navigation Rd which is now in place, the package moving forward to delivery will be schemes that have progressed as funding is secured. On this basis the Crossing from St George's Field over the inner ring road and the 'missing link' on the university routes can progress but larger projects need to secure further funding before they can be delivered.

As Active Travel England become established with their HQ in York it is very much expected that they will be able to support City of York as a 'test bed' for solutions that provide quality walking and cycling routes in a compact historic city like York. I am keen to work closely with them to adopt the best approach to develop a long term plan that will build on our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan to be adopted next year. As an example of the sort of improvements that are possible with some imagination, I would point to the recently completed Barbican Rd Traffic Signal Renewal work, where new pedestrian and cycle crossings have been incorporated, a left turn cycle lane created and advance stop box and green signal phase for cycles approaching Walmgate from Barbican Rd. This has transformed an area which was previously extremely hostile for cyclists, while also improving provision for pedestrians. Depending on the outcome of consultation, similar changes could soon be made on Hospital Fields Rd to join up the off road university cycle/ pedestrian route through the Barracks site to the riverside paths and Millennium Bridge.

At the same time further design work is being done to provide 'people friendly' environments outside some of our schools, starting with Ostman Rd (Carr Junior) and also Badger Hill and Clifton Green. I would love to be able to address the challenges outside every school, but these are the ones who have worked with Sustrans and City of York Council in recent years to find workable solutions for their specific location and needs.

Climate Change

This year we experienced record summer temperatures following near record floods in February – all part of a pattern of more extreme weather which will get worse as our emissions continue to rise. In 2019 York adopted a policy to follow scientists advice on the need to limit global temperature rise to 1.5degrees by 2030 and thus to aim for zero carbon by that date. Our draft climate change strategy recognises that Transport (mostly from private cars) represents some 27% of our total emissions and unlike the other sources, has barely declined at all in the last decade. In order to meet our target, emissions from Transport would need to be cut by 71%. While everyone is much more aware of the financial cost of energy to heat their homes compared to 12 months ago, switching from driving to other forms of transport is for most people something that could improve their health relatively easily. Even finding ways to share car use, or use shared mobility options such as scooters, taxis and hire cars could cut costs and emissions. These will be a key

focus for us to deliver our Transport Strategy, working with people on solutions that are right for their circumstances not 'lecturing them' on what they should be changing. Even though we don't yet have the government guidance on LTP4, our own commitments and what we know about national transport policy makes clear that active travel and public transport will be key elements that must be made more accessible, efficient and attractive in a very short space of time.