

---

**Decision Session  
– Executive Member for City Strategy**

**7 September 2010**

Report of the Director of City Strategy

**Bus fares and service levels in York**

**Summary**

1. This report is written in response to a petition received from Cllr. Alexander requesting a freeze in First York bus fares, an end to First York bus service cuts and a review of outer York bus services to ensure that all villages have sufficient access to bus routes. The report concludes that whilst effort is made by the Council to attempt to influence the first two areas, it is only the third over which the Council currently has any level of control. The Council reviews its levels of socially necessary (i.e., not commercially viable) bus provision on a regular basis and plans to carry out a further review prior to the forthcoming tender round that will take place in 2011.

**Recommendations**

2. The Executive Member is asked to note the contents of this report and to:
  - 1) Support the work currently being undertaken to encourage and sustain commercial bus services with realistic fares on York's bus network.
  - 2) Agree to a review of the network of subsidised bus services provided across York prior to the re-tendering of services in Autumn 2011.
3. Reason: The vast majority of contracts for York's tendered bus network expire at the end of August 2011. It is within the context of this tendering round that any changes to the existing bus network would best be considered for the delivery of a sustainable, attractive bus network to be achieved.

**Background**

4. A petition was received by City of York Council from Cllr. James Alexander in early 2010 containing 529 signatures. A copy of the accompanying letter to the petition can be found at Annex A to this report.
5. The first two requests petitioned for are targeted solely at First York, which company currently provides approximately 75% of the operated bus mileage in the Authority area. They are as follows:
  - a. A freeze in First York bus fares until June 2011.

- b. An end to all First York bus cuts.
6. Since the submission of this petition there have been further developments on both items, with a fares increase and cuts to commercially operated bus routes being implemented in July/August 2010.
  7. The Council has written to First Group to request a formal response to the contents of this petition. The detail of which is outlined in the 'Consultation' section of this document at paragraph 19.
  8. The third request petitioned for has a wider implication and calls for:
    - c. A review of all bus services to ensure that villages in outer York have sufficient access to bus routes.
  9. This is the only element of the petition over which the Council currently has any direct control.
  10. The York bus network is made up of two distinct groups of service. Firstly those which operate on a commercial footing (without control or direct financial subsidy from the local authority) and, secondly, where commercial services don't exist and a need is identified for the Council to procure services at specified frequencies and standards.
  11. The Council currently spends c. £750,000 per annum on local bus service provision in York. A significant proportion of this expenditure goes toward the provision of bus services linking the villages of the York Outer constituency to the City Centre. The following table details the services and frequencies of bus routes in a number of the villages and indicates whether the routes operate on a commercial or semi-commercial basis. A number of the services listed below, and identified by an asterisk, are either partially or entirely subsidised by either North Yorkshire or East Riding of Yorkshire Council's.

**Table 1**

<b>Village</b>	<b>Supported service</b>	<b>Commercial service</b>	<b>Combined weekday, daytime frequency</b>
Acaster Malbis	21(*)	Nil	Every 120 mins
Askham Bryan/Richard	37(*)	Nil	3 per day
Bishopthorpe	21(*), 11 (eve & sun)	11 (day Mon – Sat)	At least every 30mins
Copmanthorpe	13 (sun & part of route)	13, Coastliner	At least every 30 mins
Dunnington		10	At least every 30 mins
Elvington	36, 195(*)		Every 120 mins

Haxby/Wigginton	12 (eve & sun), 20	1, 12 (day Mon – Sat)	Every 10 mins
Murton	747(*)		3 per day
Naburn	42(*)		Every 60 mins
Poppleton	20	10	At least every 30 mins
Rufforth	412/413(*)		Every 60 mins
Skelton	22		Every 60 mins
Stockton on the Forest		Coastliner	Every 30 mins
Strensall		5	Every 20 mins
Wheldrake	35(*), 36		Every 60 mins

12. With a small number of exceptions, most of which lie on or near to main roads linking York to major conurbations, the vast majority of outlying villages receiving a frequent, often commercial, bus service are those with higher population levels.
13. The Council has a duty to provide bus services where none are provided commercially and where a need is identified. In terms of its role with commercial bus operations, the Council works with all of the bus operators under the umbrella of the Quality Bus Partnership (QBP). This is a voluntary partnership with representatives from all of York's bus operators, representatives from North Yorkshire Police, Bus Users UK and the Confederation for Passenger Transport. Further, the Council meets regularly with bus operators on an individual basis to discuss commercially sensitive issues and operational matters that concern only them.
14. Prior to the Transport Act of 1985 bus services in York and across the United Kingdom were largely operated by publicly owned bus operators in a regulated environment. On 17<sup>th</sup> November 2009 the Council's Executive considered a report to introduce a Quality Contract Scheme following a full Council request for it to take up the powers outlined in the Local Transport Act 2008.
15. The motion proposed at Full Council did not seek a 're-nationalisation' of bus services but rather sought to address the issue of re-regulation through the introduction of a Quality Contract Scheme. The cost, complication and lack of clarity as to how a scheme might be taken forward (not to mention the absence of a scheme having been introduced anywhere else in the UK – a situation which still exists) resulted in the Executive deciding not to move forward with a Quality Contract at this stage. The Executive did, however agree to consider a trial statutory Quality Partnership on the A59 corridor and surrounds which was possibly to form a part of the new park and ride service.

16. The current economic pressures make it even less likely that a Quality Contract Scheme might be pursued at this time. To this end the only way in which the Council can address the first two requests of the petition are through forging and retaining good relationships with bus operators and by providing an operating environment that makes bus travel attractive.
17. In addition to the requests contained in the petition, Councillor Alexander also raises a number of supplementary matters in his covering letter as follows:

**Reduction in fare paying patronage**

*'In response to rising bus fares, the number of paying passengers reduced by just under 14% during the period 2005/6 – 2007/8...from approximately 11m to 9.5m.'*

18. The figures reported by the Council in performance indicators are provided by bus operators. Table 2 below shows the total number of journeys made by public transport in 2009/10 against the previous two years. Whilst these figures include concessionary as well as fare paying journeys, they demonstrate that whilst the number of bus journeys being made is not growing, neither is it dramatically declining.

**Table 2**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Patronage</b>
2007/08	14,853,143
2008/09	15,334,448
2009/10	14,774,792

19. Over the period 2008 – 2010, the number of fare paying passengers in York will have reduced as a proportion of the whole as a result of the expansion of the concessionary fares scheme from local to national use and therefore an increase in the number of concessionary journeys being made (this is particularly noticeable on York's park & ride service with a larger number of visitors from other parts of the UK than on local bus services).

**Reduction in passenger satisfaction**

*'In 2003/4, 29% of people were not satisfied with local bus services. This number has risen to 32% in 2007/8.'*

20. The figure of 32% for 2007/8 includes those indicating that they were **neither satisfied nor dissatisfied** with the local bus service overall. Those responses indicating that are fairly or very dissatisfied total 17%, whilst those stating that they are fairly or very satisfied total 68%. Whilst this latter figure is slightly lower than that for 2006 (71%), when considered with that for 2003 (67%), the overall satisfaction level has risen dramatically since 2000, when a satisfaction level of just 48% was achieved, and York now falls within the top percentile of all

Unitary Authorities, where the average satisfaction level is only 57%. However, it is recognised that these figures do fall somewhat short of those published by Passenger Focus, where the average figures for overall satisfaction, obtained from a varied, representative sample of operational areas across England were 79% (Bus Mystery Traveller Survey 2009/10 – sample 4800 journeys from six PTE and three urban areas) and 88% (Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey 2009/10 - sample 18500 passengers from 14 metropolitan, urban and rural areas). Therefore it is accepted that there needs to be continuing focus and investment in York's bus network in order to achieve satisfaction levels comparable to those attained elsewhere.

### **Reduction in bus punctuality**

*'Performance Indicators show that under 32% of buses leaving the city in the morning leave on time. Only 25% of buses are on time at timing points along service routes.'*

21. The figures outlined above reflect the lowest performance data from surveys undertaken in 2006/7 and only represent those services leaving the city classed as 'low frequency' which in York refers to routes operating at a frequency of every 15 minutes or less. Figures reported at the same time showed that for low frequency services running in to the city, 68% of buses departed on time.
22. In 2009/10, the overall number of low frequency bus services running on time stood at 67%. The survey data collected by the Council only provides a snapshot of how services are performing on any given day and are currently collected by roadside staff. For 2010/11, the roadside surveys will be cross referenced with real time data, recorded for every journey made by equipped buses in York (all First Group, Transdev York/Coastliner, EYMS and Arriva buses are fitted with the necessary radio/GPRS kit). This will provide the Council with a far better representation of how punctual buses are throughout the year.

### **Consultation**

23. A request was sent to all of the councillors for York Outer to seek their opinions on the level of bus service to villages in their wards. They were asked whether they would like immediate consideration to be given to the level of service provision or whether this should take place as part of the tender process? Their responses are contained in Annex B.
24. First Group were consulted on the contents of the petition. The following response was received from Richard Harris, Commercial Director First West & North Yorkshire on 16 August.
  - a. With regard to a freeze on First bus fare increases:  
*'Unfortunately due to rising costs bus fares were increased in July, however fares on City services had not increased prior to July for 18 months. We are open about and publicise our price increases, in comparison to supermarkets who do not publicise increases, and we also limit the number of occasions when prices are changed. Our costs are increased by traffic congestion making journeys take longer to*

*complete and the only way this can be addressed is through the introduction of bus priority measures and we would look to work in partnership with local authorities to achieve this.'*

- b. With regard to an end to all First York bus cuts:  
*'We have to monitor the demand for our services and make adjustments to meet it if it changes, running virtually empty buses does not help anyone. It does not help the environment nor does it help to keep fare levels down. However we will put service resources back into the network where we can identify the potential to grow the market.'*
- c. With regard to a review of all bus services to ensure that villages in outer York have sufficient access to bus routes:  
*'It is not for First to try to determine what the levels of access should be, we are committed to providing a quality service that is sustainable and profitable, and it is for local authorities to determine whether access levels need to be enhanced further through financially supporting other forms of transport provision.'*

## **Options**

- 25. The following options are presented for the Executive Member's consideration:
  - a. Undertake an immediate review of the bus network in York Outer to establish areas with unsatisfactory access to bus services and ensure that all villages within the constituency receive a minimum level of service.
  - b. Take no action, accepting that the existing situation is as good a level of service as can be provided within the existing budgetary restrictions.
  - c. Approve a review of the subsidised network of bus services prior to the expiry of contracts for a majority of these services and the concurrent tendering process in 2011.

## **Analysis**

### ***Option A***

- 26. A brief examination would appear to reveal that a majority of the villages in the York Outer constituency receive a satisfactory level of public bus service, commensurate with population size and bus patronage. All bus services in York provided with Council subsidy are surveyed annually as a minimum standard. The surveys feed in to the tender process and changes to the route/frequency or existence of services are considered at the point at which the contract is approaching its end date.
- 27. The exception to this rule is if patronage on a given bus service is particularly poor and it is not providing value for money. In this instance, a service will be comprehensively surveyed, local residents consulted and a decision will be

brought to the Executive Member to determine the future of the service (as recently occurred with both services 21 and 55).

28. Equally, where a group of residents are of the opinion that the level of service to an area is unsatisfactory and choose to bring the matter to the Council (by way of a petition or significant correspondence), the Council will consider what it might be able to do to improve the level of service (budgetary limitations permitting).
29. Whilst a review may be desirable, a lack of detail concerning which villages or areas feel that they are not being adequately provided for in the context of bus services would make this a difficult exercise to complete outside the context of the complete portfolio of Council subsidised bus services.

### ***Option B***

30. The Council makes every effort to ensure that our subsidised local bus surveys provide value for money and, wherever possible, to ensure that all York residents are within easy reach of a local bus service. There are exceptions where this is not possible, all of which are within largely rural areas. In these areas, the Council's 'Dial & Ride' service is strongly publicised to ensure that, for those with no access to private transport, they are aware that there is a service linking them to the City Centre and the out of town retail centres.
31. Within the existing budgetary limitations, services will have to be removed from one area to provide for another. It would therefore not be possible to review service levels in one area without considering the whole of the subsidised bus network. This would best be achieved in the formulation of the 2011 tendering package.

### ***Option C***

32. In the design of bus tenders in 2011, consideration will be given to how well each route has performed over the life of its previous contract. The result will be that some of the routes cease to exist in their current form, others will continue unchanged and yet more will be new routes, incorporating changes requested by residents or suggested by Council officers or bus operators.
33. This is the best context, with a full appreciation of the budget available to support the resulting bus services, in which to review the levels of provision to each area of York.
34. Carrying out a review of supported services to York Outer in isolation cannot happen, as most the routes serving villages also serve areas closer to the City Centre en route to their final destination.

### **Corporate Objectives**

35. The recommendation meets the Council's objectives of encouraging use of public transport and reducing the number of private car journeys made into the City and additionally meets the requirements to procure non-commercial services in the most cost effective and favourable manner.

## Implications

- **Financial** – The review of bus services would be undertaken using existing Council resource whether in 2010 or 2011.
- **Human Resources (HR)** - none
- **Equalities** - none
- **Legal** - none
- **Crime and Disorder** - none
- **Information Technology (IT)** - none
- **Property** - none

## Risk Management

36. The risk of undertaking a review of subsidised local bus services is very low. The outcome of such a review would be reported back to a further Council meeting. It is only at this point, when the future of any bus services might be considered, that the risk management score might increase.
37. The above risk and any other potential risks associated with the introduction of the taxi card have been measured in terms of impact and likelihood using the Council's risk management system. The risk score for the recommendation is less than 16 and thus, in line with the risk management system, at this point the risks need only to be monitored, as they do not provide a real threat to the achievement of the objectives of this report.

## Contact Details

**Author:**

**Andrew Bradley**  
**Principal Transport Planner**  
**(Operations)**  
**Transport Planning**  
Tel No. 1404

**Chief Officer Responsible for the report:**

Richard Wood  
Assistant Director (City Development &  
Transport)  
City Strategy

**Report Approved**  **Date** 16.08.2010

**Specialist Implications Officer(s)** *List information for all*

Implication: Financial  
Name: Patrick Looker  
Title: Finance Manager  
Tel No: 1633

**Wards Affected:** *Bishopthorpe, Rural West York, Dringhouses & Woodthorpe, Skelton, Rawcliffe & Clifton Without, Huntington & New Earswick, Haxby & Wigginton, Heworth Without, Osbaldwick, Heslington, Wheldrake, Derwent, Strensall, Fulford*

**All**

**For further information please contact the author of the report**



**Background Papers**

None

**Annexes**

Annex A – Letter accompanying the petition

Annex B – Response from Ward Members