

Annex B - Park and Ride Review

1. A comprehensive study concerning how the value of York's Park & Ride network might be maximised and sustained was undertaken by the Council's Sustainable Transport Manager over a six month period from September 2014 – February 2015. The study sought to answer two key questions
 - a) How the York P&R will deliver the best possible service for potential and existing customers; and
 - b) How (the York) P&R should be operated over the years to come so that it is self financing and not a burden to the taxpayer.
2. The study contained two elements
 - surveys of York P&R and non-P&R users; and
 - interviews undertaken with representatives from local authority bodies operating P&R's elsewhere in England.
3. The general conclusion resulting from the study was that performance of the Park & Ride was good and that the services were well used. However there was a view that to further enhance the sustainable operation of the service, continued consideration needed to be given to
 - the relationship between the cost of city centre parking and the Park & Ride service;
 - the operating hours of both the Park & Ride sites and bus services ;
 - the importance of key elements of the Park & Ride service, which could be deemed as 'optional extras', but were actually deemed very important by users (e.g. CCTV and toilet facilities at the Park & Ride car parks;

Park and Ride User Survey

4. 600 surveys were issued on board buses on all six of the York P&R routes. 507 completed surveys were returned. The surveys were undertaken on weekdays in December and January 2014/15. Every passenger on board the buses surveyed was given the opportunity to participate in the survey. To avoid seeing the same people twice, no journey on any given route was surveyed more than once and the completed surveys were gathered from a range of days and times. Surveys were distributed until a minimum of 50 completed surveys had been collected for each site/ route.
5. Surveys were completed by passengers boarding at the P&R sites, at intermediate stops on the way into / out of York and from stops in York city centre. Surveys were completed on every P&R route to establish which findings were applicable across the P&R network as a whole and which findings only related to specific P&R sites or P&R bus services.

6. The following headline information came out of the Park and Ride user survey (Previous survey in 2007 in brackets):
- i.* 98(86)% of travellers were either very satisfied or satisfied with the the Park & Ride service they used with the remaining 2% stating that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the quality of the service..
 - ii.* 40(32)% of park and ride users commenced their journey from within the City of York Council area with Monks Cross attracting a greater proportion of local users (60%)..
 - iii.* 70(60)% of respondents indicated that convenience was the main reason they used the service while 44% stated that used the service because of the cost of city centre car parking.
 - iv.* Of those who had boarded at the P&R sites, 91% of those surveyed had either driven or had been a passenger in car that had parked at the site. The remainder had walked (8%) or cycled (1%).
 - v.* 55(43)% of all survey respondents were travelling alone although this increased to over 85% for journeys made before 0900 and then dropped throughout the morning to a low of 33% for surveys undertaking in the 1130-1200 window..
 - vi.* The primary purpose of 52 (49)%% of passengers was to travel to the city centre for a shopping or leisure activity. 42(40)% of passengers were travelling to work. The remaining 8% of passengers were using the service to access education.
 - vii.* 6% of travellers were using the service for the first time and 47% used it more than twice a week.
 - viii.* 82 (87)% of passengers stated a preference for articulated (bendy) single deck buses if capacity had to be increased (rather than double-deck buses).
 - ix.* When asked, 36% of passengers considered later P&R bus services to be very important, with 24% citing this as the most significant improvement which could be made to the service.

Review of Other Park and Ride Operations

7. A review of six other English park and ride operations indicates that York has one of the largest and most successful park and ride operations.
8. The review identified four specific areas for consideration which are summarised here.

Structure of tendering model

9. All of the local authorities benchmarked in this review had a single operator for their Park & Ride network. The exception being Norfolk, who currently have two bus operators. Following a recent tendering exercise, however, they too are moving to a single supplier.
10. Five of the six local authorities had undertaken a tendering exercise to secure their Park & Ride operator. The exception was Oxford, whose Park & Ride is operated on an entirely 'commercial' basis, without the existence of any contract. This means that, although the councils involved do not pay for their Park & Ride service, they do not receive any income from the operator either.
11. Subsidy is currently paid to Park & Ride operators in four of the six operating areas. The exceptions, in common with York, were Oxford and Bath where either no subsidy was paid, or payment was made to the local authority by the operator.

Ticketing

12. The majority of park and ride services make a charge for bus travel. Of the Park & Ride operating areas benchmarked, only Oxford / Oxfordshire made a charge for parking in addition to the fare collected on the bus. Although not forming part of the study, Cambridgeshire has recently introduced charged for parking (in addition to the bus fare). This is widely reported to have had a negative impact on passenger numbers. Norfolk used to charge for parking but have moved to a pay-on-bus arrangement.
13. Bath and Chester both expressed the view that the Park & Ride user being required to pay twice was both cumbersome and could have a negative impact on patronage.
14. In York, a single fare is levied per-passenger although up to two children may travel for free with a fare-paying adult. In 2013, First introduced a network-wide (off-peak) commercial ticket entitling any four persons to travel for the price of two adults. Other Park & Ride operations allow a discount for groups of passengers, for instance Nottingham. Care must be given, however, to the impact that such discounting would have on the viability of the Park & Ride.

'Green' Buses

15. In the past 18 months, First has introduced fully electric buses on to both Poppleton Bar and Monks Cross Park & Ride services. The technology is comparatively in its infancy. The business case, however, is built on the fact that the lower cost of powering the vehicle over the life of the vehicle will easily outweigh the additional capital investment required to purchase the electric vehicles.
16. Of the benchmarked local authorities, Reading and Nottingham either already have, or will shortly have, fully electric or compressed natural gas (CNG) buses providing their Park & Ride services. Oxfordshire and Bath both use diesel-

electric hybrid vehicles and Norfolk and Chester both use diesel buses. In spite of the potential operating savings for the operator resulting from the use of fully electric or CNG buses, a number of commissioning local authorities were hesitant to specify either type in their tenders for fear that the cost would make the whole operation prohibitively expensive. In common with York's electric bus fleet, central Government grant funding has been crucial to the delivery of low emission vehicles in the benchmarked P&R towns and cities and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future.

Evening services / overnight parking

17. The benchmarking exercise with other P&R operating areas did not identify a consistent offer concerning the provision either of evening services or overnight parking. Oxford, however, operated P&R services late into the evening and permitted overnight parking and Bath targeted enhanced evening (or indeed early morning) services during key events or festivals.
18. Analysis of the data gathered from the York P&R user and general travel surveys suggests a significant potential demand for later evening P&R bus services. Although attractive, the business case for introducing later services would require detailed consideration and York does, already, provide enhanced evening services for certain events (e.g. for the Christmas period and during the 'Illuminating York' festival).
19. If later evening services are not possible to introduce at this stage, it may be that following Bath's model of relaxing the restrictions on evening parking and allowing people to return to the sites by taxi or, if applicable, later evening bus services running nearby, would be an alternative first step. Such a move would require changes to the existing operational arrangements.
20. In terms of overnight parking, there are two factors which need to be considered. The P&R user surveys identified that overnight parking would be a welcome addition. This view was held more strongly by users of some sites than by others. To this end, any move to implement overnight parking should be targeted at specific sites rather than network-wide. Good publicity and signage would be required to ensure that P&R users are clear as to which sites offer overnight parking and what responsibility (if any) would be taken for cars left in the sites overnight. Secondly, consideration must be given to whether or not a parking charge will be introduced at the sites.
21. The evidence from the benchmarking studies suggests that retaining a single charge enhances the attractiveness and simplicity of the P&R offer. To this end, it would seem desirable to maintain free parking for the daytime period. Consideration would need, therefore, to be given to the level of control over parking overnight that is required. Unfettered night-time parking could result in vehicles being left in the site, taking up spaces, for days if not weeks at a time. If York were to allow overnight parking at some or all of its sites, it would appear necessary to charge to protect against misuse.

Conclusion - simplicity for the Park and Ride user

22. York benefits from having a comparatively easy to use Park & Ride service. Identified across the benchmarking exercise was that where Park & Ride was confusing or difficult to use, its economic viability would be hampered. In addition to the complexity of having to pay twice for the service, specific examples of unclear customer practice arising from the review of other operating areas included.
- A lack of at-stop timetable information advising, amongst other things, of the time of the last bus.
 - Buses leaving from stops on different sides of a road from a P&R site, both heading to the urban centre but with no information advising at which stop the next bus would arrive.
 - Buses with the same route number travelling to different P&R sites
 - P&R users not being able to get their cars out of the P&R site without having to pay a significant charge if they had missed the last bus.
23. In Summary, irrespective of any additional measures introduced to enhance the potential viability of the service, the continued success of the Park and Ride in York is dependent on its continued simplicity and convenience for the user.