

Executive

16 March 2023

Report of the Director of Transport, Environment
and Planning
Portfolio of the Executive Member for Transport

Update on local bus services

Summary

1. Bus service operation has been extremely challenged nationally during and since the covid pandemic. Levels of patronage as well as significant rises in operating costs and national driver shortage have all impacted the operations since the pandemic. Whilst this continues to be evident in York, the impact has not been as severe as many other places.
2. These pressures manifest themselves as challenges in the commercial viability of services.
3. The government has provided significant financial support in response to COVID to the bus industry, also recently announcing the latest short term extension to that support to June 2023. This however is likely to only provide short term relief to the immediate pressure facing the bus network.
4. In responding to these challenges, in December 2022 Executive made decisions to support local bus services in the short term, by approving emergency subsidy in a bid to maintain the bus network where possible, as well as review frequency of bus services to maintain the network, work with bus operators on the driver recruitment challenge and seek to open park and ride for Easter 2023. These actions are designed to facilitate future growth.
5. This report updates the Executive on actions taken in response to those decisions and details future plans to stabilise, improve and grow the local bus network.
6. By stabilising the network against this challenging backdrop, it sets a foundation to grow patronage, grow the network and maintain the objective

to enhance the network within York's Bus Service Improvement Plan. City of York Council has been working with a range of stakeholders in the bus industry to develop services in the city in the longer term.

7. Officers have completed all actions in relation to securing the DfT BSIP funding for 2022/23 and 2023/24

Recommendations

8. The Executive is recommended to:
 - a) note that the short term bus subsidy for services 12, 13 and 412 funded through BSIP has saved the network extent.
 - b) To note that as per the Executive Decision in December 2022 the Director of Transport, Environment and Planning (in consultation with the Leader of the Council, Executive Member for Transport and the Director of Governance, Section 151 Officer or their delegated officers) has delegation to award the long terms contracts for the 12, 13 and 412 using BSIP funding.
 - c) To note that Poppleton Park and Ride will open at the start of the school Easter Holidays on the 1st of April with support from BSIP funding.
 - d) To delegate to the Director of Environment, Transport and Planning the authority to vary the park and ride and contract against contractual obligations for the purpose of stabilising the wider bus network.

Reason: To ensure that the Bus Network in York is stabilised and that the council can work with the statutory Enhanced Bus Partnership to deliver its stated Bus Service Improvement Plans objectives in line with the National Bus Strategy.

Background

9. Prior to the covid pandemic, York's bus services carried approximately 16 million passengers a year, with a steady increase in passenger volumes since 2014. The number of passengers carried at the moment is around

85% of pre-covid volume, at a time when service operating costs have increased, which means York's bus services now:

- Carries around 40,000 passengers a day
- Fulfils around 10% of all journeys in the city, and around 30% of all journeys to the city centre
- Costs approximately £70,000 a day to operate
- Employs around 500 people

10. Short term Subsidised bus service contracts have been let for the services 412, 12 and 13 services and the network maintained. Longer term contracts for these services have been tendered and submissions received for all services for commencement on 31 March 2023. As per the delegation officers are currently reviewing those tenders and will make a decision shortly.
11. City of York Council has been successful in securing funding to develop the bus network. Zero emissions bus grants of £11.3m have been awarded in the last 12 months. The council was also successful in attracting £17.5m funding through central government's National Bus Strategy
12. Though the Local Plan process a series of network enhancements have been identified to support new developments in York. It has also begun the process of supporting York's Dial a Ride service, operated by York Wheels.
13. A successful engagement event in January has been undertaken as part of a study to introduce a city centre shuttle.
14. Improvements to York's bus network are also important elements of a number of major projects in York, particularly York Station Frontage, Castle Gateway and York Central. Improvements to the junctions on the A1237, as part of the York Outer Ring Road upgrade will also improve bus services which cross the A1237 on Shipton Road, Wigginton Road, Haxby Road and Huntington Road. The Council has also been considering measures to upgrade bus routes and facilities in York city centre. Initially part of the Castle Gateway programme, securing funds for the Bus Service Improvement Plan has allowed this work to be accelerated.

15. The driver recruitment has improved but all operators are not yet at full establishment. Significant recruitment drive is in progress and some operators are reporting an improved situation.
16. York's Bus Quality Partnership, which has existed for 20 years, has been converted into an Enhanced Partnership – something which brings new expertise into the partnership and enhances the way the Council, bus operators and other stakeholders work together to improve the network for the benefit of its users and enabled the access to the significant government funding.
17. This report considers these developments, providing an update where appropriate.
18. The budget approved by Council includes £100k to incentivise the use of public transport locally to ensure the local bus network can be maintained. This spend is to be discussed with the Enhanced Bus Partnership.

Bus Service Improvement Plan

19. In April 2022 City of York Council was given an indicative allocation of £17.4m for enhancing York's bus network which will be delivered through the Enhanced Bus Partnership. This funding comprised capital funding of £10.7m and revenue funding of £6.7m. The grant for the first year (£4.6m) was paid to CYC in November 2022, at which point CYC mobilised to deliver the programme. Key elements of the programme are:
 - Upgrading York's park and ride sites to provide a wider range of services, including providing opportunities to provide a wider range of bus and coach services, park overnight, pick up e-bikes and e-scooters for onward travel and greater numbers of cycle lockers.
 - Improved bus priorities on high frequency bus routes/ in the city centre
 - Improvements to real time information systems across York
 - A range of reduced fares, targeted to younger people and those who may be suffering hardship but are not covered by existing concessionary fares schemes
 - Introducing an all-operator tap-on-tap-off ticketing system – potentially also allowing reduced price travel across the York boundary into North Yorkshire/ the East Riding of Yorkshire

- Enhancements to bus networks – more routes, greater frequencies
 - Travel behaviour change campaigns to encourage greater use of sustainable modes, including buses.
20. Work to date has been around defining a clear programme and spend profile over the delivery period to the end of March 2025, then agreeing this with DfT.
 21. The proposed delivery programme forms Annex A to this report. York's Bus Service Improvement Plan has already been through a Decision process Executive in December 2022 and individual schemes in the programme will also be subject to further consultations and Decisions as they are progressed.
 22. Consequently, at this stage the Executive is asked to note the proposed programme and delivery timescales for the various elements of the programme. Progress on individual elements of the programme is given below.

Bus Support

23. The funding challenge continues locally and nationally. Operators have been withdrawing services which are no longer financially viable. Government support has been announced to continue until June 2023.
24. The York Bus Network has been affected by decreased passenger numbers both on the Park & Ride and wider network with a 20% reduction in passengers compared to pre COVID.
25. Operators are also experiencing rising operating costs in terms of fuel with increases averaging 38% and staff costs increasing on average by 28%.
26. There are national and local driver shortages. The pool of drivers in York is very small and many have either changed to other professions or there has been an increase in retirements. Resource issues are a key problem in many sectors of the economy.
27. Without additional external assistance, the council does not have sufficient financial influence on its own to make much overall difference to the economic viability of the bus network in the long term.
28. Short term Subsidised bus service contracts have been let for the services 412, 12 and 13 services and the network maintained. Longer term contracts for these services are due to be awarded and Executive will be updated at the meeting.

29. The long term contracts are funded through BSIP funding and are the contracts are conditional on the BSIP funding, break clauses have been inserted if the BSIP funding is not secured in the future.

City Centre Bus Improvement Work

30. The work being undertaken on buses in the city centre is ongoing, however, initial analysis has identified a small number of improvements which can be progressed through an Executive Member Decision to allocate funds to capital works. In particular, these will focus on improving poor quality bus stops in the city centre.

31. As such, capital funding from the city centre allocation of the Bus Service Improvement Plan will be released to improve bus stops at we expect Cosultation to take place in May 2023 on proposals

- Piccadilly (adjacent former Banana Warehouse)
- Walmgate
- Gillygate
- Exhibition Square

32. And also to replace life expired bus shelters at:

- Tower Gardens
- Station Avenue

Real Time information

33. York's Bus Service Improvement Programme includes a capital allocation to provide 100 battery powered real time bus information screens across York. Use of batteries allows the equipment to be installed in locations which are remote from a power supply, particularly in residential areas and villages. Officers have been in discussion with councillors over the most appropriate locations for installing the equipment in each ward.

Reduced Bus Fares/ simplifying bus fares

34. Funding is allocated in the BSIP programme for supporting targeted bus fare reductions, particularly:

- Extending the existing concession which allows up to 3 children to travel with an adult on the park and ride service to all bus services in York
 - Other targeted reductions for younger people, students and other groups in society who could benefit from reductions in the cost of bus travel
35. Furthermore, the Enhanced Partnership is developing new “tap-on-tap-off” ticketing products to make it easier for bus passengers to cap the cost of daily travel – in the same way that is currently applied in London. Tap-off readers have been installed on First and Transdev buses, and will be installed on all other buses in York in the coming months.
36. CYC is engaging with Transport for the North to identify the most effective ways to implement fare reductions and simplifications. The Executive is asked to note that this work is progressing towards a target for introducing the new ticketing products in September 2023.

Electrification of the bus network

37. City of York Council established a voluntary clean air zone covering York’s Inner Ring Road and the area within it in January 2020. All buses operating more than five times a day inside the zone have been equipped to Euro VI standard since the end of January 2021. Previous bus electrification projects have introduced:
- 12 electric buses – for use on the Poppleton and Monks Cross park and ride services – in 2014
 - 23 electric double decker buses for use on the Askham, Grimston and Fulford park and ride services – in 2020/21
38. In April 2022 CYC was awarded £9.5m First York to purchase 42 electric buses (with First contributing a similar amount toward purchase), and in February 2023 a further £1.8m of funding was awarded to the Council to support the purchase further electric buses, which will allow complete electrification of First York’s operation. This will allow approximately 70% of all York’s bus services to be provided using electric buses once the fleet is delivered by the end of March 2024.
39. York’s Dial A Ride service will also be converted to electric power.

City Centre Shuttle Bus

40. York's Bus Service Improvement Plan carried a specific commitment to investigate the shuttle bus service and a study of options was let in Autumn 2022. A workshop and exhibition of some of the potential vehicles which could be used in York was held during Residents' Weekend at the end of January.
41. Feedback from the event, which was attended by approximately 180 people over two days, is currently being collated.

Poppleton Park & Ride

42. There are a number of challenges to the Commercial Park and Ride services. Following the start of the Pandemic in 2020, the contract was varied to allow First, the operator, to temporarily sublet the Poppleton Bar site to central government as a COVID testing facility.
43. The council also gave First temporary discretion to alter service frequencies as necessary in response to the pandemic. This has led to the actual level of service provision being somewhat different to the contract terms.
44. The Council is working to return service levels to those it has contracted with the operator to provide, with work currently ongoing with First on a recovery plan for Park and Ride. This is on the basis that it does not impact upon the cities other bus services.
45. . First are leading on the Communications Plan for the reopening it is outlined below with Key dates:

Activity	Explainer	Go live/deadline
Poppleton Bar landing page	Update the First Bus website landing page for York P&R and Poppleton Bar with information on re-opening. Add information on opening to all Easter BH communications	13/03
Organic social media	Owned channel social posts regarding re-opening across @FirstYork and @YorkParkAndRide. Link in with all Easter BH communications.	13/03
First Bus App notification	Schedule app notification to York customers from 27th March - copy TBC	24/03

CYC website & socials	CYC to add information on the re-opening (using branded assets) to their landing pages/social accounts	13/03
PR	Work with CYC to produce PR surrounding re-opening	13/03
Visit York promotions	Discuss with Visit York options for promoting the re-opening of Poppleton to their database	13/03
Paid social campaign	Facebook/Instagram ads to target geo area surrounding Poppleton Bar site & geo area of key travel routes (Knaresborough/Boroughbridge/Harrogate/Wetherby)	13/03
Internal comms	Connect App and Facebook group posts. Posters for depot noticeboard. Working with local Ops Manager to best communicate	06/03
On site signage	Site signage needs to be updated to new prices/timings. Entry/Exit signs to be updated to remove reference to 'closed'.	31/03
Local highway messages	Paul M mentioned opportunity to add messages to local highway digital signage such as 'Poppleton Bar Park & Ride re-opening 1st April' or similar – pick up with CYC	13/03
Signage in lead up to site	To confirm any existing signage and identify any opportunities for new signage in the lead up to the Poppleton Bar site.	31/03
A3 posters on bus	Create A3 posters advertising the re-opening for placement on P&R buses across York	13/03
A3 posters at Rawcliffe/Askham	Create A3 posters advertising the re-opening for placement at Askham Bar and Rawcliffe Bar P&R sites	13/03
Door drop	Door drop to the local area (Upper Poppleton/Nether Poppleton and villages along A59) OR extended door drop which includes the outer parts of Knaresborough/Boroughbridge/Harrogate/Wetherby (i.e. not the centres).	03/04

46. Whilst the communications plan is being lead by First Bus input and support from CYC communications team is being made.

47. The Poppleton site has been out of action since March 2020 due to its use as an NHS COVID Testing Site.
48. Poppleton Park and ride will reopen on the 1st of April for the start of the school Summer Holidays. The relaunch of Poppleton is to be funded by support from the BSIP package – it is therefore important that it is done in a sustainable way. The DfT are very keen to see delivery of high profile improvements to networks, the funding from DfT has been received by the Council. First and the Council will monitoring the impact of this on the performance of adjacent Park & Ride sites at Rawcliffe and Askham Bar. We are working closely with First on marketing activity.

Council Plan

49. This report is about the development of York's bus network and therefore has the potential to improve the quality of life for residents and support the delivery of all the outcomes in the Council Plan which are:
 - Well-paid jobs and an inclusive economy
 - A greener and cleaner city
 - Getting around sustainably
 - Good health and wellbeing
 - Safe communities and culture for all
 - Creating homes and world-class infrastructure
 - A better start for children and young people
 - An open and effective council

Implications

Financial Implications

50. All works set out in the report above are covered by existing capital and revenue allocations, the majority of which is grant funded via competitive processes.
51. The external funding that will be utilised from the Bus Service Improvement Plan award is only available for the following two years and therefore cannot fund long term interventions beyond that time.

52. Bus service subsidies will need to be reduced down the budget by 1st April 2025 should alternative funding not be identified.

Equalities

53. The council will need to take into account the Public Sector Equality Duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct; advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it in the exercise of a public authority's functions). An Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out for each service as it is reviewed.

Consultation

54. Consultation has been undertaken with Bus Operators and with the York Bus Forum in their response they are keen to support retaining as many services as possible across the City.

Council Plan

55. The proposals in this report contribute to the following key outcomes in the 2019-23 Council Plan:
56. A greener and cleaner city – key BSIP objectives include transferring journeys from car to bus and reducing vehicle emissions.
57. Creating homes and world class infrastructure – BSIP commitments include working with developers to ensure high-quality public transport provision for new developments, and improvements to existing public transport infrastructure.
58. Good health and wellbeing – by moving journeys from car to bus, realising air quality improvements and reducing congestion on the highway network, a secondary effect of the BSIP will be to facilitate complimentary growth in walking and cycling mode shares.
59. A better start for children and young people – BSIP commitments include simpler, lower bus fares for children and young people.

Implications

44. **Equalities** – the consultation will need to take into account the Public Sector Equality Duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct; advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it in the exercise of a public authority’s functions). The final EP scheme will be subject to Executive approval and an Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out at that point.
45. **Legal** – The delivery of the BSIP through either an EP route or a franchise route is mandated by the Transport Act 2000. EP Plans and Schemes are statutory documents. The Bus Services Act 2017 incorporates a duty on local transport authorities to consult on EP Plans and EP Schemes into the Transport Act 2000.

Risk Management

52. The minimal-risk option is to maintain the base network to support the delivery of the BSIP growth targets.

Annexes

Annex A - York Bus Service Improvement Plan Programme

Background Papers

Executive December 2022 Bus Network Review

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Wards Affected: List wards or tick box to indicate all

All

For further information please contact the author of the report