

Subsidised and Community Transport (£44,000)

Overview

A comprehensive review of public transport arrangements in York will be presented to the Executive in January 2009. The key areas of the study are as follows:

Bus services

Subsidised bus services

Consultants, Halcrow, were commissioned to consider the current, tendered, bus network to establish whether or not the Council was receiving value for money for the services provided. Several options were considered; to cut some services; to retain all services; or to replace some of the local bus services with demand responsive or taxi-bus alternatives.

The outcome of the study is a proposal to consider withdrawing traditional bus services with a subsidy of more than £2 per-passenger. Where viable bus alternatives do not exist, the report explores the option of utilising Council dial & ride vehicles or taxi buses as an alternative. The report also outlines the large capital investment and ongoing revenue budget required to support a Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) operation, estimated to be in the region of £50,000 per annum, per vehicle.

Commercial bus services

The review provides an overview of the commercial bus network and confirms that the good levels of accessibility, coverage, frequency and quality are delivered to York residents and visitors.

Members are also made aware that the network is 'fragile' in parts. The impact of steeply rising costs for bus service providers, combined with reducing numbers of fare paying passengers, has led to the withdrawal or reduction of some commercially provided services during 2008. Informal discussions with bus operators suggest that there are other bus services which are now struggling to remain commercially viable.

Park & Ride

The review assesses the recent operational history of these services and analyses the implications of the new contract (commencing in February 2009) and the Access York project.

Concessionary travel

There are two main areas considered:

English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS)

This scheme, launched in April 08, allows entitled concessionary pass holders to travel anywhere within England on local bus services, within permitted hours. The review summarises the first eight months of operation and concludes that the system, operationally, is working well.

Take up of passes and 'ridership' are both higher than was anticipated. Concessionary trips in (or starting in) York were as follows:

- 2006/7 2.9m
- 2007/8 3.1m
- 2008/9 est. 4m (based on figures received to date)

The review considers the impact of concessionary travel on the operation of commercial and park & ride bus services. It also analyses whether the existing 09:00 start time should be put back to 09:30 and whether the existing arrangements for companion pass holders should be amended.

Estimates are given for ridership in future years and the implications of increased concessionary patronage on the Council budget are assessed.

National Transport Tokens

The quantity of tokens issued was reduced to £20 per claimant for 2008/09. This has led to a corresponding drop in the level of token claimants to 7,806 claimants (year to date) against 13,124 claimants last year. Claimants of ENCTS passes have increased in the same period from 27,826 to 34,718.

The review suggests several options for consideration:

- Retain the status quo (eg £20 distribution for all concessionaires)
- Withdraw the distribution of tokens completely
- Better target priorities (the review considers the over 75s, registered disabled & those with no access to local bus services)
- Increase the value of tokens
- Replace the anonymous token system with a stored value taxi card system.

Supporting measures

In order to better promote public transport, the review highlights improvements made in the past year across several areas:

- Bus information/Journey Planning
- Tackling bus congestion, better utilising the 'Bliss' system
- 'Your Next Bus' SMS bus information
- Improved ticketing solutions (Yorcard and YOzone 16-18yr old pass)
- Improvements to bus vehicle and passenger road safety
- Improvements to bus stop information and facilities