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**Decision Session  
(Cabinet Member for Transport, Planning and  
Sustainability)**

**Date of meeting**  
19<sup>th</sup> November 2012

Report of the Director of City and Environmental Services

## **Improving York's Bus Service**

### **Summary**

1. This paper sets out how City of York Council (CYC) will work to help transform York's bus service by improving passenger satisfaction and generating patronage growth. The paper presents how CYC will drive improvements to York's bus service through a reformed partnership approach with operators linked to the government's Better Bus Area Fund initiative. The reformed York Quality Bus Partnership will provide the focus for improved co-ordination between the CYC and bus operators and will facilitate increased investment from all partners in York's bus network. Critically, the reformed partnership will deliver CYC's ambition for a high quality, responsive and integrated bus service in York, mirroring the best practice seen in the UK. The paper also, however, sets out that these benefits could, in the event of a failure of the partnership, be delivered through a Quality Contract Scheme, under which bus services in York would be franchised to operators in a similar manner to the way park and ride services in the city operate now.

### **Background**

2. The importance of the bus service in delivering sustainable growth is set out in the "Get York Moving" section of the 2011 Council Plan, which states CYC's aspiration for a 10% increase in bus passengers between 2011 and 2015. However, improving York's bus service has the potential to make a positive impact on all the Council's priorities (see paragraph 28).
3. Despite objectives to increase use of buses in York, patronage on the city's bus network has been generally flat since 2006.

Consequently, there is a mismatch between the recent performance of the network in attracting new passengers and CYC's aspirations to increase bus use in the medium term.

4. Annexes A and B to this report are two studies undertaken on bus services in York in order to provide a baseline evidence base and shape the next steps. The York Bus Improvement Study (Annex A) concluded that meeting the levels of growth to which CYC aspire requires bus services matching the best practice seen in cities such as Brighton, Cambridge and Oxford. However, the evidence base collected during the study suggested that bus services in York were fragmented between an unusually large (for a city of its size) number of different bus operators and that the service suffered from patchy delivery, with a range in the levels of customer satisfaction between the different operators. The performance of York's bus network, compared to similar cities, was only around average for the group. The research also uncovered widespread dissatisfaction with some elements of the bus service, particularly fare levels and service levels in the evening and on Sundays.
5. The research, however, demonstrated that there are bus operators in York who achieve high levels of customer satisfaction, and it is therefore concluded that there are no absolute barriers to offering a bus service in York which meets its customers' expectations. The report set out that bus services in York could be rendered to a higher and more uniform standard through improved co-ordination of the city's bus companies via a reformed QBP, or the alternative of franchising through a York-wide Quality Contract Scheme (QCS).
6. Research by QBP specialists, the TAS Partnership, (Annex B) looked specifically at the governance of the existing York QBP, assessing its suitability as a delivery mechanism for improving the bus service in the city. The research concluded that the QBP was sound in most of its functions but lacked strategic focus and dynamism. It was concluded that it required strengthening and re-launching, with a clearer strategic focus on patronage growth and improving customer satisfaction, before it could act as an effective delivery mechanism for the patronage growth which CYC wish to see.
7. CYC has also, during the study period, been successful at attracting funding for a Better Bus Area Fund (BBAF) project. The project in York has an overall value of approximately £6 million (£2.9 million being funded by the Department for Transport). It has been

designed to help transform bus services in York, specifically through:

- a. Smart ticketing – the introduction of a smartcard similar to London’s Oystercard in York;
  - b. Two new bus priority schemes and improved enforcement of existing schemes in York city centre;
  - c. Reconstruction of bus stops and shelters across the city, including five bus “Interchanges” in York city centre;
  - d. A substantial upgrade of York’s bus real time bus information system;
  - e. Enhanced driver training in customer service and awareness of cyclists;
  - f. A range of marketing and promotion activities (such as poster campaigns and telemarketing, development of new media marketing and working with large local employers to promote bus travel to work); and
  - g. More active management of service reliability in York city centre and
  - h. A Bus Enquiry desk at the railway station.
8. The BBAF project is being enacted between April 2012 and March 2014. The BBAF has a specific objective of improving partnership working between bus operators and local authorities, and it is likely that effective partnership working will be evaluated as a performance indicator for projects. Subsequently, the Department for Transport has stated that authorities will be able to bid to become “Better Bus Areas”. If York were to achieve status as a “Better Bus Area” it would give CYC access to increased funding for local bus services through a reallocation of Bus Service Operator Grant (BSOG) money to CYC (it is currently paid direct to bus operators), with potential for a top-up payment above BSOG, which could be used to fund service enhancements or infrastructure for bus services, such as priority lanes or passenger facilities, but only, it is proposed, if the improvements were delivered on a partnership basis.

## **Overall Strategy**

9. It is therefore recommended that improvements to York's bus network are driven through a major strengthening and refocusing of the existing QBP in the short term, with the alternative approach of a franchised network delivered through a Quality Contract Scheme (QCS) kept under review as a further step to take if improvements do not result from the partnership based approach. Through the BBAF programme there is a clear opportunity to improve partnership working between operators and the authority to improve services.
10. The activity of a reformed QBP needs initially to be focussed on co-ordinating the activities of the bus operators in relation to:
  - a. Delivering the BBAF project, which the QBP will be actively involved in steering;
  - b. Improving inconsistent quality, assessed through customer satisfaction and performance data (reliability, cancellations, etc) between services operated by different bus companies;
  - c. delivery of consistently high standards in some elements of service (for example, bus information (including developing a single form of presenting timetable information to match national best practice), service change dates and consultation protocols);
  - d. improving co-ordination between bus operators, through QBP brokered agreements, to deliver an improved multi-operator ticket (to improve multi-operator cross-city travel opportunities) through QBP co-ordination of operators (priced in-line with the guidance produced by the Competition Commission) and to reduce bus on bus congestion at some heavily used stops in the city centre; and
  - e. the need to "lock in" the benefits of the significant investment being made through the Better Bus Area Fund, and bring forward investment by operators, through use of instruments such as Statutory Quality Partnerships and Qualifying Agreements.
11. Given the importance of the bus service to residents of York, and the potential benefits of improving service quality, it is proposed that the QBP and partners' progress is monitored through patronage growth and a series of annual surveys which will be compared with the baseline survey results presented in Annex A to this report.

12. The reformed QBP will be central to delivering the BBAF project. It is proposed that the QBP forms a steering group for the BBAF project, and that CYC approaches bus operators for the assistance of their staff in the areas of the BBAF programme where bus operators already have expertise – for example, with marketing and promotional activity, and driver training.
13. The option of moving to a franchised environment for delivering bus services in York should be kept under review, through monitoring operators’ performance via the annual performance survey, and patronage growth. CYC will also begin basic due diligence work on the mechanisms for delivering a QCS in York if the Partnership is not successful at meeting CYC’s aspirations.

### **Recommendations**

14. The recommendations of this report are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Recommendations**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
1. The Quality Bus Partnership (QBP) in York should be retained but reformed with new terms of reference and underpinned by new agreements between CYC and bus operators aimed at improving services.	<p>The QBP should be reformed in York with a clear strategic focus and new terms of reference, focussed on improving service quality and patronage growth, to recognise the greater CYC led intervention through the Better Bus Area Fund. A key function of the QBP will be to formulate a series of bilateral agreements between operators and CYC which will be designed to ensure all bus services in York are provided to a consistently high standard – in order to improve customer satisfaction and drive patronage growth. These bilateral agreements will be reviewed on an annual basis, informed by passenger surveys, such as those undertaken nationally by Passenger Focus.</p> <p>As part of the reform process it might be appropriate to consider membership of the QBP, with large local employers and other transport operators (e.g. Northern Rail) encouraged to contribute to the group to better integrate it with the wider York employment and transport context.</p> <p>As part of moves to put the QBP on a more</p>

	<p>formal footing, it will be appropriate to consider how Statutory Bus Quality Partnerships and Qualifying Agreements can be used in York to co-ordinate operators better than at present and protect CYC/ DfT investment under the Better Bus Area Fund.</p> <p>The QBP should also present and consider key performance data at its meetings – for example, for congestion, delays to services and timekeeping.</p>
<p>2. CYC should formulate a clear policy statement about bus services in York and the Council's expectations of bus operators in delivering those policies. This should form part of the Local Transport Plan for York. This should include consideration of the various means of regulating bus services set out in para 6.39 of the Bus Improvement Study.</p>	<p>There are inconsistent patronage targets for bus services in York in the key policy documents relating to developing bus services in the city. Bus operators claim they do not have a clear statement of CYC's objectives for the bus network. Consequently, CYC needs to provide a clear "Bus Strategy" setting out their targets for the network as a whole and clearly outlining their expectations of operators and what CYC will do to facilitate and promote bus travel. The Strategy needs to consider areas such as vehicles and emissions standards, ticketing and ticket prices, network standards, reliability, passenger information, provision for wheelchairs and buggies on buses and customer service as a route to the wider outcomes expressed in the city's LTP and other policy documents. The policy statement should be developed in consultation with the bus operators through the Quality Bus Partnership and should include a framework to monitor progress against, with a timescale for delivery based on that given in Figure 1 of this paper.</p>
<p>3. CYC should ensure additional resources available to ensure that change is delivered through the QBP</p>	<p>Public transport staff in CYC are already fully utilised managing the existing bus network and delivering the Better Bus Area Fund project. In order to ensure that development of the QBP is given the high priority it requires, the partners in the QBP will work together to ensure that the reformed partnership is resourced to make adequate progress with the partners' ambitions for bus services in York.</p>

<p>4. Review the bus network so that it can best meet the needs for travel in York</p>	<p>CYC should consider whether there is scope to reconfigure the bus network in York to improve its coverage of the city, both in terms of its geographic reach, the times during which the network is in operation and the times when the frequency is lower in the early morning and the evenings. It is recommended that this is progressed through a general review of York's bus network, against its social and commercial objectives and funding constraints. This should also consider integration between park and ride and stage services. Other options for integration should also be considered, for example with home to school services and Community Transport or taxi operations in areas or at times of low demand, and the potential for new integrated ticket products, including smartcards, to assist passengers making cross city journeys involving more than one operators, or who live on routes served by different operators in the daytime and in the evening.</p>
<p>5. CYC should continue to use integrated transport, traffic and parking management to ensure that the priorities in CYC's movement strategies are achieved. This should include considering opportunities for a bus station in York city centre.</p>	<p>A number of the BBAF proposals demonstrate scope for improving road layouts (e.g. by reallocating road space to buses on some routes) and ensuring that car-park pricing is used to ensure the costs of bus and car use in York are competitive.</p> <p>The Bus Improvement Study (Annex A) suggests that there is substantial support for having a bus station in York. CYC should consider locational options for a bus station in York city centre, including sites currently being redeveloped and/or which the Council would be able to release for development. These should include the site adjacent to the Rail Station which would be released by the removal of Queen Street bridge and relocation of some (or all) rail station long stay parking, and seeking to secure commitments to this by the station operator and Network Rail (as part of the current franchising round).</p>

<p>6. CYC should continue to monitor progress on the bus network and undertake appropriate preparatory work so that it can apply for a Quality Contract Scheme (QCS) in York if bus services in the city continue to be patchy and inconsistent or if the Bus Strategy targets are not met.</p>	<p>If the QBP fails to achieve the Council's aspirations, a QCS in York offers a further option for improving bus services in the city. It is proposed that operators should be challenged to deliver the benefits which could be achieved through a QCS through partnership with the city over the duration of the BBAF (as set out above). However, a QCS should remain a live option for implementation post BBAF if CYC is not satisfied with progress against clearly stated objectives. To this end the city needs to develop a clear supporting policy framework (see recommendation 2, above) so that the need for any necessary remedial action can be clearly justified.</p>
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15. Figure 1 shows a timescale for enacting these recommendations.









## **Consultation**

16. Wide ranging consultation and data collection has been undertaken for the Bus Improvement Study (Annex A). In addition to comprehensive surveys of both bus and non-bus users, the Study team has consulted with parish councils, ward committees and special interest groups, such as the York Youth Council.
17. In reviewing the QBP (Annex B), the TAS Partnership interviewed a wide range of stakeholders, including bus operators, Council officers, the Cabinet Member for City Strategy and other interested parties.

## **Options**

- A) To agree to one, a number of, or all of the recommendations as outlined in Table 1.
- B) Reject the recommendations.

## **Council Plan Priorities**

18. Support for bus services in York contributes to the following Council Plan priorities:

### **Create jobs and grow the economy:**

Improving bus services in York has the potential to impact positively on policies to create jobs and grow the economy. The bus has a key role in providing access to employment and training for people without access to a car, and for providing effective business travel across the city. Effective governance of bus services will have a beneficial impact on the amenity of York city centre, making the environment more pleasant for residents and tourists, and thus more likely to bring about repeat visits. The bus also has a role in York's tourism and leisure economy, allowing the many tourists who do not have access to a car during their stay in York to access tourist attractions across York and in the wider sub-region.

### **Get York moving:**

A commitment to improve York's local bus network aims to deliver an increase in the quality, reliability and punctuality of local bus

services. Partnership arrangements will be agreed with the bus operators to develop all aspects of bus travel. This will include improvements to vehicle fleets, better timetables, and real-time information and more bus priority measures. Through ticketing will also be improved, building on the recent “All York” initiative and Yorcard smartcard availability. This means passengers will only need to buy one ticket to complete a journey, even if they have to use more than one bus operator’s services. These improvements aim to deliver a 10% increase in bus trips between 2011 and 2015. Achieving mode shift from car travel to buses is a crucial ingredient in York’s wider policies to accommodate economic growth in the city without the adverse impact of greater city centre traffic congestion.

### **Build strong communities:**

Effective bus services contribute positively to building stronger communities through improving:

- access to healthcare, food shopping and for social visits for those without access to a car;
- access to school, college and training opportunities for young people;
- community infrastructure, in the form of improved bus stops and other passenger facilities, and more attractive vehicles (operators invest in fleet if patronage and revenue improves).

All of these measures will serve to reduce levels of social isolation.

### **Protecting vulnerable people:**

Improvements to York’s bus fleet have the potential to improve air quality across the city of York, particularly where air quality is currently poor because of elderly buses currently in use on some services.

Bus service improvements will provide valuable links for elderly, young and disabled people to key amenities.

### **Protect the environment:**

York will be better prepared and more resilient in the face of a changing climate and will steadily reduce its carbon emissions. This policy contributes towards the commitment in proposing more efficient utilisation of the City’s bus fleet as well as better vehicle standards. Increasing the viability of the bus network is likely to

lead to greater investment in more modern vehicles with higher emissions standards.

Local Transport Plan 2011- 2015 (LTP3): Support for the services outlined above would contribute to several of the aims of the third Local Transport Plan, namely:

- To provide quality alternatives to the car to provide more choice and enable more trips to be undertaken by sustainable means
- Improving Strategic Links to enhance the wider connections with the key residential and employment areas in and around York, and beyond
- Tackling Transport Emissions to reduce the release of pollutants harmful to health and the environment.

## **Implications**

1. The following implications have been considered:

**(a) Financial**

*It is anticipated that the recommended pieces of work can be delivered from within existing budgets.*

**(b) Human Resources (HR)**

*The work required to deliver the QBP re-launch and bus network reviews would be undertaken by third parties.*

**(c) Equalities**

*Continued consultation will be undertaken with a range of interest groups and an Equalities Impact Assessment will be produced to accompany the proposed Bus Strategy, Bus Network Review and Quality Bus Partnership Re-launch.*

**(d) Legal**

*There are no legal implications.*

**(e) Crime and Disorder**

*There are no crime and disorder implications.*

**(f) Information Technology (IT)**

*There are no information technology implications.*

**(g) Property**

*There are no property implications.*

**(h) Other**

*There are no other implications*

***Risk Management***

19. The key risk in accepting the recommendations of this report is associated with a failure of the relaunched Quality Bus Partnership to deliver the bus service improvements which CYC aspire to see. The timescale for enacting the recommendations in this report includes an annual review of progress towards a further decision about whether to continue with the relaunched QBP or apply for Quality Contract powers. This is judged to mitigate this risk of the failure of the Partnership. A cost/ risk/ benefit analysis of a Quality Contract Scheme would need to be undertaken and considered at the time. Recommendation 6 seeks to ensure that any necessary information for this is obtained/ monitored in the intervening period. Quality Contract Scheme risks have previously been discussed in 2009 (2<sup>nd</sup> April and 17<sup>th</sup> November)..

**Contact Details**

<b>Authors:</b>	<b>Chief Officer Responsible for the report:</b>			
Andrew Bradley Sustainable Transport Operations Manager Sustainable Transport Tel No. x1404				
Julian Ridge External Public Transport Consultant	<b>Report Approved</b>		<b>Date</b>	
<b>Specialist Implications Officer(s)</b> <i>List information for all</i>				
<b>Wards Affected:</b>			<b>All</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>For further information please contact the author of the report</b>				

**Background Papers:**

**Annexes**

**Annex A – Bus Improvement Study**

**Annex B – TAS assessment of the York Quality Bus Partnership**