

## **Meeting of Executive Members for City Strategy and Advisory Panel**

**8 September 2008**

Report of the Director of City Strategy

### **Coach Strategy Review**

#### **Summary**

1. This report provides a description and analysis of key findings arising from the York Coach Strategy Update (2008). A copy of this has been placed in the member's library. The study was commissioned to update the information gathered in a previous report, York Coach Study (2003) in order to provide current information with regard to implementing the city's coach strategy. Two issues the report uncovered were that a central coach park was preferred by drivers and that coach facilities could be improved. Other findings are discussed in this report along with a recommendation to retain St George's Field as a coach park in the short to medium term. This has been recommended because of the convenience for passengers, concerns over some aspects of using external locations (such as Park and Ride sites) and driver's preference for a central site. The report also recommends a detailed examination as to the feasibility of coaches using bus lanes in York.

#### **Background**

2. The coach strategy encompassed within the second Local Transport Plan (LTP2) was largely derived from the York Coach Study (2003) report - completed by Steer Davies Gleave. The results of this were reported to EMAP on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2004. The main issues arising from this work included:
  - Recommendation that coach-parking levels be maintained at current levels +/- 5 spaces.
  - St George's Field received positive comments as a coach park from the consultants, drivers and visitors
  - Recommendation that the current ban on coaches using bus lanes be overturned.
  - Visitors and Drivers felt that the walks into the City Centre were long.
3. A recent study was commissioned by City of York Council to update the 2003 study and to re-examine some of the key issues surrounding coach stabling (parking), rendezvous points, special events, and overarching mechanisms for coaches (use of bus lanes etc). Another factor prompting this was the finding from the 2007 York Visitors Survey that the amount of people visiting York by coach has risen from being 8% of total visitors to 10%. This 10%

approximates to 400,000 people per year so is an important market to cater for.

4. High volumes of coach operations are centred around special events, such as the St Nicholas Fayre and Ebor race meetings. Events associated with York races have not been comprehensively considered as part of the recent coach study because the vast majority of coaches are parked at the racecourse. The amount of coaches attempting to access the city centre is not drastically affected by these events.
5. There are 61 coach parking spaces in the City Centre. These are charged as shown in the following table.

<b>Time</b>	<b>April - October</b>	<b>November - March</b>
1hr	£5	£5
3hrs	£8	N/a
24hrs	£11	£8

6. In addition to the city centre coach parks at Union Terrace and Kent Street, spaces are offered at Monks Cross Park and Ride site and non-council owned facilities are located at the bus depot on Hospital Fields Road and the railway museum. Informal parking takes place on Knavesmire Road and this site is effectively offering a free coach parking area close to the city centre. The rendezvous points for coaches are currently located on Leeman Road (Railway Rendezvous), Foss Bank (Minster Rendezvous) and Kent Street (Castle Rendezvous).
7. York currently holds the 'Coach Tourism City of the Year' title (awarded by Coach Monthly magazine). It is however; the author's opinion that this is for the appeal of the city to the coach tourist demographic rather than for the quality of facilities offered by York to visiting coaches. Allowing coaches to use bus lanes should see York nominated for the Confederation of passenger transport (CPT) coach friendly city award. This will bring increased free publicity to York as the 'coach friendly cities' are marketed by the confederation. Examples of two other similar cities that offer good quality coach facilities are Chester and Rochester. Both of these provide coaches with a central parking area, complete with visitor centre and drivers rest room. It is likely that this type of facility would prove problematic to introduce in York unless the coach parking could be consolidated onto one site.
8. Information is offered to coach companies and drivers in the form of the York coach parking information leaflet (APPENDIX A). This is thought to be a valued source of information and will be updated and continued as necessary. The map is not currently displayed online or available for downloading so work will be progressed to look into this and to potentially have a 'coach section' on the City of York Council website to ensure the information is easily accessible and linked to the VisitYork website.

9. Coach movements in York can be generally categorised as shown below.

- Pick up and drop-off at a central coach park.
- Drop off at a central rendezvous point before parking for free out of town i.e. Park and Ride site (Monks Cross) or a lay-by.
- Drop off at a rendezvous point then park in a central coach park.

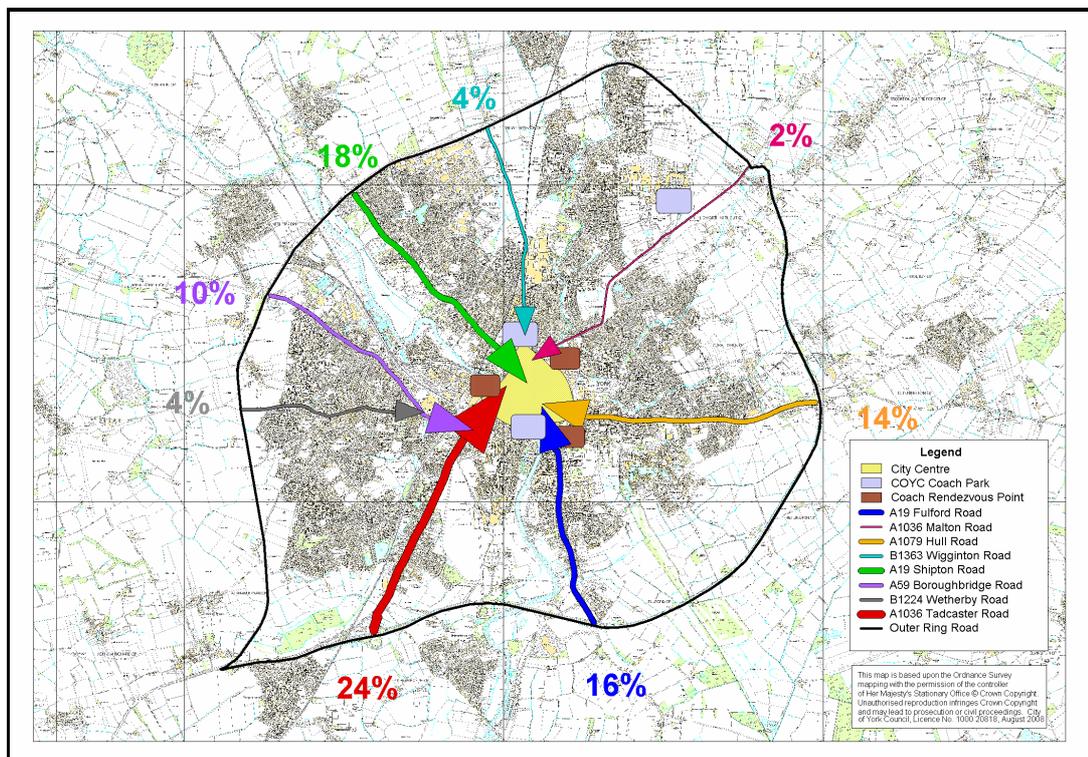
Offering these three options caters for varying driver and operator preferences and this contributes to making York an attractive option for coach companies when selecting their tours.

## Consultation

10. Coach operators, coach drivers, City of York Council officers, and members were consulted as part of the study. Bus Operators were also questioned on their opinions regarding the use of bus lanes by coaches. The decision was taken not to include a visitor survey as a comprehensive analysis of visitor opinion took place in the York Coach Study (2003).

11. Coach drivers were consulted using a questionnaire. This was posted out in addition to several being handed out to drivers at the coach parks. The questionnaire was designed with the intention of following a driver's visit to York from approach to departure in order to gain an insight into all stages of coach movement during their stay in York. Figure One shows a map of how coaches access the city:

Figure One:



Other routes – 8%

The map shows that 40% of coaches use the main southern radials to access the city (Tadcaster Road and Fulford Road). It also shows that the Monks Cross Park and Ride site is located on a corridor unpopular with coaches, so this offers an explanation for its current poor levels of use despite having no charge.

12. Opinion on parking was fairly conclusive. When asked for their ideal coach park, 70% preferred a city centre site and 64% were happy with facilities at the location they were parked. Close to a third, however, were unhappy and this suggests that work needs to take place to improve facilities where possible. 57% suggested they would park at a Park and Ride site should it be the recommended option. This is of some concern as it implies that 43% would not and therefore suggests that there would be higher levels of informal parking. Just over half of respondents thought that the cost of coach parking was high in York.
13. Rendezvous points are of concern. Almost 70% of drivers asked stated that rendezvous points need to be improved. Work to improve these will be progressed by officers, with particular emphasis on improving information, such as signage and potentially relocating at least one of the Minster and Castle rendezvous points. These are both poorly used, and demand for the Castle rendezvous on Kent Street is likely to be limited now the coach park is out of service. The Minster rendezvous in particular offers a poor welcome to the city. Work is progressing to examine the feasibility of introducing a temporary rendezvous point on the Reynard's Garage site (17-21 Piccadilly) as recommended in the study and thought to be welcomed by many in the city (particularly traders). This should provide a suitable foil for St George's Field and will offer a central drop-off point for parties wishing to access the Jorvik Centre and other attractions in the near vicinity.
14. Coach operators were unanimous in their desire to allow coaches to use bus lanes and drivers also mentioned this as a key area for improvement. Local bus operators were mixed in their opinion, several companies felt that coaches should be allowed to use the bus lanes, however, the main operator, First York felt that the lanes should be used by buses only. York is in a small minority of cities that restrict coaches and this is also the key issue that is currently prohibiting York from gaining a 'coach friendly city' award from the CPT. There is no desire on behalf of the CPT to see local bus services disrupted, so extra work is required to see if any of the bus lanes can be opened up to coaches.

## **Options**

- A** To retain St George's Field in the short to medium term as a coach-parking site so that use can be monitored in order to establish whether the site is a suitable long-term option.
- B** Use St George's Field as a temporary coach park with a view to relocating coach parking in the medium term, primarily to Park and Ride sites as these are the recommended option in the study.
- C** Progress work on examining the feasibility of allowing coaches to use bus lanes.

## Analysis

### Option A

15. This option follows CPT guidelines set out in CPT Briefing – CP9.1, Coach Parking Facilities (2006) which, whilst only being a desirable outline for coach parking is a useful guide to providing a quality facility that should satisfy the requirements of operators, drivers and visitors. Central coach parking is recommended so using St George's Field compliments these guidelines.
16. Coach parking at St George's Field already takes place during the St Nicholas Fayre, where it is used as an overflow park. It received favourable comments from drivers and passengers in the York Coach Study (2003), and driver consultation in the York Coach Strategy Review (2008) revealed a city centre site to be the preferred option for relocating Kent Street. It appears to be the most viable option, certainly in the timeframe available since the closure of Kent Street.
17. A central coach park allows for passengers to make their way back to the coach when they so wish, this is not the case when a coach is parked at an out-of-town site and is of concern particularly to older passengers. The studies both show that Union Terrace and Kent Street are used for dropping off as well as parking so this reduces the pressures upon rendezvous points. This is currently important as only the Railway Rendezvous has a notable level of use – therefore moving coach parking away from the City Centre would place an increased burden on this location which may well cause disruption to the highway on Station Road.
18. Monitoring the usage of St George's Field will allow for officers to analyse the demand placed on the site. As figure one shows, a substantial amount of coach traffic approaches from the south of the city and as St George's Field is closer to the City Centre and has a more attractive, traffic free walking route (beside the river) it is expected to be more popular than Kent Street.
19. Whilst, location-wise, St George's Field is in a prime position there are significant concerns over flooding. The car park has been briefly closed this year as a result of high water levels and this would present problems should it occur during a busy day for coach traffic. As many coach tours are booked well in advance the weather is not such an influential factor in deterring a visit so it is likely that most coaches would still travel in the event of inclement weather. Should St George's Field be closed coaches will have to be directed elsewhere, to Monks Cross coach park, Knavesmire Road and the other non-council owned facilities.
20. St George's Field has been used as a coach park for the St Nicholas Fayre in recent years. Advance bookings are taken for this site and Union Terrace at a cost (£23 + VAT last year) and as Kent Street was a free site during the festival; the city will be effectively 27 spaces down on previous years. Due to Kent Street parking being free there will be a requirement to direct coaches who haven't pre-booked that may arrive at this site to other areas where they are able to drop-off and pick up during the festival. For two weeks during March a fair is located on St George's Field. Coaches will again need to be

directed to other sites that are publicised in the coach route map and the changes and recommended replacement parking facilities be publicised.

21. Using St George's Field will enable the city to show it's commitment to the coach trade and it's demographic of passenger. 400,000 visitors a year demonstrate it is an important source of trade and central facilities to compliment York's position as one of the leading destinations in the UK should be a beneficial aid to tourism.
22. The capacity of St George's Field car park is 411 spaces and the coach park necessitates the removal of 135 of these leaving 270 plus 6 disabled spaces. Analysis of parking data suggests that over the three-month period from 12<sup>th</sup> May to 12<sup>th</sup> August the car park was only full on one day, the 26<sup>th</sup> May (Bank Holiday Monday). At the time of peak capacity at St George's Field there were 160 spaces available at four other council owned long-stay car parks so capacity is available at other city centre sites. Closely monitoring this site and other levels of nearby car parking will indicate whether a substantial evaluation of car parking in the local area needs to take place. In the timeframe allotted for moving Kent Street coach park there has not been sufficient time to assess this. There may also be greater demand placed on car parking closer to Christmas. It is not ideal to offer reduced car parking spaces in this area, however when the coach park is established and monitoring has taken place as to the effects this can be examined in greater depth.

### **Option B**

23. Using Park and Ride sites for coach parking in the long-term has several implications, which prove problematic. There is a risk that some drivers may drop off a coach party onto a Park and Ride bus and allow them to travel in on that service. This is attributable to the eligibility of over 60's to travel on the service for free as part of the national concessionary fares scheme. The demographic of coach passengers suggests this is worthy of concern. A full coach (of 53 for example) would take up a substantial amount of the 77-person capacity of a Park and Ride rigid bus. This should be enforced to ensure it does not happen were this option to be selected.
24. In planning terms Park and Ride sites are designated as an 'appropriate' use of Greenfield land. Coach parking is not, however, so is not straightforward to implement. It should be noted that if very special circumstances exist permission can be granted but the decision would need to be referred to the Secretary of State. However it could be possible for coaches to arrive at the Park and Ride site as a drop off and coach parking location and the new Park and Ride sites could include coach parking facilities.
25. Using out of town sites for coach parking doubles the amount of trips for coaches within the city as, instead of driving to the coach park, setting down and remaining there; they are required to drive to a rendezvous point, set down then drive out to an out-of-town site before returning in once more to pick up the passengers. This system will result in increased pressure upon the rendezvous points and as a result enforcement of waiting restrictions would have to take place. There would also be a requirement to create extra capacity, which will probably involve relocating the two underused rendezvous

points. They would ideally have relatively equal demand in order to manage coaches effectively and this would naturally come at a cost.

### **Option C**

26. Progressing an investigation into the feasibility of use of bus lanes by coaches will enable officers to establish whether there is potential for coaches to operate in all, or some of these lanes. Some implications of this include, capacity and the likely effect at busy times on scheduled service timetables and also the lack of coaches being equipped with traffic light priority transponders. The possible award for becoming a 'coach friendly city' is potentially quite lucrative and as York is competing for tourists with other cities across the country any extra addition to its 'armoury' should be helpful.

### **Corporate Objectives**

27. Implementing schemes to encourage and accommodate coach travel contributes towards improving the economic prosperity of the city and also may encourage more people to travel to York by coach so could increase the use of more sustainable modes of transport. On a nationwide corporate level, having good quality, well-located coach facilities will enable York to strongly compete against other areas for trade from this tourism sector.

### **Implications**

#### **28. Financial**

In terms of lost revenue from the car park; calculations based on a worst-case scenario (each car paying for one hour) suggests that during the period 12<sup>th</sup> May to 12<sup>th</sup> August the total loss would have been £3317. This is based upon the number of cars and time spent over the new 270-space limit using the VMS data. This is purely lost revenue from St George's field so does not factor in that some cars will relocate to other car parks. This loss over three summer months is relatively small and revenue would be retained should an average of three coaches per day park for over three hours at the site.

There are no other known implications

### **Risk Management**

29. There are no known risks associated with this report.

### **Recommendations**

30. That the Advisory Panel advise the Executive Member to:

- 1) Approve Option A to allow coach parking to remain at St George's Field in the short to medium term

Reason: To allow for York to offer quality facilities suited best to the visitor demographic that will enable the city to strongly compete with other destinations for coach trade.

- 2) Approve Option C for Officers to investigate the feasibility of the use of bus lanes by coaches.

Reason: To enable officers to carry out a feasibility assessment of allowing coaches to use bus lanes.

### Contact Details

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Report Approved  Date 18/08/08

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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**

**Background Papers:**

York Coach Study (November 2003) *Steer Davies Gleave*

York Coach Strategy Review (July 2008) *Halcrow*

Local Transport Plan 2 Annex E, Coach Strategy (2006 – 11) *City of York Council*

Coach Parking Facilities, CPT Briefing – CP9.1 (March 2006) *CPT*

**Annexes:**

**ANNEX A** – York Coach Parking Information 2007/08