Public Transport Information

Overview

1. Current and understandable public transport information is key to encouraging modal shift and to making the majority of York accessible for visitors and residents alike without the need for a car.

2. The quality of printed literature has been greatly improved during 2008 to support the publicity of the York bus network. Key highlights of the past year and plans for the year to come include the following:

3. **Bus event** - A public transport information event was held in the city centre in July 2008. The two-day 'Bus-Doctor' event in Parliament Street provided an opportunity to launch York's new bus route map and guide; provide information on bus timetables and routes; promote the local Traveline service number for bus information (01904 551400) and help the public with their journey planning enquiries. The event was very well attended and over 2,000 bus route guides given out. It is planned for this event to be repeated in 2009 and built upon with further events taking place.

4. **In Town, Without My Car!** is an established event whereby on the 22nd of September each year, town centre streets across Europe close to traffic, and open up solely for people to enjoy walking, cycling, street theatre, live music, dancing, public art and children's play areas.

5. This report proposes that York should be a part of ITWMC day in 2009 and that public transport should be promoted as an alternative to mode on the day. Several bus operators have already offered to participate in the event and it is hoped that through the closure of a significant number of City Centre street to cars on the day, it will be an excellent opportunity for local residents to sample public transport.

6. **Key message-** In Town, Without My Car! should include a significant focus on the role of public transport, enhanced by the removal of cars from several key city centre streets.

7. **Bus route map poster-** A new all-operator bus route map for York was produced in June 2008, the first such map in five years. This large scale, semi-schematic map was produced for use in bus shelters across the city and has also been distributed for display at key public sites such as libraries, council offices, the university and at major workplaces. The poster also contained an inset map illustrating boarding points in the city centre to enable easier multi-operator journeys and key interchange points. An updated version was produced and distributed in September 2008 due to bus network changes.

8. A revised poster will be issued following timetable and route changes this Spring.

9. **Bus route map and guide**. A printed bus route map and guide was also produced for public use in June 2008. The bus route maps incorporated a general guide to using bus services in York and details of concessionary fares available. In addition, the map included a destinations list showing how to get to the top 70 most popular destinations in York by bus; contact details for all bus operators; and a frequency list showing at-a-glance information on which operators provide which route to which destination and how frequently.

10. Supplies are regularly distributed to key public sites in the city including libraries, council outlets and major education establishments and employers. An updated version was produced and distributed in September 2008 due to bus network changes and a revised guide will be issued following timetable and route changes this Spring.

11. '**yournextbus**'. Significant work has been undertaken towards the launch of this text messaging service in early 2009. Your Next Bus enables any intending bus passenger with a mobile phone to find out, in real time, how far their next bus is away from their stop. The vast majority of bus stop flags in the City are now labelled with their own, unique identifier.

12. **Park & Ride re-branding**. In partnership with First Group, the Park & Ride vehicles were re-branded and a new range of publicity and posters will be launched in conjunction with the new contract commencement in February 2009.

13. '**Carwise**'. This informative booklet details how motorists can reduce their fuel costs and emissions though smarter driving, such as reducing loads in the car; improving driving style to reduce fuel use; and smarter journey planning. It also provides information on more 'greener' ways of using cars, such as the use of alternative fuels, buying an environmentally friendly car, joining a car club or signing up to York's car share scheme.

At bus stop information

14. Transport Planning Unit currently produce on-street timetable information at city centre stops for Park & Ride services, Council-subsidised services and those operated by smaller bus companies (such as Reliance and Stephenson's).

15. Prior to the deletion of the Public Transport Data Coordinator post in 2006, the Council was sufficiently resourced to produce custom, composite timetable displays in a common format. These were produced for all stops in the city centre and at several other key locations around the CYC area.

16. First, Coastliner & Arriva produce their own on-street timetables in the city centre. Outside the city centre, all operators are currently expected to

provide information on their own services. The quality and style of information displayed differs from operator to operator.

17. The new Council-produced Bus Route Map posters are displayed in shelters where large-format timetable cases are fitted and Council-produced stand allocation maps ("Where to board your bus") are displayed at a number of city centre stops.

18. To improve the quality of at-bus stop information delivered in York, the Council might take the decision to produce information for every bus stop in-house. This would require additional resource on a periodic basis. Alternatively, we might look to outsource this responsibility to an external contractor or local authority to produce.

19. The options presented in the main body of this report are as follows:

   a. Provide additional staff resource to better deliver printed bus information.

   b. Engage an external local authority or private company to deliver improved printed bus information.

   c. Take no action and continue to deliver the best possible printed bus information with the existing resource available.

20. If options a or b are to be considered, then either or both of the following examples from other areas of the country are strongly worth considering:

The partnership approach - Essex
21. A new information partnership initiative was recently unveiled between Essex County Council and their local bus operators. A set number of bus service change dates are agreed per year, and if operators keep to these dates, the County Council will print standard-format timetables free of charge for any stops within the county boundary. Any timetable amendments arising due to changes outside the agreed dates are undertaken at the bus operators' cost.

22. Bus operators then put in place the timetables along their routes, with agreements in place for larger operators to assist smaller ones where required. The initiative is reported to have been highly successful in providing county-wide standardised public transport information at a lower cost than previous less-coordinated efforts.

23. **Key message** Consultation should take place with operators through the Quality Bus Partnership to discuss the creation of an information partnership agreement.

The uniform approach - Metro
24. West Yorkshire PTE uses a custom-designed system (COSA Trackbuilder) to input timetable data and print on-street information

displays. Current arrangements mean that York timetable data is already entered onto the Metro system for 'Traveline' (see below) purposes. It may be possible to develop this system, at an unspecified cost, to produce printed on-street displays in a York-specific format.

25. **Key message**- The feasibility of using COSA Trackbuilder to produce York branded timetable displays is worth considering if financially viable.

Traveline

Overview
26. The Government places a responsibility on all PTEs, County & Unitary Councils to provide bus timetable information to the public by telephone and via the internet.

27. Traveline provides a standardised, operator-independent public transport information service throughout all regions of the UK via a network of call-centres and websites, funded by the DfT, PTEs, local authorites and transport operators.

History
28. Until May 2006, a service was provided for in York by the Council-operated Bus Information Centre on George Hudson Street. Enquiries were taken in person and by telephone using the local number (01904) 551400.

29. Following the closure of the centre, a short-term contract was signed with East Yorkshire Motor Services to take bus information calls at their BusCall centre in Hull at a cost of approximately £17,000 per annum. To make the transition as smooth as possible for the public, it was decided to retain the local telephone number, with the council covering the difference in cost between a local-rate call and the diversion to Hull. This entails a small cost to the council of around 1p per minute per call, totalling an average of around £100 per month on top of the fees charged by EYMS.

Current Situation
30. The contract with EYMS has been extended several times, the last extension having been made in late 2007.

31. There are around 20 other Traveline call centres around the UK capable of handling bus information enquiries. To satisfy procurement guidelines a tendering exercise should be carried out to find the best value call centre provider.

32. **Key message** The Council has to formally tender a contract for bus information telephone service provision and officers plan to have awarded this work by mid-2009.

33. Depending on the outcome of the tendering exercise, which could result in York Bus Info calls being handled from a location anywhere in the UK, the Council will have to decide whether to retain the local number and continue to finance the as-yet un-quantified difference in call costs, or to adopt the National Traveline number, 0871 200 22 33, adopted by many other parts of the country.

34. Every bus stop in the city would be re-labelled and all printed materials containing the widely-publicised 551400 number would need to be re-designed and published. The Council has never previously publicised the national Traveline number as calls to this are charged at a minimum of 10p per minute (from a BT landline), significantly more expensive than a local call and a potential disincentive to using the service.

35. The options presented in the main body of this report are as follows:

    a. Retain the existing local telephone number (01904 551400)

    b. Replace the number with the National Traveline number (0871 200 22 33).

Internet Journey Planner
36. Bus information is available free of charge on the internet by using the Yorkshire Traveline Internet Journey Planner (www.yorkshiretravel.net). This site is jointly funded by PTEs and local authorities across Yorkshire through the regional Traveline agreement.

37. Timetable data for York is currently input on our behalf by Metro (West Yorkshire PTE) at their Leeds offices. This agreement was informally arranged in early 2006 following the departure of the previous Public Transport Data Coordinator. Metro have a large data entry team which has proven to be more efficient and resilient than any separate staffing arrangements that CYC could put in place.

38. Data entry work is now done by Metro at cost. A formal tendering exercise could potentially take place to contract this work but is unlikely to result in cost savings for the council, and would most likely increase overall costs.

39. The only notable drawback of the current arrangement is that the data entry staff in Leeds have limited real-world knowledge of York and do not always appreciate local idiosyncrasies. This leads to occasional errors that cannot be rectified promptly as CYC have no direct access to Metro's COSA Trackbuilder system. Minor errors could potentially be corrected more quickly by TPU staff if a secure remote connection into Metro's system could be established.

40. The options presented in the main body of this report are as follows:

a. Request that officers investigate the feasibility of remotely accessing York PTI data within the Metro 'COSA Trackbuilder' to improve data quality.

b.   Continue to react to errors as and when they arise, appreciating that there will be a minimum two-week lag on any incorrect information published on Traveline.

Real-time Passenger Information (RTPI)
Overview
41. Introduced in 2002, 'BLISS' (Bus Location Information Sub-System) was intended to improve the reliability of bus services in the city whilst stimulating patronage growth by increasing passenger confidence in buses through the provision information on their arrival in real time.

42. The reliability of the BLISS system has been variable over the past six years. As a consequence the full benefits of the system have never, to date, been realised. Despite problems with the system both the Council and bus operators in the city remain fully committed to the project. The implementation of many successful projects elsewhere in the country has proved that similar systems can and are delivering the benefits that were promised as part of the BLISS system.

43. Partnership working has led to a number of key improvements this year and much effort is currently being made to ensure that at stop displays, web information and traffic light priority are all working to a level not previously experienced in York.

44. The system is managed for the Council by Network Management with support from the Transport Planning Unit.

45. As of January 2009, all buses operated in the city by First York, Arriva, Yorkshire Coastliner, Harrogate & District, plus the EYMS X46 fleet, are fitted with real-time equipment. All other services are displayed on the system, but only provide scheduled timetable information.

46. All stops along RTPI enabled routes have been labelled with 'yournextbus' logos and stop codes, allowing public use of the SMS service. Following the conclusion of preliminary trials, 'yournextbus' will be launched in early 2009.

Services for the public
47. The public can access real-time information on bus services in the following ways:

48. Electronic LED matrix displays. These 3-line LED displays show the next 3 bus departure times from the associated stop. There are around 30 of these displays around the city centre and along key routes. These displays are usually mounted under shelter canopies but a small number

of freestanding installations exist. These units are gradually being refreshed to improve performance[1].

49. Cityspace kiosks with LCD displays. These larger full-colour displays, based on LCD flat-screen technology, show a list of departures either for a single stop or a cluster of stops depending on configuration. A further touch-screen display allows free public access to the internet Journey Planner. A large-format plasma display is installed on the inside of the Railway Station entrance.

50. 'yournextbus' – SMS, web. Each bus stop in the city has been assigned a unique 8-digit code. This can be used to find real-time information for the stop, either by sending an SMS text message containing the stop code to 64422, or currently via wypte.acislive.com on the internet. The SMS service costs each user 12p plus their normal SMS rate per enquiry. Work is in progress to launch a York-branded traffic information site which will include real time bus information as well as car park, roadwork and other network management news.

Services for operators/Council
51. Bus operators benefit from the system in the following ways:

52. 'Busnet Live' is a software interface with the BLISS system which allows operators and the Council to manage and monitor the progress of buses on a day-to-day basis. In the city, currently only First York have a license for the software as costs in the past have been prohibitive for other companies. It is understood that the license costs may well be more affordable now and should this prove to be the case then selling the benefits of the system to smaller operators may become easier to achieve.

53. **Key message -** Officers will continue to encourage smaller operators to purchase real-time equipment for their vehicles and will investigate how this can best be achieved.

54. 'Bus Operator Reports' is a software package which stores and provides tools to analyse historic data. An accurate picture of bus punctuality and traffic delays can be built up over a period of time and improvements can be implemented where appropriate.

55. As much of the information collated in Bus Operator Reports is 'commercially sensitive' to bus operators, the Council does not have a licence to access this data. Initial conversations with bus operators have suggested that they would be willing for the Council to purchase a licence to access the software if a data sharing agreement was signed, restricting the use of such information with regard to bus services operated on a

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[1] Buses entering York from further a-field (e.g. 'Coastliner' services) are equipped with GPRS technology rather than the native radio (PMR) units. The only way to ensure that they displayed at bus stops was to modify the units, installing GPRS technology, which has the capacity to identify code from local radio transmitting buses as well as from GPRS buses.

commercial basis. The cost of Bus Operator Reports is approximately £12,000 for a five year licence.

56. In the main body of the report, Members are asked to consider the purchase of a licence to access 'Bus Operator Reports' which will allow the Council to remotely monitor and build up a more realistic picture of bus services in the City.