

Meeting:	Executive Member for Transport
Meeting date:	05/12/2024
Report of:	Director of Environment, Transport & Planning
Portfolio of:	Cllr Ravilious Executive Member for Transport

Decision Report: Bus Service 16 Petition

Subject of Report

1. A petition calling for improvements to the number 16 bus service was presented to Council by Councillor Waller on 19th September 2024. The petition asked for City of York Council and Connexions Bus Company “to sort out the timetable and frequency of the number 16 bus”.
2. This report presents options to address the identified issues from both the petition and monitoring work undertaken by officers since receiving the petition.

Benefits and Challenges

3. Bus service 16 provides an important route connecting parts of Westfield and Holgate wards to York City Centre, providing an hourly frequency on weekdays and Saturdays. Hamilton Drive, the Holly Bank Road area, Stephen’s Road and the Windsor Garth area all have no other bus provision other than service 16. These communities all benefit, through service 16 from direct buses to Acomb and York City Centre. Service 16 is fully tendered by City of York Council, therefore Connexions, the operator, cannot make timetable changes without agreement from the Council.
4. There are two core challenges associated with operating service 16. Firstly, delivering a punctual service using one bus to a clockface timetable (where the bus departs at the same time each hour) has been proven to be difficult in the traffic conditions experienced on the route since it’s registration in September 2024.

5. The second challenge has been ensuring there is sufficient seating space for all passengers. A smaller bus is required to operate the route as some of the roads are tight and would be impossible for a full-sized bus to operate on reliably without changes to the highway layout.
6. The earliest any timetable change could be implemented would be 19th January 2024. This is because of lead in times for service registrations to the Traffic Commissioner and time for officers to produce new composite timetables for affected bus stops. A short notice registration could be progressed sooner, but this would mean that printed timetable information at bus stops would be outdated for several weeks.
7. Bus operators are required by the Traffic Commissioner to operate registered services reliably. In practice this means operating to a window of tolerance; buses should not depart from starting points or registered timing points more than one minute early or more than five minutes late. Generally a 95% requirement to this window of tolerance is required.

Policy Basis for Decision

8. Providing bus services in areas where there is no commercial bus route is a key part of the Councils core commitment around Equalities and Human Rights to create equality of access for all.
9. Bus service 16 also provides an alternative to using the private car for journeys to destinations along the route which contributes towards the Councils Climate and Environment core commitments and supports the objectives within York's Local Transport Strategy.

Financial Strategy Implications

10. The options proposed work within existing budget approvals and as such, incur no additional expenditure. There is no funding available to increase the number of buses operating on service 16. This prevents consideration of options that increase the frequency of the service and minimises the options available to officers to address the issues outlined in the petition.

Recommendation and Reasons

11. **Recommendation one:** approve the implementation of the revised hourly frequency timetable outlined in option one and delegate authority to the Director of Environment, Transport & Planning (in consultation with the Director of Governance and the Head of Procurement) to take such steps as are necessary to implement the revisions.
12. **Reason:** To resolve the occasional need for some passengers to stand and to maintain a timetable that is easy to understand for passengers.
13. **Recommendation two:** instruct officers to undertake a route assessment to identify areas where there may be local obstructions to bus movement, approve the progression of any required changes using the BSIP small bus priority schemes fund and delegate authority to the Director of Environment, Transport & Planning (in consultation with the Director of Governance and the Head of Procurement) to take such steps as are necessary to implement the changes.
14. **Reason:** To seek to improve journey time variability on the route of bus service 16.

Background

15. The meeting of the Executive on February 20th 2024 approved bus service 16 to be retendered as a longer, hourly route, taking on the Ascot Way loop from service 24. This reduced the frequency of service 16 from every 45 minutes to hourly. The funding available means that the service 16 timetable must be able to be operated using one bus only.
16. An hourly timetable was created by officers and registered by Connexions before commencing service on September 2nd 2024.
17. The registration of the service coincided with the month long closure of a lane of the eastbound carriageway of the A64 between Askham Bar and Fulford Interchange. As a result of traffic rerouting away from the A64 a host of bus services across the city,

particularly those using and connecting with the Tadcaster Road corridor suffered major punctuality issues.

18. The punctuality issues experienced across a wide range of bus services were so severe that the Head of Active and Sustainable Transport wrote to the Traffic Commissioner to advise of the exceptional circumstances that bus operators in the city were working to.
19. Officers undertook monitoring work during September 2024 which validated the concerns highlighted in the petition. Due to the exceptional circumstances officers agreed with Connexions to retain the existing timetable and to further monitor the service once the A64 had reopened to full capacity.
20. Monitoring recommenced from Monday 7th October through to 2nd November. Some causes for concern remain from a punctuality perspective;
 - a) The first trip of the day has been delayed by 8 minutes or more on arrival in the City Centre on 7 of the 24 days monitored.
 - b) Each of the four Fridays monitored has seen inconstant levels of delay with the final trip being between 18 and 30 minutes late. Levels of delay across the city's bus network on Fridays are considerable and officers are analysing the situation.
21. The numbers of passengers does, on occasion, exceed the seated capacity of the vehicle. Officers have attributed this to two factors; firstly the volume of concessionary pass holders seeking to arrive in the City Centre at the earliest opportunity allowed and secondly, when delayed, the first bus of the day carries more young people on their way to school. Commercial services typically carry these students when service 16 runs to time.
22. Service 16 is due to be retendered with operation of a new contract to commence in April 2025. Further work can be undertaken with users of the service, those living along the route and bus operators ahead of the tender publication to understand longer term preferences.

Consultation Analysis

23. Meetings have been held with Ward members and the lead petitioner to discuss the issues highlighted. The extensive monitoring work has validated, to a degree, the views of the lead petitioner and the signatories. There is a preference amongst ward members to retain the hourly clock face timetable for passengers.

Options Analysis and Evidential Basis

24. **Option One:** Retain the existing hourly frequency; retimed to split the first journey that concessionary pass holders can access as in implications c and d of option one. The key implications are;
- a) Due to traffic conditions in the city this option is not likely to be suitable to run to traffic commissioner windows of tolerance until January. Effectively meaning that the service would likely remain unreliable for the remainder of the month. Further action, including highways measures, will also be required by the council to ensure the timetable remains workable next autumn.
 - b) Provides a shorter journey time when traffic levels are lower making the service more attractive.
 - c) Retains a clockface timetable between the AM and PM peaks
 - d) The current 08:31 trip from Ascot Way is retimed to 08:44. This will permit concessionary pass holders in the Hamilton Drive area to use the service as it arrives after 9am.
 - e) Concessionary pass holders in the Ascot Way area will need to take the next bus at 09:54 - 19 minutes later than current timings.
 - f) The 16:35 trip from Ascot Way to Piccadilly needs to be removed to enable the 17:10 departure from Piccadilly to be operated. This service currently carries 3 passengers on average.
 - g) For printed timetable information at bus stops to be updated when the timetable changes this option would need to be implemented in January.
25. **Option Two:** Implement a revised timetable to a 70-minute frequency (Annex A Option Two).

26. This option reduces the frequency of service 16 further but will ensure a more reliable timetable by providing more time for the bus to complete each trip. The main implications of creating a more reliable, but longer service are;
- a) Reduced frequency and no clockface timetable which is highly likely to make the service less intuitive and convenient to use for some passengers and will make the service generally less attractive.
 - b) The operator is more likely to be able to operate to the window of tolerance required by the Traffic Commissioner.
 - c) The current 08:31 trip from Ascot Way is retimed to 08:44. This will permit concessionary pass holders in the Hamilton Driver area to use the service as it arrives after 9am.
 - d) Concessionary pass holders in the Ascot Way area will need to take the next bus at 09:54 - 19 minutes later than current timings.
 - e) The 16:35 trip from Ascot Way to Piccadilly needs to be removed to enable the 17:10 departure from Piccadilly to be operated. This service currently carries 3 passengers on average.
 - f) For printed timetable information at bus stops to be updated when the timetable changes this option would need to be implemented in January.
27. **Option Three:** Do nothing. This option is not recommended as there will remain occasions when trips are operated with passenger numbers exceeding the seated capacity of the bus. The operator would also be at risk of punitive action by the Traffic Commissioner if punctuality targets were not being met in the longer term.
28. Officers can undertake a route assessment to identify any potential small-scale measures to minimise the risk of obstructions. Any such measures could be implemented using the Bus Service Improvement Fund small scale bus priority measures programme which is currently undersubscribed.

Organisational Impact and Implications

29. The report has the following impacts and implications:

- a) **Financial** There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
- b) **Human Resources (HR)** There are no HR implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
- c) **Legal.** Any existing bus service contracts between the Council and existing operators must only be extended and/or modified in accordance with their contractual terms and conditions and in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 or the Procurement Act 2023.
- d) **Procurement.** There are no procurement implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
- e) **Health and Wellbeing.** The evidence base on the link between active travel and physical activity is extensive. Movement makes people happier and healthier, and it does the same thing for communities – with life-changing, sustainable benefits that have huge economic and social value. A recent study in Scotland (Friel 2024) concluded that active commuters were less likely to suffer from a range of negative physical and mental health outcomes compared to non-active commuters. This further strengthens the evidence for the health benefits of active commuting and promotion of active travel.
- f) **Environment and Climate action** Public transport provides an important and lower carbon alternative to using the private car and aligns with the Climate Change Strategy objective to increase uptake of active travel and public transport.
- g) **Affordability** There are no affordability implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
- h) **Equalities and Human Rights** There are no equalities or human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
- i) **Data Protection and Privacy** The data protection impact assessment (DPIAs) screening questions were completed for the recommendations and options in this report and as there

is no personal, special categories or criminal offence data being processed to set these out, there is no requirement to complete a DPIA at this time. However, this will be reviewed following the approved recommendations and options from this report and a DPIA completed if required.

j) **Communications**, Communications recognises the options contained in this report, and their importance to residents. Communications will support any decision with relevant and timely messaging, as well as any reactive statements that are required.

k) **Economy** There are no economy implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Risks and Mitigations

30. If service 16 remains unreliable then there is a risk that the operator could be fined by the Traffic Commissioner and/or could choose deregister the service. The options have been proposed to the operator as part of the development of this report.

Wards Impacted

31. Westfield, Holgate and Guildhall.

Contact details

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Background papers

N/a

Annexes

- Annex A: Bus Timetable Options