



Bus Operators and Council working together to deliver better bus services for York

## **Reactions to the draft Final Report of the ad hoc Traffic Congestion Scrutiny Committee**

May 2009

### **1. Introduction**

The York Quality Bus Partnership (QBP) is a public commitment made by Bus Operators and City of York Council (CYC) to maintain and improve the provision of bus services in the City. Working together in partnership for the benefit of all residents, businesses and visitors to the City, the Bus Operators and CYC will strive to provide the best quality of bus services and facilities that can be achieved with the resources available to the partners. The QBP seeks to co-ordinate investment and service development between the partners to improve services to customers and reduce the deleterious impacts of road traffic.

The Independent Chair of the Partnership became aware at a late stage of the meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2009 to consider the draft final report of the Traffic Congestion ad-hoc Scrutiny Committee (TCSC) and has prepared this response without the benefit of discussion with members of the partnership. Views expressed are therefore the personal responsibility of the author and may be updated following the QBP meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2009.

### **2. TCSC Review Conclusions**

#### **2.1 A more Sustainable City (paragraph 5)**

TCSC refers to the policies of the Council expressed through LPT2 and "Access York" and the disappointing lack of prominence of transport policy in the Sustainable Community Strategy vision. The York Environmental Partnership has increased its examination of transport issues, although unfortunately the QBP has not been represented at several meetings because of pressures of business on its members.

It is worth making a number of general points (the first two not specific to York) at the outset:

- The widely expressed attitudes of motorists and bodies promoting motorists' interests that there are irrevocable rights to drive and park freely. This often extends to outright opposition to further traffic management measures, notably including lower speed limits, additional parking and loading restrictions and priorities for buses. This points to a need for greater awareness amongst the general public of sustainability issues in relation to transport and the social, economic and environmental gains that arise from the better management of traffic to maximise the contribution of walking, cycling, public transport and other shared modes (including cars);
- Correspondingly, there is a lack of awareness of the economic (and other) value of scarce road space (consider what the development value of the equivalent land area occupied by roads in central York would be in the impossible circumstances that it could be released and continue to be accessed!). It is unlikely (as referenda results in Edinburgh and Greater Manchester show) that there is any general public appetite for road user charges in congested areas. Arguably London, where public attitudes changed perceptibly after the previous Mayor's introduction of the Congestion Charge, is an exception probably because of experience of the unstable highway

interested in assessing their current performance and improving their driving skills (and maybe also those invited to do so by the Police as an alternative to a fixed penalty!). The Chair of the QBC is associated with the developer of a laptop computer based performance recording and assessment system that has been very successfully used in Australia, Asia and the USA for training bus and taxi drivers and is being developed for car driver training. Such systems could be applied in York but obviously are only partly within the purview of the QBC.

### 3. TCSC Review Recommendations

#### 3.1 Short /Medium Term (paragraph 12)

##### Overall

The Transport Strategy study at (iii) should be stakeholder driven by a suitable steering group and involving appropriate discussion and inputs from businesses, drivers, bus and freight operators, cyclists and pedestrians as well as Council departments and agencies.

The approach at (v) should be fully inclusive involving the bus operators fully with the QBP available as an existing sounding board for those not directly involved in the detailed work. A better formulation might be:

*Agree a development plan to increase the use of bus services, identifying a core network sustainable with the resources predicted to be available commercially from the local bus companies together and the revenue support realistically expected to be available from the City Council.*

This plan should include routes, marketing and ticketing.

At (vi) dealing with charging, it is suggested that a higher level approach is required. There is a need to consider parking charges in the context of other charges for transport, especially bus fares, so that the overall transport policy objectives and targets, particularly modal split, can be achieved.

##### Public Transport

At (viii) there is reference to "holding down" bus fares. Under legislation up to the Local Transport Act 2008, fares are a commercial matter for the operators except for subsidised services for which budgets are limited. The Local Transport Act offers scope for including fares within Quality Contracts and Statutory Partnerships but at the expense of increased bureaucracy. It is suggested that this reference be replaced by "minimising the gap between perceived costs by car and bus".

Also in (viii), revise from "concessionary" to "influencing" to read "*concessionary patronage, additional bus priority measures. Influencing*"

(xiv) needs to be more widely cast. For example:

*Improve access to York District Hospital from all parts of the District. This may involve route revisions and through ticketing. Demand for parking at and around the Hospital as well as improved access can be achieved by ensuring the extension of Park and Ride services to include the hospital.*

(xv) must involve the highways authority as well as operators. Thus:

These must also be related to proposals for significant development elsewhere in the City, such as York Central. One family of options that should be pursued is creating a public transport spine across the city centre probably based on one of the bridges. Implementation of such a strategy might initially involve creating a loop or other system for distributing general traffic to avoid the central area, progressively increasing the proportion of central area through routes devoted to priority classes of vehicle.

#### **4. Summary and request**

Notwithstanding its length this response to the TCSC report has been quickly prepared and has not had the benefit of discussion with other members of the QBP.

At a number of points it is suggested that the QBP should be given the opportunity to comment, make input or be involved in taking issues forward. It may be that there will be an opportunity to do some of this at the QBP's meeting on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> June. In any event it is requested that the QBP should have the opportunity to consider the final report.

Taking the perspective of an informed outsider, the Chair of the QBP considers that key issues are:

- Managing servicing of the central core through an agreed servicing plan
- Ensuring public transport is fully considered in the access plans of all significant new development
- Considering alternative transshipment based servicing options
- Working towards a cross city public transport (bus transit) spine
- A jointly agreed bus development plan
- Full involvement of all stakeholders (particularly operators) in developing future transport strategy.

**John Carr**

6 May 2009

JDC/CYQBP/6 May 2009, perhaps