

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

19 FEBRUARY 2020

STATEMENT OF THE ACCESS PORTFOLIO HOLDER COUNTY COUNCILLOR DON MACKENZIE (INCLUDING HIGHWAYS, ROAD AND RAIL TRANSPORT, BROADBAND, MOBILE TELEPHONY)

A59 Kex Gill

The scheme to divert the A59 trans-Pennine route northwards away from Kex Gill to a more stable alignment continues to be progressed. A planning application for the new road went live on the planning portal in December and the statutory consultation process is underway.

The full business case is under active consideration by the Department for Transport and the Treasury. A decision had been expected last year but was delayed by the general election.

The procurement of a contractor has completed its first phase with selection of companies for the tender list. This process will resume once we know that our business case has been approved. Negotiations continue with landowners, as does the work on the necessary orders required for the scheme.

Subject to granting of planning permission and approval of funding, and assuming that the Secretary of State does not call for a public inquiry, construction work will start this summer.

Highways Contracts

Preparatory work continues on establishing our Teckal company, NY Highways, which will take over the operational highways maintenance services for the County Council from April 2021.

The vision of the new company will prioritise the delivery of excellent value for money for our residents, putting our customers at the heart of all we do, and focusing on an effective and efficient service.

The Professional Services Contract for design and consultancy works, which comes to an end on 31 March, has been re-awarded to WSP, following their successful bid to retain the work. The new 4-year contract will commence on 1 April 2020, and includes the provision of top up design services for in-house client teams and specialised services like geotechnical engineering and traffic modelling.

Harrogate Rail Line

At our meeting earlier this month, the Executive voted unanimously to accept the North Yorkshire LEP's grant of £9.6m, and to approve a contribution from the County Council to fund track and signalling upgrades on the Harrogate Rail Line at Cattal. This scheme will enable the frequency of train journeys between Harrogate and York to be doubled. Network Rail is going through the industry's statutory processes and consultations, which are due to end in February.

It is now hoped that work can get underway within a few weeks and be completed in time for the improved frequency to begin with the introduction of the December 2020 timetables.

The County Council's contribution to the funding of the scheme will come from our on-street parking surpluses.

Public Services Vehicle Accessibility Regulations

Members are aware that the County Council was subject to a legal challenge last September in relation to home to school transport. It was made clear that the PSVAR apply to home to school transport whenever a fare is paid. As a result, we were compelled to stop charging non-entitled and post-16 pupils for travel, making use of spare seats on buses.

In a letter to local authorities last November, the Department for Transport gave details of a process by which councils could apply for a temporary exemption to the regulations until December 2021. We have applied for exemptions on 109 eligible services and these were granted last month.

We are now able to reintroduce charges on home to school transport, and expect to publish a consultation later this month in order to seek views on whether the council should continue to use non-accessible vehicles for school transport, and under what circumstances we should charge for the use of spare seats on our services.

The DfT has issued a further letter to local authorities on 30 December 2019 and asked for that to be distributed to all schools and colleges to make them aware of an exemption for pupil transport services which they procure themselves. This exemption has been offered only until July.

Broadband and Mobile Telephony

We made a bid for £1m last year to the Government's Rural Connected Communities programme to seek funding to develop 5G networks. If successful, we will use the award to bring this latest technology to places like Reeth, Muker, Leyburn and Middleham, where existing mobile phone coverage is inadequate. I am confident of a positive outcome.

In my statement in November, I made reference to the proposal by Government and by the four mobile network operators to introduce a Shared Rural Network, which would improve geographic coverage of a 4G signal in our county from 60% to over 90%. This would bring about a remarkable improvement for our rural areas. We expect the proposal to be ratified in next month's budget statement.

Our £15.1m Local Full Fibre Networks project is well underway. Having started laying fibre last October in Brayton, our contractor has so far dug 27km of fibre underground in Selby, Easingwold, Malton, Pickering, Tadcaster, Thirsk and Whitby. Installation of full fibre is now taking place in Harrogate and Scarborough, which will lead to a big increase in speed of deployment.