

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

22 JULY 2020

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

Our annual highways repair programme is well underway. The County Council is investing record sums in ensuring our roads and paths continue to be well-maintained and safe. The much-reduced volumes of traffic on our highways and footways have meant that work is being carried out efficiently, with little disruption to the travelling public.

Our newly formed Teckal company, NY Highways Ltd, has recently appointed its first managing director: Ross Bullerwell will take up his post on 9 September. Ross is currently Managing Director of Rennicks (UK) Ltd, a company which develops innovative traffic signage. He brings to our company many years of experience in highways contracting.

We have recently agreed a short extension to our contract with Ringway until 1 June 2021, at which date NY Highways will become operational. The extra two months will allow us to keep existing arrangements for the full winter season. I take this opportunity to express our thanks to Ringway managers and staff who have been very supportive to us throughout the continuing process of transferring our highways contract to the new company.

We still await a response from the Department for Transport following the submission of our full business case for funding the re-alignment of the A59 trans-Pennine route at Kex Gill. Tenderers have been shortlisted, and tender documents are ready to issue. We remain hopeful of positive news in the very near future.

In the meantime, severe flooding of the River Aire in Selby district in February forced the closure of the A19 between Chapel Haddlesey and Eggborough. Storm Dennis led to the overtopping of the road's embankment, which was submerged for several days and, when water levels receded, more than 1km of the structure was found to have been badly scoured. The road has remained closed until now. The BES Director, in consultation with his Executive Members took the decision last month to award the contract to repair the road at a cost estimated at £6.5m. Work will start next month and take at least six months to complete.

Upgrades for A1(M) Junction 47 and Harrogate Rail Line

Both of these improvement schemes were given the go-ahead at the end of April, with firm costs of £7.77m and £9.85m respectively. Much of the funding for the schemes has been provided by the YNYER LEP, with the balance coming from the County Council's on-street parking surpluses, and, in the case of J47, from a developer's contribution of £1m.

The highway scheme involves the installation of traffic signals, road widening, and additional improvements at the T-junction where the A168 joins the A59. Work is expected to start shortly and be concluded by early autumn 2021.

The rail scheme involves track and signalling upgrades near Cattal. We are working with Network Rail to ensure that this work proceeds swiftly to make up for timing slippages due to Covid-19 restrictions. Once completed, this project will make it possible to run two trains between Harrogate and York every hour in each direction, double the current frequency.

These additional train movements have given rise to a formal objection to the plans by LNER who believes that the capacity of the East Coast Main Line north of York will be overloaded. Network Rail and the County Council remain confident that this matter can be resolved.

Both of these transport schemes are much needed in view of the rapid commercial and residential growth planned along the A59 corridor between Knaresborough and York.

Social Distancing and Active Travel

Our highways area offices have been busy responding to each stage of the Covid-19 pandemic by ensuring that pedestrians in town centres have sufficient footpath space for social distancing, and to support retailers and other traders in town centres to keep their customers safe as businesses re-open and the economy comes back to life. County Council officers continue to work closely with partners, including district councils, business organisations and the police throughout this process. Details of measures taken can be found here: www.northyorks.gov.uk/socialdistancing

The County Council has been allocated up to £1.3m from the Government's Emergency Active Travel Fund, to be used to encourage travellers to avoid public transport and to walk or cycle. As members will understand, this funding is limited and will not go far when distributed over the whole county.

February storms

Last winter was the wettest on record. The combined effects of three named storms and prolonged heavy rainfall in February led to severe floods in many locations across North Yorkshire, especially in Craven, Hambleton, Harrogate, and Selby districts. The most serious effects were experienced near Selby around the Lower Aire.

I pay tribute to all our partners involved in the multi-agency response, which was outstanding. As lead local flood authority, the County Council has commenced a formal investigation into the flooding events under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act (2010).

Broadband and mobile telephony

As much of the country stayed at home these last few months, so our reliance upon video conferencing and digital communications has never been greater. North Yorkshire's digital infrastructure has proved to be very robust, and NYnet's networks have performed extremely well. I am also able to report excellent progress with the following projects:

- Phase 3 of our Superfast North Yorkshire is well past half-way with about 8,000 connections made out of a contract total of 14,239, most by means of full-fibre
- SFNY has set aside £11.5m for Phase 4, the contract for which has attracted very good responses from interested providers
- The County Council's Local Full Fibre Networks project, valued at £15.1m, has made remarkable progress whilst roads and footpaths have been free of traffic. About 100km of gigabit fibre ducting has already been installed in towns throughout the county.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR DON MACKENZIE