

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

16 FEBRUARY 2022

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

Highways

So far this winter the weather has remained relatively benign with just a few days of significant snow and ice, mainly on higher ground. Strong winds have caused disruption as named storms passed through the county, and our NY Highways teams have been engaged with the removal of hundreds of trees blown on to our roads.

Salt barns have been restocked throughout the season in order to maintain our resilience, and salt bins and heaps across the highway network are also replenished when needed.

I pay tribute to our colleagues at NY Highways who have carried out an excellent winter service so far, and especially to our Head of Highways, Nigel Smith, whose regular and prompt reports have kept us all informed when conditions have been challenging.

In addition to the £500,000 investment in 10 new weather stations and cameras, we have recently introduced a gritter tracking service, which is available on the County Council's website. Anyone wishing or having to travel during inclement weather can now access real-time information on road conditions throughout the county.

As always, we are supported by our dedicated team of more than 100 farming contractors who stand ready to support our ploughing and gritting services at periods of extreme weather.

Major schemes

Colleagues are aware that completion of our Junction 47 scheme near Flaxby has been delayed. High ground water levels and the discovery of great-crested newts have combined to push back the finish date by several weeks to spring. The scheme, valued at £10m, includes widening of the A1M slip roads, an additional lane on the A59 eastbound, full signalisation of the roundabout and upgrades to the A168 junction to the east of the roundabout. This investment anticipates increased traffic flows which will result from substantial residential and commercial development along the A59 corridor.

The second major project on the A59 is at Kex Gill, between Harrogate and Skipton. Statutory processes are progressing well on the £61m scheme to realign the A59 Trans-Pennine route at Kex Gill. Funding is in place, arrangements to appoint a contractor are underway, and construction work will start as soon as possible.

Transforming Cities Fund schemes

At its meeting on 25 January the Executive decided unanimously that all three Gateway projects for Harrogate, Selby and Skipton should be progressed to detailed design and implementation. The schemes bring £42m worth of investment to the three town centres, and provide a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform the travel gateways to the benefit of local residents, businesses and visitors.

The projects are designed to provide better facilities for walking and cycling, encourage the use of trains and buses, upgrade surrounding public spaces, and boost local town centre economies. Work now goes ahead to finalise designs, to prepare traffic regulation orders and to draw up and submit business cases to the West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

I am grateful to WYCA and to Harrogate Borough and Craven and Selby District Councils for their valuable partnership support during the TCF process to get us to this positive position.

Bus and rail updates

The County Council has submitted a bid for funding to the Government's Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme. Our business case has the ambitious proposal to convert the entire Harrogate Bus Company fleet to battery electric operation. The total cost to electrify the whole fleet is £20m, which would be paid for by our successful bid for £8m and a contribution of almost £12m from Harrogate Bus Company. We expect to receive a decision about our bid by the end of next month.

A period of public consultation on the County Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan ended last week. The £116m plan sets out various proposals including measures to make bus services commercially sustainable, to improve reliability and journey times and to expand coverage of the YorBus pilot, which is underway and proving very popular in an area bounded by Bedale, Masham and Ripon.

Rail travellers between Harrogate, Knaresborough and York have been enjoying a much-improved service since 12 December. The County Council-led £10m scheme to upgrade track and signals near Cattal has allowed train operator Northern to double the number of trains from one to two every hour in each direction.

Broadband and Mobile Telephony

Phase 3 of the County Council's Superfast North Yorkshire project is expected to be completed next month when all 14,239 properties in the £20m contract awarded to BT will have been connected to high quality broadband, with most benefiting from full fibre to the premise.

Phase 4 is already well underway, with Quickline Communications under contract to deliver a further 15,830 property connections. This broadband delivery contract is worth £14.5m and will use a mixture of fibre-to-the-premise and fixed wireless access technology.

By the end of the roll-out of Phase 4, we expect that about 98% of all domestic and business premises in North Yorkshire will have been connected up to high quality broadband.

In addition to our SFNY project, the County Council has also invested £15m in a county-wide Local Full Fibre Network connecting up a total of 331 public buildings. This scheme will be completed next month. The network, managed for us by NYnet, has also provided the means to introduce public Wi-Fi into 18 market towns. Of those, 12 are already operational and in regular use by residents and visitors; the remaining six will be on-stream over the next few weeks.

We have also received funding from the North Yorkshire LEP to extend the LFFN into 12 business parks around the county.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR DON MACKENZIE