

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

17 FEBRUARY 2021

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

Highways

The Department for Transport announced on 30 January that the County Council's bid for funding of £56m to re-route the A59 trans-Pennine road away from Kex Gill on to a more stable alignment had been approved. This represents a very successful conclusion to many years of work to bring us to this favourable position.

Just two weeks before the Secretary of State for Transport made his announcement, the County Council's Planning and Regulatory Functions Committee had unanimously given planning consent to the diversion proposal. The decision was subject to a call-in request by a minerals extraction company but the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government subsequently turned this down and the permission stands.

Construction work on the 3-mile long new road is expected to take up to 18 months. Once completed, it is expected that the regular closures of the road caused by landslips at this location, which necessitated a lengthy diversion via Otley and Ilkley, will be avoided in the future.

I thank all our officers – in highways, planning, procurement, public rights of way, legal, environmental, property services – for their highly professional work and dedicated efforts, alongside those of our consultant WSP, which have resulted in this significant investment in our highways network.

Winter weather – snow, ice, floods

The last few weeks have been a reminder of the challenges, which winter can throw at us. Our gritting teams have had to cope with periods of heavy snowfall, whilst carrying out their duties in a Covid-safe manner. As in 2018 when we faced the Beast from the East, we are likely to see the cost of our winter service exceed its £7m budget.

Periods of heavy snow were often interspersed by rainfall, which washed off the grit salt spread earlier, necessitating additional gritting. Very low temperatures (down to minus 8C in Muker) meant that salt spread rates have had to be raised. As a consequence, 20,000 tonnes of salt were spread on our roads between Christmas Eve and mid-January. We started the winter service with 55,000 tonnes of salt and thanks to good procurement and the excellent relationship with our supplier in Boulby, our stocks remain sufficient.

I pay tribute to our gritting teams including our Ringway partners and the 100-plus farmers who help to keep our main roads open at all times and to provide a winter service second to none.

After two significant spells of heavy snowfall and very low temperatures, milder weather was introduced by Storm Christoph, which brought an even greater challenge for our highways teams and partners – flooding. There were road closures in many parts of the county during the second half of January. Hard work and improved defences meant that domestic properties were largely spared, but it was a close-run thing in Malton. Selby district was

badly affected with Cawood Bridge still closed as this report is compiled. Work to repair the A19 at Chapel Haddesley, damaged in last February's floods, had been proceeding on schedule, but there is now a risk that renewed flooding in the area may delay matters.

Transforming Cities and Active Travel Funds

The County Council has secured substantial funding, which will significantly boost provision for active travel in the county.

A total of £31m has been awarded to three transport gateway schemes in Harrogate (£7.8m), Selby (£17.5m) and Skipton (£5.8m) as part of the Government's Transforming Cities Fund. These projects will transform roads and public areas around rail and bus stations in the three towns. Public consultation on the schemes will start on 23 February and finish on 22 March.

In Tranche 2 of the Department for Transport's Active Travel Fund, the County Council has made a successful bid for £1.011m to be used to create four cycle paths – two in Harrogate, one each in Knaresborough and Whitby. All four are expected to be delivered by March 2022

Harrogate Transport Improvement Programme (HTIP)

Reports were presented to the Skipton & Ripon and Harrogate & Knaresborough Area Constituency Committees last month outlining the progress made with the Harrogate Transport Improvement Programme. The HTIP follows on from the Harrogate Congestion Study and the public engagement in 2019, which attracted an unprecedented 15,500 responses.

Those responses and the views expressed by members of the two meetings will now be taken into account when the BES Director and Executive Members make a decision on next steps to be taken to deal with congestion in the Harrogate area.

Rail investment

I am pleased to report that the works on the £9.8m scheme to improve reliability and capacity of the rail line between Harrogate and York were completed just before Christmas, on time and just under budget. The project, which involved track and signalling upgrades, was funded by the YNY LEP and by the County Council using parking surpluses.

Broadband and mobile telephony

The contract for Phase 4 of the County Council's SFNY project was signed in December. Valued at more than £14m, this latest investment in superfast broadband expansion will connect up almost 16,000 households and business, taking the total number of properties to benefit from our project to well over 200,000. The successful bidder is Quickline Communications. Whilst the technology used in the first three phases was fibre to the cabinet (FTTC) and fibre to the premise (FTTP), this latest phase involves wireless connections.

The County Council is a major partner in the Mobile Access North Yorkshire consortium, which has been established in order to investigate how the latest 5G mobile technology can benefit rural communities, and especially those with poor or non-existent mobile coverage. Coverdale in Richmondshire has been chosen for an initial pilot and a planning application for a 5G mast is being determined by the local planning authority this month.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR DON MACKENZIE