

North Yorkshire Council

Selby and Ainsty Area Constituency Committee

19 January 2024

Update on Local Bus Services

Report of the Corporate Director - Environment

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on local bus services within the Selby and Ainsty Area Constituency Committee

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Local Bus services continue to be under significant pressure both locally and nationally since the Covid-19 pandemic. Passenger numbers have recovered to around 90% of pre covid levels with this figure much lower for concessionary pass users at around 70%. This has particularly affected rural routes where older passengers represented a greater proportion of users.
- 2.2 There has been a significant increase in operating costs (vehicle procurement, maintenance, insurance, staffing, property rental and fuel) along with national difficulties with recruiting bus drivers, engineering staff and sourcing spare parts. As a result of these added pressures, providers are reviewing their services more than ever before, resulting in commercial service level reductions and higher prices for routes operating under contract to the council.
- 2.3 North Yorkshire Council has maintained its support for local bus routes over recent years, spending over £1.6m each year on bus services. We are also accessing grant funding from central government which is helping to keep the current bus network running. The council is now financially supporting a number of previously commercial bus routes that would otherwise have been withdrawn entirely in the last two years.

3.0 Selby and Ainsty local bus service update

- 3.1 We have seen a number of service reductions and contract price increases as the industry continues to try and cope with the many issues caused by the pandemic. We are working with all bus operators across the county to keep services running but this is still a very challenging time. The current focus is on maintaining the existing network and supporting the recovery in passenger numbers. Inevitably this has meant some routes are now operating less frequently but it is hoped that keeping a core level of service running will mean that these can be built back up again as passenger numbers improve.
- 3.2 In late 2022, the Selby and Ainsty area saw a number of commercial bus routes either being withdrawn entirely or having their timetables reduced. These included:

Service 64/164 Selby – Leeds via Sherburn
Service 405 Selby – Doncaster via Whitley
Service 408/9 Pontefract – Doncaster via Womersley

Service 412 Wetherby – York via Tockwith
Service 476 Selby – Pontefract

- 3.3 At that point North Yorkshire County Council stepped in and was able to tender for replacement services to ensure communities were able to retain a bus service. With the resources available it wasn't always possible to keep the same timetable but the majority of these routes are continuing to run regular journeys with ongoing support from NYC (and neighbouring authorities contributing in some cases).
- 3.4 Service 840 (Leeds – Tadcaster - York – Whitby) was also under threat of withdrawal but the increase in passengers generated by the National £2 Fare Cap during summer 2023 helped to stabilise the route and it continues to run on a largely commercial basis.
- 3.5 Since then, the local network has remained stable, with some revisions in Selby in July 2023 resulting from Selby College changing how some of its routes are operated and to improve timekeeping. Support from the local councillor also saw additional Saturday journeys introduced on Service 42 (Selby to York via Cawood) in May to provide extra capacity and a Sunday timetable was introduced for Service 401 (Selby – Goole) in November.
- 3.6 We are in discussions with the NHS Trust who own the land around the entrance to Selby Hospital where we want to see better waiting facilities for bus passengers.
- 3.7 A meeting took place last month with a local care provider to look to improve access by bus for staff based at Whitley.
- 3.8 Work is on-going with the Sherburn in Elmet Business Forum to look at how bus and rail access can be improved. This project is on-going with a small team from NYC, the Forum and transport operators. Arriva have been asked to review their timetables and see if these can co-ordinate better with key shift changes. We are also looking at plans for the Sherburn 2 site to ensure bus stop access and infrastructure is included.

4.0 National £2 fare cap scheme

- 4.1 In January 2023, a national scheme was introduced to lower bus fares and encourage more people to travel by bus. Funded by the Government, the scheme means that a single bus journey on all eligible bus routes run by participating operators will cost no more than £2 (or £4 return). The majority of the local bus operators in North Yorkshire are taking part in the scheme.
- 4.2 The fare scheme was originally due to run for three months but was then extended until 30 June 2023 and more recently further extended to December 2024. Feedback from bus companies is mainly positive, in that the scheme is generating more passenger journeys. It has been a significant factor in Yorkshire Coastliner's decision not to withdraw the Route 840 Leeds to Whitby service. However, it has led to some overloading issues, particularly on tourist routes and at busy times of the year.

5.0 Funding from central government

- 5.1 NYC has received a number of grants to help to maintain the bus network since the pandemic which help to offset the loss in fare revenue and recent cost increases. These are currently in place until summer 2025. However, there have been a number of different funding streams, often provided for short periods of time and at very short notice which has made longer term planning of the bus network very difficult.

6.0 Community Transport

- 6.1 Community Transport passenger usage has recovered to around 70% of pre covid usage. Some volunteer drivers did not return after the pandemic and it is an ongoing challenge for all schemes to recruit and retain volunteer drivers. North Yorkshire Council has maintained its support for community transport with journey reimbursement, and the provision of grants to extend services and recruit volunteer drivers.
- 6.2 Harrogate and District Community Action recently ceased the operation of both the Harrogate and Ripon Volunteer Car Schemes, and Tadcaster Volunteer Community Support Association offered their support and are now working in partnership with Ripon Community House, Harrogate Neighbours and Chain Lane Community Hub to continue volunteer car schemes in the Harrogate and Ripon areas.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report as it provides an update.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report as it provides an update.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no equalities implications arising directly from this report as it provides an update.

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no climate change implications arising directly from this report as it provides an update.

11.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 11.1 It is recommended that Members note the contents of this report.

APPENDICES:

None

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04 January 2024

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Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.