

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

21 February 2024

STATEMENT OF EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION

Winter weather

It has been wet, wild and wintry, with North Yorkshire feeling the effects of no less than ten named storms this season. As a consequence, roads have been flooded and trees brought down in several locations. Snow, ice and temperatures as low as -10C also disrupted travel, and we've unfortunately seen flooding threaten several communities.

Whatever the weather throws North Yorkshire's way, teams from the council and NY Highways rise to the challenge, ably assisted by a fleet of former subcontractors and specialist arboriculture teams. They operate 24/7 and those who are out on the ground are often working in most-inclement conditions. Therefore, it is right for me to recognise formally their contribution to keeping our highway network as safe as possible for our residents.

A59 Kex Gill

Delivery of the £68.8m scheme to divert the A59 continues. Key achievements on site include the specialist dismantling and reconstruction of over 2km of drystone walling, comprising eight different styles of traditional techniques, and the building of a 3.5km temporary haul road to facilitate site access. At time of writing this, works have commenced on two key structures: a large retaining wall at the valley head and the beck underpass in valley bottom. This is despite difficult site conditions. Spring 2024 sees the commencement of the substantive earthworks operation to form the new highway, a task we hope will be aided by better weather and longer days.

Ensuring that the existing A59 is available for use is a constant challenge and we recently completed some remedial works to the slope below the road along with resurfacing and patching. Unfortunately, at the time of writing a thin crack has emerged on the verge in another section of the A59 and we have had to install two-way traffic lights to keep vehicles away from that side of the road for safety reasons and to prevent further movement. We are assessing the situation and will be designing the most effective repair scheme. It's imperative that we get this key route reopened as soon as possible.

Transforming Cities Fund – Harrogate, Selby and Skipton

We continue to make progress on work on transformative Gateway schemes to improve access to three of North Yorkshire's rail stations. Full Business Cases have been submitted to West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) and Department for Transport (DfT) for all schemes. Subject to approvals, work is expected to commence in Harrogate and Selby in Autumn. Work in Skipton is likely to commence on site slightly earlier, with a summer start anticipated.

Electric Vehicle Charging

North Yorkshire Council is leading the way for rural areas with its roll out of electric vehicle charging infrastructure. We have already received £3.27m funding through two Office for Zero Emissions Vehicles grants to deliver 220 Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCPs) in total. We have also bid for a further £4.88m from the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Capital Fund, which was offered as an indicative allocation rather than a competition. This should enable delivery of around 1,300 EVCPs. Subject to approval, this would see us deliver our target four years ahead of schedule. NYC also received £494,000 from the LEVI Capability Fund to cover resourcing of this project. We expect to procure a charging point operator very soon, meaning we can start delivery of EVCPs early in the next financial year.

Highways Capital Programme

Following the reallocation of funding from HS2, the Council has received an additional £9.4m funding for highway maintenance schemes from the Department for Transport (DfT). This is split between this financial year and 2024/25. A programme of schemes has been identified, delivering carriageway resurfacing works across the county, enabling us to bring forward over £7.5m of works from our highways capital forward programme, including schemes in Filey, Pickering, Thirsk, Settle, Boroughbridge and Selby.

Looking further ahead, as part of the HS2 funding, the DfT has announced an additional £314m of highway maintenance funding for North Yorkshire up until 2034. We are awaiting further details on this funding; however, it could represent around a 60% increase in maintenance funding compared to what we currently receive. The funding can be used across all highway assets, including carriageways, footways, street lighting, signs, bridges and structures. We are working on developing a programme of schemes to utilise the funding from 2025/26.

Buses

The £2 fare cap continues to prove popular, and it appears to be working well in terms of boosting passenger usage in North Yorkshire. Overall, there has been an 11% increase in patronage in 2023 compared to 2022.

In further positive news, NYC has been given an indicative allocation of £3.5m in additional funding to support delivery of our delivery of our Bus Service Improvement Plan. This extra money is also from reallocated HS2 funding.

And in yet more positive news, more electric buses are heading to Harrogate. Thanks to our successful £20m bid with Harrogate Bus Company to the Government's Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas fund (ZEBRA), 20 new single deck and 19 new double deck battery electric buses will be introduced in the Harrogate district area between April and June this year. This will result in immediate air quality improvements in the four declared air quality management areas in Ripon, Harrogate, and Knaresborough and an improved travel experience.

COUNCILLOR KEANE DUNCAN