

North Yorkshire Council

Skipton and Ripon Area Constituency Committee

7 March 2024

72 Skipton – Grassington Bus Service

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Members with information regarding the No.72 Skipton – Grassington bus service.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Service 72 bus route has needed financial support from the council to operate for many years with tenders being issued approximately every 4 years. The nearby Service 64, between Ilkley and Skipton, ran commercially (no requirement for subsidy) until February 2023 when the bus operator Transdev announced that, due to rising costs and fewer passengers travelling following the pandemic, it was no longer viable and planned to withdraw it.

With only limited funding available and not wishing to see an entire bus service withdrawn, the transport team worked with Transdev to consider alternatives. The company proposed operating both Service 64 and Service 72 together on a reduced two-hourly basis Monday to Saturday. This would still retain a regular timetable on Service 72 but also keep Service 64 running. Service 64 carried significantly more passengers than Service 72 and it was important to find a solution that worked for the majority of passengers. Revised timetables were introduced from May 2023 with Service 72 reducing from 9 round trips per day to 6. The timings of journeys on each route were based on accommodating the largest number of existing passenger journeys as possible.

- 2.2 Mr Tony Serjeant submitted a public statement to the 14 December 2023 Skipton and Ripon ACC regarding the No.72 service (the statement and Officer response can be seen at Appendix A). Following the statement, Members asked that an item covering this be added to a future agenda.
- 2.3 On 1 February 2024 a petition with 164 signatures, 160 of which have North Yorkshire addresses, was received. The petition wording was as follows:

We the undersigned call on Keighley Bus Company to reverse its recent cuts to the No.72 bus service (Buckden – Skipton) and urge North Yorkshire Council & national government to increase its financial support for rural bus services so that we do not lose routes such as the No.72 which brings tourists to the Dales and is a vital lifeline for many residents and people who work in Upper Wharfedale & Skipton.

Petitions with more than 500 signatures are automatically referred to the relevant committee. Petitions with fewer than 500 signatures are referred to the relevant department.

Therefore, it is important to note that, as this petition does not reach the criteria to be referred to the Committee, it is not being considered under the petitions scheme and therefore the petitioner does not have a right to speak. They are able to speak under the public questions and statements scheme.

3.0 72 SKIPTON – GRASSINGTON BUS SERVICE

- 3.1 Procurement regulations require contracts to be re-tendered periodically, normally every four years, although the Covid pandemic interrupted the usual schedule for service reviews. Local bus routes in the Craven area were put back out to tender in October 2023 with new contracts due to start on 8th April 2024. Ahead of this the public transport team wrote to members and parishes last summer for their views and these were used to shape the tenders. Around 30 local bus routes were part of this tender exercise along with over 300 school routes. The procurement process ran from October to January with new contracts being awarded during February 2024 to start from 8th April 2024.
- 3.2 The tender for Service 72 included as options both the current timetable and the more frequent timetable that had operated until May 2023 and the outcome is that the previous timetable will be reinstated (Appendix A).
- 3.3 Local bus timetables must be registered with the Traffic Commissioner at least 42 days before being introduced, and this took place on 23rd February to allow these timetables to start from 8th April. Changes can be made after the new contracts start but Service 72 links operationally with Service 64 (Skipton – Ilkley), and with the 72A & 72 B to allow connections from further up the dale, so the potential knock-on effect of any changes would also need to be considered.
- 3.4 Regarding national government funding, the government are allocating the HS2 funding to councils across the Midlands and the North for different purposes. For local bus services DfT has published indicative funding allocations for 2024/25 only from the redirected HS2 budget and North Yorkshire Council has been given an indicative allocation of £3.5M. The Department for Transport (DfT) expects us to use the funding to maintain existing bus service levels and also on other measures to improve public transport consistent with our published Bus Service Improvement Plan. These have to be agreed through the statutory Enhanced Partnership that each council has in place with bus operators and passenger representatives after which DfT will confirm the final allocation to be made by the end of the financial year. Our Bus Service Improvement Plan includes measures to maintain and improve bus services in rural areas but with only one year of funding currently being made available, and at very short notice, it will be difficult to introduce wholly new bus services and develop them to the point of longer term sustainability in a single year. This is something we, and other councils, have raised with DfT as longer term funding is needed to deliver the improvements to public transport we want to see. There is a report going to Executive on this next month.

4.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Not applicable, this report is for noting.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no financial, legal, equalities of climate change implications.

6.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 The report is for noting.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION

- i) To note and provide comments on the information.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Public Statement and Officer Response to the 14th December 2023 Skipton and Ripon ACC.

Appendix B – Service 72 timetable from 8th April 2024.

*Karl Battersby
Corporate Director – Environment
County Hall
Northallerton
26.02.24*

Report Author – Andy Clarke Public & Community Transport Manager