

# North Yorkshire Council

## Richmondshire (Yorks) Area Constituency Committee

16 September 2024

### Public Transport in the Constituency Area

#### Report of the Corporate Director - Environment

#### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide an update on local bus services in the Constituency area with particular focus on Richmond, Stokesley and North Northallerton.

#### **2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The legislation that governs local bus services was put in place in 1985 when bus services outside London were de-regulated. Bus companies are required to operate on a commercial basis, setting their own routes and timetables and covering their operating costs from the income generated from bus fares. Local authorities work closely with commercial bus operators and can also contract bus routes where no commercial service exists. However, councils don't have regulatory powers to compel companies to alter their timetables or run additional journeys without payment.
- 2.2 Local Bus services have been under significant pressure both locally and nationally since the Covid-19 pandemic. Passenger numbers have recovered to around 90% of pre covid levels although 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.
- 2.3 There has also 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.
- 2.4 North Yorkshire Council (NYC) continues to support local bus services using our council budget and by accessing grant funding from central government. This is helping to keep the current bus network running and the council is now financially supporting many previously commercial bus routes that would otherwise have been withdrawn entirely in the last two years.

#### **3.0 RICHMOND CONSITUENCY AREA BUS SERVICE UPDATE**

- 3.1 We have seen some service reductions and contract price increases across the county recently as the industry struggles with higher costs. Our focus has been 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 Bus services in the Richmond constituency area have remained largely stable in recent years. Arriva have made some mileage reductions to less well used evening and early morning journeys on service X26/X27A and have withdrawn it from Catterick village. Service 18 (Stokesley – Guisborough) was withdrawn as a commercial service in 2022 but North Yorkshire Council has been able to fund a replacement service to retain the link from Stokesley & Great Ayton to Guisborough.
- 3.3 Catterick and Richmond have regular services to Darlington via the X26/X27 with Richmond also connected to Northallerton, Leyburn, Ripon and Barnard Castle. There are also bus routes, largely funded by NYC, linking villages in the constituency area to a nearby town plus routes providing links to the Dales, mainly on Sundays and Bank Holidays. North Yorkshire Council operate town services in Richmond and Northallerton with the latter including journeys from the North Northallerton development.
- 3.4 Stokesley has regular bus links to Middlesborough and James Cook Hospital via Arriva Services 28/28A, to Northallerton and Friarage Hospital via Services 80/89 and to Guisborough on Service 18. There is also a demand responsive Friday market day bus from nearby villages into Stokesley. All routes except the 28/28A and the Friday market day bus are subsidised by NYC.

#### **4.0 COMMUNITY TRANSPORT**

- 4.1 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. NYC has maintained its support for community transport with journey reimbursement and grants to extend services and recruit volunteer drivers. The Richmondshire Volunteer Car Scheme and Stokesley Community Care Association provides a community car service for shopping, leisure, and health trips in and around Richmond and Stokesley, with the Little White Bus and Car schemes offering journeys further to the west.

#### **5.0 NATIONAL £2 FARE CAP SCHEME**

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 The fare scheme was originally due to run for 3 months but was then extended until 30 June 2023 and more recently further extended to December 2024. Feedback from bus companies is positive, with the scheme generating more passenger journeys. A decision on the future of the scheme is expected following the budget announcement in October.

#### **6.0 FUNDING FROM CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND THE COMBINED AUTHORITY**

- 6.1 Along with all local authorities in the country, NYC have received grants since the pandemic which help to offset the loss in bus fare revenue and recent cost increases. These are currently in place until late 2025 and have allowed us to keep the current bus network in place. However, there have been 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. Following the change in government in July we are waiting to hear what their approach to bus funding will be.
- 6.2 NYC received a Bus Service Improvement Programme (BSIP3) allocation of £3.5m for 2024/25 which is currently for one year only (2024/25). The Department for Transport (DfT)

expects us to use the funding to maintain existing service levels and also on improvements that can be delivered in this short timescale. Given the priority residents have placed on bus services in the recent Local Transport Plan engagement, this additional funding gives an opportunity to address some of the issues that were raised. With this in mind, we are focussing on some key areas of delivery:

- Strengthening bus routes through higher frequency and improvements to evening and weekend services
- Making bus travel more affordable for young people by introducing a £1 fare cap for a single journey for those under 19 years old.
- Improving information and customer experience through improved marketing and promotion as well as providing additional customer service support at very busy bus stations
- Providing additional journeys for rural communities
- Delivery of general maintenance improvements to bus service infrastructure such as bus stops and signage.

One of the schemes planned is the introduction of a Saturday timetable for Service 18.

6.3 BSIP3 grant proposals were approved by the Executive on 19 March 2024 and will be delivered from this summer onwards. The DfT have indicated that there could be future years of BSIP funding, but this will not be confirmed until after the new government's budget statement in October 2024.

6.4 Following the creation of the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority (CA) and the election of a mayor in May 2024, the CA now has overall responsibility for public transport, but delivery of day-to-day operational functions is currently being delegated to North Yorkshire and City of York councils respectively. From 2025 onwards, any future bus funding from the government will be paid direct to the CA who will provide strategic direction for public transport and lead on the creation of a new joint Bus Service Improvement Plan for York and North Yorkshire from 2025 onwards.

## **7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

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

## **8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

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

## **9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

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

## **10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report as it is providing an update. one this is an update.

## **11.0 RECOMMENDATION**

11.1 That members note the contents of this report.

**APPENDICES:** None

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