

North Yorkshire Council

Selby and Ainsty Area Committee

19 September 2024

Public Transport in the Committee Area

Report of the Corporate Director of Environment

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide an update on local bus services in the Committee area.

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 is 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 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and the council is now financially supporting many previously commercial bus routes that would otherwise have been withdrawn entirely in the last two years.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 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. The 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 Arriva operate much of the bus network in the Selby area and made a number of service changes on 21 July. Most of these were designed to improve punctuality, with revised timetables to reflect current traffic and congestion levels.

- 3.3 There were minor changes to improve reliability on Service 401 Selby – Goole, service 409 Pontefract – Kirk Smeaton, service 476 Selby – Pontefract and service 493 Sherburn in Elmet – Pontefract.
- 3.4 Service 5 Selby – Staynor Hall has been withdrawn, this service was funded by developer section 106 contribution. The funds have now run out and the service has not reached a patronage level where it is feasible to continue, alternative services are available on Bawtry Road.
- 3.5 The Service 8 Selby – Drax timetable has been altered with one less journey now operating. This route is linked operationally with Service 42 Selby – York and the additional time was needed to address reliability issues resulting from traffic congestion. There are also additional early morning journeys between Cawood and Selby and the link to Selby College has been retained.
- 3.6 Service 64, 164, 165 Leeds – Sherburn in Elmet – Selby has a new timetable with additional journeys to Sherburn Industrial Estate from Leeds which are being financially supported by West Yorkshire Combined Authority. The route no longer serves Abbots Road in Selby, where alternative journeys are available on service 476.

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 positive, with the scheme generating more passenger journeys. A decision on the future of the scheme is expected following the budget announcement in October.

5.0 Funding from central government & the Combined Authority

- 5.1 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 the approach to bus funding will be.
- 5.2 North Yorkshire received a Bus Service Improvement Plan (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.

5.2.1 We are working with local operators on schemes to increase the number of journeys on Service 476 and on Service 64/164 between Selby and Sherburn in Elmet.

5.3 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.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

8.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

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

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

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

10.0 RECOMMENDATION

10.1 That members note the contents of this report.

APPENDICES: None

Background Papers: None

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 County Hall
 Northallerton
 9 September 2024

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