

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

17 NOVEMBER 2021

STATEMENT OF THE ACCESS PORTFOLIO HOLDER COUNTY COUNCILLOR DON MACKENZIE (INCLUDING HIGHWAYS, ROAD AND RAIL TRANSPORT, BROADBAND, MOBILE TELEPHONY)

Highways

We are ready for winter. Salt barns have been restocked, salt bins and heaps across the highway network are full, and our gritting teams have reviewed operational procedures.

NY Highways has ensured that gritting route familiarisation and training have been carried out. Many of our gritter drivers have stayed with us through the transition, so that we retain the specialist knowledge and expertise needed to continue to deliver our excellent winter service

We have invested over £500,000 in 10 new weather stations and cameras, providing the County Council with the most up to date equipment of its type in the country. As we enter the winter season, drivers will also be able to track our gritters and view local conditions online.

We have also invested £2.2m in 18 new gritting vehicles, reducing the average age of our fleet to only 3.7 years, and allowing us to achieve efficiencies in our salt spreading rates without reducing the quality of our winter service, which remains one of the best in the country. We have also provided new ploughs and salt spreaders where necessary for the more than 100 farming contractors who stand ready to support us again during extreme weather conditions.

This year's programme of revenue budget activities is nearing completion. Some 85% of planned schemes have been delivered and outstanding projects are underway. The excellent progress made this financial year ensures certainty of delivery before the onset of winter

Major schemes

Work is progressing well at Junction 47 of the A1M where the motorway passes under the A59. This £8m scheme includes the construction of an additional lane on the A59 eastbound, widening of the motorway slip roads, and the introduction of traffic light controls on the roundabout and at the A168 T-junction nearby.

Following our successful bid for funding to the DfT, and the granting of planning permission earlier this year, we are hopeful that the £61m scheme to divert the A59 trans-Pennine route at Kex Gill will get underway later this year, as long as no Public Inquiry is needed.

Transforming Cities Fund schemes

A final round of public consultations on the £38m programme of improvements under the Government's Transforming Cities Fund ended last week. The Gateway schemes for Harrogate, Selby and Skipton have attracted a great deal of comment. The views expressed will be taken into account when final, detailed designs are drawn up. A series of recommendations will come in a report to the Executive early in the New Year. Work to deliver the schemes is planned to start in spring 2022.

Rail

The County Council's £10m recent investment in the Harrogate rail line between Knaresborough and York, in partnership with the North Yorkshire LEP and designed to increase capacity of this single track section of the line, has secured an immediate return. Train operator Northern has confirmed that its new timetable, effective from 12 December, will bring a doubling of service frequency between York and Harrogate. This is a major boost for rail travellers and for our efforts to support public transport.

We will be bidding for funding under the Government's Levelling Up initiative early next year to improve access and other facilities at Malton, Seamer and Thirsk railway stations.

Bus Services

Our YorBus pilot, the digital demand-responsive bus service introduced in an area bounded by Bedale, Masham and Ripon, has now been operating for over four months and passenger numbers have grown month on month. This is a flexible service allowing users to book travel to and from anywhere in the zone using an app. The service operates six days per week, significantly improving options for anyone wishing to travel in the pilot area, including visitors. Early signs are really positive, and users have given us top marks for service.

Last month the Executive approved the publication of our Bus Service Improvement Plan, which has duly been submitted to Government. The plan is costed at £116m over eight years, and sets out various proposals including measures to make bus services commercially sustainable, to improve reliability and journey times and to expand coverage of the YorBus pilot.

The County Council's bid to the DfT's Zero Emissions Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme has been shortlisted. We will now submit a business case in partnership with Harrogate Bus Company for an ambitious plan to convert the entire Harrogate bus fleet to electric. The bid is valued at £8m whilst the bus company will contribute £11.5m.

Broadband and mobile telephony

The County Council's Superfast North Yorkshire project, started in 2012 and managed by our broadband company, NYnet, is currently in Phase 4 of its expansion throughout our rural communities. Thanks to the SFNY scheme, over 200,000 domestic and business premises have been provided with high quality broadband, which they would not otherwise have received. There are just over 1,000 connections out of a total of 14,239 still to be completed by BT in Phase 3, whilst the Phase 4 contract for a further 16,000 connections, awarded to Quickline Communications, is already underway. Residents and businesses can check their status in the current expansion phase here:

www.connectedyorkshire.co.uk

As a huge boost to our investment in North Yorkshire's digital infrastructure, it was confirmed two weeks ago that the north of our county has been chosen to benefit from the Government's £5bn Project Gigabit. Up to 28,000 premises will be connected to gigabit fibre, with procurement to start in 2023.

Our delivery of free public Wi-Fi to 18 town centres throughout our county is underway. So far, the service has gone live in: Leyburn, Northallerton, Ripon, Scarborough and Skipton. Next up are: Selby, Stokesley, Tadcaster, Thirsk and Whitby.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR DON MACKENZIE