



Protecting the public and transforming travel Policy recommendations for reallocating road space York Civic Trust and York Cycling Campaign

29th May 2020

Introduction

We present, in this report, York Civic Trust's and York Cycling Campaign's joint response to the social distancing and mobility needs arising from the novel Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and the associated respiratory condition, Covid-19.

Congestion, air pollution and impacts on climate change have for some time been the three most serious problems for York caused by its transport system. Our surveys in September 2019 and our Citizens' Transport Forum in February 2020 both confirmed that these are the issues which residents most want to see tackled in any new transport plan.

The lockdown imposed to tackle the pandemic has dramatically changed all three. With car use down by 80%, congestion has all but disappeared, carbon emissions from transport have halved, and nitrogen dioxide levels have fallen by a third. Many have welcomed the cleaner air, quieter surroundings and generally safer roads which have resulted.

But this situation is inherently unstable. The effects of the lockdown impose serious threats to York's tourism, retail and leisure industry. We will need to return to fuller employment, education, shopping, leisure and tourism if the city is to remain vibrant. Yet we know that social distancing will need to remain in place for some time to come, reducing the capacity of pavements, cycle lanes and bus services alike. With the government still discouraging people from using public transport, there is a real danger that car use will rise to levels above those before the lockdown, and result in even worse levels of congestion and pollution. We cannot, therefore, simply let the transport system rebalance itself, but need targeted interventions to enable us to return to normality while retaining the benefits which we have seen.

Fortunately, the government has offered a basis for doing so. On 9th May 2020, the Secretary of State for Transport issued Statutory Guidance to local authorities on

Reallocating Road Space, in response to needs arising from the Coronavirus pandemic. In his foreword he said:

“We recognise this moment for what it is: a once in a generation opportunity to deliver a lasting transformative change in how we make short journeys in our towns and cities.” “Active travel is affordable, delivers significant health benefits, has been shown to improve wellbeing, mitigates congestion, improves air quality and has no carbon emissions at the point of use. Towns and cities based around active travel will have happier and healthier citizens as well as lasting local economic benefits. The government therefore expects local authorities to make significant changes to their road layouts to give more space to cyclists and pedestrians. Such changes will help embed altered behaviours and demonstrate the positive effects of active travel.”

The Statutory Guidance places the following requirement on local authorities:

“Measures should be taken as swiftly as possible, and in any event within weeks, given the urgent need to change travel habits before the restart takes full effect. None of these measures are new – they are interventions that are a standard part of the traffic management toolkit, but a step-change in their roll-out is needed to ensure a green restart.”

A subsequent letter on 12th May 2020 from the Department for Transport’s Director General for Roads, Places and Environment sets out in more detail the expectations on local authorities, and refers to a £250m fund to support such schemes. Recent advice from the Department states:

"Allocations will be agreed shortly. Funding will be provided to local authorities in line with shorter-term priorities for local transport restart measures and longer-term Local Cycling and Walking Implementation Plans".

The Director General’s letter also raises the question of public transport. We are well aware that, with people actively discouraged from using buses, and buses required to be no more than a quarter full, we will need to offer alternatives, particularly in the peaks, for school travel and on park and ride services, where buses are typically busiest. At the same time we need to encourage the re-emergence of a revitalised public transport service. We are working with York Bus Forum to develop a separate set of recommendations to achieve this. In the meantime we focus in this report on the Statutory Guidance and its encouragement to councils to give more space to pedestrians and cyclists.

York Civic Trust fully supports the objectives set out in the Statutory Guidance and, in its role as a source of expert guidance to City of York Council, has asked its Transport Advisory group to develop proposals. We are delighted to have been able to work with York Cycling Campaign in developing the proposals set out below. In doing so, we have been able to draw on expertise in transport policy, urban planning, transport modelling, public transport, traffic management and road safety, as well as in the biological modelling of disease transmission.

Given the pressing need, as made clear in the Secretary of State’s message, we urge the Council’s officers and elected members to work together to secure government funding to

implement our proposals, and to publish an implementation plan so that all network users know what to expect and when. We stand ready to support the Council in this endeavour.

The Council's response to date

The Council has already introduced one way working with a contraflow cycle lane past the Bishopthorpe Road shops, reallocated car parking spaces in Marygate car park to provide safe social distancing space for pedestrians and cyclists, and allocated one lane westbound over Castle Mills Bridge to cyclists. It is proposing widening pavements in Micklegate and Low Ousegate, reviewing the footstreet network to identify possible one way routes, establishing park and cycle at the Designer Outlet, Monks' Cross and Rawcliffe Bar park and ride sites, and carrying out a review of each main corridor and of conditions outside each primary school. We welcome these first steps, while noting that the contraflow lane in Bishopthorpe Road contravenes the statutory guidance, which specifies that facilities for cyclists "should be segregated as far as possible, i.e. with physical measures separating cyclists and other traffic. Lanes indicated by road markings only are very unlikely to be sufficient." However, significantly more action than this will be needed if York is to rise to the challenge set by the government.

We also note that the Council has recently announced a £500k programme of site-specific improvements for cyclists, which some have seen as an initial response to the challenge. We warmly welcome the specific schemes within that programme. However, it is important to bear in mind that this programme has been developed over the last ten months in response to a Council budget allocation and is not a response to the Statutory Guidance. While welcome, it does not offer the level of enhancement in cycling provision which is now needed to address the emergency caused by the pandemic.

Objectives

The emergency caused by SARS-CoV-2 is ongoing and there remains considerable uncertainty as to how the pandemic will develop or fade in the coming months, whether pharmaceutical interventions will be available or for how long other interventions, such as social distancing, will be necessary. It is essential that any plans acknowledge this uncertainty and are robust to a variety of future trajectories.

The Statutory Guidance relates both to the immediate need to reallocate road space to achieve social distancing and to its continuing application to support lasting transformative change. The transformative change which the government seeks is wholly consistent with the findings of our Citizens' Transport Forum, which recommended that the Council "produce a holistic, bold and visionary plan which achieves significant changes in travel behaviour in the near future". Our response to coming out of lockdown offers an unanticipated opportunity to commence this process.

For the foreseeable future, the message to York's residents has to be:

- stay local;
- continue to work from home where possible;
- walk and cycle for as many journeys as possible;
- leave public transport at the busiest times to those who most need it;

- only use your car when there are no reasonable alternatives; and
- expect priority to be given to keeping people safe rather than to smooth traffic flow.

If we can reallocate road space to allow as many people as possible to access York safely, this in turn will support the recovery of business and tourism.

To achieve these, we need to enable and encourage:

1. residents who are able to do so to access the city centre, local centres, colleges and workplaces on foot and by bike;
2. primary and secondary school children to access their schools on foot and by bike as an alternative to using school buses or the car;
3. commuters from outside York to switch to park and cycle;
4. tourists and day visitors to walk and cycle from their arrival point in York and throughout their stay.

Strategy

The key to meeting these objectives must be to reconfirm the Council's commitment to its hierarchy of users, which places pedestrians, disabled users and cyclists ahead of motorised vehicles, but which often appears to be overlooked when individual schemes are designed.

As well as reallocating road space to pedestrians and cyclists, and enhancing access for disabled users, the strategy should be designed to:

1. provide safe conditions and personal security in which to walk and cycle;
2. ensure that pedestrians can cross roads without needing to cluster while waiting;
3. provide space for shoppers and pavement cafés which is separated from passing pedestrians, thus helping the visitor economy to recover;
4. generate a change in habits which focuses on active travel; and
5. avoid actions which hinder the recovery of an effective public transport service.

Network-wide measures

For pedestrians Across the network as a whole, resources to support pedestrians should focus on:

- widening pavements where conflicts arise between movement and frontage use, and ensuring that all such widened pavements can be safely used by those in wheelchairs and with visual impairments;
- converting more streets in the city centre and residential areas so that pedestrians are not confined to pavements, but have priority over vehicles;
- bridging gaps in the walking route network;
- ensuring that parked vehicles do not obstruct pavements, and are banned outside all schools;
- eliminating the need to cluster at crossings or on pedestrian islands by widening crossings, increasing the time available for crossing and allowing pedestrians to cross without having to wait part way; and
- separating pedestrian and cycle movements wherever flows of both are significant.

For cyclists Across the network as a whole, resources to support cyclists should focus on:

- ensuring that all cycle lanes are appropriately delineated and where possible made mandatory, so that they can be effectively enforced;
- bridging gaps in the cycle route networks and removing sudden discontinuities, where necessary by relocating kerbside parking;
- substantially improving the quality and continuity of signing generally, and badging the principal routes on signs and maps, so that new users know where to go;
- taking the opportunity to widen cycle lanes, to meet current government guidelines;
- providing advanced cycle signals and reliable cycle detection at key junctions;
- implementing readily enforced 20mph measures on all urban roads with on-road cycle lanes;
- ensuring that parked vehicles do not obstruct cycle lanes;
- at the same time ensuring that all cycle lanes and routes are free of barriers, well maintained, cleaned, lit and kept free of vegetation;
- substantially increasing secure cycle parking in the city centre, including provision for e-bikes and cargo bikes, perhaps by using empty retail premises; and
- at the same time increasing cycle parking at schools, the hospital, universities, other key employment locations and park and ride sites.

For pedestrians and cyclists Across the network as a whole, resources to support both pedestrians and cyclists should focus on:

- developing, with North Yorkshire Police, Council staff and voluntary bodies, an enforcement programme to ensure that all the above measures are effective;
- promoting walking and cycling in schools and workplaces, with dedicated support staff to promote these modes, and actively discouraging car use;
- implementing safety campaigns for all road users, and providing volunteer support for less confident cyclists;
- launching promotional campaigns such as car-free days; and
- continuing to ensure that the public understand reasons for these measures and use them appropriately.

Specific schemes

York has a particularly constrained road network. As a result, these generic actions will not be sufficient on their own in many places, and it will be necessary to reallocate road space in significant ways to achieve our objectives. Priority locations should be determined by:

- identifying streets where road space for cyclists, pedestrians and users of frontage properties is most limited; these will in the main be in the city centre;
- identifying the heaviest flows of cars, and providing facilities to replace car use;
- identifying the major bus user flows, in the expectation that these will need to be supplemented by improvements to walking and cycling.

Based on an initial analysis, we recommend the following specific schemes, shown in the attached maps, and would welcome the opportunity to work with the Council to develop further proposals.

Pavement widening A programme of widened pavements should focus on those streets where space is most limited and frontage activity greatest. We recommend action in the following: Micklegate (east side, lower end), Bridge Street, Skeldergate (north end), Ouse

Bridge (east side), Low Ousegate, Nessgate, Coppergate, Pavement, Rougier Street, George Hudson Street, Station Road, Lendal Bridge, Museum Street, St Leonard's Place (both ends), Bootham (west side), Gillygate and its link to Union Terrace, Goodramgate, Monkgate (east side), Skeldergate Bridge (west side). Widened pavements are also needed on some of the approaches to the centre, such as Holgate. As noted above, all such widening needs to be designed to provide for the partially sighted and those in wheelchairs, which implies that kerbs will need to be relocated, at least temporarily. In Bishopthorpe Road, the current scheme needs to be upgraded, by providing temporary decking to widen the footways, and installing wands to demarcate the contra-flow cycle lane. We welcome the current proposal for trialling a full closure, except for pedestrians and cyclists, other than in the weekday peaks.

Park and cycle facilities We recommend that park and cycle facilities be provided at all six park and ride sites, starting with the three which the Council has identified. All should offer the options of drivers bringing their own bikes each day, leaving them securely on site, or using a new bike rental service. The rental service should include e-bikes, with appropriately higher security for parking at each end. Cycle routes from each site to the city centre should be as direct as possible, and continuous. Where cycle routes follow main roads, the cycle lanes need to be statutory; all parking will need to be relocated, 20mph limits introduced and enforced, and priority provided at all junctions. These cycle routes should be seen, and promoted, as York's equivalent of the cycle super-highway. Effective continuous cycle routes should also be provided to other key destinations, including the hospital, universities, all outlying villages and major suburban employment centres.

Other major cycle corridors The orbital cycle route needs to be upgraded and more effectively signed, with continuous statutory cycle lanes on busy roads, priority crossings of all radial roads, and barriers closing residential roads to through traffic in Acomb, Clifton and South Bank. The extension of the orbital route from Millennium Bridge through the university campus to Grimston Bar requires the same treatment, together with appropriate widening and surfacing across Walmgate Stray. Enhancements are also needed on Melrosegate, and suitable routes should be provided from the main villages. The Environment Agency's proposed closure of Terry Avenue is wholly incompatible with the Government's aims, and should be resisted.

Through cycle routes in the city centre We welcome the Council's proposal, in its £500k programme, to upgrade the route from Bootham Bar through the city centre via High Petergate, Deangate, Aldwark, Hungate and Navigation Road, and recommend that this be implemented early in the programme. At the same time we would like to see it extended to link directly to the Foss Islands route, with protected priority crossings of Foss Islands Road and James Street. A through route already exists via Micklegate, Ouse Bridge, Coppergate, and Stonebow. However, it needs to have wide, clearly demarcated statutory cycle lanes in both directions. This will require a reduction in traffic flow on Ouse Bridge and the introduction of one way working for buses and taxis in Coppergate. We recommend introducing a bus only road on Ouse Bridge with taxi exemptions equivalent to those on Coppergate, and diverting NE-bound buses and taxis from Coppergate to Tower Street.

The city centre bridges Lendal, Ouse and Skeldergate Bridges impose the greatest constraints on safe provision for pedestrians and cyclists. We recommend that full width cycle lanes are marked on all three bridges, with an overtaking ban on each, and clear signs indicating that vehicles must not overtake cyclists. This will allow us to emulate good practice in cycle provision in Dutch cities. At the same time, traffic should be limited to a single lane each way on Castle Mills Bridge. Skeldergate Bridge also imposes serious constraints on pedestrians at its junction with Tower Street, which make social distancing impossible. With a bus only road at Ouse Bridge, traffic turning into and out of Tower St North will be much reduced, and the junction with Skeldergate Bridge could be greatly simplified to provide a single lane in each direction between the adjacent bridges, with priority crossings of Tower St North.

The inner ring road

The Inner Ring Road should have cycling facilities throughout, with a 20mph limit on and within it. Foss Islands Road, which serves five large supermarkets, is a particularly important corridor for shopping by bike, and should have wider cycle lanes. All crossings of the Inner Ring Road should be able to be made in a single stage; this will require modifications at Bootham Bar, Monk Bar, Layerthorpe, Walmgate Bar, Fishergate Gyratory and Nunnery Lane Gyratory. A signalised pedestrian crossing should be provided on Museum Street to promote the route via Museum Gardens from Scarborough Bridge and Clifton.

Gillygate presents some of the worst problems for pedestrians and cyclists in York. Pavements are narrow, cycle lanes virtually non-existent, and levels of pollution acute. Social distancing is almost impossible, even before shops and restaurants reopen. The Council should take the bold step, while traffic flows are still low, of limiting motorised traffic to buses, with taxi exemptions equivalent to those on Coppergate, and a central single lane section with alternate working.

Conclusion

We fully appreciate that the programme which we outline above is substantial, will require significant initial investment and continued resources for maintenance and enforcement, and will in parts be controversial. But it is essential that York adopts a visionary programme of this kind if it is to be successful in achieving the objectives outlined above.

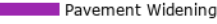
The immediate need is to respond to the Government's £250m programme using measures which can be implemented rapidly under experimental or temporary traffic orders. Most of our proposed network-wide measures could be tackled in this way. But York also needs to include specific schemes which demonstrate the "Yorkness" of the programme. We recommend including upgrading of the Bishopthorpe Road scheme, widening pavements at our other listed sites, implementing a demonstrator park and cycle site, trialling our proposed treatment of the city centre bridges, cycle parking in empty retail premises and introducing the bus gate on Gillygate.

It will not be feasible to consult widely on these initial schemes, but we have established a Commonplace interactive map on which residents throughout York can suggest improvements to walking and cycling. Consultation should commence immediately on the

other proposals in our list, and the Council should set targets for achievement. monitor the impacts of implemented schemes and publicise and promote the results.

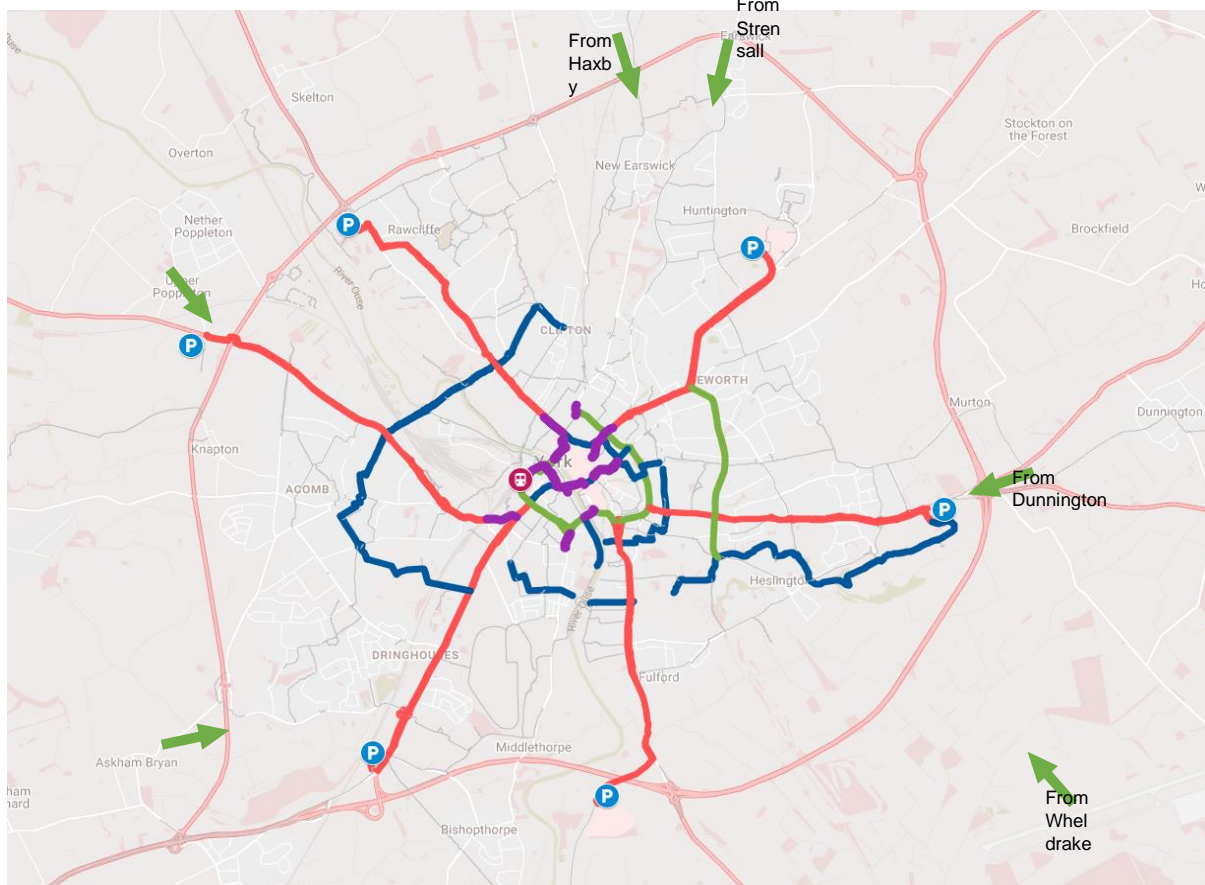
We look forward to working with the Council on this programme, in order to achieve the transformational change which the government, our own Citizens' Transport Forum and, we are sure, our Council seek.

Key to Map Symbols

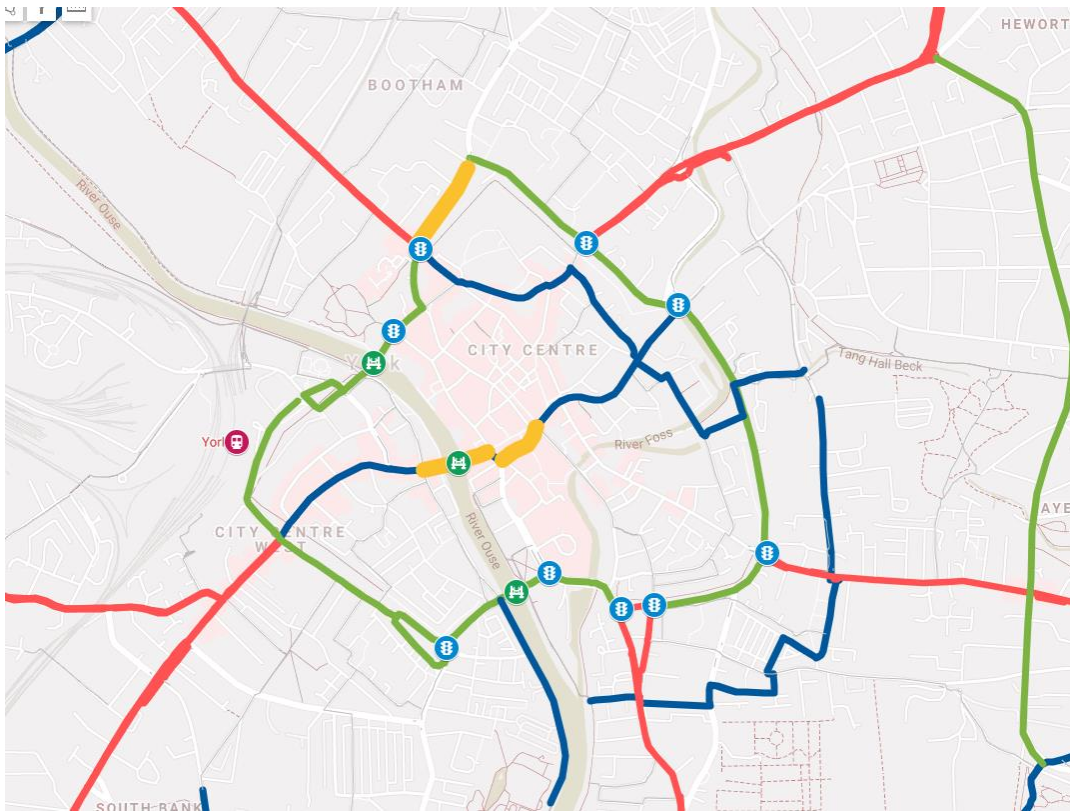
-  Upgraded crossing
-  Bridge enhancement
-  Railway Station
-  Park & Ride Site
-  Bus Gate
-  Pavement Widening
-  New Cycle Route
-  Park & Cycle Route
-  Upgraded Cycle Route

Map data: ©2020 Google, Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v2.0.

City Wide Map



City Centre Cycling Access



City Centre Pedestrian Access

