



## **York Citizens' Transport Forum Report from the December 2020 Forum meetings 14<sup>th</sup> December 2020**

### **The role of the Forum**

York's Citizens' Transport Forum has been established jointly by York Civic Trust, York Bus Forum and York Environment Forum, to enable the public to be directly involved in developing York's next Local Transport Plan. The first round of Forum meetings in February 2020 sought the Forum's views on the problems which York faces, the goals for York's new Local Transport Plan, and the broad strategies which that Plan should adopt. Its report was published in March 2020.

In December 2020 Forum members met for a second time to review the recommendations from the Forum's March report in the light of the changes that have happened as a result of the pandemic. It also considered how effective the Council's short-term measures had been in dealing with those changes, and what else might be done in the short term.

The Forum's membership was drawn from the 1388 respondents to a survey of residents' travel needed conducted in September 2019, and more specifically from the 440 who expressed interest in contributing to the Forum. An initial membership of 100 was drawn from these 440 volunteers in a way designed to achieve a representative cross-section by age, gender, residential location and level of car use, while giving priority to those who did not regularly contribute to Council policy. This was broadly achieved, with the exception of an under-representation of younger adults.

The December meetings had to be held online, using Zoom, which inevitably constrained both timing and availability. In total, 40 members were able to participate, and were broadly representative of the total membership, with the further exceptions that there were fewer from the outer south of York, and slightly fewer who used a car daily.

Two identical two-hour meetings were held, on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> December and Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> December. As in February, participants were divided into five groups, with two discussion sessions. The first focused on problems and goals and the second on strategy and the specific measures adopted. This report is based on the notes kept by each group, the feedback to each meeting's two plenary sessions, and comments on a first draft report.

Forum groups were unanimous in concluding that the broad recommendations of the March 2020 report, on problems, goals and strategy, remained valid. We have therefore updated the March 2020 report as a freestanding document *Towards a Transport Strategy for York*, which is also being submitted to the Council. The remainder of this report presents Forum members' specific observations on trends, problems, goals and strategy, and then focuses

on the measures adopted by the Council, and the lessons learnt on the implementation process. While there was inevitably a range of views expressed, there was a consensus on the majority of the following observations and recommendations.

### **Trends and problems**

We were presented with information on trends in traffic flows, use of different modes, increases in working from home, and impacts on congestion and pollution. We accept that immediate future trends are uncertain, but expect that the changes to working from home and to online shopping will be maintained and that future weekday traffic patterns will thus be less peaked. We question whether public transport patronage will return to pre-lockdown levels, and what impact this will have on service viability. We stress that changes in government messaging are needed to encourage a fuller return to bus use. We also note that there appears to have been an increase in car use for the school run.

We would like to understand the factors underlying certain trends, such as the recent reduction in cycling, and reiterate our earlier view that more effective monitoring of York's transport system and a clearer understanding of trends are needed.

In the light of this information we conclude that our earlier findings on problems are still valid: the most serious problems faced in York are congestion, air pollution and contributions to climate change; other issues of concern include impacts on safety, public health, intrusion into public space and unequal opportunities for access; and all of these problems are likely to become more serious unless action is taken.

We particularly welcomed the quieter, less polluted streets in the early stages of the lockdown and the resulting improvements in bus reliability and the encouragement of walking and cycling. We suggest that the Council should ensure that the public remains aware of what was achieved and should aim to return to similar conditions while providing for increased access. Since then, roads appear to have become less safe as vehicles move faster, cycling has been discouraged as a result, the use of vans and the prevalence of vans parking on pavements have increased, buses have become more unreliable again, disabled people have faced increased difficulties in gaining access, pedestrians have experienced more delays in crossing roads, and there appear to have been more taxis in the city centre.

### **Goals and strategy**

We conclude that the goals set in our March report remain valid. The new Local Transport Plan needs to be designed, in particular, to ensure that the transport system is more efficient and less polluting. It needs also to ensure safety, support public health, increase equality of access and liveability, and protect public space and heritage. The priorities among these goals should remain as listed, subject to giving greater emphasis to public health and safety and to regenerating the city's economy, given the impacts of the pandemic on the retail and hospitality sectors. In support of these, York needs to assess what mix of economic activities will best sustain the vibrancy of its city centre.

We confirm the recommendations in our March report, that the key elements of a strategy to meet these goals will be measures to enhance public transport, walking and cycling. With the support of these measures, we need to reduce car travel, especially in congested and

sensitive areas of the city, and to reduce the need to travel longer distances, particularly through the design of sustainable communities. To reinforce this core strategy, action is also needed to improve the operation of the road network, by reallocating road space and using it more efficiently, and to improve freight and delivery operations.

In light of recent experience, we would like to see greater emphasis on rebuilding trust in public transport. We fully support the government's emphasis on active travel, but would like to see increased support for walking as a healthy travel mode. We advocate a greater focus on avoiding the school run and on encouraging smarter car use through car clubs and electric vehicles. We would like to see additional support given to sustaining local centres, which will be of importance in providing for those working from home. The opportunity should be taken to reallocate road space while spare capacity is still available, and a strategy is needed for more efficient and low energy freight distribution.

### **The measures implemented and planned in response to the pandemic**

We congratulate the Council on the speed with which it acted to develop measures to support social distancing and active travel, and on the number of measures implemented. We particularly welcome the extension of the footstreets and of footstreet hours to support businesses, the inclusion of Fossgate and Castlegate, and the introduction of one-way operation on Coppergate. We acknowledge that some disabled drivers have been disadvantaged, and that more effort is needed to provide realistic alternatives for them. We approve of the introduction of the Low Traffic Neighbourhood in the Groves, and the emphasis it gives to considering such streets first and foremost as places where people live.

We question the design of some measures, and in particular the one-way operation on Bishopthorpe Road which, while necessary, was poorly designed in its street layout, lack of improvement to the diversion route and encouragement of rat running. We had mixed views on the cycle lane on Castle Mills Bridge, for which there appeared little demand.

Many of us were unaware that a number of measures, such as increased cycle parking and the park and cycle provision at Rawcliffe Bar, had been implemented, and we recommend that greater publicity is given to them. We sense that the need for such measures is not always clear, that priorities might have been determined more by what could be easily implemented rather than by where the needs are greatest, and that as a result the benefits of individual schemes are not always obvious. We advocate identifying priority lists of measures for each mode, with a clear justification for each, so that bids can readily be made when funding is available, and individual schemes can then be clearly justified and assessed against their aims.

We observe that, while the government's Emergency Fund was for Active Travel, almost all measures have focused on cycling. We would like to see equal consideration given to walking, to reflect the Council's own hierarchy. Measures should focus on removing pavement parking, providing more phases and more time for crossing at signals, replacing nearside green man signals, which we consider to be unclear and unsafe, and allowing children to walk safely to school. We have mixed views on the sharing of space between cyclists and pedestrians, but note that the shared space on New Walk (and in many

European cities) works well, and could be used as a model for applications in the city centre, with encouragement to all users to show consideration for others.

We stress the importance of attracting people back to public transport and, in particular, the need for promotion to make clear that buses are both safe and more reliable. A coherent plan for an affordable future service pattern needs to be agreed with all providers. To improve reliability further and at the same time to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists, the Council should take the opportunity, while demand is still low, to reallocate road capacity, and redesign and re-sign roads to encourage lower speeds.

We also suggest that the Council might take early action to encourage transshipment of city centre deliveries, and promote the use of electric vans and cargo bikes, so that, with the exception of such vehicles, footstreet hours can start earlier.

Our discussions also covered other measures which might be included in the next Local Transport Plan, which we will consider in subsequent reports. We list these in an annex.

### **The implementation process**

We are concerned by the antagonism generated by some of the measures implemented and note that these views seem to be dominated by a vocal minority, and reinforced by the media. We recommend a new approach, in which the Council starts the consultation process, and briefs the media, at the stage at which a range of solutions to a given problem is being considered, so that the needs and priorities are understood, any potential side effects are identified and the case for the selected schemes is made clear. This should overcome the current sense that schemes are being chosen because they are easy to implement rather than because they are needed; it will also help to ensure that schemes can be assessed against their intended outcomes.

The schemes selected should be designed so that any adverse impacts, such as those on disabled access or inappropriate diversions, can be identified at the outset and solutions found. Schemes should be implemented experimentally, with a clear and public process of monitoring and evaluation, so that changes can be made as needed and the case for retention made clear.

Such an approach should help to build a consensus for the schemes adopted and to demonstrate that they have local support, as part of a broader emphasis on winning hearts and minds. It should avoid critics misunderstanding the purpose of the scheme or its actual impacts, and at the same time help assuage the fears of business and other affected users. It would involve the Council in adopting a more public-facing communications policy, in which the case for a scheme, its actual impacts and any changes are made clear, and misunderstandings from critics or in the media are robustly and consistently rebutted.

In essence, we would like to see the Council moving away from simple information provision and consultation on specific schemes to encouraging the more inclusive involvement of the public in the decision-making process. It was to this end that the Forum was established, and we hope that the Forum will be called upon to work with the Council in developing a consensus on its short-term plans as well as on its new Local Transport Plan.

## **Annex: other measures identified for consideration in the Local Transport Plan**

As noted in the report, several specific proposals were made by Forum members which, while not necessarily essential to the short-term response to the pandemic, could usefully be considered as part of the new Local Transport Plan. These are listed below, by mode, for future reference.

Walking We would like to see more time provided for pedestrians when crossing roads, by installing additional pedestrian phases, enabling pedestrians to cross diagonally, and providing countdown signals. Generally we would like to see more priority given to pavement maintenance, and to responding to hazards when reported. Greater access to green space should be provided to encourage walking for leisure and exercise.

Cycling Cycling routes need to be coordinated and continuous and to be segregated from heavy traffic flows. Safe cycling routes to school are particularly important in providing an alternative to the school run. Barriers need to be removed where cycle routes cross open spaces. Effective maintenance of cycle paths and cycle lanes is crucial. Many members indicated that this was their greatest barrier to cycling more. We would also like to see greater provision for e-bikes and e-scooters.

Public transport We stress the importance of having an affordable, comprehensive and coordinated bus network. A central bus interchange at the station with sufficient capacity to allow all routes to serve it is crucial to this. The fare structure needs to be simplified and use contactless payment to avoid delays. Some members would like to see more stations and services on local rail lines.

Freight We would like to see city-wide use of transhipment, night delivery and low carbon vehicles.

Car use and roads We would like to see continued emphasis on nudge-based measures to encourage behavioural change. In parallel we see the need to review parking policy, and to promote new car-free development. We would like to see the use of 20mph zones extended throughout the city. While we encourage increased use of car clubs as an alternative to car ownership, we suspect that conventional car sharing will continue to be less popular. Forum members have mixed views on the merits of upgrading the outer ring road, and are concerned that it may simply attract additional traffic. They would like to see measures taken to divert traffic from the city's roads to make use of the additional capacity.