



York Civic Trust

A Strategy for Enhancing Public Transport in York

Summary Paper

April 2021

This note summarises our report *A Strategy for Enhancing Public Transport in York*. It is one of a set of seven modal strategy documents, written in the context of our earlier report *Towards a Transport Strategy for York*, and prepared as input to York's new Local Transport Plan, LTP4. In compiling it we have benefited from inputs by York Bus Forum and the very welcome proposals in the Government's recent report *Bus Back Better*. We consider the role of buses, as the dominant public transport services, but also trains, demand-responsive services, taxis, private hire vehicles and ride sourcing companies such as Uber.

We welcome the challenging requirement in *Bus Back Better* for the Council to develop a Bus Service Improvement Plan by October 2021. We offer these proposals as an input to that process, which will be central to implementation of the new Local Transport Plan.

Public transport has the potential to offer equality of access, promotes liveability, the protection of public space and heritage and supports the economy. By offering an attractive alternative to the car it helps achieve the City Council's commitment to being carbon neutral by 2030, contributes to a reduction in air pollution and reduces congestion, thus making the transport system more efficient and buses themselves more reliable.

Most of York's 43% sustainable transport mode share for journeys to work in the 2011 census was cycling. Bus and rail only accounted for 11%, much lower than in comparable European cities, for reasons including high fares, poor interchange and gaps in services. A 2014 review of York's bus network found 17% of the population, in a ring of low-income suburban wards, suffering under-provision of buses. A 2015 survey found buses experiencing significant delays in 32 locations, seven involving boarding delays and 25 traffic congestion. Currently peak journeys typically take 15% to 80% longer than equivalent off-peak trips. Over half of residents in our surveys were dissatisfied with bus schedules, delays, frequencies and lack of direct services. Nevertheless, before the pandemic a third of users expected to use buses more over the coming five years.

We propose five targets. The first seeks an increase of 30% in ridership by 2027, and 50% by 2037, reflecting the need for reductions in car use and a growing population. The other four focus on service provision, with better daytime and evening access, greater reliability and shorter journey times. We would like to see no more than 10% of the population having an under-provision of services by 2027, falling to 5% by 2037. This will require the Council regularly to review access by public transport and seek remedial measures.

We advocate a comprehensive review of the bus network to fill gaps in coverage, to offer a more attractive alternative to the car and to address the challenges in *Bus Back Better*. Options to be considered include a more extensive park and ride service, all city centre routes serving the station, new orbital routes serving major destinations away from the centre, and the potential for using park and ride sites as hubs for new timetabled and demand-responsive services to improve access for the villages and on Sundays and evenings. We propose a series of supporting measures to improve service reliability, bus stops, vehicle design and technology, fares, information and marketing.

We recommend a review of the complex range of fare scales and ticket types. As *Bus Back Better* advocates, the fare structure should be unified, simple, fit for current needs and offer value for money for all customers. At the same time, information provision should be upgraded to provide universal real-time information on- and off-vehicle, and the potential should be considered for developing Mobility as a Service provision, which integrates information, bookings and payment across all forms of public transport.

Our action programme is divided into different time phases: quick wins for implementation in the immediate future, a medium-term Bus Service Improvement Programme informed by the proposed network review and a set of longer term proposals. The latter could include orbital bus services, park and ride sites as hubs for local access, and the development of a possible light rail or very light rail network to serve major communities.

We anticipate the strategy involving a mix of network wide measures and dedicated interventions affecting specific localities: the city centre, inner city, out-of-town centres, suburban York and the outer villages, new developments and the wider catchment area. Network-wide measures include an audit of bus stops focusing on access, safety, security, comfort and real-time information, using audio and video in buses, easy interchange between the envisaged wider range of services, and promotional and marketing measures to encourage greater use of public transport by those with and without a car available.

The governance of public transport is complex. We consider it important that the Council retains responsibility for public transport strategy, with the Quality Bus Partnership, and hence the operators, contributing to delivery. We suggest that the Enhanced Partnership required in *Bus Back Better* would be worth expanding to include providers of intermediate forms of public transport. This Enhanced Quality Access Partnership should have greater involvement of politicians, the public and representative groups of users. A transition to a franchised service, again as proposed in *Bus Back Better*, should be retained as an option.

Finance to support services will continue to be a constraint. We recommend that the Council adopts an approach which identifies need and then seeks the funding necessary to support it. In doing so, it should negotiate with operators to achieve a shared approach to funding, and consider novel approaches to third party funding.

We see the strategy for public transport as central both to overcoming inequalities in access and in providing an alternative to car use. It can be reinforced by the strategies to reduce travel and to manage the road network, and needs to be planned in synergy with strategies for managing car use and for improving walking and cycling.