

North East Combined Authority (NECA)
Durham County Council Transport Activity Report
April-Dec 2014

Introduction

1. The County Council operates an 'Integrated Transport Unit' in line with Government's best practice guidance. The ITU delivers public transport, home to school transport, SEN transport and adult social care transport. It also has close links with health, clinical commissioning groups and the North East Ambulance Service.
2. Integrating transport in this way enables the authority to create packages of work across sectors to maximise the use of vehicles and staff, ensure full use is made of existing local bus services for education and social work purposes and deliver consistency of standards across different modes. The opportunities to integrate commissioning and delivery of local authority transport with non-emergency healthcare transport have also helped to deliver a simpler and more understandable service for the user.
3. The formation of a Unitary Authority under the 2009 Local Government Reorganisation facilitated the harmonisation of policy and delivery across the economic development, planning, housing and transport functions. This created the structure to ensure that we maximise transport's contribution to economic growth in the County.

Bus Service Network

Current State of Commercial and Subsidised Networks

4. Bus operators' own commercial services provide a high proportion of the network in most of County Durham. Go North East and Arriva provide the majority of the services, with approximately equal market shares; six other firms also run locally significant commercial services. All the main towns have at least two operators providing commercial services, except for Consett and Newton Aycliffe; Bishop Auckland has six commercial operators each providing at least hourly services.
5. Total bus boardings in 2013/14 increased year on year by 3.3% to 24.6 million, mainly rebounding from the effect of severe winter weather in 2012/13 but with some element of underlying growth. This trend continues so far in 2014/15.

6. The majority of the commercial network in County Durham has been essentially stable since October 2012, when Arriva revitalised its services following some retrenchment in preceding years. The bus fleet has also benefitted from considerable investment in new buses.
7. Recent DCC activity has focussed on issues with Arriva's commercial services in east Durham, which have led to Arriva making considerable changes implemented on 26th October. These address some long-standing DCC and community concerns while also responding to the competition from Go North East by an increase in services on the Peterlee–Sunderland corridor. In an offsetting economy, Arriva is withdrawing a loss-making commercial service competing with a small operator between Willington and Bishop Auckland, which will continue to serve the corridor at a sustainable half hourly frequency.
8. A local service in the Stanley area operated commercially by Stanley Buses ceased at Christmas causing significant local concern. DCC has secured replacement transport to cater for school time travel in partnership with Tanfield School. Following discussion with potential operators, Go North East has come forward with a replacement for the main part of the service, which they will operate without subsidy. This outcome has been appreciated by the local community.

Secured Service Retendering Activity

9. General DCC practice is that our contracts for bus services are arranged on 4 year cycles with DCC holding a right to extend to 5 years. Normally all contracts in an area are renewed in the same cycle, with contracts changing at the start of the school summer holidays to enable operational synchronisation with school bus contract changes commencing the start of September. Contracts in much of Co Durham were renewed to start in autumn 2012, with the rest renewed in July 2013. The current year is therefore a period of low activity in retendering core bus services.
10. Contracts are eligible for an annual price review, calculated to reflect the average change in costs of operating bus services in Co Durham. The August 2014 review has provisionally found a 1.5% increase, with falls in the cost of fuel offsetting some increases in wages and other costs. If the current fall in fuel cost is sustained to April 2015, it will mean only a very low increase is likely in 2015. Prices may even fall at the next review.

Park and Ride

11. The contract for the Durham Park and Ride service has been retendered and the new contractor started on 27th October 2014, to run for five years plus up to two further years at DCC's option. The contract reverted from Arriva to Scarlet

Band, who had operated the service in its initial years; affected staff had the opportunity to transfer under TUPE regulations. The new contract specifies an unchanged timetable with new buses meeting Euro VI emissions. The contract is considerably cheaper and the outcome is considered very satisfactory.

Clean Bus / Vehicle Technology Funds

12. Durham and Sunderland's successful bid in partnership with GNE for funding under the 2013 Clean Bus Technology Fund has been delivered during summer 2014 in partnership with the similar scheme led by Gateshead and Newcastle. A total of 20 buses on routes between Co Durham and Sunderland have been upgraded with innovative exhaust treatment equipment improving emissions from Euro III to near Euro VI.
13. The same partnership team led development of two complementary bids for funding under the 2014 Clean Vehicle Technology Fund, to equip GNE buses on four services across the NECA area with a kinetic energy recovery system. The bid led by Newcastle for Blyth - Newcastle and Newcastle - Sunderland services won funding in the first round of awards. The Durham-led bid covering Durham - Newcastle and Newcastle - South Shields services was awarded funding in a second round announced in December.

Concessionary Fares

14. Reimbursement payments under Durham's concessionary fare scheme for older and disabled people form the major element of DCC's spending on public transport. Largely fixed price arrangements have been negotiated with the two major operators. So far results in 2014/15 have fallen within the range of the "cap and collar" provisions and we expect this to continue.

Public Transport Information

15. DCC provides a comprehensive range of passenger information on all local bus services operating within the County. This includes maintaining current timetable displays at over 2,800 bus stops, providing electronic displays at bus stops, printed county public transport map, printed timetable leaflets and a web based interactive bus map. The interactive bus map shows bus routes and individual timetables for all registered services in downloadable format. Work is currently underway to develop a new and improved interactive public transport website for bus and rail services including real time data from individual bus stops.
16. DCC also provides the data management and system development roles for the North East Traveline journey planning service. This includes processing and collation of bus service data from Tyne & Wear, Northumberland, Tees

Valley and Cumbria on a continuous basis. Work is ongoing to enable the web based journey planner to become more compatible with mobile devices.

Real Time Passenger Information

17. DCC is working in partnership with Nexus, Northumberland CC, Tees Valley Unlimited and local bus operators to deliver a new Real Time Passenger Information system for the wider North East region. This system is currently being tested on-site with completion planned for early 2015. The service data from this system will be displayed on electronic displays at bus stops and on-line via Traveline North East, NextBus and the DCC interactive bus map.

Home to School/Social Care Transport

18. Home to school and social care transport forms the major part of DCC Sustainable Transport Group's operations, with a total spend of approximately £13 million pa and about 1,200 contracts in operation. This includes an increasing provision of places on school transport buses that are paid for by parents and or schools, as DCC's current policy for provision of free transport has retrenched to essentially statutory entitlement for year groups starting primary or secondary schooling from Sept 2012. Some 3,000 pupils currently travel under these concessionary terms. Two new schemes covering over 400 pupils start in January 2015.
19. General DCC practice is that our contracts for Home to School Contract Hire services are arranged for up to a maximum 4 year period with DCC holding a right to extend to 5 years. Tendering is carried out over a three year period on an area by area basis. Contracts are renewed in each area to commence at the start of the school year in September. South and West Durham contracts were renewed to start in autumn 2012, East Durham contracts in 2013 and North and Central contracts in 2014. The current year is therefore a period of lower activity in retendering with focus on renewing some short term contracts. The Tender prices have been very competitive across the range of service throughout this period. Despite an increase in the number of SENs transport services, actual spend has remained the same. Some 6,500 mainstream and SEN pupils currently travel under these arrangements.
20. Contracts are eligible for an annual price review, calculated to reflect the average change in costs of operating bus services in Co Durham. The August 2014 review has provisionally found a 1.5% increase, with falls in the cost of fuel offsetting some increases in wages and other costs.

Travel Response Centre (TRC)

21. TRC operates a booking and scheduling service for people with disabilities, the elderly and those without a direct bus service to their destination. Around 80,000 calls are handled on an annual basis.
22. TRC is a central point for people ringing to book on to DCC's dial a ride service (Link2) and health transport services or for travel information. In some instances TRC directs callers to commercial operators and the community/volunteer sector.
20. The Health Booking Service is delivered on behalf of the NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups in Durham. Following an eligibility assessment, patients are booked on to North East Ambulance Patient Transport Services. Patients and visitors who are ineligible for NHS patient transport are where possible, booked on alternative services providing access to hospitals or advised on how to make their journey by public transport.
23. The TRC also processes referrals from Social Workers and other care staff for client travel to day care.
24. TRC has a large data base of approved operators providing social care and pupil transport and has close links with NEAS, private ambulance services, community transport and volunteer driver schemes.

Community Transport

25. The CT sector predominantly concentrates on group hire, although Weardale Community Transport has operated a summer-only Sunday bus service for the third year in 2014, supported by DCC engagement. DCC's programme of capital grants to assist Community Transport continues. We expect to provide approximately 70% grants to at least 3 groups in 2014/15. Groups are required to demonstrate a viable business plan for the sustainable operation of the buses from revenue raised. We are also working to support groups bidding to the government's Rural Community Transport Minibus Fund, announced in November 2014.
26. We are also continuing our use of RSCTI funding to support the CT sector to develop its capacity, with a particular focus on the recruitment of volunteers.

North East Smart Ticketing Initiative (NESTI)

27. DCC is undertaking in conjunction with NESTI two pilot trials of the forthcoming regional Stored Travel smartcard. A trial involving DCC's Cathedral Bus

service in Durham has been running successfully since May. A trial on GNE services started successfully in October.

Multi Operator Ticketing Scheme

28. DCC is working with bus operators in County Durham to implement a scheme of multi-operator bus fares reflecting the bus market of County Durham, with an intention to start at least an initial phased roll out in the first half of 2015. The concept entails a zonal fares structure initially focussing on adult weekly tickets. Consultants are providing independent expert support on zones and pricing.

Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF)

29. The LSTF South Durham *Local Motion* project is encouraging the adoption of low-carbon travel habits through a complimentary package of sustainable transport measures targeted at businesses, schools and local communities. It is currently being delivered in Bishop Auckland, Shildon and Newton Aycliffe with a focus on cross-boundary journeys to Darlington. The DfT has allocated £2.008m to Durham CC for the project over the period 2012-2015.
30. From April 2015, the project will expand towards Durham City and target Spennymoor, Crook and Willington to improve connectivity to access work and training opportunities within South Durham and further afield to Darlington and Durham City. The programme has been awarded a grant of £840k through the LSTF to enable successful delivery in 2015-16.
31. DCC is also the lead authority for the national LSTF Living Streets *Walk to School Outreach* project. This project is a partnership of 11 local authorities and Living Streets and is encouraging more walking to school. Measures are focussing on where the school run is having a significant negative impact on congestion, journey times and economic growth. The DfT has allocated £4.671m to Durham CC as lead authority for the project to cover the period 2012-2015.
32. From April 2015, the project will deliver an ambitious and innovative project to increase levels of walking among people of all ages. Targeting areas of high congestion, the Living Streets *Walk To* project will extend the reach of our hugely successful Walk to School Outreach project through working closely with schools, businesses and communities. A range of engaging interventions are planned which will support significant changes in people's travel behaviours leading to reduced congestion and an improved environment whilst also benefitting health and well-being. The programme has been awarded a grant of £3.980m through the LSTF to enable successful delivery in 2015-16.

33. In December 2014 DCC were asked by DfT to become the lead authority for the national Modshift *STARS Accreditation Scheme*. This programme rewards achievement in schools for the successful promotion of walking and cycling as well as encourage schools to engage in the sharing of inspiration, knowledge and experience for the benefit of all. LSTF grant funding totalling £184,000 has been awarded for the period 2014/15 to 2015/16. This funding will expand the current Modeshift STARS project on a national basis and allow the remaining 19,000 schools across the country to sign up for free. DCC is acting as the funding recipient and distributor with Modeshift being responsible for managing and delivering the project.