



## **North East Joint Transport Committee**

**Date:** 18 June 2019

**Subject:** Discharge of Transport Functions by Durham County Council

**Report of:** Vice Chairman with Portfolio Responsibility for Transport for Durham County Council

### **Executive Summary**

The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee of how Durham County Council has discharged the transport functions delegated to it by NECA for the 2018/19 year.

### **Recommendations**

The North East Joint Transport Committee is recommended to note this report.

## **1. Background Information**

- 1.1 When NECA approved its constitution in April 2014, it delegated to Durham County Council transport functions contained in Parts 4 and 5 of the Transport Act 1985 and Part 2 of the Transport Act 2000. These primarily relate to concessionary travel and ticketing on local passenger transport services. Durham's Cabinet approved the delegation of these functions at its meeting of 16 April 2014 to the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder, Economic Regeneration.
- 1.2 Attached at Appendix 3 is an account of the discharge of transport functions for 2018 agreed by the Corporate Director for Regeneration and Local Services and Transport Portfolio Holder, Economic Regeneration. Appendix 3 has been reported for information to the County Council's Cabinet meeting on 3 April 2019.

## **2. Proposals**

- 2.1 Members are requested to note the report.

## **3. Reasons for the Proposals**

- 3.1 The NECA operating agreement requires that the relevant Portfolio holder provides reports when required to the North East Joint Transport Committee advising on how the delegated functions have been exercised.

## **4. Next Steps and Timetable for Implementation**

- 4.1 These are identified as far as practicable in Appendix 3.

## **5. Potential Impact on Objectives**

- 5.1 The report describes how Durham County Council is discharging transport functions delegated by NECA.

## **6. Financial and Other Resources Implications**

- 6.1 The transport functions will be funded by the levy issued by NECA to Durham County Council.

## **7. Legal Implications**

- 7.1 This report is submitted in accordance with obligations contained in the Deed of Operation entered into by the constituent authorities on formation of the Combined Authority.

## **8. Key Risks**

- 8.1 None specific in this report.

## **9. Equality and Diversity**

- 9.1 None specific in this report.

**10. Crime and Disorder**

10.1 None specific in this report.

**11. Consultation/Engagement**

11.1 None specific in this report.

**12. Appendices**

12.1 Appendix 3 – North East Combined Authority (NECA) – Durham County Council Transport Activity Report 2018/19

**13. Background Papers**

13.1 The North East Combined Authority Constitution  
The North East Combined Authority Deed of Operation dated 29 April 2014  
The North East Combined Authority Deed of Cooperation dated 4 July 2018

**14. Contact Officers**

14.1 Adrian J White, Head of Transport and Contract Services, Durham County Council, [adrian.white@durham.gov.uk](mailto:adrian.white@durham.gov.uk), Tel: 03000 267455

**15. Sign off**

- The Proper Officer for Transport:
- Head of Paid Service:
- Monitoring Officer:
- Chief Finance Officer:

# North East Combined Authority (NECA) Durham County Council Transport Activity Report 2018/19

## Introduction

1. The County Council operates an 'Integrated Passenger Transport Group' (IPTG) in line with Government's best practice guidance. The IPTG delivers public transport, home to school transport, Special Education Needs (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 is especially important in more rural areas, enabling 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 Council also values the benefits of the harmonisation of policy and delivery across the economic development, planning, housing and transport functions. This approach ensures that we can maximise transport's contribution to economic growth in the County.

## Bus Service Network

### *Current State of Commercial and Subsidised Networks*

4. A comprehensive network of bus services operates across almost all the county, although frequencies and coverage are reduced during later evenings and on Sundays, reflecting lower demands for travel. The majority of the bus network in County Durham has been essentially stable since October 2012 in terms of level of service and the service routes, although there have been periodic adjustments to details of timings reflecting better data now available from new tracking systems. A strike by drivers significantly affected Arriva bus services for one week in December 2018. A threatened further strike in January 2019 was averted by a negotiated settlement.
5. Services operating without subsidy from DCC ("commercial service") provide a high proportion of the network in most of County Durham. Most of the main towns of County Durham have at least two operators providing locally significant services without subsidy. Go North East and Arriva provide the majority of the services, with approximately equal market shares. Three other firms also run locally significant bus services without subsidy. This is a reduction following the takeover by Scarlet Band of the former JSB service between Willington and Bishop Auckland in November 2018.
6. Total bus boardings have increased slightly in 2018/19 to quarter 3 compared with the same period of 2017/18, by about 1.6%. This compares with a decline that had set in from mid-2014, which itself reflected the trend occurring in other parts of the region and

most of the UK. This increase is despite a continuing slight fall in concessionary bus journeys, considered to be due to the impact of the increasing age of entitlement to concessionary travel.

7. There has been further investment in new and cascaded buses in the period, although at a lower rate than seen in previous years.

### **Secured Service Retendering Activity**

8. The council's general practice is that contracts for bus service are arranged on 4-year cycles, holding a right to extend to 5 years. Almost all of the Council's contracts expired in October 2017 (having started in 2012 or 2013) and were replaced by new contracts on largely unchanged specifications running to 2021. This has meant that 2018 has seen little change in bus contracts.

### **Concessionary Fares**

9. Reimbursement payments under Durham's concessionary fare scheme for older and disabled people form the major element of the County Council's spending on public transport. Largely fixed price arrangements have been negotiated with the two major operators, with "cap and collar" provisions to handle deviations from expected volumes. Total concessionary boardings in 2018/19 are set to fall by only about 0.3% compared with the previous year. This is a lower reduction than the rate of recent years, and reflects the less severe winter this year. It is anticipated a further slight fall in concessionary travel will continue in 2019/20.

### **North East Smart Ticketing Initiative (NESTI)**

10. Durham has continued to actively participate in the NESTI initiative. The Pop PAYG card was successfully rolled out on Durham Park and Ride in summer 2016. Usage has continued to grow and it is now the method of payment used by most regular users on Park and Ride. However, Pop PAYG has yet to achieve material levels of use across the wider bus network. The availability of contactless payment on all Arriva and Go North East services provides an alternative method of cash-less payment which is easier for many people.

### **Multi-Operator Ticketing Scheme**

11. The Council is continuing to work with bus operators in County Durham to implement a scheme of multi-operator bus fares reflecting the bus market of County Durham. While the work has not progressed as fast as hoped, we continue to work with operators to deliver a scheme.

### **Transport Focus Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey**

12. DCC continues to work with Transport Focus, Arriva and Go North East to support the annual survey work carried out by Transport Focus, measuring passengers' satisfaction with their bus journeys. Previous years have shown generally high levels of satisfaction but with passengers' concerns regarding punctuality becoming a feature. This trend was seen in many areas in previous years' survey results and the 2018 results, summarised

below, confirm the trend. The overall result for County Durham was equal top within the region, and in joint 5<sup>th</sup> place (out of 26) nationally.

Category	Arriva	Go North East	Overall (including other operators)
Overall satisfaction	86%	93%	91%
Value for money	66%	69%	70%
Punctuality	67%	79%	77%
Journey time	88%	88%	89%

### **Park and Ride**

13. The Durham Park and Ride has continued to perform very satisfactorily.

### **Community Transport (CT)**

14. The CT sector in County Durham predominantly concentrates on group hire, although Weardale Community Transport again operated its summer-only Sunday bus service in the dale in 2018. The Council's programme of offering capital grants from Local Transport Plan funding to assist Community Transport continues.
15. We are also continuing our use of Rural Sustainable Community Transport funding to support the CT sector to develop its capacity, with a particular focus on the recruitment of volunteers.
16. The Department for Transport's announcement of revised interpretation of regulations regarding community minibus permits and community bus services has caused understandable concern to the sector. The limitations in the new guidance on operation of contracts has little impact in County Durham as our contracts have always required full Public Service or Taxi Operator licences. However, if the guidance remains unchanged after the current consultation, there appears to be considerable difficulties for the organisations that primarily exist in order to provide community transport, which may no longer qualify for the current exemptions from normal licence requirements.

### **Home to School/Social Care Transport**

17. Home to school and social care transport forms the major part of Durham's operations, with a total spend of approximately £13 million pa and over 1000 contracts in operation. This includes school transport buses that are paid for by parents and or schools, supplementing the statutory free travel provided by the Council. In the 2018/19 school year, about 6,000 pupils receive free travel to school from Durham County Council, with a further 3,300 pupils travelling under the non-statutory concessionary schemes.
18. Our general practice is that contracts for Home to School Contract Hire services are awarded for a 4-year period, with the Council holding a right to extend to 5 years. Tendering is carried out over a rolling programme, with new contracts starting in September each year. Tender prices have remained very competitive, despite increased fuel prices and some impact from the National Living Wage.

## **Travel Response Centre**

19. Durham has continued to operate the Travel Response Centre (TRC) for the booking of non-emergency patient transport to health appointments as well as the council's Link2 demand responsive transport service and Access Bus. The TRC handles over 80,000 calls on an annual basis. Referrals from social workers and other care staff for client travel to day care are also processed.
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 advised of alternative services providing access to hospitals or how to make their journey by public transport.

## **Public Transport Information**

21. Durham County Council has continued to process, validate and submit public transport data for the national and regional data sets on behalf of Tyne and Wear, Northumberland, Durham and the Tees Valley local authorities. This data is required for national and regional journey planning, NextBus, electronic displays at bus stops as well as being used by third party applications.
22. The Council continues act as the regional contact for National data issues and represent the region at national working groups. This includes Traveline as well as taking an active role in the DfT Open Data Initiative.
23. Durham County Council has continued to provide a comprehensive range of passenger information on local bus services operating within the County. This includes maintaining printed timetable displays at over 2,800 bus stops, providing 130 electronic information displays at bus stations and on-street 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.
24. Interactive display kiosks installed at Durham Railway Station and Durham Bus Station have improved the provision of local and wider travel information. Additional display kiosks will be installed at key interchanges across the county as funding is made available.

## **Real Time Passenger Information**

25. Durham County Council has continued to provide the data management role for the North East Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) project in partnership with Nexus, Northumberland County Council and Tees Valley Unlimited. This involves processing, validating and submitting public transport data.

## **DfT Access Fund 2017-2020**

26. Durham has continued to be part of the successful Living Streets bid to the Department for Transport Access Fund. This project, entitled 'Walk To', was awarded £7.5m for the period 2017-2020 and is being delivered by Living Streets in partnership with 10 local

authorities. The project supports economic, health and environmental development in targeted areas through active travel to schools and workplaces. This externally funded project has continued the Council's successful work with Living Streets since 2012.

### **Wheels to Work County Durham**

27. The successful County Durham Wheels to Work (W2W) scheme has continued to develop and expand. This scheme, established in 2016, provides people who are experiencing difficulties in accessing employment or training with the loan of a scooter until a longer-term transport solution can be found. The scheme is managed by Wheels to Work County Durham Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). To date, the scheme has helped 98 people access to work or training using a fleet of 35 scooters available for hire. The scheme is currently being funded by external grant funding, Durham County Council Local Transport Plan and Area Action Partnerships (AAP).
28. Additional funding has recently been secured from the AAP Welfare Assistance Scheme to make the scheme available to residents across the whole of the County from 1 April 2019. Additional funding opportunities will continue to be explored.

### **New Horden Rail Station**

29. In July 2017, Durham County Council was awarded £4.4 million in funding from the Department for Transport New Stations Fund as contribution towards a new rail station at Horden. The remainder of the scheme's £10.55 million cost being provided Durham County Council and the North East Combined Authority.
30. In January 2019 the rail station received planning approval.
31. The design is progressing through Network Rail's GRIP process and is due to be completed and operational by 2020. The scheme will see the creation of two 100 metre platforms connected by an accessible footbridge, shelters, seating, lighting, help points, CCTV, a car park and bus stops. A new access road, footpath and cycleway will also be created.