

Cabinet

15 September 2021

**Discharge of Transport Functions by
Durham County Council 2020/21**



Ordinary Decision

Report of Corporate Management Team

Amy Harhoff, Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth

Councillor Elizabeth Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To update Cabinet on the transport activity carried out by the Council under delegation originally from the North East Combined Authority (NECA) which has continued under the North East Joint Transport Committee.

Executive summary

- 2 The Council is required to report to the North East Joint Transport Committee annually on the discharge of the functions delegated to the Council. Appendix 2 to this report contains the information which will be reported in respect of the last year.

Recommendation

- 3 Cabinet is recommended to:
 - (a) note the contents of this report.

Background

- 4 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 securing socially necessary bus services, 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.
- 5 During 2018, responsibility for transport functions became vested in a statutory Joint Committee comprising of representatives of the new North of Tyne Combined Authority and the North East Combined Authority. It was agreed in a Deed of Cooperation entered into by the seven constituent councils, that the transport functions delegated to the two counties would remain the same pending any decision by the new Joint Committee. No changes to the delegations have been proposed.
- 6 Attached in Appendix 2 is an account of the discharge of transport functions for 2020/21 agreed by the Corporate Director for Regeneration, Economy & Growth and Transport Portfolio Holder, Economy and Partnerships. Appendix 2 is also scheduled to be reported for information to the North East Joint Transport Committee meeting on 19 October 2021.

Background papers

- The North East Combined Authority Constitution
<http://northeastca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Constitution-Version-8-June-2019-1.pdf>
- The North East Combined Authority Deed of Operation dated 29 April 2014
- The North East Combined Authority Deed of Cooperation dated 4 July 2018 <https://northeastca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Appendix-1-Deed-of-Cooperation-4-July-2018.pdf>

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

As detailed within this report.

Finance

Transport functions carried out by or on behalf of the Combined Authority are funded by a levy raised by the Combined Authority. The funding for transport functions in Durham is transferred into the Combined Authority, and the Combined Authority in turn transfers the funding back to the Council to cover the discharge of its transport functions.

Consultation

None specific in this report.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None specific in this report.

Climate Change

All of the areas of transport detailed in Appendix 2 (The JTC Report) contribute to many of the aims of the Climate Emergency by maintaining and encouraging the public to use a comprehensive passenger transport network across County Durham and beyond.

Human Rights

None specific in this report.

Crime and Disorder

None specific in this report.

Staffing

None specific in this report.

Accommodation

None specific in this report.

Risk

None specific in this report.

Procurement

None specific in this report.

Appendix 2: JTC Report

Date: 19 October 2021

Subject: Discharge of Transport Functions by Durham County Council

Report of: 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 2020/21 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 securing socially necessary bus services, 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 During 2018, responsibility for transport functions became vested in a statutory Joint Committee comprising of representatives of the new North of Tyne Combined Authority and the North East Combined Authority. It was agreed in a Deed of Cooperation entered into by the seven constituent councils, that the transport functions delegated to the two counties would remain the same pending any decision by the new Joint Committee. No changes to the delegations have been proposed.
- 1.3 Attached at Appendix A is an account of the discharge of transport functions for 2020/21 agreed by the Corporate Director for Regeneration, Economy & Growth and Transport Portfolio Holder, Economy and Partnerships. Appendix A was reported for information to the County Council's Cabinet meeting on 15 September 2021.

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 A.

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 A – North East Combined Authority (NECA) – Durham County Council Transport Activity Report 2020/21

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 Andy Leadbeater, Integrated Passenger Transport Manager, Durham County Council, andrew.leadbeater@durham.gov.uk, Tel: 03000 268512

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 2020/21

Introduction

1. This report covers the discharge of the powers delegated to Durham County Council (DCC) in the period April 2020 to March 2021. The Covid-19 pandemic has naturally had a very substantial impact on activity in this year, and continues to have a major impact.

Organisational arrangements

2. The County Council continues to undertake its passenger transport functions through 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Due to the pandemic, IPTG staff have almost entirely worked from home during 2020/21, in line with almost all Durham County Council office-based staff. This has been successfully achieved as the Council was already proceeding to more flexible ways of working, with ICT systems and hardware largely in place already.

Bus Service Network

Current State of Commercial and Subsidised Networks and the Impact of Covid-19

6. The pandemic has naturally had a major impact on the bus service network throughout the year with, at times, huge reductions in the patronage of services due to "lockdowns" and related changes in travel demands. At times radical

changes in services necessarily were implemented at short notice. These arrangements have been managed successfully in the context of a long-term close and constructive relationship between Durham County Council and bus operators in the county. It is appropriate to record appreciation for the contribution made by all in the industry to maintaining services in challenging circumstances.

7. In the initial period pending the confirmation of the government's funding arrangements for bus services, timetables were radically reduced in frequency to provide an hourly service in most cases, in a simplified network that still covered all the places normally served. Monday to Saturday daytime services previously running hourly or less frequently were almost all retained at their normal level. Lower levels of service were operated in the later evenings and on Sundays.
8. The level of service was considerably increased once the Covid-19 Bus Service Subsidy Grant (CBSSG) arrangements were introduced by the government, with essentially normal networks running after the initial lockdown was lifted. Subsequently from late November 2020 a shortage of drivers caused certain Arriva services in the Durham area to revert to a slightly reduced frequency. The lockdown in January 2021 caused reduced frequencies to operate more widely, although more frequent services were not reduced to below two buses per hour and services normally operating hourly or less were unaltered in almost all cases.
9. Additional school time buses were introduced in September 2020 where material numbers normally used mainstream local bus services. This was done to ensure capacity was available in the context of restricted seat occupancy allowed on normal services, and to limit the contact between pupils/students and the general public. These measures have been funded by Durham County Council's allocation of Additional Dedicated Home to School and College Transport Grant.
10. The diverse geography of County Durham, including its many rural destinations, creates complex travel demands highlighting the importance of transport across our rural County. The local bus network plays a key role in our ambitions for County Durham and our wider plan for both transport and the economy.
11. 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 and an increasing impact of congestion on timetables.
12. Services operating without subsidy from Durham County Council ("commercial services") 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 (53%) and Arriva (42%) provide the majority of the services across the county. Three other firms also run locally significant bus services without subsidy.

13. Total bus boardings have been radically affected by the impact of the pandemic. It appears patronage in County Durham has closely followed the experience in other parts of the region. The degree of recovery as the lockdown measures ease remains a matter of concern, with potential large impacts.
14. Go North East's bus fleet benefitted from substantial numbers of new buses during 2020 following long-delayed deliveries originally due in 2019. This has meant many key services have been upgraded to Go North East's "X-Lines" branding, with high standards of passenger amenities.

Secured Services Retendering Activity

15. The Council's general practice is that contracts for bus services are arranged on 4-year cycles, holding a right to extend to 5 years. Almost all the Council's contracts run to 2021. This has meant that 2020-21 has seen little change in bus contracts. A successor was arranged for a small contract that ceased as the contractor was unable to continue with effect from January 2021. Payments to contractors were maintained at normal rates even where services have been reduced, in line with the CBSSG arrangements. A Supplier Relief Scheme was introduced to maintain a significant proportion of normal payments to contractors for school and social care transport in periods when normal operation was suspended.

Concessionary Fares

16. 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.
17. In line with government requests, payments to operators were maintained at pre-pandemic levels except for a proportionate temporary adjustment reflecting the temporary reduction in services from January/February 2021.

Multi-Operator Ticketing Scheme

18. The circumstances of the pandemic have delayed progress towards a formal multi-operator ticket scheme, although, as a contingency measure, operators have been accepting the equivalent tickets issued by other operators. A proper, comprehensive scheme continues to be a key objective and discussions to progress this have resumed in 2021.

Transport Focus Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey

19. The planned further round of surveys in autumn 2020 was not undertaken due to the pandemic. We expect this work will continue to be a key indicator that will resume when possible.

Park and Ride

20. The Durham Park and Ride was suspended from late March to June 2020, when a staged resumption commenced, at slightly reduced frequency. Patronage has naturally been very substantially affected, to a greater degree than the general bus network. This reflects that a material part of the normal usage is for shopping and leisure purposes, and the closure of most city centre shops for periods of the year.

Community Transport (CT)

21. The CT sector in County Durham has experienced a very difficult year, with most normal operations either suspended or operating at a much-reduced level. Some organisations took on new roles to provide support for people self-isolating or shielding, by doing deliveries etc.

Home to School/Social Care Transport

22. Home to school and social care transport forms the major part of Durham's operations, with a total spend of approximately £15 million pa and over 1200 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 2020/21 school year, about 6,500 pupils receive free travel to school from Durham County Council, with a further 3,000 pupils travelling under the non-statutory concessionary schemes.
23. While the closure of schools to most pupils in summer 2020 and from January to March 2021 caused the suspension of a lot of transport contracts, many contracts continued to operate throughout the period with reduced numbers. Arrangements have been subject to a lot of short notice changes due to self-isolation of pupils and other changes in requirements. Enhanced measures to protect against health risks were introduced for the general return to school from September 2020, including some limitation of seat occupancy, enhanced cleaning and use of PPE. A supplementary payment was made on all contracts to reflect the additional requirements.

Travel Response Centre

24. Durham has continued to operate a 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 handled over 30,000 calls in 2020/21 compared to 63,000 in the previous year as a result of reduced appointments and travel restrictions. Bookings are now returning to previous levels as restrictions ease. Referrals from social workers and other care staff for client travel to day care are also processed.
25. 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

26. The 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 150 electronic information displays at bus stations and on-street stops, printed county public transport maps, 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.
27. Durham County Council has also continued to manage the processing and validation of public transport data for the regional and national 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.
28. From July 2020, the processing of data has been undertaken by Traveline Information Limited (TIL) under contract to Durham County Council on an interim basis. Each local authority has submitted their data directly to TIL for processing into the North East regional dataset for inclusion as part of the national data set.
29. The Council has continued to act as the regional contact for national data issues and represent the region at national working groups and meetings. This includes taking an active role in working groups for the DfT Open Data Initiative that will make changes to the way that bus operators provide information about their registered services and make it easier for bus passengers to plan their journeys through access to routes and timetables data, fares and tickets data and real time information.
30. The new regulations require bus operators to publish route, fares and vehicle location data to a central web service called the Bus Open Data Digital Service (BODDS) from January 2021 with requirements being phased in until 2023.
31. The council has provided support to help bus operators meet the new regulations. This includes the council acting as an agent to provide timetable data to BODDS for small bus operators where required. Data is currently being uploaded to BODDS on behalf of six small bus operators for services that operate in County Durham.

Real Time Passenger Information

32. From July 2020, the data management role for the North East Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) has been shared by Durham County Council and Nexus. Durham is responsible for processing, validating and submitting public transport data to the regional data broker for County Durham and Tees Valley led services. Nexus is responsible for Tyne & Wear and Northumberland led services.

DfT Access Fund 2017-2021

33. Durham continued to be part of the successful Living Streets bid to the Department for Transport Access Fund. This project, entitled 'Walk To', was awarded £10m for the period 2017-2021 and was delivered by Living Streets in partnership with 10 local authorities. The project supported economic, health and environmental development in targeted areas through active travel to schools and workplaces. This externally funded project continued the Council's successful work with Living Streets since 2012.

DfT Capability Fund

34. In March 2021, the DfT announced new revenue funding for sustainable travel, called the 'Capability Fund'. An indicative allocation of funding was stated for each local authority with spend needing to align with DfT priorities and with Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan delivery. Indicative funding of £301k was allocated to Durham County Council for 2020/21 and would enable continuation of the Living Streets 'Walk To' project as part of a range of projects for approval by the DfT.

Wheels to Work County Durham

35. The successful County Durham Wheels to Work (W2W) scheme has continued to develop and has now expanded to cover the whole of the County. 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).
36. The scheme has continued to operate during the Covid-19 restrictions, although the number of clients has reduced due to furlough and job losses as well as not being able to take on new clients due to the DVSA suspension of Compulsory Basic Training. The scheme operated 40 scooters and supported 46 people into work or training during 2020/21. A total of 214 people have been supported since the scheme started. The scheme is funded by Durham County Council transport revenue budget as well as Area Action Partnerships and the Local Transport Plan. External grant funding has also been successfully secured. Additional funding opportunities will continue to be explored.

New Horden Rail Station

37. The new Horden Rail Station was opened in June 2020 as planned. The project cost of £10.55 million was funded by the Department for Transport New Stations Fund (£4.4 million) with the remainder provided by Durham County Council and the North East LEP.

The new station includes 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 has also been created and a local bus service has been diverted to serve the station.