

Joint Special Meeting of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee



6 June 2024

Regional and Local Transport: Policy and Delivery

Report of Amy Harhoff Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy, and Growth

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide the special meeting of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on transport policy and delivery in County Durham and the wider region.

Executive summary

- 2 Arrangements have been made for Mark Jackson, Head of Transport and Contract Services, and his senior officers to attend on 6th June 2024 to provide a presentation focusing on Transport Policy and Delivery at both the regional and local level. The functions of Transport policy and delivery will be impacted by devolution and issues related to the establishment of the North East Combined Authority (NECA) will be covered.
- 3 While Air Quality and Low Carbon issues are highly relevant to this session, there has been a separate informal information session for overview and scrutiny members relating specifically to these subject areas.
- 4 A copy of the presentation is attached as Appendix 2.

Recommendations

- 5 Members of the Committee are asked to note information contained within this report and presentation accordingly.

Background – Structure and Governance

- 6 Following discussions with the chairs of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it was agreed that a special joint committee would be held to consider overall transport policy and delivery in County Durham.
- 7 Transport policy and delivery are already shared at a regional and local level with regional responsibility currently being focussed on the North East Joint Transport Committee (JTC). The creation of the North East Combined Authority (NECA) will mean that the JTC will no longer exist and that NECA will exercise the devolved transport functions.
- 8 The Mayoral Functions relating to transport include the power to draw up a Local Transport Plan and strategies, bus franchising powers, the ability to pay grants to bus service operators and to the Constituent Councils for exercising transport functions. All other functions will be Non-Mayoral Functions.
- 9 The presentation will firstly give an overview of policy and devolution before focusing on how transport infrastructure is currently delivered at a local level. Following the success of last year's session, the presentation will follow the same format and be divided between active travel, buses, new transport infrastructure and rail, and electric vehicle infrastructure.
- 10 Appendix 2 to this report contains a presentation that provides an overview of the transport policy and delivery. The Head of Transport and Contract Services and senior members of his team will be in attendance to deliver the presentation to the Committee's meeting and answer any questions.

DCC Transport, Transport Policy, and Devolution

- 11 The Head of Transport & Contract Services has 3 teams namely: Integrated Passenger Transport, Transport and Infrastructure funding, and Strategic Traffic. The Head of Transport also receives policy support from the Strategy and Delivery team, sitting within the REG directorate as part of the Planning and Housing Service. The Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Team sits within the Neighbourhoods and Climate Change directorate as part of the Environment Service Area.

- 12 Transport policy is written at national, sub national, regional, and local levels and is a fundamental part of economic, environmental, public health, and planning policies. At national level, transport policy focuses on policies to enable economic growth, decarbonise transport and improve air quality and is set out by the Department for Transport.
- 13 At sub-national level, the vision for the transport network is co-ordinated by Transport for the North (TfN) who provide policies on issues including the strategic road and rail networks. At the regional level, transport policy is drafted by Transport North East and will now be adopted by the new Combined Authority. The previous Joint Transport Committee (JTC) included our Economic Regeneration and Partnerships Portfolio Holder as one of its key members and provides strategic leadership on the transport agenda in the region. The JTC will though be replaced by a new NECA committee as part of the devolution deal although committee positions and structures are still to be finalised. Then North East Transport Plan (2021) will then be updated as a first priority of the NECA and will include specific targets relating to quantifiable carbon reductions as a result of transport policy.
- 14 At a local level, Durham County Council have responsibility for delivering local strategies and delivery plans such as the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, Electric Vehicle Charge Points Plan and local parking standards via the County Durham Plan. We also have plans related to improving Air Quality in Durham City and reducing our Carbon output as part of the Climate Emergency Response Plan.
- 15 Whilst strategic transport policy may sit with Transport for the North and new NECA, the delivery of transport projects, highways improvements and our capital scheme programme remain the responsibility of Durham County Council.
- 16 At every geographical level, there is a clear link between the role of transport supporting economic growth and this is articulated locally in our Inclusive Economic Strategy. However, over the past 5 years, there has been a significant shift in emphasis towards clean growth, decarbonising transport, and tackling the impact on climate change and air quality.

Active Travel

- 17 Active Travel continues to be an area of growth and investment and gained particular momentum as the government responded to the pandemic. It features prominently in policy commitments to decarbonise transport at a national scale and the governments vision

is best articulated in their 2020 Cycling and Walking strategy '[Gear Change – A bold vision for cycling and walking](#)'. There is also detailed guidance note (LTN 1/20) which sets out specific standards expected for cycling infrastructure. The government has also created 'Active Travel England', a new inspectorate for walking and cycling links, whose mission is to ensure that all new developments must include quality active travel links.

- 18 Active Travel policy and the importance of walking and cycling is now embedded within the County Durham plan and its supplementary planning documents. The Council has developed Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPS) for 11 of our main towns which must be considered as part of the planning application process. As a council we have been delivering our [Strategic Walking and Cycling Delivery Plan 2019-29](#) which included projects related to all aspects of active travel. The progress so far includes securing £2.5M for the North Durham Active Travel Corridor (New College to Arnison Centre), securing £3.7M for Aykley Heads Innovation District's *Connectivity, Woodland, Parkland* programme, delivering the Towns and Villages £3.75M Walking and Cycling Programme, delivery of primary and secondary LCWIP routes in Durham City and Bishop Auckland, 12 new town cycling maps and delivering the Borrow a Bike scheme across the County.
- 19 The presentation will cover both the improvements of policy integration at DCC and many of the individual projects that have been delivered by the Active Travel and the Transport Infrastructure team.

Buses

- 20 Over 90% of local bus services used to operate without financial support. However, the impact of the pandemic on the bus network in County Durham has been severe. Patronage and consequently the fares income used to support bus service has been negatively impacted. Bus passengers are around 80% of pre pandemic levels, and the bus operators have been struggling to retain local services as well as staff, as bus revenues have been reduced and fuel costs have increased.
- 21 However, despite these negative headlines relating to bus services in the aftermath of the pandemic, it could be time to 'talk our buses up'. In April 2022 DfT announce that bus services in the area covered by the JTC would receive a funding allocation of £163 million pounds as part of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). This will allow NECA and the constituent authorities to invest in the bus network between 2022 and 2025. The BSIP funding is to be made-up of £73m capital and £89m revenue. The new funding will be used to create

new services, increase the frequencies, extend operating hours and crucially, for the residents of County Durham, reduce daily fees when using bus services. Crucially for our residents, fares remain at the reasonable price of £2 per ticket for a one-way journey. There is also a £4 daily cap for County Durham residents.

- 22 There are currently 114 local bus contracts managed by Durham County Council at a gross cost before fares income of £11m and a net cost of £7.8m. In total these carry 3m passengers per year, 17% of all bus passenger journeys per year within County Durham.
- 23 These contracts can be broadly classified as follows; providing whole services offering unique links, supplementing the core of commercial services, Park and Ride, demand responsive services, Cathedral Bus tourism services and registered school services.
- 24 The presentation will cover both the challenges of recovering from the pandemic and the opportunities provided by the BSIP.

New Transport Infrastructure and Rail

- 25 The presentation will be an overview of current and future major transport infrastructure projects. In 2023/24, DCC have completed the delivery of the new Durham bus station, a new junction near at the New Inn traffic lights and as well as new active mode improvements between Newton Hall and Rivergreen. In 2023/24, DCC are delivering over £70 million worth of transport projects around the County including new active mode routes at Newton Aycliffe and capacity improvements in Bishop Auckland. In 2024/2025, there is the potential for DCC to hold a public consultation on the Toft Hill Bypass. The junction improvements on the A19 corridor at the Seaton Lane have nearly been completed and Bishop Auckland Bus Station and surface level car park is under construction.
- 26 The Council are progressing more 'medium to long term' funding opportunities on the local rail network as a result of the 'Restoring Your Railways' fund. Notably, we are progressing a business case for a new unmanned train station and car park at Ferryhill. We continue to work on feasibility studies relating to the concept of a potential Consett-Newcastle passenger service as well as new passenger service on the Weardale railway that will link the Bishop and Weardale railway lines.
- 27 Working as DCC and as part of the NECA, we will continue to lobby the sub national and national government regarding the reinstatement of the Leamside Line, which would enable extra capacity for passenger and freight services as an alternative to the

congested ECML. We will also lobby nationally and sub nationally to increase the frequencies of transnational services stopping at Chester le Street on the ECML and on the Durham Coast Line at Horden and Seaham.

Electric Vehicle Infrastructure

- 28 The percentage share of new cars sold that are fully electric has taken off since 2019. In 2022 the market share of new cars sold that were fully electric doubled from 10.7% to 22.9%. The Council must play a role in ensuring that residents have sufficient chargepoints available to charge their cars.
- 29 The [North East Zero Emission Vehicle Policy](#) (2022) states that the North East currently only has 2-5%¹ of the fast chargers required by 2035 and only 12-29% of the rapid infrastructure required to support the levels of 2035 demand. DCC has also committed to 35k fewer petrol and diesel cars on the road by 2035 in our [Climate Emergency Response Plan](#)².
- 30 The presentation is an overview of various projects that have been delivered by the EV team at Durham County Council. These projects have been underpinned by the Councils Charge Point Delivery Plan (2021). Since 2019, Durham has been very successful in being awarded funding grants and delivering several projects related to the delivery of charge points. The council have now installed over 200 new chargepoints. These successful projects delivery has recently led to the council being awarded significant funding (£4.375m) to deliver the LEVI project. This will support the council's efforts to locate new charge points at another 250 sites across the County which is to commence in Summer 2024.
- 31 A further 16 EVCP are to be installed utilising ORCS and Level Up Funding at rural locations across County Durham – a mix of slow, fast, and rapid charging. First installations have commenced April 2024 and will be completed by December 2024. Another submission will be made later in the year under LEVI for an additional £3m to install 200 EVCP's on housing association land in the coming years.
- 32 The council are also planning to install slow and rapid chargepoints, for private and fleet charging, at strategic fleet sites once surveys are complete, such as a further 10x dual 22kw chargers at our

¹ Pg. 42 of the North East Zero Emissions Vehicle Policy <https://www.transportnortheast.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/TNE-ZEV-Policy.pdf>

² Pg 35 of the CERP - <https://democracy.durham.gov.uk/documents/s157682/CERP2%20-%20Plan.pdf>

Meadowfield Depot and additional rapid 50kw+ chargers to enable quick top up where required.

- 33 In addition to this DCC hope to install EV charging devices such as connections to existing 32 or 64 amp commando sockets to use as EV charging ports and potentially lamppost charging to allow slow overnight charging of fleet vehicles.

Conclusion

- 34 The attached report and presentation provide an opportunity for Members to consider and comment on the way in which transport are policy and operations is delivered.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

- None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

This report is for information only

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

Not applicable

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable