

North East Combined Authority

Transport North East Committee

North East Combined Authority (NECA) Durham County Council Transport Activity Report January - December 2015

Introduction

1. The County Council operates an 'Integrated Transport Unit' (ITU) in line with Government's best practice guidance. The ITU 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 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 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. 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 have fallen slightly in 2015, continuing a trend that set in in mid-2014. No single cause has been identified, although it is probably related to some decline in footfall at major retail centres, and reductions in car fuel costs
6. 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. There

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has been considerable further investment in the new buses in the period by both main operators. Further investment continues into 2016. The planned spending on support for local services has remained stable since the cuts introduced in 2011/12. Commitments have been managed in the light of the planned reduction of £400,000 to be implemented in the 2016/17 financial year.

7. Go North East made substantial changes to their services in the Stanley area in November 2015, with a slight increase in the overall number of buses operating in the network. A key aim was to improve the punctuality of corridors where traffic delays on routes into the MetroCentre and Newcastle have affected services. Some former through services were split at Stanley, which has transformed punctuality of the sections in County Durham. The network includes additional express services between Stanley and Newcastle, including a new peak time express service via the Team Valley operating with transitional support from DCC. We see potential for this to develop further in coming years.

Secured Service Retendering Activity

8. 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. 2015 was therefore a period of low activity in tendering bus services. The contracts for the "Link2", our demand responsive minibus service, were tendered with North East Accessible Transport (based in Jarrow) winning the contracts at very competitive rates, covering the operation of 6 minibuses; the remaining two bus duties continue to be operated by DCC's in-house fleet.

Park and Ride

9. The Durham Park and Ride has continued to perform very satisfactorily. Record numbers were carried during the Lumiere event in November 2015.

Clean Vehicle Technology Fund

10. The project in partnership with other NECA councils which won 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 has progressed slowly in 2015. Two trial vehicles were equipped but results were unsatisfactory. Discussions are continuing between GNE, the partner

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authorities and the Department for Transport about how best to proceed, probably with alternative technology.

Concessionary Fares

11. 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. During 2015 total boardings have declined slightly which will lead to a fall in the total cost of successor agreements for 2016/17.

Community Transport (CT)

12. The CT sector predominantly concentrates on group hire, although Weardale Community Transport again operated its summer-only Sunday bus service in 2015. The Council's programme of offering capital grants from Local Transport Plan funding to assist Community Transport continues. We also supported groups in making their bids to the Department for Transport's Rural Community Transport Minibus Fund, with all six bids being successful.
13. We are also continuing our use of grant funding from government's Rural Sustainable Community Transport Initiative (RSCTI) to support the CT sector to develop its capacity, with a particular focus on the recruitment of volunteers.

North East Smart Ticketing Initiative (NESTI)

14. DCC has continued to actively participate in the NESTI initiative, undertaking in conjunction with NESTI, two pilot trials of the regional Stored Travel smartcard. The trial involving DCC's Cathedral Bus service in Durham has matured into full operation from summer 2015, while a trial on selected GNE services continued to operate throughout 2015.

Multi-Operator Ticketing Scheme

15. This project to introduce countywide multi-operator zonal ticketing did not develop during 2015 in the manner that had been hoped. Although a draft memorandum of understanding and a constitution of a formal steering group were prepared, some operator's concerns about the zoning and pricing concepts that had previously been thought to be close to agreement led to a pause in the project. 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. This is likely to be based on the operators' "Smartzone" model which has been piloted in some areas of Tyne & Wear.

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Home to School/Social Care Transport

16. 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 over 1000 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. In the school year starting September 2015, about 6,500 pupils received free travel to school, plus some 3,000 pupils travelling under the non-statutory concessionary schemes.
17. 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. 2015 was therefore a period of lower activity in retendering with a focus on renewing some short term contracts and contracts for SEND pupils and social care users.. 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.

Travel Response Centre (TRC)

18. TRC is the central point for people ringing to book on to DCC's "Link2" dial-a-ride service and health transport services or for travel information. 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.
19. Around 80,000 calls are handled on an annual basis. The TRC also processes referrals from Social Workers and other care staff for client travel to day care.
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.

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Public Transport Information

20. Durham 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 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.
21. Durham 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

22. Durham has continued to work 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. Testing for the new system is currently ongoing following the development of software and upgrades to over 100 information displays at bus stations and stops in County Durham. Real time data for selected bus services is currently being displayed via electronic displays at bus stations and stops. In time, this will include all operators and services and include on-line via Traveline North East, NextBus and the DCC interactive bus map.

Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF)

23. Durham's LSTF South Durham *Local Motion* project has encouraged the adoption of low-carbon travel habits through a complimentary package of sustainable transport measures targeted at businesses, schools and local communities. From April 2015, the project was expanded towards Durham City and targeted Spennymoor, Crook and Willington to improve connectivity to access work and training opportunities within South Durham and further afield to Darlington and Durham City. LSTF funding for this project ends on 31st March 2016.
24. DCC has also continued as the lead authority for the national LSTF Living Streets *Walk To* project. This project, in partnership with 11 local authorities and Living Streets, has increased the levels of walking among people of all ages. A range of engaging interventions have supported significant changes in people's travel behaviours leading to reduced congestion and an improved

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environment whilst also benefitting health and well-being. Measures have focussed on where the school run is having a significant negative impact on congestion, journey times and economic growth. LSTF funding for this project ends on 31st March 2016.

Sustainable Travel Transition Year 2016/17

25. Moving forward, a consolidated NECA-wide bid has been submitted to the Department for Transport Sustainable Travel Transition Year (STTY) funding for 2016/17. The bid, entitled Go Smarter (across the North East) combines the most effective elements from LSTF Go Smarter Tyne & Wear, Northumberland, and South Durham Local Motion, expanding the reach and impact to additional communities with co-ordinated delivery across the NECA area.

26. The proposal builds on the investment and proven success of existing programmes that have increased sustainable travel for businesses, schools and local communities. It supports the local economy, boosts economic growth and cuts carbon emissions by making it easier for people to access jobs, training and education opportunities, by engaging and informing younger people, those seeking jobs or training, or already employed. A decision on the award of STTY funding is expected to be made at the end of April 2016 with delivery commencing immediately thereafter.