

North East Combined Authority

Transport North East Committee

Appendix 1

North East Combined Authority (NECA)

Durham County Council Transport Activity Report 2016/17

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 share. Service changes by both operators during 2016 have included increased head to head competition in east Durham. Six other firms also run locally significant services without subsidy. The presence of this number of operators is unique to County Durham and continues to influence the market. Almost all the main towns of County Durham have a least two operators providing commercial services.
5. Total bus boardings have fallen slightly in 2016, continuing a trend that set in in mid-2014. A similar trend is seen in national statistics. In County Durham, no single cause has been identified, although contributory factors are thought to be changing retail markets, fewer young adults in the population, and some impact from disruption to services arising from major road and utility works during 2016.
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, although

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there have been periodic adjustments to details of timings reflecting better data now available from new tracking systems. There has been considerable further investment in new and cascaded buses in the period by both main operators. Further investment continues into 2017.

Secured Service Retendering Activity

7. 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. Normally all contracts in an area are renewed at the same time. 2016 was a period of low activity in tendering bus services, with extension options taken up to focus on a renewal of all contracts with effect from autumn 2017.

Park and Ride

8. The Durham Park and Ride has continued to perform very satisfactorily. Total boardings in 2016 have fallen slightly compared with 2015, mainly due to the effect of the record numbers carried during the Lumiere event in November 2015.

Clean Vehicle Technology Fund

9. The project in partnership with other NECA councils to equip Go North East (GNE) buses on four services across the NECA area with a kinetic energy recovery system has progressed in 2016. Two trial vehicles were equipped but results were unsatisfactory. An alternative retrofit exhaust system solution has been agreed between GNE, the partner authorities and the Department for Transport. This followed successful testing during autumn 2016 which showed that excellent reductions in emissions of nitrous oxides are being achieved on the road, essentially equivalent to the latest "Euro VI" standard. The retrofit will be rolled out on the two services involved in County Durham during the first half of 2017. Part of the revised scheme entails GNE providing new "Euro VI" buses on Consett – Stanley – Durham services in lieu of the original scheme, and these were delivered in February 2017.

Concessionary Fares

10. 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 2016, total concessionary boardings have risen by about 0.4% compared with 2015.

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Community Transport (CT)

11. The CT sector predominantly concentrates on group hire, although Weardale Community Transport again operated its summer-only Sunday bus service in 2016. 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.
12. 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.

North East Smart Ticketing Initiative (NESTI)

13. Durham has continued to actively participate in the NESTI initiative. The PopPAYG card was successfully rolled out on Durham Park and Ride in summer 2016. It provides a discount fare equivalent to that previously available by buying a 20 journey card, but in a more convenient manner. Many regular users are now using the PoP smartcard on Park and Ride. However, Pop PAYG has yet to achieve material levels of use across the wider bus network, and the roll out of contactless payment during 2017 appears likely to have a much greater impact.

Multi-Operator Ticketing Scheme

14. 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 will use the "Smartzone" model which has been introduced by bus operators in Tyne & Wear.

Transport Focus Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey Autumn 2016

15. Transport Focus under-take an independent survey of passengers' satisfaction with their bus journeys each autumn in a range of areas across England and Scotland. County Durham was included in the 2016 survey for the first time since 2011, following funding provided by DCC jointly with Arriva and Go North East. Key results are summarised below:

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% satisfied	All County Durham (inc other operators)	Arriva in County Durham	GoNE in County Durham
Punctuality (all passengers)	79%	70%	82%
Journey time (all passengers)	86%	81%	87%
Value for money (fare payers only)	58%	54%	56%
OVERALL (all passengers)	89%	85%	91%

16. The results show considerable progress since 2011, when overall satisfaction was 83%. The 2016 result matches the average of other unitary councils in the survey, and is above the average score of shire councils. The satisfaction with punctuality is fourth highest of the 27 areas in the survey. However, only five others have lower VFM results from fare-paying passengers, with concerns about the impact of congestion and roadworks on journey time apparent in the comments. This appears to reflect the impact of the major road schemes and utility works that have particularly affected the Arriva network in the last two years.

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. As at October 2016, about 5,100 pupils received free travel to school, together with 3,400 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, benefitting from lower fuel prices. However, some adverse trends are expected in subsequent years due to increasing fuel costs and some impact from the National Living Wage.

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Travel Response Centre (TRC)

19. The travel Response Centre (TRC) is the central point for people ringing to book on to our “Link2” dial-a-ride service and health transport services or for travel information. The TRC has a large database of approved operators providing social care and pupil transport and has close links with NEAS, private ambulance services, community transport and volunteer driver schemes.
20. 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 directly 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.

Public Transport Information

21. 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.
22. Electronic display kiosks have been installed at Durham Railway Station and Bus Station to improve the provision of local and wider travel information. Funding for the displays has been provided through the Local Growth Fund as part of the regional gateway stations project. The council has developed interactive touch-screen software to provide a range of travel and local information on the displays. The displays show departures, routes, journey planning, information on nearby local facilities and advertising to provide the possibility of sustainable third party funding. Additional display kiosks will be installed at key interchanges across the county as funding is made available.
23. 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 and the Tees Valley on a continuous basis. The council will procure a new contract for the provision of software for the journey planning engine and associated data processing tools in 2017/18.

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Real Time Passenger Information

24. Durham has continued to work in partnership with Nexus, Northumberland County Council, Tees Valley Unlimited and local bus operators to provide Real Time Passenger Information for the wider North East region. Testing and validation of the new system is ongoing with real time data for the majority of services presented at over 150 electronic displays at bus stations and stops across the county. Work is continuing to include all operators and services as well as making real time information available on-line via Traveline North East, NextBus, display kiosks at interchanges and via Durham's interactive bus map.

DfT Sustainable Travel Transition Year Funding 2016/17

25. Durham was part of the successful NECA bid to the Department for Transport Sustainable Travel Transition Year Fund (STTYF) for 2016/17. This bid, entitled Go Smarter (across the North East), has built 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.
26. Durham County Council has also continued as a partner in the national Living Streets *Walk To* project in 2016/17. This project has increased the levels of walking among people of all ages through delivery of a range of interventions. This has supported significant changes in people's travel behaviours leading to reduced congestion and an improved 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.

DfT Access Fund 2017–2020

27. Whilst NECA was unsuccessful in their bid for the Department for Transport's Access Fund, Durham will continue to work with partners over the remainder of the Go Smarter project to explore opportunities to continue working with schools, businesses and local communities.
28. Durham will also continue as a partner in the national Living Streets 'Walk To' project for the next three years following their successful Access Fund bid. Living Streets were awarded £7.5m for the period 2017-2020 and the project is being delivered in partnership with 10 local authorities across the country. The project will support economic, health and environmental objectives in targeted areas through active travel.

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Wheels to Work County Durham

29. A new Wheels-to-Work (W2W) scheme was established as a pilot in Chester-le-Street, Stanley and Mid-West Durham in October 2016. This scheme is providing 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. Wheels to Work County Durham Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) manage the scheme with delivery by Rural Action Derbyshire. Funding for the scheme was sourced through a combination of Local Growth Fund, STTYF Go Smarter and the council's Area Action Partnerships. Additional funding opportunities will continue to be explored to expand and maintain delivery after the end of the pilot project.