

## **Transport North East Committee**

### **North East Combined Authority (NECA) Durham County Council Transport Activity Report 2017/18**

#### **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. 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. The increased head to head competition between Arriva and Go North East in east Durham that commenced in late 2016 has continued, without provoking instability in the network. Four other firms also run locally significant bus services without subsidy. Among them, Scarlet Band introduced a new service in Durham improving access to the University from the east side of the city, with support from commercial interests involved in student housing. Almost all the main towns of County Durham have a least two operators providing significant services without subsidy.
5. Total bus boardings have fallen in 2017, by about 1.8%, continuing a trend that set in in mid-2014. A similar trend is seen in national statistics and in other parts of the region. A prime cause is falling numbers of concessionary bus journeys due to the impact of the increasing age of entitlement to concessionary travel.

## Transport North East Committee

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 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 and further investment continues into 2018.

### *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. 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. All the main contracts are on "cost-based" terms where fares revenue is credited to the Council, in line with most of the expiring contracts. This has contributed to an essentially stable net cost being achieved from the procurement.

### *NECA Bus strategy*

8. Durham County Council supports the emerging vision from the current work on a Bus Strategy for the NECA area. The vision is to deliver buses to people living, visiting and working in the NECA area that are accessible, affordable and reliable and support the growth of the NECA area economy. Therefore, we will aim for an inclusive, stable and sustainable network of bus routes and services which will provide access to education and training, employment, health, leisure and social destinations.
9. In order to achieve this vision Durham County Council, in partnership with Nexus and Northumberland County Council must:
  - Arrest the decline in bus patronage;
  - Maintain and strive to improve accessibility;
  - Improve benefits to current and future bus passengers; and
  - Ensure affordability

### **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. Total concessionary boardings in 17/18 are set to fall by some 4.4% compared with the previous year, reflecting national trends. It is anticipated this trend will continue in 18/19.

## **Transport North East Committee**

### **Young People's Fares**

11. DCC members and officers contributed to the NECA Task and Finish Group which considered arrangements for Young People's Fares, with a particular aim to respond to research showing complications and inconsistencies were a barrier to young people. The outcome of the discussions which took place with major bus operators was a region-wide standardisation of the age groups covered by the reduced bus fares offered by the operators on a commercial basis. All operators in County Durham and elsewhere in the region now consider young people under 16 as child fares. Reduced tickets are also now generally available for people under 19, which in some cases previously were only available to students. There is also mutual recognition of proof of age.

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

12. 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 grown considerably since 2016 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 roll out of contactless payment on all Arriva and Go North East services during 2017 has provide an easier alternative method of cash-less payment for many people.

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

13. 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 Autumn 2017**

14. Transport Focus undertake an independent survey of passengers' satisfaction with their bus journeys each autumn in a range of areas across England and Scotland. Durham was again included in the 2017 survey, following funding provided by DCC jointly with Arriva and Go North East. Key results are summarised below (2016 results in brackets).

## Transport North East Committee

% satisfied (2016 %)	All County Durham (inc other operators)	Arriva in County Durham	GoNE in County Durham
Journey time (all passengers)	88% (86%)	86% (81%)	88% (87%)
Punctuality (all passengers)	74% (79%)	66% (70%)	77% (82%)
Value for money (fare payers only)	73% (58%)	73% (54%)	72% (56%)
<b>OVERALL (all passengers)</b>	<b>91% (89%)</b>	<b>88% (85%)</b>	<b>91% (91%)</b>

15. The results show some progress since 2016, with a distinct improvement in the satisfaction with Arriva services, which in 2016 had been affected a series of major roadworks and utility schemes. The County Durham results for satisfaction with Value for money found by Passenger Focus are the highest in the survey, probably reflecting the pricing of zonal tickets where several zones have been extended and prices held unchanged.
16. Satisfaction with punctuality has declined; a similar trend is apparent in other parts of the north east and across other regions, and is thought to reflect some impact from increased congestion. Adjustments to timetables to improve punctuality by adding running time at peaks or adding extra buses into the operation are the main cause of service changes seen in County Durham in 2017.

### Park and Ride

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

### Community Transport (CT)

18. The CT sector predominantly concentrates on group hire, although Weardale Community Transport again operated its summer-only Sunday bus service in the dale in 2017. The council's programme of offering capital grants from Local Transport Plan funding to assist Community Transport continues.
19. 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.
20. 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

## **Transport North East Committee**

remains unchanged after the current consultation, there appear 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**

21. 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 17/18 school year, about 4,200 pupils receive free travel to school from Durham County Council, with a further 3,200 pupils travelling under the non-statutory concessionary schemes.
22. 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**

23. 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.
24. 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.

### **Public Transport Information**

25. Durham County Council has continued to provide data management and system development 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. Procurement for a new contract for the provision of software for the journey planning engine and associated data processing tools is currently being progressed.

## **Transport North East Committee**

26. Durham County Council has continued to provide 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 over 100 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.
27. Interactive display kiosks have been installed at Durham Railway Station and Bus Station to improve the provision of local and wider travel information. 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, local information on nearby local facilities. Additional display kiosks will be installed at key interchanges across the county as funding is made available.

### **Real Time Passenger Information**

28. 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.

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

29. 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**

30. The successful County Durham Wheels to Work (W2W) scheme has continued to develop and expand. This scheme, established in 2016, now operates in seven Area Action Partnership areas across the county with 35 scooters available for hire. 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. The scheme is managed by Wheels to Work County Durham Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). Funding for the scheme has been provided by a package of funding secured from the NELEP LSTF Local Growth Fund, NECA STTYF Go Smarter and Durham County Council Local Transport Plan and Area Action Partnerships. Additional funding opportunities will continue to be explored to expand across the county.

## **Transport North East Committee**

### **New Horden Rail Station**

31. 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 £10.5 million cost being provided Durham County Council and the North East Combined Authority.
32. The design is progressing through Network Rail's GRIP process and is due to be completed and operational by 2020. The station will have two platforms with waiting shelters, seating, lighting, help points and CCTV. The platforms will be linked by a covered footbridge and the station will have a car park with space for up to 100 cars as well as facilities for drop-off, taxis and bus services.