



Better than a Bus Station !!

A TRANSPORT INTERCHANGE FOR YORK

A DISCUSSION PAPER PREPARED BY THE YORK BUS FORUM BUS STATION SUBGROUP

Comments before 31 August please, to busstation@yorkbusforum.org
This Discussion Paper is available at www.yorkbusforum.org/busstationreport

**To be discussed at an Open Public Meeting in West Offices at
5.30pm on Tuesday 18th September**

This paper was written by the Working Group members: Dee Boyle, Alan Dawes, Peter Fisher, Tony Hudson, Bryan Nye, Alan Robinson, Diana Robinson and myself. I should like to thank them and members of the Forum and others for their contributions, comments, suggestions and support.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Lots of things are changing in York. There are many plans for the future and they all affect how we get around. The impact will last for many generations and it's important to get them right.

Apart from practical questions, there are many questions of priorities, and many uncertainties. Should we inhibit single-person car travel in favour of pedestrians and public transport? Will petrol run out? Will shared cars, taxis and electric vehicles become more popular? "Mobility as a Service" is being mooted. Will HS2 arrive and *triple* the number of rail passengers in York?

In the middle of all this, *four* major consultations are taking place in York, and they are not very joined up. Car traffic is planned for, but buses are largely ignored. The lack of consideration of public transport in the York Central discussions led York Bus Forum to consider the question of whether York needs a bus station. There were many different views, so in February 2018 we set up a working group to consider the matter and to prepare a discussion document for the general public. That is the document you see here.

In the meantime, City of York Council (CYC) published its "Station Frontage" proposals in June 2018, with a tight deadline for responses. Their proposals overlapped considerably with ours, and the tight deadline delayed some of our work. The YBF response to the CYC proposals is available at www.YorkBusForum.org/YorkStationFront The document available there includes an earlier but almost-identical version of the current document.

The aim of this document is to provoke informed discussions about important matters and to affect decision-making. **Recommendations are underlined and in bold.**

We emphasise the interlinkages between bus issues and other aspects of planning, and the need for long-term joined-up thinking. Present structures do not encourage this. Private ownership often focuses on short-term balance sheet bottom lines, and the council is constrained by immediate financial and electoral goals. As a result, transport of all sorts suffers. We therefore propose as a long-term aim that **York needs a city-wide "Transport for York" (TfY) transport authority with a holistic long-term overview on all aspects of transport. It needs 'teeth' like TfL in London. Above all, it needs authority. Otherwise, discussions will continue in a piece-meal fashion and public transport above all will suffer.** We recognise that this proposal may not be feasible within the foreseeable future, and TfY will undoubtedly be different from TfL, but we feel this should be retained as a long-term goal. Details need to be worked out.

Regarding a bus station, we concluded that however desirable a single bus station might be in theory, in practice *a single bus station like those seen in Hull, Leeds, Chester and elsewhere is just not feasible in York*. However, developments by the station provide once-in-a-century opportunities for an effective, modern transport interchange. We recommend **a carefully thought out bus interchange that straddles both sides of the station.** This has many advantages which are discussed below. Even if it is not feasible in the immediate future, we should earmark space so it can be implemented when funding is available.

The proposed new interchange may be visitors' first sight of York and should provoke a "Wow!" factor - like the new Kings Cross atrium, and as the current York station must have done in the 1870s. First impressions are important! Our recommendations include **a new International Architectural Competition, in which the world's leading architects and engineers will be invited to pool their ideas so that York can continue being "the best of the best".** In the 1870s, architects Thomas Prosser and William Peachey developed a vision for York Railway Station which is still working 150 years later. We must now plan for the next 150 years!

The report also contains detailed designs for a bus interchange, and the following recommendations:

-) **City of York Council (CYC) must ensure that plans for the station area are considered as a whole, and not just piecemeal in four separate consultations as at present**
-) **The entire station area should be a 20 mph zone**
-) **CYC should assess all planning applications for their impact upon public transport**
-) **CYC should involve York Bus Forum in all discussions that impact upon the interests of bus users and potential bus users**
-) **The needs of disabled people and those who use buses as their main means of transport should be given priority in all transport-related decisions**
-) **The seven current bus hubs require better linkage (several proposals are given)**
-) **Public transport must be considered centrally within the planning of York Central (it has been largely ignored to date)**
-) **Feedback received during public consultations should be public by default (so we know what the public is thinking)**
-) **Public transport, walking and cycling must be given priority in York Central (we are concerned by NRM's proposal to extinguish rights of way)**
-) **The demolition of Queen Street Bridge must be carefully planned to minimise traffic disruption; car movement may have to be restricted; this could be a good opportunity to trial "Fare-Free Public Transport" (FFPT) to and from the station area**
-) **A bus interchange should be built on *both* sides of the station, but mainly on the east, near the present long-stay car park**
-) **The station area design should encourage shared cars and taxis as well as buses**
-) **Innovative funding methods should be considered, including a tourist tax, paid parking at P&Rs, and voluntary 10% levies on council tax – all with free bus passes**

We realise that this will all cost money. However, it should be regarded as an investment; there are many social as well as economic benefits, and costs can be amortized over many decades. We have not attempted detailed costings. Nor have we quantified the long-term benefits of our proposals. However, other cities have developed effective transport interchanges, as York did in the 1870s.

Is our municipal pride less now than it was then? If the Victorians could do it, then so can we!

BACKGROUND: Ever since York Bus Forum was founded in 2016, we have heard the cry "York needs a bus station!". But not everyone agreed – even inside the Forum. So we established a Working Group to prepare this Discussion Paper addressed to the whole York community. **We welcome your comments.**

Our aim has been to outline and discuss the relevant factors and possible ways forward, and make recommendations. Discussion meetings are also planned. **A public discussion will be held at 5.30pm on Tuesday 18th September in West Offices.**

We are aware of four other consultations relating to the station area which have developed while this report was being prepared. These relate to

- (a) Scarborough Bridge, north of the station
- (b) the York Central ("Teardrop") site, west of the station
- (c) the inside of the Station
- (d) the Station Front Project east of the station.

We find this multiplicity of uncoordinated consultations most regrettable and confusing. Citizens must be baffled! We call upon City of York Council to grasp this nettle and ensure that the entire area around the station is considered as an integrated whole, which is what we have tried to do

INTRODUCTION: The present situation

“York needs bus interchange”

Headline in York Press: 25 October 2001

“York may get bus station by 1970”

Headline in Yorkshire Evening Press, 19 June 1968

For many years, people have advocated a central bus station in York. Recent comments at public consultations and letters in The Press have said the same thing.

The following online comment is also pertinent. It calls for a new “bus culture” and emphasises “bus priorities” and “traffic restraint”:

“You don’t need ‘experts’ to state what successful bus operations need - modern vehicles, contactless joint-operator ticketing, and real-time information. Above all though what you need is bus priority in the suburbs and traffic restraint in the centre, as congestion is the number one disincentive to bus use”

.“Bus priority” and “traffic restraint” are policies that reduce congestion for everybody. We also need a new “bus culture”: the Council can lead in this by ensuring effective discussion of bus interchanges amongst other things.

Those calling for a central bus station in York often cite nearby cities and towns like Leeds, Hull and Harrogate which have good central bus interchanges. “Why can’t York have one?”.

Apart from Leeds, Hull and Harrogate, Chester’s new interchange (opened June 2017) is also often cited. This has 13 bus stands and caters for some 90 buses per hour including Park & Ride and National Express. *Station Shuttles* link with the station, and free “*Shopper Hoppers*” provide connections elsewhere. There is good signage and the council produces clear explanatory leaflets with maps, so even first-time visitors know their way around.

By confusing contrast, York currently has seven bus interchange ‘hubs’ (York Central could soon become an eighth):

1. Central (Rougier Street), including parts of Station Road and Micklegate
2. Exhibition Square – Museum Street, St Leonards Place
3. Piccadilly and Merchantgate
4. Railway station – Station Road and Leeman Road
5. Stonebow
6. Blossom Street and Nunnery Lane
7. Clifford’s Tower - Clifford Street and Tower Street.

Sorting one’s way between these hubs is a continual problem, particularly for strangers and those without smart phones. This is one of many user-hurdles which inhibit bus use. **A prime aim of improving bus interchanges is to remove perceived hurdles so that buses are ‘user friendly’ and used more.**

A single bus station could be simpler than eight hubs, and it would be nice to have a single bus station in York. However, **whatever its theoretical advantages, we have concluded after examining the evidence that this option is not feasible.** York has no space within the walled city for such a bus station. Even if it did, it would be some way from the railway station. (One option could have been in place of the then-new Aviva building on Rougier Street. However, this opportunity has now been lost.) **We recommend that all future planning applications should be impact-assessed to see what modifications could lead to improved public transport in York.**

Lack of holistic perspectives on York's public transport planning

While this report was in draft form, other related discussions were announced. It seems that CYC have been consulting with interested parties about the Station Front without including YBF.

We recommend that CYC and others should be asked to include York Bus Forum in all future discussions which impinge on bus-related matters. It is a pity that our regular liaison meetings with CYC did not inform us of the above.

This lack of consultation may be part of a larger problem which has been summarised to us in the following comment received:

"My main concern is that there are too many bodies doing their own thing in isolation and a lack of an overall strategy

The York Central Partnership is currently working towards a Master Plan for York Central but (apparently) in isolation from the east side of the Station which is no longer included within the York Central boundary.

CYC is working towards proposals for the east side of the Station but (apparently) in isolation from the YCP Master Plan.

York Civic Trust has a very valuable contribution to make, particularly based on the transport expertise of Professor Tony May.

YBF appears to be the only body looking at bus services and facilities on a City-wide basis.

I feel that there is a great need for coordination of all these different inputs to achieve the maximum benefit for York as a whole."

Regarding the above, we invite comments and practical suggestions for mitigation.

If a single York bus station is not feasible, what are the alternatives?

As indicated above, we came rather swiftly to the conclusion that the idea of having a single bus station in York is just not feasible, whatever its theoretical merits. We saw our remit as including all forms of bus interchange in central York, plus related issues. There seemed to be three complementary ways forward:

1. To work with the present seven interchange hubs, and find ways of improving their effectiveness.
2. To explore the potential of current developments, especially York Central and the Station Front Project.
3. To explore beyond this – extending the "realities" of current York to include "dreams" about York's transport for the future.

Underlying all these issues is the need to *think holistically*, linking all modes of transport. Do we need a “TfY” (Transport for York) to match TfL in London? We conclude that in the long term, a “TfY” of some sort *is* needed. Its remit should include particular issues relating to disabled people, children and others who use buses as their main means of travel. They can be left stranded, isolated and vulnerable at times and places where buses do not run. CYC and the NHS pick up the bits! York Bus Forum has established an Access Group which is about to publish an information and discussion brochure relating to this.

We recommend establishing a city-wide “Transport for York” (TfY) authority to speak with authority and look holistically at all aspects of transport. Ideally it needs ‘teeth’ like TfL in London. Without TfY, discussions will continue in a piece-meal fashion and public transport will suffer.

At the top of their list, TfY and CYC must put the needs of disabled people and those who use buses as their main means of transport.

Working with the seven current interchange hubs

The seven current hubs provide a complex and potentially confusing network of possible interchanges. **The situation could be improved by actions such as the following:**

- J Better signing and linkage, avoiding misleading and ambiguous terminology. (For example, the word “Central” is much-misused: ‘York Central’ and the newly-renamed “Central” interchange hub on Rougier Street are far from each other, and even further from what most people regard as the City Centre. More helpfully, drivers on the No 9 P&R call out “City Centre!” at Stonebow. If you miss that, you have ahead of you a 2km journey to the Railway Station and back!)
- J Regular free or £1 shuttle buses linking the hubs, possibly also serving important high-demand destinations such as the hospital and near the Minster. (Funding is discussed below.)
- J York Bus Forum members are currently developing ideas for a demand-responsive “HospiBus” to reduce congestion near York Hospital. This model could be rolled out city-wide. But such ideas are difficult to implement within the current legal framework, although the new Bus Services Act may provide alternative options.
- J Improved routing could lead to better functioning of these hubs, with reduced congestion, more efficient working, and healthier air. For example, if P&R routes 9 and 3 were merged to provide one cross-town service from Monks Cross to Askham Bar, this would avoid a lot of redundancy along with near-empty “turn-round” mileage. It would also provide new route options beyond those currently available e.g. Monks Cross to Railway Station, Askham Bar to Stonebow.
- J 24-hour ‘express’ P&Rs could link with early and late trains, using smaller, more flexible demand-responsive “TaxiBuses” when demand is low. This would reduce the need for parking near the station.

Public Transport and York Central – a neglected topic

We commented above on the need to integrate York Central discussions (which has to date almost completely ignored public transport) with other consultations. **We recommend that future York Central discussions should reflect this integrated approach.**

York Central discussions have scarcely touched on public transport issues, and we were rather alarmed to see the following comment from someone who watched the CYC webcast of 21 June which discussed the York Central Master Plan, and felt that buses had been ignored, and that elements of the public consultation which mentioned buses had also been ignored::

“I was amazed to find that no one at the meeting mentioned buses (neither the Executive members, public participants or CYC staff presenting the document). In fact the only item on

buses I could find in the Master Plan document (117 pages) is where it mentions at para 43 ix - one of the main elements of the scheme “Bus routes for Park and Ride and local bus services” The many posting notices I saw on “bus interchanges” at the previous exhibitions seemed to have been ignored. I think we now know there is little we can do to influence anything more substantial than just a few bus stops on the western side of the rail station.”

If comments made about public transport at public consultations are ignored, or perceived to be ignored, that is bad for the status of public transport, and for public consultations. **As default, we feel all feedback received on public consultations should be public.**

Furthermore:

The question of bus interchanges needs resolving before York Central and Station Front projects are settled, or chaos will result. We have a golden once-in-a-century opportunity to try and overcome the chaotic traffic flows, congestion and pollution that York currently experiences, and which will get worse.

Three Options Considered

We have considered three main options for a new Railway Station interchange:

1. A new “Interchange West” predominantly on the York Central side of the station
2. “Interchange East” on the Queen Street side of the station
3. A ‘straddling’ East-West Interchange covering both sides of the station.

It has been put to us that York Central provides little scope for a West Interchange as other uses will have precedence, including:

- The proposed new public square and park areas
- The proposed NRM expansion which will remove rights of way
- The likely demand for intensive commercial/office developments close to the station
- The need for private parking in York Central - even though there seems to be general agreement that public transport, walking and cycling should have priority.

We accept that priorities are extremely important. We are concerned that NRM may seek to erase current cycling and walking rights along the current route of Leeman Road. The solution found at Amsterdam’s *Rijksmuseum* should be investigated). **We urge the development authorities to continually re-emphasise priorities including the importance of public transport, cycling and walking.**

Regarding straddling, we have taken account of the points made above, but believe it can be dealt with as indicated below. We also feel that some bus and bus-rail interchanges will be west of the station, so a certain element of straddling is inevitable. Our choice is either to plan for it, or to ignore the issues created by straddling.

On balance, our preference is for Option 3, the ‘straddling’ East-West option. But we feel it is important to discuss the reasons and underlying issues, especially as these may change over time, and it is important as far as possible to make today’s decisions ‘future-proof’.

Option 1: “Interchange West” on the York Central side of the station

Pro:

- York Central has “lots of space”, including room for a 21st-century cutting-edge bus station.
- It’s much simpler to have all routes coming to the same place; no other site is large enough.
- Buses must integrate with other futuristic transport modes such as taxibuses, carpools, autonomous vehicles, etc.; this will be easier here than anywhere else
- Putting the interchange in York Central will enhance and increase the new site’s prospects of success

Con:

-)] There's lots of competition for space on this site. If more is given to buses, then less will be available for other things
-)] The more buses that come to York Central, the further they will be on average from the station (and even further from the town centre).
-)] If all buses come to York Central, congestion and pollution will increase at pinch-points such as Marble Arch on Leeman Road
-)] The bridges at Marble Arch and Leeman Road present problems for double-deckers.
-)] For some routes e.g. from Tadcaster Road, coming via York Central would add route mileage, damage service times, and exiting via Marble Arch Bridge would be difficult.

Option 2: "Interchange East" on the Queen Street side of the station

York railway station is more than a transport hub. It is a historical monument in a historic location, right by the ancient city walls. Most recent consultations have ignored this and focussed on York Central. **We recommend that both sides of the station should be considered together, in an integrated and timely manner.**

Some comments relating to the Eastern side reflect those given above for the West side e.g. better integration possibilities, simpler to have everything in one place, etc.. But the East has less space available than the West, and its prior ownership and infrastructure situation is more complicated e.g. the Railway Institute (RI).

In order to add space and potential to the Eastern side of the station, **we recommend that Queen Street Bridge should be demolished.** We are pleased to see that, despite the cost and short-term inconvenience that demolition will entail, CYC are now supporting this idea in their current Station Front proposal. **We urge however that demolition be carefully timed and planned so as to minimise disruption to bus routes. While demolition is taking place, car usage should be restricted: this could be a good opportunity to trial fare-free transport to the station.**

The advantages of demolishing Queen Street Bridge are to:

- Allow holistic planning of a much larger area
- Enhance the setting of the City walls at their south-western corner
- Give greater prominence to G T Andrews's Tudor arches which permitted trains to pass through the walls and gain access to the original York Station (now West Offices)
- Enhance the setting of the Queen Street terrace houses beside the Railway Institute: they are currently overshadowed by the Queen Street bridge
- Allow improved access to the area around the Railway Institute buildings and current long-stay parking.

Option 3: A straddling "East-West Interchange" covering both sides of the station

Pro:

-)] The 'straddling' option shares the space required between the two sides of the station, and is therefore more likely to be compatible with other demands
-)] Straddling also allows more scope for flexible integration with taxis etc on both sides of the station, thus satisfying travellers to and from all parts of town
-)] Because the interchange on each side is smaller, the average bus-train distance is less
-)] For bus-changers who do *not* need to traverse the station, walking distances are also less

-)] For passengers using the East side of the station and going into town, walking distances will be considerably less than under Option 1 above
-)] It will solve the problem of routes that currently have no easy turnaround
-)] Each bus route can call at whichever side of the station seems more natural. As routes change, these details can change organically.
-)] The straddling option allows more 'organic' evolution as situations develop and change – we cannot know what will be needed in 2050, but with infrastructure on *both* sides, it will be easier to adapt than if it was all on *one* side. (Moral: "Don't put all your busqueues in one exit!'.)
-)] Compared with CYC's Station Front proposals, which require two traffic lanes for bus stops, the interchange proposal allows the road outside the station to be some 40-50% narrower, so crossing the road is far easier and there is considerably more space for the public domain.
-)] Placing the bus bays beside the station walls allows close integration between railway and bus customer facilities
-)] Extra bays will be needed on race days and for rail replacement services

Con:

-)] The straddling option may appear more complicated for first-time users
-)] For passengers traversing the station, walking distances will be greater by about 100 metres. (However, this can be mitigated as discussed below e.g. by extending and improving the two existing tunnels possibly with new high-quality pedestrian bridge/tunnel(s), moving walkways, and even bus-to-bus driverless buggies to take you from A to B if you have luggage or are needy. Some of these ideas could be merged with proposals made by Bus Forum member Alan Robinson regarding a new Walk-Cycle bridge following the line of the city wall from Micklegate right over the railway lines into York Central.)
-)] For south-travelling routes, using the interchange adds some 200 yards onto their straight-line route. However, pedestrian journeys will be shortened as passengers will be dropped nearer their goal. (This point will require some careful modelling before benefits can be quantified.)

Summary: Although all options need to be considered, we recommend a "straddling" East-West bus interchange at the railway station, to include high-quality integration of *all* modes of transport with moving walkways and a new Walk-Cycle bridge linking East and West.

Details of a "straddling" bus interchange at York Railway Station

We have given above our reasons for proposing a new "straddling" interchange at the railway station. The Appendix provides one detailed 'vision' of how it can be done. We now consider some further questions, recognising that as we are users rather than professionals, many technical issues need to be resolved by others.

Why are you proposing a 'straddling' interchange, rather than one that is just on one side of the railway station?

In short, we think that the straddling option allows more efficiency and flexibility than the other two options.

How will people get from one side of the station to the other?

At present very few people cross the station from one side to the other. After the two sides of the station have been developed, this number will increase massively – possibly one hundred-fold. Thus new infrastructure will be required. We recommend that this includes:

-)] Enhancements to existing tunnels and bridge so they become pleasant to use
-)] Tunnel extensions into York Central and under the road outside the station so people going into the city centre can pass under the road rather than over it
-)] Clear links and signage to Scarborough Bridge to encourage the use of this route into town (and the use of Marygate Car Park rather than carparks near the station)

- J A new walk-cycle bridge across the railway some 100m south of the existing bridge. This could be extended as outlined in the Appendix to this document, to link up with the city wall and could also be broadened to include shops and viewing areas etc.. thus becoming effectively a Southern Concourse.

Will it be 50:50, or will one interchange be bigger than the other?

It won't be precisely 50:50. Indeed, one advantage of the straddling option is that ratios can evolve over time as needs change. Initial ratios may be 80:20 or so, with 80% of buses on the Eastern side. Whatever ratio is decided upon, **the possibility of changing ratios must be born in mind while planning the areas next to the bus interchange, so that expansion is possible in future decades without undue disruption.**

Where exactly will the interchanges be?

Interchange West (York Central side): Interchange West has less existing infrastructure to contend with, so its precise location is more flexible than Interchange East. Generally we feel that "nearer is better" – so a short, quick route from Interchange West into the railway station is the best option. This may be moderated by other factors e.g. access for bikes and taxis, and the location of bridges or tunnels to Interchange East. **We particularly welcome advice on these details.**

One key question is how to integrate York Central with the new Scarborough Bridge access near Platform 4. This will soon become a major foot/cycle link to and from the city centre. During consultations about the Scarborough Bridge the question of linkage with York Central was raised and we were told it was impossible to consider it then. But it must be considered now!

Interchange East (Queen Street side): Access to Scarborough Bridge is easier and shorter from the East than it is from the West, but it is still an issue. Generally on the Eastern side, things are far more restrictive than on the West, due to prior infrastructure and mindsets.

Our thoughts are along the following lines (moving from North to South, from Leeman Road and the Station Hotel, past the current station frontage, down to the Railway Institute and the current long term car park).

1. *Tea-Room Square etc:* A 'quick fix' here would be to change the gyratory so it goes anti-clockwise rather than clockwise. That will reduce congestion massively, but requires careful signing. The short-term car-park will move further south. In the longer term, motor traffic may disappear from this area completely as proposed under the Station Front Project. (However, if cycles are excluded, that will considerably reduce the value of the new Scarborough Bridge route.)
2. *Portico etc.:* This will become pedestrianised.
3. *Taxis:* will now collect from *outside* the portico – possibly south of it. Bus stops will move to the Interchange further South.
4. *Long-term car park:* This will be reduced in size or removed entirely; rapid P&Rs will link with locations outside the city centre; Marygate Car Park may play an increased role
5. *New Bus Interchange:* This will be on or near the present long-term car park. The floor level may be raised a metre or so and a two-storey system could be considered, with short-term parking and taxi and car drop-offs underground. For further details please see the Appendix.

Will it be just a bus station, or will other modes of transport be catered for too?

All modes of land transport will be catered for, but private cars may prove a challenge. Car-drivers will be encouraged to use P&Rs: new express P&Rs may be needed. These may include train-based P&Rs starting from new stations e.g. at Haxby, near York hospital, or at Barton Hill on the A64 for bidirectional train-based P&Rs serving Scarborough as well as York. **We would like to encourage car-clubs and shared taxis as efficient ways of using York's road and interchange network.**

What about long-distance buses and coaches?

Long distance buses and coaches are victims of York's congestion, but they also contribute to it. All four National Express routes which come to York pass through here rather than terminate. They

could use the interchange. But to ease congestion at peak times, they might do better to avoid the town centre and pick up near one or more P&R sites. From there, transfer into local services would be easy. (A free local bus pass could be provided for every visitor arriving by coach.)

How will passengers get from one side of the station to the other?

This is an important point and we do not have a complete answer. The simplest option might be to extend and improve the existing tunnels, possibly taking them right under Station Road and up on the Eastern side near the city wall. However, these tunnels are currently very murky and unappealing. Visionary work is needed!

Another possibility would be a new pedestrian bridge with moving pavement plus added features and attractions such as social areas and lookout points. The National Railway Museum might sponsor it!

Who will pay for the interchange?

The Yorkshire Evening Press of 19 June 1968 stated that a central bus station for York *“could be in operation within two years ... if the thorny question of who pays for it can be settled”*. The question evidently remains unsettled, and the promised bus station never materialised. Funding must still be a “thorny question”. But why is it “thorny”? Is it because the question of value for money is doubted, or is it because today’s system of public investment and private profit means that the benefits are externalised while the costs are internalised to the public purse, and we live in an area where public investment is discouraged?

We have not gone into this question in detail. But we do recognise that other towns have arranged to pay for an interchange so we are sure that York can too, given the will and attitude. Getting it right is more important than getting it quickly! Investment in buses generates wealth and saves money on roads and car-parking. If the value of our proposal is doubted, then we suggest an independent cost-benefit comparison of our proposals with those of the council.

The recent CYC pamphlet *“Transforming the Front of York Railway Station”* indicates that some funding has already been secured. We propose that **York should adopt a principle of parity between private and public transport – every pound spent on private transport infrastructure should be matched by one pound or more on public transport**. Funding could also be raised from those that benefit e.g. Could there be a £1 infrastructure charge for everybody who comes to York (every rail ticket, every hotel room, every visitor to the National Rail Museum)? Or could York institute an optional 10% Community Levy on the top 3-4 bands of Council Tax?

Any other incentives?

We would encourage York concerns – especially those benefitting from York Central – to offer incentives for those who arrive via public transport.

What if Queen Street Bridge is not demolished?

If Queen Street Bridge is not demolished, options for Interchange East are far more constrained. We have considered this option below but **our preference is very much for Queen Street Bridge to be demolished, and for a brave 21st-century approach to the new East-West interchange using a competition as outlined below.**

What’s this about an architectural competition?

The authors of this report are “interested amateurs”. We are not architects, engineers, town planners or even transport experts. We speak for the people of York, not for the professionals.

In outlining our ideas, we want to encourage adventurous, forward-looking, integrated thinking. Interested amateurs can do this, but so can professionals. We are therefore proposing a **large-scale international architectural and engineering competition. This would seek re-designs of York’s classical railway station to make it a 21st century interchange, preserving the best but changing what needs to be changed.**

This architectural competition would raise the profile of York and this important development, and would place it firmly on the international stage. Sponsors will be found and prizes will be awarded. **Can we replicate some of the great competitions of the past that led to the creation of so many Victorian masterpieces?**

Other Options

While preparing this document, we received many suggestions and comments from YBF members and others. This included an interesting and important paper by YBF member Alan Robinson who outlined **detailed proposals for an East Interchange**. This is attached as an Appendix for discussion and as an indication of what can be done.

Other suggestions have been incorporated into our main document. There are also several others that we feel may be useful in stimulating further ideas, even though we decided against including them in our main proposals:

1. **The long-stay car park should be relocated to the West of the station i.e. in York Central. We are firmly against this proposal.** It risks destroying some of the great potential which York Central offers. We do not have a firm view on whether there should be a long-stay car park or where it should be. However, we note that parking for four cars take up approximately one bus space. This could host a new bus every 5-10 minutes i.e. a hundred buses or at least a thousand passengers per day. *Should four cars have preference over 1000 bus passengers?*
The following options also need to be considered:
 - a. Long-stay car parking could be well away from the city centre, with speedy, frequent shuttle services to the station, building on the existing P&R system.
 - b. Marygate Car Park can be developed, possibly as a two-storey structure with under cover top-floor access direct to Scarborough Bridge and even buggy support for the needy.
2. **Queen Street Bridge should be retained, in order to facilitate bus turnaround at the station.** This would allow routes travelling south to enter the proposed new interchange without going across the north-flowing traffic. They could instead travel by the west side of West Offices, under the Andrews Arch and the retained Queen Street Bridge, thence beginning their return journey without having to cross the path of traffic going north.
This is an interesting idea which might save money. (But maybe not in the long run unless Queen Street Bridge will outlive the developments currently being discussed.) However, apart from facilitating turnround it has no advantages. After considering it carefully **we feel we cannot support it, unless Queen Street Bridge were to be retained for other reasons.**
3. **A small interchange should be built immediately south of the Railway Institute.** Buses from the South could then enter via Holgate Road and a widened Lowther Terrace. Others might enter via The Crescent. The remainder of the car park could continue if required, possibly on a multi-storey basis. **We are not convinced by this argument, but it may merit further consideration.** We want to discourage carparks and cars in this area, because they inevitably produce congestion, pollution and delay.
4. **To reduce city-centre congestion, bus routes should generally run through-town, rather than terminate, turn round and wait in the town centre.** We mentioned above the situation regarding P&R routes 3 and 9, which currently spend a large proportion of their journey time almost empty because of turning-round problems. If they were merged in one cross-town P&R, considerable savings would result, and new travel options such as Malton Road to the station, and Askham Bar to Stonebow would become possible. This model could also be considered for other routes which would reduce congestion and pollution. (It is often stated as an argument against this idea, that longer routes are more prone to holdup and delay – e.g. it is said that this applies to the Coastliner routes. However, even if there were delay, the time between services would not necessarily be impacted, and 12 vehicles going across town could provide a better service than two groups of 6 vehicles each going into town and turning around.)

- 5. Long-distance buses should be encouraged to use P&R pickups with good feeder services, rather than clog up the city centre.** Long distance buses and coaches are victims of York's congestion but they also contribute to it. All four National Express routes which come here pass through rather than terminate. Their service could be vastly improved, especially at peak times, by picking up at or near the P&R sites rather than coming into the town centre. Travellers could then arrive at the P&R site by car, taxi or bus (with free bus pass).

This model could be replicated nationwide to provide a high-quality intercity bus service which avoids urban congestion as much as possible. As one example, selected Coastliners could provide an "Express" service along the A64, picking up near Askham Bar and Monks Cross or Barton Hill, thus saving 30-40 minutes on travel time and avoiding adding to York's urban congestion.

6. CYC should consider innovative ways of funding public transport provision in York.

Options that have been suggested include:

-) P&R parking should be paid for per-vehicle, rather than per-passenger as at present. By including a free bus pass for all passengers in the parking charge, bus loading times would reduce by some 5 minutes per bus.
-) High-value hotel bookings could attract a 1% tourist levy, which again could include free bus passes. This is effectively changing the VAT rate from 20% to 21%, but would benefit local services rather than national government.
-) CYC could introduce an optional 10% levy on all higher-band council tax charges – which again would include free bus passes. (An average of £200 per head would probably be sufficient to make bus travel free for all and improve bus services even where and when buses do not run at present.)

York Bus Forum Discussion Paper

BETTER THAN A BUS STATION !! **A TRANSPORT INTERCHANGE FOR YORK**

Appendix

One of York's transport headaches has long been the lack of a bus station. The nearest we have is a string of stops, from the railway station at one end, down Station Road, and into Rougier Street, with other small 'hubs' dotted about town, for example at Exhibition Square and Merchantgate.

There is also a lack of out-of-service bus parking in the city centre, making it more difficult to terminate services here.

Grasping the Nettle

The 'York Central', or 'Teardrop site' development offers a chance to do something about it.

The idea of a bus station on the Teardrop site has cropped up quite often. The present development plans do include extra provision for buses, in the form of a 'bus hub' at the rear of the railway station. But this is little more than three bus stops, which in reality will add yet another mini-hub to the all-too-dispersed collection we already have.

That's not to say a few stops at the rear entrance are a bad idea. Buses going via Leeman Road or the new Millennium Green access road would do well to stop there. But please let's not kid ourselves this is anything like a solution to York's lack of a bus station.

The development plans are right not to put an entire bus station on the teardrop site for two reasons. Firstly, it's on the wrong side of the railway station for city centre access. A better location would be on the east side, near the inner ring road.

Secondly, to get into town from the Teardrop site, buses must go under the Marble Arch, which is a low bridge with only 3.7m (12 ft) headroom. Unless the road bed is lowered – a horribly expensive and disruptive operation! – only single deckers can pass under it. Many coaches are also too high.

A golden 'integrated transport' principle is that bus and railway stations should be together, forming a single hub for journeys by bus, train, or both. That leaves only one good place for the bus station: on what is now the long-stay car park at the south end of the railway station. Although not on the Teardrop site itself, this area is part of the redevelopment.

The Obvious Place for a Bus Station

The most obvious place for a bus station is alongside Queen Street Bridge, which puts it as near as possible to the railway station. The idea isn't a new one: in 2012 the then Labour Council proposed using this area, but nothing has yet come of it.

But how practical is it? I did a little research using Google Maps, assuming we'd need a layout making best use of limited space. The aim was to see what could be fitted into the land between Queen Street Bridge and the railway station.

Initially, four West Yorkshire bus stations were used as a guide: Leeds City, Bradford Interchange, Huddersfield, and Wakefield. These all have 25 bays, give or take one or two. Hull Paragon

Interchange, which is also particularly relevant, has no less than 38. But it's hard to see how York could possibly need anything that big.

At all of these five stations the buses stop with their noses up against the station building wall at an angle of 60° or so. The angle is needed so the buses can be parked close together without one bus's doors being blocked off by the bus alongside on the left. If the same sort of thing is done here, and assuming the same spacing between buses, 13 or perhaps 14 bays could be put along the exposed part of the train shed wall.

But there's a price to pay for packing so many buses into such a small area. They need room to turn into and reverse out of the bays. Taking the dimensions of those five bus stations used as a guide, the tarmac would have to go most of the way out to Queen Street Bridge.

That creates another problem: too little space to include an adequately sized concourse between the train shed wall and the bays, especially at the north end, where the flow of pedestrians would be greatest but where the space is most constricted. Knocking Queen Street Bridge down and a slight eastwards realignment of the road might create a little extra space, but doesn't look like it would generate enough to provide a good solution.

Queen Street Bridge

Queen Street Bridge was built to take the road over the railway tracks into the 1841 station inside the Bar Walls. This early station soon proved inadequate, so the North Eastern Railway built the present one, opened in 1877. The old station is now the City of York Council's West Offices building.

The bridge isn't exactly the most pretty of sights, largely due to the overhanging concrete pavement structure. There's little prospect of removing just that part of it for aesthetic reasons: it was added later because the bridge as originally built was too narrow.

Although the original tracks under the bridge were used as sidings even up until the 1960s, the real justification for its existence vanished long ago. Knocking it down would cost money in the short term, but save on maintenance costs in the long term.

Although it would be quite possible to fit the buses and manoeuvring space into the area between the bridge and the station, the bus station's entrance and exit must also be considered. Demolishing the bridge would remove the needless grade separation between the road and ground level, so entrance and exit junctions can be laid out far more rationally.

Architecture

The area is dominated by the Bar Walls and railway station, which are both of huge historic importance. Between them, Queen Street Bridge begs for termination of its unsightly misery. The walls and station should remain the dominant features, with new additions being low-key affairs fitting in with both. A bold 'architectural statement' of a bus station building would not seem appropriate. Nor would something horribly utilitarian.

If you stand on Queen Street Bridge and look across the car park towards the station, you'll see a row of bricked-up arches in the train shed wall. Compared to the station's grand interior, it's a bit of a drab sight. Might it look better if those arches were opened up? Or some of them? There is a precedent for it. Quite a few arches elsewhere in the station are either open, or have doors or windows in the walls inside. That thought triggered an avalanche of ideas leading to this proposal.

The railway station is of course a listed building, and changes can't be made at will, but it's hard to see how putting doors or windows in these arches is a no-no, providing it is done sensitively. Some of the

changes made in the past have been awful by comparison. The changes made to Hull Paragon station are far more drastic than this proposal for York.

Inside this wall there are a road, a few parking spaces, two disused platforms, and cycle stands. The space is poorly used. So how about using some of it as the concourse for the bus station instead? That puts the concourse inside the train shed, the buses outside it, and access to the buses is through the presently bricked-up arches.

With no concourse outside the train shed, there's enough space for buses to manoeuvre, and the bus and railway stations are about as integrated as possible. Bus station construction costs are obviously a lot lower if there's no new building to erect, and external visual impact is pretty well zero. Few other uses for this space would leave it so open.

The visual impact inside the train shed becomes what matters. Because it is rather tucked away in the southern corner of the station, under a separate arched roof from the main three, there shouldn't be any major difficulty there.

Where there is space for 13 or perhaps 14 buses, there are 18 arches. This permits the use of one arch for each bay, leaving a few not needed for bus access. Perhaps those could be left as they are, to keep the bricked-up arch preservationists happy.

Of the five bus stations looked at, Hull Paragon Interchange is particularly interesting because it does a similar thing, albeit on a larger scale. Here, a glass front has been added to the north wall of the railway station. Buses stop outside it, and the concourse is inside. This isn't to suggest York station should be given identical architectural treatment, but the idea of putting the concourse inside the train shed is essentially the same.

There is one key difference in Hull. The train shed wall also had arches, but they are generally wider, and not on a completely regular pitch. This made it impossible to align the bays with the arches, so the lower part of the wall has been replaced by a steel beam supported by pillars. Access to the buses is between these pillars.

But in York, there are more arches than there would be bays for buses, and they are on a regular pitch too, so such drastic modification isn't needed. Opening up existing arches, leaving the pillars and buttresses between them intact, would do the trick and cost less.

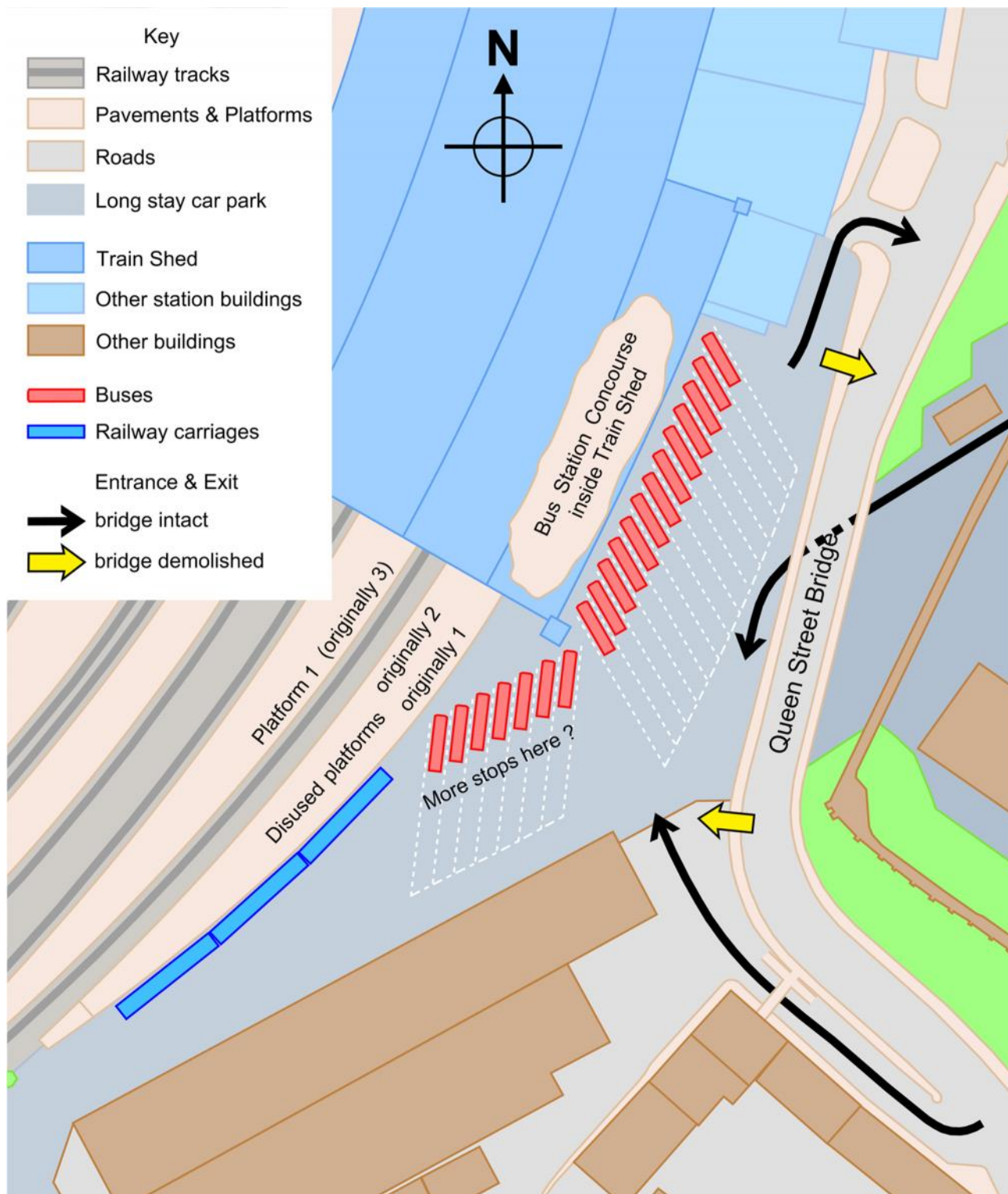
I personally don't think York station needs anything like the glass front given to Hull Paragon. Glass inside the arches would be more appropriate, and again, less expensive. But that's only my view: let's leave that one to the architects, the Council, and the paymasters.

How Many Bays?

It's hard to see how York could need a bus station as big as any of those four West Yorkshire ones, let alone Hull's, with 38 bays. Would the 13 or 14 that the train shed wall can accommodate be enough? If not, the concourse can be extended beyond the end of the train shed, making space for a total of, say 20. That seems more than plenty. The point here is not detailed design, but simply to show that this outline proposal is workable.

Additional out-of-service bus parking would also be needed, especially for terminating services, but there's no shortage of space nearby in other parts of the long-stay car park.

Site Map



This simplified map shows the general idea. It isn't precisely to scale, but near enough to give a clear idea of what the possibilities are.

Queen Street Bridge and existing buildings – which may or may not be demolished – are shown. Hopefully that will make it easier to see how the buses would fit in. It turns out that the amount of space needed is quite small compared to the entire long stay car park. Only a small proportion of its parking spaces would have to be displaced elsewhere.

Thirteen buses are shown alongside the train shed wall, though a fourteenth might perhaps be fitted in. Seven more are shown beyond the train shed, giving a total of 20, which seems far more than York would ever need. Their exact location and orientation would depend on whether or not the building(s) to the south are demolished.

The dotted white lines indicate the minimum manoeuvring space the buses would need. The dimensions are based approximately on the four West Yorkshire bus stations, but things are complicated a little by the curvature of the train shed wall. At the north end, the buses approach the wall at an angle of about 50°, similar to Bradford Interchange, whereas at the south end of the wall the approach is more like 60°, similar to Leeds City and Huddersfield.

The angle at which buses must approach the train shed necessitates a northbound bus flow past the bays. Demolishing Queen Street Bridge permits access at any point along the road, as suggested by yellow arrows. A clockwise flow would then be easy enough to provide for.

Black arrows indicate access routes with the bridge intact. Northbound buses would enter via Queen Street, passing underneath the Railway Institute fire exit bridge, which would have to be modified to allow double-deck buses underneath, or removed entirely, with alternative fire exit arrangement for the RI building.

Southbound buses could not easily enter via this route because they would have to double back without causing traffic jams. Widening the road to create junction space by digging into the adjacent rampart, or demolishing some of the terraced housing would be needed. To avoid that, southbound buses might enter at the north end and turn round at the south end, or run along the road between the Council's West Offices and the nearby Bar Wall, passing under Queen Street Bridge. The road bed would have to be lowered because the bridge was designed to clear railway vehicles, which are not as high as double-deck buses.

While something along these lines does appear feasible with Queen Street bridge still intact, it looks less attractive than demolishing the bridge.

Flow-through Provision?

The proposal as described so far assumes all buses have doors at the front only, or at least that these are the only doors that would be used. This might be acceptable in some cases where there are centre doors, but would be more awkward for bendy buses, which would be better served by the addition of a few flow-through stops. The question of where these might be located has yet to be addressed.

This leads to the question of whether the whole station might have a flow-through structure instead. The possible disadvantage of that is that it makes less efficient use of the available space. Whether it would be feasible depends on the number of bus stands needed.

Disused Platforms and Land Levels

The proposal relies on the existence of two disused platforms. It would seem unwise to close off the option of bringing them back into railway service. This scheme avoids that, with one caveat: the most easterly track (originally Platform 1) can no longer enter the train shed if that space is taken up by the concourse. Short trains could still be accommodated. To give an idea, a three-car train is shown in the map, though up to four cars might be feasible without extending the platform.

The other disused platform (originally Platform 2) needn't be shortened at all.

The area outside the train shed wall, where the thirteen bays are, slopes slightly. At the north end, near the car park entrance, it is at platform level. At the south end, near the end of the train shed wall, it is at track bed level.

Inside the train shed, the best way to make good use of available space would be to put the bus station concourse at platform level. That way, the concourse is just another part of the single seamless platform space covering the whole east side of the station. That requires the land on the outside be at platform level too, or nearly so. It must be raised up.

After well over a century of being a nuisance, Queen Street Bridge may finally come in handy. Its last dying act would be to provide hard core for raising the land. Or to put it another way, the rubble wouldn't have to be transported very far, and importing lorry-loads of material from elsewhere is avoided.

One more point: the proposal does not involve lowering land levels anywhere, so there is no risk of project delay for archaeological reasons.

Taxis, Disabled Parking, and Cycles

This proposal is of course only a sketchy outline. More work needs to be done. In particular, how it would affect taxis, disabled access, and cycles needs to be considered. There do not appear to be any major problems.

A negative impact on taxis seems highly unlikely because bus stops outside the station entrance would be abandoned, , freeing up space for better taxi arrangements. Hopefully this would eliminate the rather nonsensical traffic flow round Tea Room Square.

At the platform-level north end of the car park there are six disabled parking spaces which would be displaced, but raising the land up to platform level and freeing up land in front of the station both create options for alternative locations.

The new concourse would occupy some of the space currently taken up by cycle racks, which would need a new home. While I haven't worked up any detailed proposals, there do appear to be plenty of options. In any case, some of the cyclists who use the present arrangements can be expected to prefer cycle storage near the rear station entrance instead.

If there remain cycle stands on the disused platforms, raising the land up to platform level would not only improve access, but also remove the former Platform 1 edge, which constrains the space available for them. That gives options for expansion that presently do not exist, and potentially on quite a large scale.

Conclusions

The results of this little study are very encouraging:-

- ♥ a bus station at the railway station seems entirely practicable;
- ♥ *key to success and affordability is putting the concourse inside the train shed;*
- ♥ the outcome is near ideal from an integrated transport point of view;
- ♥ using the train shed avoids the cost of a new bus station building;
- ♥ the internal concourse location greatly eases external space constraints;
- ♥ this is one of the few possible uses for this area that leaves it an open space;
- ♥ land take is not excessive, and the space is efficiently used;
- ♥ nothing proposed appears unduly costly or technically challenging; and
- ♥ no major risks are immediately apparent.

This proposal is of course only one suggestion. Better alternatives are only to be welcomed. The important point is the existence of at least one workable and affordable-looking option for a York bus station.

I therefore believe the York Central Partnership and City of York Council should work up more detailed proposals for a bus station on the city-centre side of the railway station, with this outline proposal as a basis for at least some of the options.

Appendix A – Pictures

A1 and A2 show the space for buses between the train shed and Queen Street Bridge, A1 looking northwards, and A2 looking southwards.

This space is large enough for buses to manoeuvre in and out, but not for a decent-sized concourse too.

Buses would park with their noses up to the train shed wall, and the bricked-up arches opened up to give access to the concourse behind the wall.

While there is space for 13 or 14 buses, there are 18 bricked-up arches, plus one at the north end with a door through.



A3 Queen Street Bridge is opposite the train shed wall, seen from within the long-stay car park, looking northwards.

Compared to the Bar Walls and station, this feature is – how might one put it? – hardly replete with aesthetic merit.

A4 looks northwards into the train shed area where the concourse would be.

The edge of the former Platform 1 can clearly be seen. Rubble from the demolished bridge would be used to raise the road surface up to platform level, both inside and outside.

The option of returning this end of the platform to railway use would be closed off.



A5 looks northwards along Platform 1 and disused former Platform 2 (which could be brought back into use).

The train shed wall and arches are on the right through the pillars.

A6 and A7 taken from inside the train shed look towards the bus station space. A7 is taken from the footbridge above Platform 5. The vantage point of A6 is near the left of the lower picture.

The bus station concourse and railway platforms would be combined into one single, open, and level space.

In the bottom left corner of A7 is a lift down to an underpass leading to platforms on the west side. There is already provision for disabled access from any of the platforms to the bus station.



A8, taken from Platform 1, is another view of the presently bricked-up arches through which the buses would be accessed.

At present the disused platforms are used for cycle parking, both inside and beyond the train shed.

All pictures © Alan Robinson 2018.

A9 Not all York's arches are bricked up. Here is an open one between Platforms 7 and 9, seen here from the inside.

On the bus station side, access to buses would be through a succession of arches like this, perhaps with glass doors and windows, if that helps in windy weather.



A10 shows the bus station concourse on the north side of Hull Paragon railway station, looking westwards. The concourse is inside the train shed and the buses outside, to the right (see also picture A4). The Hull development is on a grander scale than York would need, and in any case York has less space available.

On the right, the ticket office is behind two unmodified original arches. Beyond that, the old arch tops are supported by a horizontal steel beam on new pillars spaced at closer intervals, equal to the distance between the bus bays. Access to the buses is between the new pillars and through the glass frontage added on the outside.

A11 looks back eastwards. The old arches are comparatively few and far between. Access to the buses, (and being sure to board the correct one!), would be more difficult with the original brick walls still there.

In York, such serious structural surgery would be unnecessary because the existing arches are regularly and more closely spaced. All that is needed is to open enough up, leaving the pillars and buttresses intact.



Appendix B – Diversion of Road during Bridge Demolition

This appendix is attached to anticipate objections on the grounds that demolishing Queen Street Bridge would be far too disruptive, or that diversionary arrangements would be too expensive.

Queen Street Bridge has remained for well over a century because knocking it down would be no trivial task. Naturally enough, fears arise that its demolition could cause horrendous disruption.

It would be idiotic to pretend disruption can be avoided, but the worst – closing this part of the ring road – should not be necessary.

With the steps and bridge up to the Railway Institute first floor fire exit removed, and a parking ban, Queen Street looks wide enough to take two-way traffic.

The entrance to the long-stay car park can also take two-way traffic, with the removal of a bit of pavement, wall, and some railings.

So a diversionary road can be put through the car park approximately along the route shown here.

It would be cheap enough: this isn't a question of building a new road, but removing a few obstacles and painting some white lines on tarmac that already exists.

The most disruptive work is not bridge demolition – the diversion is routed clear of that – but removal of the approach ramps at the two ends. Tricky parts of that operation might require night-time closures.

Alan Robinson, 17 Jun 2018.

