

York Bus Forum Meeting Tuesday 21st March 2023 17.30 by Zoom

Attending; Doreen Magill (Chair), Dave Merrett, Roger French (Finance and Membership), Tom Bridge (First), Julian Ridge (CYC), Terry French, Kevin Fradley, Catherine Odell, Carole Green, David Stuart, Ian Anderson, Diana Robinson, Eden Blyth, Tony Hudson, John Bibby, Alan Robinson, Mary Fairbrother, Duncan Millar, Lionel Lennox, Iris Wells, Christian Vassie, Simon Lockley, Rachel Melly, Debby Cobbett, Gail Shuttleworth, Dee Boyle, and George Wood.

1. The Chair welcomed delegates to the meeting and apologies were received from: Graham Collett, Niall McFerran, Flick Williams, Robin Jorimann, Jim from Harbus, Michael Howard (CYC), Glen Simpson, Ed Pearson, Mary Cannon, Stephen Dunthorne, Richard Parker and Richard Bryan.
2. Christian Vassie showed a short video outlining transport plans in Dijon. Christian explained that over 6 years he had produced 15 films working with 2 European Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working with 12,000 cities and towns covering 1.1 billion people on their plans to reduce the effect of climate change and had spoken to circa 50 mayors in total. The film he showed was about the tram systems in Dijon (a twin City of York with a population of circa 160,000) and Brest. The tram network in Dijon carries circa 24m passengers a year, over 60,000 a day, and Brest carries circa 10.5 million passengers per year. Christian explained that the cities had a vision of what they wanted to achieve with real modal shift from the private car and, despite significant initial public and business opposition, had transformed matters so that businesses and people not immediately served by the route now wanted access to the tram network. They had achieved major efficiencies by linking with other European cities on joint procurement exercises and adopting best practice designs. Christian offered the opinion that York needed to decide whether it wanted to be a large market town or a progressive developing City, (citing Cambridge as an example, where leading edge businesses wanted to locate), demonstrating real vision and setting targets such as everyone in the City being within 200 metres of an at least half hourly public transport service, 7 days a week with access also to safe cycle tracks and walking routes. Doreen Magill welcomed the vision but questioned whether the increased role of central government in the UK compared to European would hinder such a vision being brought into being here. Christian emphasised that now was the time to show the vision with the Department for Transport and Ministers looking for opportunities to demonstrate their positive impact to the public. Roger French questioned whether City of York, whilst going into the combined mayoralty with North Yorkshire, should seek to influence the Mayor to look to forging links with Leeds (the largest City in Europe without a light transit system) and West Yorkshire to achieve economies of scale and the benefits of a larger offering. Christian emphasized that European cities had the vision and had collaborated to progress their schemes. In comparison, he felt there's been no vision behind York's Transport plans.

Dave Merrett partly agreed but pointed to the vision showed by York in introducing the 1988 MVA Traffic and Parking strategy, which led to the progressive introduction of Park and Ride, pro bus measures and a cycling network, despite initial opposition. This had linked the Park and Rides to City Centre car parking and charging policy. He acknowledged that hadn't reduced overall car levels but had allowed the City Centre to expand economically and absorb big increase in visitor volumes. Julian Ridge agreed re the Park and Ride which over 2,000 cars use daily and reflected that bus passengers pre-pandemic had increased by 60% over time. Julian agreed with the need for a vision led approach to public transport but did think that the context of local government in the UK was a significant factor. He said also that big decisions needed to be made, and followed through to make schemes effective, citing Nottingham, that had introduced workplace parking charges, which had generated significant sums to help finance its tram scheme. Julian also said that the risks involved in planning large scale infrastructure schemes must be acknowledged citing the failed tram schemes in the past in Liverpool and Leeds which showed the need to be clear eyed about what was being signed up to. Mary Fairbrother noted that Dijon and Brest were far apart geographically and asked whether York could realistically join with cities elsewhere in the UK, and questioning whether the DfT had the vision to allow schemes of that type to go forward. Christian reasoned that to win approval from the DfT York would need to have worked through from the vision to have ready-made projects on the shelf waiting to go and emphasised that Ministers wanted to feel they had made a difference and want to be able to point to schemes that they can say they had made happen. Christian said that currently York don't have such plans ready and waiting. Doreen Magill commented on the fact that at the start of the Dijon project there had been a majority of public opinion against the scheme which had been turned around. Christian emphasised that consistent public engagement was hugely important, that people everywhere instinctively react against change but Dijon had undertaken a massive communications exercise at all levels and York would need to do the same to introduce public transport plans to meet climate change requirements.

3. The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

Matters arising from the 20th December meeting:

Bus passenger numbers – Tom Bridge offered to send on information on current passenger numbers which are at 91% of pre-covid levels (97% if concessions were excluded) with 22% of journeys on the University routes and 33% on Park and Ride.

Tom also stated that weekend numbers were over 100% compared to pre-covid.

Tom was asked by Doreen Magill if the £2 fare had had a significant impact as she had recently been on a very busy Coastliner service. Tom responded that the impact on urban routes was limited. He explained that in other areas on longer routes First Bus had seen significant increases but limited impact on urban routes.

Electronic ramps – Tom Bridge clarified that First Bus do not specify electronic ramps as experience was that they were prone to failure, and stated that the decision not to use electronic ramps was a practical rather than commercial decision.

Debby Cobbett said that she was aware of disabled people who preferred the non-electronic ramps with the driver alighting from the bus to help them into the vehicle.

Matters arising from the 17th January meeting

Coastliner service Malton to Whitby- Roger French confirmed that the current understanding, as evidenced in communications to Graham Collett from Transdev, was that the Coastliner route to Whitby would continue through the summer and in the early autumn Transdev would review the numbers travelling before discussing the future of the route with North Yorkshire County Council.

Matters arising from the 21st February meeting

Nether Poppleton – provision of an alternative stop in Millfield Way or Ebor Way when Main Street flooded.

Tom Bridge said that the provision of an alternative stop in Millfield Lane when Main Street is flooded would be in the service changes to be introduced around September.

Electronic Indicator Board- Lord Nelson stop.

Julian Ridge explained that ward councillors had been asked to prioritise stops for the electronic indicators and 100 were to be funded from BSIP funding and cited the number as being possible due to joint procurement with West Yorkshire.

Lionel Lennox thanked Tom for the alternative stop to be introduced in Millfield Lane and speculated that an electronic indicator board there may be more valuable than at the Lord Nelson stop where there was a printed timetable.

Dave Merrett asked that the proposed list be made available for information to the Bus Forum and public generally. He also asked Tom if First was aware of the proposed new temporary flood barrier across rather than along the side of Tower Street which would lead to significant implications for East bound bus services.

Tom thanked Dave for making him aware of the issue and promised to look into it.

Timing of First Bus No. 10 service- Tom alluded to the meeting set up with members of the Bus Forum committee on 31st March when this topic was on the agenda. He said that punctuality had improved on the route since the current timetable had been introduced and First were keeping the situation under review.

Doreen Magill raised the issue of the No 11 service where buses had been introduced later into the evening, a welcome development, but their introduction had not been publicised. Tom said that First had been due to introduce publicity linked to relaunched, modernised buses to be introduced on the route but delivery of the buses had been delayed. He expected the publicity initiative to be revived once the buses were delivered.

Debby Cobbett commented that the no 10 and 11 timetables used to be logical but offered the opinion that they were not now.

Tom Bridge had to leave the meeting at this point.

Rachel Melly returned to the prioritisation of electronic indicators and said that she felt that ward councillors should have been given advice on the factors to be taken into account to decide priorities-giving a number of examples- e.g. should prioritisation should be given to already well patronised stops or stops where numbers were fewer to encourage increased bus usage.

Christian Vassie welcomed the initiative to engage ward councillors in the prioritisation of Electronic indicator board locations and also welcomed the fact that

rural and suburban wards would have indicator boards rather than solely the city centre.

City Centre Bus Shuttle Report

City Centre Access Study

Rachel Melly confirmed that the City Centre Bus Shuttle report and City Centre Access report would now not be reported until after the pre-election period due to start on Monday 27 March and last until after the local elections.

4. Local Transport Plan.

5. Process and opportunities for Improving Bus Services in York.

Julian Ridge spoke to these two items explaining that all 80 authorities with transport responsibilities used to have to update local Transport plans every 5 years, but that timing was removed in 2011.

Recently this had changed and the expectation was that all authorities would need to have a new Transport Plan by either March 2024 or July 2024- the exact date to be clarified by the Department for Transport (DfT) post the local elections.

Julian was of the opinion that it was reasonable to assume that local authorities would be asked to set out how carbon emissions would be reduced and how significant modal shift would be achieved.

Given the planned move to a North Yorkshire and York Mayoralty it was assumed that it would be a joint plan covering North Yorkshire and York.

Julian believed that York would have a separate chapter in the report as, indeed, may areas within North Yorkshire as, for instance, Scarborough was very different in nature to the rural Dales.

Consequently York now needed to set out now what could become a 20,30 year vision and offered the opinion that the Transport system in York now could be regarded as the result of the vision of the 80's and 90's referring back to the MVA Strategy and implementation of Park and Ride.

Julian's question for the Bus Forum was what we want to see. Referring to the 5 priorities the Bus Forum had set out for the BSIP what would be the priorities for the Transport plan.

Julian indicated that engagement by the Council would take place throughout 2023 with many meetings and much publicity.

Dave Merrett offered an initial view that York needed a transport plan that wasn't just based on a public transport service serving the City Centre as significant employment and leisure facilities had developed outside the City Centre. Dave also emphasised the need to improve Sunday and weekend evening/early morning services.

Christian Vassie agreed that the Transport Plan must not only be about the City Centre and stressed the need to encourage people to use public transport to access countryside attractions.

Christian also emphasised the need to co-ordinate the approach to cycling, walking and bus provision to inform the shaping of the plan.

Terry French stressed the importance of getting the views of young people with the aim of persuading young people that travelling by bus is the natural thing to do and Doreen Magill emphasised that bus travel must be affordable for young people.

6. Transdev- cancellations of City of York Supported Services, service 25/26 issues.
Roger French referred to the on-going issues with Transdev's poor performance on City of York funded supported services and informed members that Transdev management had not responded to recent communications re the continuing lapses in service. He informed members that over the last 6 days prior to the meeting (excluding Sunday when supported services do not run) Transdev had cancelled 48 journeys with 30 of these being on the no 12 route where for the last couple of days the evening service had hardly run any buses.
There were continuing issues on the numbers 24 and 26 services with one Bus Forum member having to face cancelled services on a regular basis.
Julian Ridge said that Michael Howard was in contact with Transdev about the situation. Julian said that Transdev had faced driver shortages and difficulties with providing buses due to one being withdrawn following an accident.
Dave Merrett said the service was unacceptable and the Council should look to take sanctions against the company/push them into bringing replacement vehicles in from elsewhere. Transdev had informed the Bus Forum several weeks ago that bus driver shortages were no longer an issue and a company the size of Transdev should have sufficient vehicle capacity to provide a service.
7. Banana Warehouse stop- suggested move to Merchantgate.
Doreen Magill referred to the continuing issues with the bus stop at the Banana warehouse and the proposal by the Bus Forum that the stop be moved to Merchantgate. Michael Howard had informed the Bus Forum that the Merchantgate stop was too busy. However, Bus Forum members had observed the stop and this did not seem to be the case and pictures of the lack of queues at the stop had been taken and City of York had been asked for passenger numbers at the stop- which had not been forthcoming as yet.
Tony Hudson reported via the Chat facility that 5 Parish Councils served by the No 10 service had written a joint letter to City of York Council on behalf of their constituents requesting that the stop be moved to Merchantgate.
Julian Ridge was unable to clarify Michael Howard is dealing with this issue.
8. Nominations for Committee
No additional nominations had been received to date but Roger French clarified that nominations could be taken up to and including the Annual General Meeting and also clarified that there was no limit in the constitution to how long a member could service in the committee- i.e. no limits such as two terms of x years.
Doreen Magill asked that any members willing to serve on the Committee contact any member of the committee.
9. Any other Business
Kevin Fradley reported that he had been at a Better Bus campaign meeting in Hull where it was reported that the X46 York to Hull service was to be doubled in frequency to run every 30 minutes – the change he believed would come into force at the end of April.
Doreen Magill reminded members that the National Conference of the Better Buses campaign is to take place in York on 17th June- though David Stuart observed via the chat facility that this was a Race Day in York which would as a result be very busy.

10. Date of next meeting – Tuesday 18th April at 5.30p.m. , preceded by Annual General Meeting at 5 p.m.