York Bus Forum – Members Monthly Meeting 17.30-19.00 Tuesday 19th September 2023, by Zoom

Attending: Doreen Magill (Chair), Graham Collett (Vice Chair), Niall McFerran (Secretary), Roger French, Flick Williams, Tony Walmsley (Steer Consultants) Andy D’Agorne, Jason Murgatroyd, Richard Parker, Roger Pierce, George Wood, Eden Blyth, Duncan Miller, Glen Simpson, Dr. Christopher Fletcher, Tony Hudson, Tony May, Catherine Odell, Tom Donnelly (First Bus), Peter Kitchin, John Bibby, Christine Cooke, Iris Wells, Margaret Caudwell, Debby Cobbett, David Stuart, Diana Robinson, Mary Fairbrother, Ann Pask, Dave Merrett, Julian Ridge (City of York Council), Toby Hart, and Terry French.

1. The Chair welcomed delegates and reported apologies from; Gail Shuttleworth, Robin Jorimann, Mary Cannon, Jim from Harbus, Ian Anderson, Lionel Lennox, Kevin Fradley, Tom Bridge (First Bus) and Michael Howard (City of York Council).
2. Presentation by Tony Walmsley, Steer Consultants.

Julian Ridge introduced Tony saying that City of York Council had a long standing concern about access to the City Centre for buses as had First Bus and as a consequence Steer had been commissioned to undertake a study 17 months ago the outcome of which Tony was about to present on.

Tony gave a brief resume of his personal background including time spent working in the bus industry and as a resident of York.

As a resident he was aware of the good practices in York with bus uptake on a par with most cities in England but also the issues faced in terms of, for instance, narrow roads, poor bus timekeeping, and the low level of network resilience

Tony said that York had a good reputation for its Enhanced Partnership arrangements which was a surprise to many members attending the meeting (see item below)

In terms of the study Tony highlighted a number of key network sections citing such as the Lendal Arch, the Central corridor from Lendal to Tower Street and the Rail Station area where the study found that physical interventions were needed to improve the resilience of the bus network.

Examples cited were in the Lendal Arch/ Tower Street area to consider restricting through traffic to buses taxis and cycles, retaining the one way operation in Coppergate, in Piccadilly make Northbound one way north of St Denys Road , at Fishergate alter the Junction at Toto’s Restaurant , at Tower Street/ Skeldergate a roundabout U-turn for buses, at Castle Mills Bridge add an East bound bus lane , in Lawrence Street and Clarence Street add in bound bus lanes and also suggested improvements for the inner ring road with improved cycle facilities.

Tony outlined that a number of other measures would be desirable to encourage improved bus take up including potentially:

Reducing the number of car parking spaces in York City centre which was over-provided in comparison to similar cities,

Pricing changes to the Park and Ride and City Centre car parking as the Park and Ride was only economically attractive to car drivers if there was only one person in the car.

Service frequency- Tony said that 35% of residents lived in areas with medium frequency of buses, improving service frequency was perhaps the most attractive enhancement to improving bus use and he had put forward for consideration by City of York Council and Operators:

1. Reducing the number of car parking spaces
2. A significant increase in the cost of car parking
3. A target of at least 4 buses per hour on most routes
4. Speedier bus journey by introducing bus priority measures
5. Multi-operator group tickets at a competitive price
6. Working with employers to encourage employees to use buses to come to work.

Other measures that could be considered to improve revenues to fund the changes needed included

1. Workplace parking levy as in Nottingham
2. Tourist tax as in Manchester
3. Congestion charging

Tony also advocated a general focus on green tourism and indicated that fundamental step changes in traffic management were necessary to hit the City Council targets for reducing carbon emissions.

Doreen Magill thanked Tony for his talk.

Questions included:

Roger Pierce said that in his experience services were good but unreliable and that existing bus lanes were blocked by taxis and private car hire vehicles. Julian Ridge responded that was the first time he had been aware of such a comment and that private hire vehicles must be registered and if they were not, or were and not acting in accordance with their registration they would be penalised but it was not an issue he was aware of.

Niall McFerran asked whether modelling work had been done to estimate the effect of the suggestions, Tony responded not by Steer though Julian Ridge indicated that the Council have run some modelling from a technical point of view looking at the impact on Bootham, Lendal and Gillygate and concluded that there would be significant displacement impacts on other routes if changes were made in Gillygate.

Flick Williams referred to the suggestions re cycling infrastructure and asked re the impact of bus bypasses which she said would impact on disabled persons and other pedestrians. Julian Ridge responded that highway infrastructure is a shared resource and City of York Council was working and learning from other local authorities who have used bus bypasses and would consider them on a case by case basis.

Richard Parker suggested that we know where we are in terms of bus services in York and where we want to be as a result of the study so questioned whether we should introduce a 6 month trial of the measures. Julian Ridge suggested that we need to introduce measures carefully and assess the impact on, for instance, journey times, business in shops patronage, for each measure.

Tony May agreed that Network Review and frequency were key but cautioned against having one way systems around the Inner Ring Road which he said increased capacity at junctions but resulted in people driving further and increased speeding.

His view and that of the Civic Trust was to downgrade the Inner Ring Road so that it is an access facility rather than for through traffic, and to make the change in conjunction with developing the Outer Ring Road.

Julian Ridge emphasised that the Council was still at the stage of Blue Sky thinking rather than modelling and Tony Walmsley said that it was possible to improve bus lane provision and cited Cardiff as an example where a one way loop had reduced traffic delays across the city.

Toby Hart was supportive of the proposals and suggested a right turn at Castle Mills Bridge but Tony Walmsley said they had considered that option but it had little benefit.

Glen Simpson welcomed the suggestion of increased bus frequencies but noted that First Bus, for commercial reasons had reduced frequencies in a random way and wondered how frequencies could be increased if First simply said it was not viable commercially.

Tom Donnelly commented that the frequencies were partly an issue of reliability. First had built there timetables based on analytical data and moved from clock based service to improve reliability.

Glen pointed out that to reduce congestion, which would increase liability; there was a need to increase frequency of bus travel.

Julian said that in the short term issues and medium term requirements may be very different.

1. Minutes of last meeting - the minutes were agreed though Richard Parker pointed out that reference was made to RP and there were two members with the initials RP so it was agreed that in future where using initials a distinction would be made so it was clear who had made the points concerned.
2. Matters arising from Tom Donnelly’s email in response to queries raised in August
	1. Diana Robinson stated that no 9 buses do go via Monkgate on the outward run to the Park and Ride. Tom Donnelly replied that drivers, depending on traffic, had discretion to do so to keep to timetable but any decision to change the route and put a stop in would need to be agreed in conjunction with the City Council Donna offered the opinion that to do so would increase the number of passengers.
3. Local Transport Plan

This item was moved forward on the Agenda and Julian Ridge informed members that guidance had still not been received from the Department of Transport and given the likelihood of a North Yorkshire and York mayor coming into post in April 2024 the Transport Plan was being developed to that timescale.

In the next 6 weeks policy principles for Transport would go to the Council in October with detailed work in November and consultation immediately afterwards.

Consultation would be wider than on previous occasions with attempts to engage hard to reach group such as young people and take place until the end of January.

Following consultation the Plan would be refined as necessary before going to full Council in March for agreement.

Julian indicated that alongside that work, work would be on-going to inform the Comprehensive Spending Review which it was anticipated government would want information for by July 2024.

In addition, the Council would need to progress BSIP plans and the City Centre movement plan taking into account the City Central development so clearly there was much to co-ordinate over the next 12 months.

Julian offered to come to a future York Bus Forum meeting as part of the Consultation process for the Transport Plan and the offer was well received.

Andy D’Agorne asked whether the City Movement Plan would change as a result of the Steer work and speculated on how this would affect getting to the end of the BSIP period. Julian said that plans would need to be finessed but the essentials in the City e.g. size, projected population would remain similar to current assumptions so the issue should be capable of resolution.

Niall McFerran asked if York Bus Forum could have a copy of the Steer report and Julian indicated that he did not think the time was right to put it into the public domain.

1. Extension of Early morning / Evening Services
	1. Extension of service to apply to Stamford Bridge not just as far as Dunnington?

Tom Donnelly stated that he had asked the commercial director at First Bus to clarify the position and was awaiting an answer but would confirm the position as soon as possible.

Tony Hudson had checked the times to and from Dunnington and there was an extension of evening times of only minutes only to the last evening times but still no Sunday evening service after 19.50, though he acknowledged that there was an additional early morning service from Dunnington to York leaving Dunnington at 07.17.

Toby Hart asked what First Bus were doing to communicate the changes to the No 10 service which included the welcome additional service but it had not been publicised.

Toby also questioned the timetable for the No 1 and 5 where two buses were timetabled on parts of the common route within a minute of each other and then there was a 59 minute gap and Debby Cobbett cited when the no 11 had been extended to evenings but there had been no publicity resulting in little take up and the services being cut again.

Tom Donnelly took on board that marketing was still an issue at First Bus but promised to work to improve the situation.

* 1. Roger French confirmed that he had checked the No 4 timetable to Foxwood and Acomb and the 24th September timetable did include the extension of the early morning and late evening services.
1. Items raised by members

Due to tie constraints the Chair said she would only take those issues raised by those who were present.

* 1. Iris Wells had provided a photo of a shelter at Foss Islands Road on the opposite side to Morrisons where there was no seat. Julian Ridge said the City Council would look at it, there may be issues of land ownership and the suggestion should be sent to buses@york.gov.uk for consideration

Debbie Cobbett said that drivers on the number 25 operated by Transdev often pull in early along the shelter and passengers have difficulty accessing the bus.

* 1. George Wood, on behalf of Lionel Lennox raised the issue of re-instating the hospital bus service.

Tom Donnelly said this was commercially not on the First Bus Radar but they were looking at improvements for the no 6 service which passes the hospital.

Julian Ridge reminded members that the Hospital service had been paid for by the hospital and take up since the pandemic had been much reduced after the covid period and the hospital had decided it could spend its funds more effectively.

Andy D’Agorne said that congestion around the hospital had worsened post covid and the hospital had extended free parking for its staff for 12 months post covid meaning they had less incentive to use the bus.

He also said that the route and times of the no 6 was not well advertised and First Bus needs to publicise it passes the hospital.

George Wood contended that to reduce congestion on Wigginton Road the City Council needs to take a lead and what he and Lionel Lennox are asking for is a relook at the issue.

* 1. Mary Fairbrother cited a number of issues re the No 1 and 5 as follows
1. On the new electric buses on the route quite often the audio announcements were not switched on
2. The internal layout of the buses downstairs made it difficult for those with walking difficulties to manoeuvre and there was a reduced number of seats
3. The electric buses were very silent and she felt that this could cause accidents as they arrived quietly.

Tom Donnelly said the voice announcements should be working, he would feedback and it may be a training issue for drivers.

Tom emphasised that the design of the vehicles had been widely consulted upon with passenger group representatives, albeit not in York and

Tom also said that the buses are fitted with a device which makes a pulsing sound to make people aware of their presence but acknowledged that this only came on when the vehicle was travelling at less than 15 m.p.h.

* 1. Ann Pask raised the issue of the no’s 11 to Bishopthorpe which had been reduced to a 45 minute rather than 30 minute service, and, 21 and 26 also serving Bishopthorpe Road. Previously the timetables had given a reasonable service to Bishopthorpe Road and South Bank areas and had also been well timed for train arrivals at the station but now the service was poorly co-ordinated and meant people were less likely to use the bus.

Tom Donnelly said he would take on board the comments and look at the issue.

Items re Howard Street northbound bus stop put forward by Christopher Rainger and the No 59 to stop at Malvern Avenue/Carr Lane were held over.

1. Enhanced Partnership

Graham Collett reported that the Bus Forum had written to Peter Kilbane, Executive Lead for Transport, outlining the Bus Forum view that the Enhanced Partnership arrangements required much improvement with its operation unsatisfactory and form an officer point of view a junior officer being left to lead. He welcomed the fact that First Bus had undertaken to attend all future Enhanced Partnership meetings

1. Accessibility Forum

Flick Williams reminded members that an Accessibility Day was to be held on Saturday 23rd September details of which are available on the Bus Forum website and Tom Donnelly reported that First Bus had promoted via their social media channels though publicity by the City Council had been limited due to the responsible officer contracting covid.

Flick reported on incidents on the afternoon of the meeting where she was refused entry to two No 4 buses in succession with the first driver saying the bus was full and being unwilling to ask those with push chairs to fold them so she could alight and the second unable to get the ramp to work.

Tom Donnelly advised Flick to send him an email with date, times of buses and he would pursue internally at First.

1. Any other Business

Richard Parker again picked up the issue of the Nos. 1 and 5 coming together on weekdays at the same times on parts of the route and Mary Fairbrother said the same happened on Sunday

1. Date of next meeting will be Tuesday 17th October by zoom at 5.30p.m.