



The countryside charity
North Yorkshire



The world is facing one of the greatest crises in human experience, and transport is the fastest rising source of greenhouse gases. Rural dwellers are not exempt from the need to reduce car use and dependency.

Electric cars are a limited solution, with environmental costs throughout their manufacture and lifetime use. They are certainly no answer to those without a driving licence, or who do not own a car. Their use will still demand road and parking ‘improvements’ and dilute the impact of new public transport services.

The climate crisis requires new public, private and voluntary intervention at significant levels, both to encourage non-motorised modes of travel such as walking and cycling, but also to provide public transport networks available to all users and at a cost which is comparable to the marginal use of the private car.

The recently-announced National Bus Strategy “Bus Back Better”¹ recognises the importance and urgency of these issues and aims to enable a significant shift in mode split towards bus. This would not only benefit the environment but also the local economy and the approx. 23% of households in Yorkshire and the Humber who do not own a car².

Each local authority, including North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC), is now required to create and submit a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) to the Department for Transport by the end of October 2021 to attract a share of the £3bn funding for this initiative.

There is clear guidance from the Department that plans should be ambitious, so it’s vital to tell the Integrated Passenger Transport team at NYCC very quickly about what improvements to bus services you would like to see in the area.

We have identified six key factors that we believe should be incorporated into North Yorkshire’s BSIP, as summarised below:

1. Improved Connectivity

We believe that North Yorkshire’s bus network should be redesigned to maximise connectivity for the area as a whole. This means planning the network on an integrated basis, including good connections between bus services and with rail.

Rural communities require access to the vital facilities of both market towns and nearby cities and railheads, which can only be provided by a network of regular-interval, high quality, affordable bus services between these market towns and the larger village settlements along these routes. Settlements away from the main road networks require links into this strategic core network.

Wensleydale is a prime example where this approach is needed. Currently there is no through Northallerton - Hawes service at all (except for Sunday DalesBus service 856) and indeed no possibility of making the journey even by connecting buses on Saturdays. We believe the structure of the Sunday service with several through Northallerton-Hawes journeys provided by a full-size bus linking with a demand responsive (DRT) minibus feeder service provides a model for a seven day per week service, and that this illustrates in general the appropriate role of scheduled bus services and DRT.

¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/980227/DfT-Bus-Back-Better-national-bus-strategy-for-England.pdf

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/906062/nts9902.ods

The CPRE proposal of ‘Every village, every hour’³ could form a strong base for developing an inclusive, connected network for North Yorkshire.

Cross boundary services can be difficult to plan and finance as they involve more than one authority, and as a result many have disappeared or been severely cut in recent years (for instance the services between Ilkley and Grassington and between Settle and Clitheroe). Yet such services are crucially important as they give rural residents access to the facilities of towns and cities and residents of the surrounding urban areas access to the countryside. We believe it is important that NYCC work closely with surrounding authorities to ensure such services are reinstated and developed in line with the overall connectivity recommendations made above.

2. Increased Capacity

In response to funding cuts in recent years many bus services in the county have been reduced to operation by 16-seater minibuses. This has allowed a basic public transport network to be maintained but is now constraining use of public transport and does not provide the required capacity for increased public transport use by both local residents and visitors. A change of approach is therefore needed, to reverse the damaging impact of the previous cuts.

This is an issue in many parts of the county, including Wensleydale, Wharfedale and Malhamdale. These are amongst the top areas where bus services should be promoted to tourists and leisure travellers, but they are currently seen as unreliable because of the risk of being left behind and cannot be strongly promoted because of lack of capacity.

We believe these services should all be provided by at least 25 seat buses, with minibuses allocated to serving more remote villages and hamlets, possibly on a demand responsive basis.

It is important to recognise that demand-responsive “dial-a-ride” services are not a cost-effective substitute for scheduled bus services on core routes, such as those linking market towns, and would not provide sufficient capacity on such services. Further information on this is provided in the appendix.

3. Development of Tourist Services

In the Bus Back Better strategy the government says:

“In popular tourist areas such as the West Country and the national parks, often blighted and congested by too many cars, we want Bus Service Improvement Plans to show how far more will be done to promote buses to visitors, with improved services, easily accessible information, park-and-ride sites and special tickets. Scenic railways, such as the Settle-Carlisle .. are now significant tourist attractions and wealth generators in their own right. We see no reason why several of Britain’s equally splendid bus routes should not be marketed in the same way.”

We believe that several bus services in the Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors National Parks (and neighbouring Forest of Bowland, Howardian Hills and Nidderdale Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) fully justify such promotion, and should be developed accordingly.

Tourism is a huge, and increasing post-2020, sector of the economy in rural North Yorkshire, yet without integrated public transport, non-car owners and many overseas visitors find this area closed to their substantial spending potential. “Sustainable tourism” is increasingly seen as important, yet without buses which have the timetables and capacity to handle volatile travel demand from tourists, the opportunity to encourage substantial modal shift is lost.

The current North Yorkshire County Council Local Transport Plan (LTP) excludes support for Sunday and “leisure” services. Clearly exploiting the opportunities to promote bus transport for tourism requires this policy to be revised. It should also be noted that whilst Sunday services are sometimes referred to as “leisure services” they are multi-purpose services, which typically serve many needs, including travel

³ www.cpre.org.uk/resources/every-village-every-hour-2021-buses-report-full-report

to work as well as for leisure purposes, and in so doing help support the area's economic and personal wellbeing.

Many weekend services, including the DalesBus and Moorsbus networks, are now managed by volunteers, and following North Yorkshire County Council and National Park funding cuts over the last decade have become over-dependent on voluntary fundraising. Much of this funding is short term or offered on a one-off basis, with continuation less likely to be possible now that the government has raised expectations of increased public sector funding for bus services. In the last full year before the pandemic, Dales & Bowland CIC and Moorsbus CIC together facilitated around 45,000 passenger journeys, so a failure of those services to survive would have serious consequences for attempts to boost the role of public transport. However, the CIC's have succeeded in significantly increasing demand for the services they have become responsible for. Such expertise and approaches to planning and marketing services should be maintained and built upon.

4. Improved Infrastructure for Buses

There are places where the infrastructure for bus services is lacking, and further investment in facilities is needed to help make bus travel an attractive proposition for more people. This includes adequate parking facilities, particularly where buses connect, at places such as Helmsley, Kirkbymoorside, Leyburn and Northallerton. More consideration should also be given to the provision of shelter, seating and information for waiting and potential passengers.

5. Simpler, more affordable Fares

Fares are currently a major disincentive to travel in rural areas, especially when a journey requires travelling with different operators or different modes. Single/return fares should be reduced with BSIP funding where necessary to achieve cost/distance parity between all areas of the county, rural and urban. A level should be reached to make bus travel attractive compared to car travel.

Some people need to make journeys on a frequent basis (e.g. for travel to work) or which require a change of service (e.g. Skipton - Buckden). Public transport is currently unaffordable for many such people. There need to be attractively priced multiple operator tickets available seven days per week, along the lines of an expanded version of the Dales Rover and Moors Rover tickets currently available at weekends only, with daily costs capped at no more than £10. Similarly, there should be attractive through fares for services involving bus and rail.

All scheduled bus services in the county should be included within the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS). Some DalesBus services have been excluded by NYCC from ENCTS as they are said to be "primarily provided for tourism purposes", despite many similar services remaining in the scheme. This is unfair and confusing to potential passengers. The rate of reimbursement to operators is also an issue, as several local bus operators have cut back services or even completely ceased trading citing the low reimbursement rate offered by NYCC.

6. Improved Information and Publicity

Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the marketing of bus services as part of a unified public transport network, with printed timetables supplementing on-line resources and up-to-date, clear and attractive roadside information. "Real-time" bus information should be displayed at popular bus stops with battery and solar-powered displays now available to allow provision in more locations.

We are aware that many of these six key factors feature in proposals already made by communities in rural North Yorkshire, and hope that they will be incorporated into NYCC's plans as well. However, **to help make this happen we encourage everyone to let NYCC know your views on this important topic via email to Passenger.Transport@northyorks.gov.uk by the consultation deadline of 3rd September.** We would appreciate a copy to betterbuses@btinternet.com too.

This message was compiled by Action for Yorkshire Transport and CPRE North Yorkshire with support from Dales and Bowland Community Interest Company, Friends of DalesBus, Friends of Moorsbus, Friends of the Dales, Moorsbus Community Interest Company and the North York Moors Association.

If you have any queries please get in touch with us at betterbuses@btinternet.com

Appendix: Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) Services

We support the view of the Rural Commission that ‘many types of transport provision are the solution that is needed for rural North Yorkshire’, but we are of the view that DRT is not the panacea to rural accessibility and that it has serious limitations.

DRT may have a role to play where potential passenger numbers are very low, but DRT almost always needs substantial subsidy and is an expensive and inefficient way of meeting heavier traffic requirements. A recent study by consultants wsp found that the average cost per passenger journey on a DRT service is typically twice that on a scheduled bus service.⁴ Dave Pearson, Transport Services Director at the West Yorkshire Combined Authority noted at a recent meeting⁵ that “Bus services are financially sustained by volumes of people. DRT can never be self-sustaining due to the lower passenger/driver ratio.”

Scheduled bus services provide certainty and visibility of the public transport offering, which gives confidence, particularly for less-frequent users and visitors. In contrast, DRT services introduce a high degree of uncertainty as to what service (if any) might be available at the desired time of travel. They also require a booking process, which raises issues about digital connectivity for some potential users and the possible difficulty of trying to contact a call centre, as well as the costs of providing such facilities.

Scheduled bus services are much more cost effective as they aggregate people making similar journeys onto the same vehicle, allowing higher occupancy levels to be achieved, which is both economically and environmentally beneficial.

DRT services provide a more customised service for individual travel needs – this can be more akin to a taxi service – if there are relatively low numbers of users of the service relative to the available capacity. If usage of the service increases it then becomes harder for each user to book their preferred journeys, and the flexibility of the service to meet individual needs is quickly lost. Therefore, DRT is unable to reliably fulfil many travel demands such as making onward and return connections from other transport services, meeting appointment deadlines, or spontaneous travel desire (whether for shopping, social or leisure reasons). Given the type of vehicle used for DRT, it is not able to cope with volatility of demand, nor use by larger groups.

Whilst the concept of Demand Responsive Transport has a long track record of more than 50 years, individual schemes in England have an average life of just under 18 months (based on data from Roger French).

We therefore believe that DRT is only suitable for adoption in a limited number of situations, where it can indeed fulfil a useful role. These may include:

- limited deviations or extensions of a scheduled service to serve smaller villages or hamlets away from the main route. In such situations it is important that any demand responsive elements do not significantly disrupt the timings of the core service.
- services with low potential passenger numbers, such as to villages and hamlets remote from the main road network, or at times of lower demand, such as in the evenings. In such cases, some degree of structure to the offering – e.g. a “one [location] to many” offering, rather than an unstructured “anywhere to anywhere at anytime” would be beneficial to try to aggregate demand as much as possible.

⁴ www.torbay.gov.uk/media/16255/torbay-drt-feasibility-study-may21.pdf

⁵ <https://youtu.be/6QjOikjlrEI?t=4005>