



North East Joint Transport Committee

Tuesday, 20th February, 2024 at 2.30 pm

Meeting to be held in the Bridges Room, Gateshead Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead, NE8 1HH

AGENDA

Page No

1. **Welcome and apologies for absence**

2. **Declaration of Interests**

Please remember to declare any personal interest where appropriate both verbally and by recording it on the relevant form (to be given to the Democratic Services Officer). Please also remember to leave the meeting where any personal interest requires this.

3. **Minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2024** **3 - 8**

4. **Discharge of Transport Functions by Northumberland County Council** **9 - 20**

5. **Transport Plan Progress Report** **21 - 30**

6. **Date and time of next meeting**

The next meeting will take place on 19 March 2024 at 2.30pm at Gateshead Civic Centre.

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NORTH EAST JOINT TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

DRAFT MINUTES FOR APPROVAL

DATE: 16 JANUARY 2024

Meeting held: Bridges Room, Gateshead Civic Centre

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillor: M Gannon (Chair)

Councillors: A Hopgood, C Johnson, N Kemp, M Meling, C Rowntree and G Sanderson

IN ATTENDANCE:

Statutory Officers: M Barker (Monitoring Officer – Transport)
P Darby (Chief Finance Officer)
T Hughes (Managing Director, Transport North East)
S Ramsey (Lead Chief Executive – Transport)

Officers: J Bailes, D Badminton-Capps, G Cocker, M Dodds, J Fenwick, P Fleming, A Flynn, A Hagg, P Holmes, G Kelly, D Laux, S Lennie, M Jackson, C Massarella, P Meikle, C Mordue, E Reynard and R Watson.

61. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor G Miller and Councillor E Scott.

62. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

63. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 DECEMBER 2023

The minutes were agreed as a correct record.

64. TRANSPORT BUDGET AND LEVIES 2024/2025

The Committee considered a report which set out 2024/25 Transport Budget and associated Transport Levies for the North East Joint Transport Committee (JTC) together with indicative forecasts for future years, also exemplified for consideration and approval. The budget proposals contained in the report have also taken into account comments received during consultation on the outline proposals presented to the JTC in November 2023 as well as input from members of the JTC Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The two Combined Authorities in the JTC area are required to set the Transport Levies before 15 February 2024 to enable their constituent councils to take the levies and other contributions into account in setting their own budgets. The two Combined Authorities will formally determine to issue the levies that are agreed by the JTC at their meetings on 23 January 2024 (NECA) and 30 January 2024 (NTCA).

Until the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority (NEMCA) is established, the current decision-making arrangements apply and therefore budget and levy proposals must be agreed by the JTC. The transport budgets and levies included in the report will form part of the overall combined budget for NEMCA from May 2024.

The report provided an update on the Revenue Budget outturn for 2023/24 and set out the revenue resources planned to be used in 2024/25 to deliver the objectives of the JTC.

The proposed budget and levy for public transport activity in County Durham is £16.905m for 2024/25, of which £16.895m will be payable as a grant to Durham County Council and £10,000 retained to contribute to the central costs of the JTC. This compares with a levy for 2024/25 of £16.912m, of which £16.902m was payable as transport grant.

The proposed budget and levy for public transport activity in Northumberland is £6.562m for 2024/25, of which £6.552m will be payable as a grant to Northumberland County Council and £10,000 retained to contribute to the central costs of the JTC. This compares with a levy for 2024/25 of £6.458m, of which £6.448m was payable as transport grant.

The proposed levy for public transport activity in Tyne and Wear is £70.300m for 2024/25, of which £68.200m will be payable as a grant to Nexus. This represents a year-on-year increase of £2.500m (3.7%) in the levy compared with 2023/24 when the Tyne and Wear levy was £67.800m. As in previous years, £2.100m of the Tyne and Wear levy will be retained and used to help fund central costs of the JTC, primarily relating to historic debt charges for the former Tyne and Wear Integrated Transport Authority (TWITA) functions.

The proposed gross expenditure budget for Transport North East is £36.672m in 2024/25, funded through a range of sources, including external government grants, a contribution from the Local Transport Plan Integrated Transport Block

grant of £500,000 (equating to £62,500 for each of the seven local authorities and Nexus), a contribution from the Transport levies and interest earned on revenue balances.

A break-even position is forecast on the Tyne Tunnels revenue account for 2023/24, where increased investment income and reduction in debt financing costs will cover the deficit previously forecast for the year. For 2024/25, a break even budget will be set on the assumption that toll increases in line with RPI are applied when the Tyne and Wear Sub Committee take its decision on tolls on 18 January 2024.

The proposed increase in the tolls will apply to Class 2 and Class 3 vehicles next year. The calculated increases required, based on RPI, are from £2.20 to £2.40 for Class 2 vehicles (cars) and £4.40 to £4.80 for Class 3 vehicles. No change is proposed to the 10% discount available to pre-paid account holders or to the toll exemptions for emergency response vehicles, public bus services, disabled users and other categories of exempt vehicle as set out in the Tyne Tunnels Bylaws and River Tyne Tunnels order. The increases are required, as RPI linked increases are triggered in the contract payments to the operator of the tunnels, so the tolls must increase to maintain a balanced position.

Increased interest on revenue balances held for transport activity is forecast in the current year, and it is proposed that the additional income generated this year (£8.125m) is transferred to an earmarked reserve at the end of this financial year, to be applied to support investment and activity in future years to facilitate and following the transition to NEMCA.

Factoring in the budget proposals contained in the report, and the accompanying capital budget report to be considered later in the agenda, the JTC reserves are forecast to be £28.204 million at 31 March 2025. Details of the sums held and earmarked for specific purposes were set out in the report.

RESOLVED: The North East Joint Transport Committee:

- (i) Noted the updated forecast outturn position for the Transport budget in 2023/24 and approve the revised estimates for the year;
- (ii) Agreed a Transport net revenue budget from the levies for 2024/25 of £93.767m, as set out in section 2.4 of this report;
- (iii) Agreed the following Transport Levies for 2024/25:
 - a. Durham County Council £16,905,000
 - b. Northumberland County Council £6,562,000
 - c. Tyne and Wear Councils (detailed in Table 6) £70,300,000
- (iv) Agreed a transport revenue grant to Durham County Council for the delivery of transport services of £16,895,000, as outlined in section 2.6;

- (v) Agreed a transport revenue grant to Northumberland County Council for the delivery of transport services of £6,552,000, as outlined in section 2.10;
- (vi) Agreed a transport revenue grant to Nexus for the delivery of transport services in Tyne and Wear of £68,200,000;
- (vii) Approved the budget for Transport North East as set out in section 2.53 to 2.57;
- (viii) Approved the budget for the Tyne Tunnels set out in section 2.58-2.70; and
- (ix) Noted and agreed the forecast level and use of reserves at section 2.71.

65. TRANSPORT CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2024/2025

The Committee considered a report which provided an updated forecast capital outturn for 2023/24 and presented the initial 2024/25 capital programme, totalling £304.416m, for consideration and approval.

The report identified that total capital expenditure on Transport schemes of £232.693m is now forecast for 2023/24 against the revised programme budget of £278.496m – forecast slippage/underspending of £45.803m (16.4%). The main variances since the last update reported to the committee is a substantial revision of forecast expenditure on the Transforming Cities Fund Tranche 2 programme and the Active Travel Fund Tranches 2, 3 and 4 programmes. There are also variances forecast on the Bus Service Improvement Plan, the Metro Asset Renewal Programme and the Metro Flow programme which are detailed in the report.

The capital expenditure forecast on the Transforming Cities Fund Tranche 2 schemes is now estimated to be £48.212m in 2023/24. This is a revision of £12.189m on the previous forecast and is mainly due to scheme development difficulties, ongoing resource and capacity constraints and challenging market conditions which have led to some scheme promoters failing to hit assurance milestones.

£3.369m of capital expenditure is forecast on Active Travel Fund Tranches in 2023/24, which is a sizeable revision (reduction) on the previous forecast of expenditure (£22.725m) and has arisen largely due to difficulties in developments, scheme interdependencies and delays in Active Travel England sign off on final designs.

The report set out details of the Nexus Capital Programme for 2024/25, totalling £102.143m, which includes the Metro Asset Renewal Program (MARP £47.191m), Fleet Replacement Programme (MFR £50.579m), Metro Flow (MFL £1.553m) and Other Nexus Capital Projects (Nexus OCP £2.819m). At this point, no funding has been confirmed by DfT for 2025/26 and 2026/27 for the MARP. Discussions are ongoing, and a further report will be brought to the Joint Transport Committee when the outcome is known.

The programme includes an estimated £14.057m of Local Transport Plan Integrated Transport Block grant that will be received by NECA on behalf of the JTC, most of which will be paid to constituent authorities and Nexus on a quarterly basis to support their capital programmes. Expenditure on the Nexus elements is included in the sections on the Nexus capital programme and to avoid double counting the remaining £11.309m is reported against the LTP Integrated Transport Block programme line.

Most of the planned capital expenditure will be funded from specific government grants received, with these capital resources augmented with the use of earmarked reserves also. Full details of the funding of the planned expenditure were set out in the report.

RESOLVED: The North East Joint Transport Committee:

- (i) Noted the latest position in respect of the 2023/24 capital programme, summarised in section 2.1 and exemplified in more detail in the sections that follow within the report;
- (ii) Approved the proposed initial capital programme for 2024/25 which amounts to £304.416m, as summarised in section 2.1 and exemplified in more detail in the sections that follow within the report;
- (iii) Noted that grant funding for the Metro Asset Renewal Programme (MARP) for years 2025/26 and 2026/27 is still subject to Department for Transport (DfT) approval, therefore the element of Nexus' capital programme relating to the MARP in these years, can only be considered indicative at this stage, pending the outcome of ongoing discussions with DfT officials;
- (iv) Noted that a further report to consider the MARP programme once will be prepared once the grant funding for years 2025/26 and 2026/27 is confirmed by DfT; and
- (v) Approved the other elements of Nexus' capital programme (2024/25 to 2025/26) for the MARP (2024/25 only), the Fleet Replacement Programme and other projects as detailed within the report.

66. TRANSPORT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received a report which provided an update on progress made across a number of Delivery Plan categories in implementing the objectives of the North East Transport Plan and achieving the vision of 'moving to a green, healthy, dynamic and thriving North East.'

A bid has been submitted to the Zero Emission Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA) 2 fund, which if successful, will provide funding for 43 electric buses for the North East region. The outcome of the bid is expected in mid-March.

Recent analysis of DfT statistics has shown that the North East (including Tees Valley) has seen a loss of 39 million bus miles over the past 18 years. This represents a 37% cut to the overall network. When broken down further and excluding the Tees Valley, the figures show a 31% reduction since 2010 and a 12% reduction in the 12 months leading up to March 2023. Furthermore, the statistics do not include the significant impact that Go North East industrial action had on the region's bus services at the tail end of 2023.

The redeveloped southern entrance of Sunderland rail station opened to the public on 8 December 2023. The project, which was partially funded by £16.3m from the Transforming Cities Fund (TCF), features a new ticket office, retail spaces and a new mezzanine level with office spaces reserved for rail industry staff. The southern entrance is the first step in a wider investment programme to transform the transport hub, with Sunderland Council campaigning for support for the next phases. Further works may include capacity increases and redevelopment of the station's northern entrance.

Urgent confirmation is still awaited from Government regarding the sign off of the funding for the refurbishment of the Tyne Bridge, which is due to start this month.

Councillor Kemp expressed his frustration regarding the delay of the signing off by Government Ministers for the Tyne Bridge refurbishment. He added that the consequences of any delay in starting the works are immeasurable.

Councillor Gannon agreed and added that the business case was approved in July 2023 and that confirmation has been sought since December 2023. He added that this was a colossal project which if delayed, could have profound implications on the economy and the delay would impact another year's Great North Run. He implored Ministers to sign off the project.

RESOLVED: The North East Joint Transport Committee noted the report.

67. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 20 February 2024 at 2.30pm in the Bridges Room, Gateshead Civic Centre.



North East Joint Transport Committee

Date: 20th February 2024

Subject: Discharge of Transport Functions by Northumberland County Council

Report of: Director of Environment and Transport, Northumberland County Council

Executive Summary

Under the Constitution of the Combined Authority, and in accordance with an Operating Agreement between the Constituent Authorities, certain functions have been delegated to the Executive of the two Constituent County Councils, namely Durham and Northumberland.

This report and the detail shown in Appendix 1 provides an update on the discharge of delegated transport functions by Northumberland County Council for the financial year 2022/23.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee note the transport responsibilities of Northumberland County Council and the activities undertaken in 2022/23.

1. Background Information

- 1.1 The Combined Authority Orders of 2014 and 2018 transfer to the Combined Authorities transport functions previously carried out by Northumberland and Durham County Councils under parts 4 and 5 of the Transport Act 1985 and functions under part 2 of the Transport Act 2000.
- 1.2 Under the Constitutions of the Combined Authorities and the Standing Orders of the Joint Transport Committee, and in accordance with an Operating Agreement between all the Constituent Authorities, transport functions have been delegated to the Executive of the two Constituent County Councils, namely Durham and Northumberland. Appendix 1 to this report provides information on how these functions have been carried out in Northumberland for the financial year 2022/23.

2. Proposals

- 2.1 Members are requested to note the contents of the report.

3. Reasons for the Proposals

- 3.1 Under protocols agreed between the Constituent Authorities, it was planned for Northumberland County Council to report to the North East Joint Transport Committee on the manner in which the transport functions have been discharged, including how they have been discharged in accordance with any performance management criteria.

4. Next Steps and Timetable for Implementation

- 4.1 Under protocols agreed between the Constituent Authorities, Northumberland County Council will provide an update report to the North East Joint Transport Committee on an annual basis.

5. Potential Impact on Objectives

- 5.1 The tasks reported in this document support the objectives of creating the best possible conditions for growth in jobs, investment and living standards, to make the North East an excellent location for business, to prioritise and deliver high quality infrastructure and to enable residents to raise their skill levels and to benefit from economic growth long into the future.

6. Financial and Other Resources Implications

- 6.1 For 2022/23, the funding for Transport functions in Northumberland County Council was transferred into the Combined Authority, and the Combined Authority in turn delegated the funding to the Council to cover the discharge of its transport functions.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 The 2018 Order requires that the two Combined Authorities establish a joint committee for the discharge of their transport functions. In accordance with its powers as set out within the 2018 Order, the Joint Transport Committee has determined that several transport functions exercisable within the two county council areas are delegated to those councils. Responsibility for the functions, however, remains with the Joint Transport Committee; therefore, in accordance with the Joint Transport Committee's Standing Orders, the county councils are required to report to the Joint Transport Committee, on an annual basis, how they have delivered the transport functions delegated to them.

8. Key Risks

- 8.1 There are no specific risk management issues arising from this report.

9. Equality and Diversity

- 9.1 There are no specific equality and diversity issues arising from this report.

10. Crime and Disorder

- 10.1 There are no implications for crime and disorder arising directly from this report.

11. Consultation or Engagement

- 11.1 There are no specific consultation or community engagement implications arising from this report.

12. Other Impact of the Proposals

- 12.1 There are no other impacts arising from this report.

13. Appendices

- 13.1 Appendix A – North East Combined Authority (NECA), Northumberland County Council Transport Activity Report 2022/23.

14. Background Papers

- 14.1 The North East Combined Authority Constitution.

North East Combined Authority Deed of Operation dated the 29th April 2014.

Deed of Co-operation relating to the Joint Transport Committee and the North East LEP dated 4th July 2018.

15. Contact Officers

- 15.1 **Paul Jones**

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16.

Sign off:

- Head of Paid Service:
- Monitoring Officer:
- Chief Finance Officer:

North East Combined Authority (NECA) Northumberland County Council Transport Activity Report 2022/23

Introduction

1. This report covers the discharge of transport duties delegated to Northumberland County Council (NCC) for the period 1st April 2022 to the 31st March 2023.

Organisational Arrangements

2. NCC has undertaken its transport functions through the Strategic Transport and Local Services teams in line with best practice guidance from the Government and experience from other authorities. Collaborating in this way has been especially important in rural areas, as it has allowed the authority to create packages of work across sectors to maximise efficiency (for example, by making use of conventional bus services for home to school transport) and deliver consistent standards across modes. Officers have also worked closely with economic development, planning and tourism functions to ensure that public transport contributes to economic growth and social inclusion across Northumberland.

Bus Service Network

3. Northumberland has a diverse geography, including a mix of urban and large rural areas with complex travel demands that make public transport vitally important. The local bus network plays a key role in the ambitions of NCC in terms of providing access to employment, education, healthcare and service centres.
4. Historically, most bus routes in Northumberland have operated commercially without any input, subsidy or support from NCC. These represent around 80% of all services. The remaining 20% of services are either fully or partially subsidised by NCC, and these would not operate without the ongoing support of the council.
5. The network of supported services comprises approximately 45 routes, or parts of routes, that cover mainly rural areas of Northumberland. The network includes instances of services running commercially at popular/peak times, but where support is given to maintain journeys at other times (for example, in the early morning and late evening). They also include support the County Council gives to key tourist services that help boost the local economy and safeguard the environment by ensuring that people can visit notable locations without needing a car.
6. Like the two previous years, 2022/23 was unprecedented in the challenges faced by NCC in discharging its transport duties and meeting the needs of bus users. The Covid-19 pandemic still cast a shadow over both supported and commercial bus services, and although patronage and revenue continued to recover both were below the levels recorded in 2018/19.

7. Until the first national Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020, much of the bus network had been stable for several years in terms of the number of routes and frequencies, although there were periodic adjustments to service details. The lockdown led to a significant reduction in public transport provision across the County, in most cases at very short notice. During this period, NCC worked extensively with operators to ensure that essential public transport links were maintained and that the reduced and simplified network still met the essential needs of users. NCC also made sure that any changes were effectively communicated to users.
8. Following the lifting of the first lockdown and with confirmation regarding funding for the public transport industry in the form of Covid Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG), operators in Northumberland were able to return to a largely normal network albeit with some reduced evening and weekend offerings, together with some modest reductions along high frequency corridors. These cuts were largely attributable to the absence of demand associated with the evening economy, but also in part to a reduction in driver availability due to sickness and staff being advised to isolate as per government advice.
9. CBSSG and its successor Bus Recovery Grant (BRG) effectively allowed operators to claim lost revenue on services at pre-pandemic levels, even though demand had dropped to as low as 10% of what was previously recorded. This funding was only a temporary measure, however, and was reduced in September 2021 then set to expire in March 2022 before being extended until September 2022. In the meantime, the government asked transport authorities to look at what network would be sustainable given the projected long-term impact of changes in travel behaviour on commercial viability and the funding available for securing services under subsidy contracts.
10. NCC worked closely with bus operators, neighbouring authorities and other stakeholders to create a more efficient but still effective network. This was a data led process using a combination of ticket data and research carried out by NCC, with changes taking place throughout 2021/22 and 2022/23. By March 2023, patronage had recovered to around 85% of pre-pandemic levels, which compares favourably with other areas.
11. Further support was then made available by the Department for Transport (DfT) in January 2023 to cap adult single fares at £2, aimed at encouraging bus use. Most operators in Northumberland joined the scheme that was initially funded to March 2023, but has since been extended to June 2023 and December 2024. The lower fares have generated growth in passenger numbers, although there has been a material decline in revenue in many places, especially on long distance routes. As a result, the scheme is dependent on continued financial support.

Table 1: NCC Supported Service Spending and Funds Available (2022/23)

Item	Supported Services Budget
Gross Expenditure	£1.4m* (Incl. £500k BSOG)
Funds available as at 1st April 2022	£1.4m

*In addition to the stated expenditure additional funding is provided by partner organisation to support specific services and a significant recharge from home to school transport for those elements of the supported bus network that are used to carry scholars.

Home to School Transport

12. NCC has a duty to support children attending school by providing free transport for families that live beyond the statutory walking distance from the nearest appropriate school (section 508B, Education Act 1996, inserted by the Education and Inspections Act 2006). NCC also has a statutory duty to offer free travel for children who cannot walk to school because of a disability, mobility problems or special educational needs. Furthermore, NCC has a discretionary policy of providing free transport to children to allow them to attend a particular school on grounds of religion or belief. All the council's transport policies for children of compulsory school age are available on the school transport webpage.
13. In addition, NCC has continued to provide free post-16 transport after it was re-introduced in 2018/19 for students attending their local high school or college of further education. Further details are contained in the council's post-16 transport policy, which can also be found on the school transport webpage.
14. NCC provides free home to school transport for 8,206 eligible children, as shown in Table 2 below. This costs £21.1 million per annum, including £11.7 million for mainstream children and £9.4 million for those with a disability, mobility problems or special educational needs.

Table 2: Free Home to School Transport by Age and Category (2022/23)

Category	Under 16	Post 16	Total
Mainstream	5,553	1,278	6,831
Special Educational Needs	1,155	220	1,375
Total	6,708	1,498	8,206

15. There has been a sharp rise in costs since the Covid-19 pandemic, which is reflective of national trends. The main supply-side factors driving up costs are driver shortages and fuel prices. A key demand-side factor affecting costs, however, is the lack of school places where they are required, resulting in pupils having to be "re-directed" to schools outside of their catchment area.
16. The home to school transport network covers the whole of Northumberland and substantial use is made of "feeder" services (operated mainly by taxis) connecting with "trunk" routes (run by conventional buses) at village hubs. A rolling programme of "clean sheet" area route reviews are undertaken on an annual basis, which involve a complete re-design of the network to maximise efficiency before re-tendering. The southeast area was reviewed in 2023.
17. To combat the rising costs of transport provision, greater use is being made of local bus and train services to transport schoolchildren. In 2023, a total of 662 students who qualified for school transport assistance used the public bus and rail networks. This has the dual benefit of reducing the cost of providing home to school transport while helping to support the long-term sustainability of the public transport network

(especially in rural areas). This approach gathered momentum during 2022/23 as part of work on the regional Bus Service Improvement Plan (see below).

Concessionary Travel Scheme

18. NCC participates in the government's English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS). The national scheme entitles pass holders who are resident in England to free off-peak travel (after 09:30) on local bus services throughout England. This scheme covers both disabled people and eligible older people.
19. In addition to the national entitlements, NCC also provides some local enhancements to the scheme. For example, pass holders can travel from 09:00 onwards on journeys beginning in Northumberland. NCC is also one of a few authorities to provide companion passes to eligible disabled persons. Companion passes allow an additional person to travel for free when accompanying a disabled pass holder.
20. The cost of providing the ENCTS scheme was £4.931 million for 2022/23. While actual ENCTS patronage was still significantly lower than before Covid-19, NCC followed DfT advice to continue reimbursing operators at pre-pandemic levels for the first part of the financial year before transitioning to actuals using the recommended phasing process. By the end of 2022/23, all operators of supported/subsidised services were being paid based on actual journeys undertaken.
21. Operators of commercial services were reimbursed using an alternative model of reimbursement. Fixed price reimbursement deals were agreed with our two commercial operators, which fixed service levels throughout Northumberland in exchange for revenue certainty in respect of ENCTS reimbursement.
22. On 1st April 2022, NCC had a total of 59,057 live ENCTS passes in circulation, as shown in Table 3 below. This represented a reduction compared to the previous year and is attributable to the expiration of passes and the failure to renew passes, which in part is linked to the reduction in ENCTS journeys during the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated government messaging around only using public transport for essential journeys.

Table 3: ENCTS Passes by Type (as at 1st April 2022)

Pass Type	Number
Senior	55,196
Disabled	2,554
Disabled with Companion	1,307
Total	59,057

Community Transport

23. Community transport plays a key role across Northumberland, providing flexible and responsive solutions to unmet local transport needs, especially in rural areas where there is often insufficient demand for 'conventional' bus services. Community transport is regulated differently to 'conventional' services, so it is well placed to offer

affordable and innovative solutions that would otherwise not be available and often represents the only way that some user groups can access essential services. As a result, it helps to develop sustainable communities and contributes to social inclusion.

24. There are a range of Community Transport operators across Northumberland – some offer services without financial support from NCC while others are contracted to deliver specific activities. The following Community Transport organisations currently deliver services under contract from NCC:
 - Adapt (North East)
 - NEED Ltd
 - WATBus Community Transport
 - Upper Coquetdale Community Transport
25. Community transport users include all different types of people travelling for a range of reasons, from accessing employment, education and healthcare facilities to going shopping or visiting friends and relatives. Community transport providers are also often embedded in the communities they serve, allowing them to focus on specific local needs or even provide one-to-one help for customers.
26. Community transport operations across Northumberland were largely stable during 2022/23, as the sector continued its recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Most Community transport operations were suspended or significantly reduced in 2020/21, and many have not returned to their full pre-pandemic activities. NCC continues to support the sector, however, due to its important public transport role across the county.

Public Transport Information

27. Since April 2016, NCC has been working in partnership with Nexus for the provision of passenger information services. As part of this agreement, Nexus has delivered printed timetables at more than 900 bus stops in Northumberland as well as a fully managed digital offer. This partnership also allows NCC to benefit from any enhancements to Nexus systems in future months and years. The current offer includes:
 - LiveTravel Map in Northumberland to deliver Real time via smart devices and a direct link through from the QR / NFC tags installed in Northumberland.
 - Journey Planner and NaPTAN stop information will also be fully managed by Nexus on behalf of NCC.
28. By entering a partnership with Nexus, we are delivering accuracy and consistency of information, especially on cross boundary services between Northumberland and Tyne & Wear, which is a vast improvement on the previous NCC offer. In particular, the inclusion of the Live Travel Map web-app where passengers can benefit from real time information at their fingertips has been a step-change in passenger information delivery.

Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership

29. NCC was actively involved in developing the region's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and associated Enhanced Partnership (EP) with Transport North East (TNE) and other partners. On 4th April 2022, TNE received a letter from the Department for Transport (DfT) offering indicative funding of £163.5 million. This letter didn't constitute a formal or binding grant offer, however, and NCC was involved in a range of actions to clarify BSIP plans, where required by the DfT, before funding was confirmed.
30. Although the award was the largest in the UK outside of London, it didn't cover the full cost of delivering all the region's BSIP proposals. As a result, NCC worked with partners to prioritise plans, which started to be rolled out from September 2023.
31. NCC also worked to set up the Northumberland Local Bus Board. The aim of the Board is to allow representatives from across the county to meet with officers and bus operators (where necessary) to discuss and understand forthcoming alterations to the bus network and consider any planning work that is being carried out at both local and regional levels. Discussion points include changes to routes and timetables, punctuality, reliability, highway infrastructure, fares initiatives and public information.
32. The Northumberland Local Bus Board is not a public meeting. Attendance is by invitation only and includes:
 - the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Local Services
 - A representative from each of the four Local Area Committees
 - the Strategic Transport Manager
 - an officer from the Passenger Transport team responsible for transport contract management and compliance
 - a representative from the Northumberland Disability Partnership
 - a representative from the Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC)
 - a representative from Transport Focus or the Confederation of Passenger Transport
 - representatives from one or more local bus operators where this is deemed necessary to address specific discussion points
33. The Board is not a decision-making body, and meetings are chaired by the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Local Services unless otherwise directed by them.

Transport Focus

34. Transport Focus carries out regular bus passenger surveys to measure satisfaction and gather feedback about travel experiences.
35. The 'Your Bus Journey' report covering the period from January to June 2023 showed that 87% of Northumberland bus passengers were satisfied with their journey, which compared with 81% for other rural areas and 80% for England (outside of London). Northumberland compared favourably with other areas in respect of bus reliability, value for money and the range of tickets that are available

but performed less well on information and integration with other modes of transport. NCC has used data from Transport Focus and other similar organisations to inform public transport planning decision and will continue to do so.

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North East Joint Transport Committee

Date: 20th February 2024
Subject: Transport Plan Progress Report
Report of: Managing Director, Transport North East

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on progress made across a number of Delivery Plan categories in implementing the objectives of the North East Transport Plan and achieving the vision of 'moving to a green, healthy, dynamic and thriving North East.' Key points include the following:

The ASLEF Union took part in another round of rail strike action from Tuesday 30 January to Monday 5 February, they also ran a ban on overtime work between Monday 29 January and Tuesday 6 February.

The newly renovated Durham Bus Station opened to the public on Sunday 7 January.

Several line closures are planned on the Metro between now and early April 2024. The closures are part of a £38 million programme to prepare for the introduction of the new fleet of trains.

It was confirmed at the January meeting of the North East JTC Tyne and Wear Sub-Committee that Metro fare prices will be increasing from April 2024 onwards. On average ticket prices will rise by 3.4% but actual changes will be dependent on the type of ticket purchased.

Work to restore the Tyne Bridge has begun its first stages with the Department for Transport releasing £35.2 million in funding. The initial works will see capacity on the bridge reduced to one lane in each direction to allow unloading to take place and scaffolding to be erected.

Recommendations

The Joint Transport Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report.

1. **Background Information**

1.1 The North East Transport Plan sets out a vision of ‘moving to a green, healthy, dynamic and thriving North East’ through the delivery of transport improvements under seven policy areas. Recent developments in the transport field are discussed below, organised by policy area.

2. **Public transport, travelling by bus, Metro, ferry and on demand public transport**

2.1 Bus Travel

Durham Bus Station – The newly renovated Durham Bus Station opened to the public on Sunday 7 January. The new transport hub, located on the site of the original bus station, was part funded through the region’s Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) and features improved passenger information, better visibility for pedestrians and buses, improved welfare facilities and office-space. Photos of the new station are included as an appendix to this report.

Levelling Up Fund – Through the second round of the Levelling up Fund, the North East was awarded £19.5m in 2023 to deliver investment in zero emission transport options.

Following subsidy control approvals, the region is now able to commence delivery of the project which will see 52 EV buses operating across the North East. In addition, the region is investing in 92 EV charging points at park and ride sites and other key destinations. Delivery will be phased from 2024 to 2026 and regular updates will be provided. By making this investment this will improve the availability and quality of zero emission transport options in the region.

Tackling anti-social behaviour on buses – Northumbria Police ran a week-long trial on Stagecoach buses in South Shields and South Tyneside before Christmas, aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour. The service was trialled in areas where passengers have reported behaviours such as vandalism and youth disorder and involved officers acting as undercover passengers. A total of 29 dispersal notices were issued and one arrest was made.

2.2 Metro

New Metro Fleet – As part of the process of bringing the new Metro fleet into service, around 22,000 contractual clauses and standards need to be complied with, 480 staff need to be given training and 90,000 individual tests need to be completed. This will ensure that when they come into service they work safely and seamlessly with the 60 Metro stations and 77km of track.

As part of the testing process, more testing in specific weather conditions has been identified as being necessary, Nexus are working with the train manufacturer Stadler on this. As such, the current delivery timescales will be delayed, but the extent of this

won't be clear until the additional testing is concluded. However, Nexus will continue to make progress with the wider testing programme while this is happening.

Metro Line Closures – Several line closures are planned on the Metro between now and early April 2024. The closures are part of a £38 million programme to prepare for the introduction of the new fleet of trains. An outline of the closure dates is included below:

Planned Closure	Date
Bus replacement between South Gosforth and Haymarket	05/01/24 – 08/01/24
Bus replacement between Airport and South Gosforth	20/01/24 – 21/01/24
Bus replacement between Pelaw and South Shields	27/01/24
Bus replacement between South Gosforth and Wallsend	10/02/24 – 11/02/24
Bus replacement between Airport and Regent Centre	17/02/24 – 25/02/24
Bus replacement between Heworth and South Gosforth	16/03/24 – 17/03/24
Bus replacement between Heworth and South Gosforth	29/03/24 – 01/04/24

Fare Increases – It was confirmed at the January meeting of the North East JTC Tyne and Wear Sub-Committee that Metro fare prices will be increasing from April 2024 onwards. On average ticket prices will rise by 3.4% but actual changes will be dependent on the type of ticket purchased. A summary of the changes is included below:

- A two-zone day ticket will go from £5.20 to £5.50
- All-zone day tickets will stay at £5.90
- The price of weekly, monthly and annual season tickets will increase by between 4.2 and 8.9%
- Shields Ferry prices will also increase from £3.70 to £3.90

The fare increases have been factored into the 2024/25 budgets.

3. Connectivity beyond our boundaries

3.1 Rail

Industrial Action – The ASLEF Union took part in another round of strike action from Tuesday 30 January to Monday 5 February, they also ran a ban on overtime work between Monday 29 January and Tuesday 6 February.

ASLEF members on LNER trains were due to strike for a further five consecutive days from 5 February in protest to the Government's new minimum service level legislation. Under the new laws, employers can require staff who have planned industrial action to provide 40% of timetabled rail services. However, LNER, which is run by the DfT's operator of last resort, told the union they no longer intended to put

minimum service levels in place, and so the additional industrial action was called off.

Rail and Metro Extensions – Officers at Transport North East are currently working towards the development of a prospectus of potential local rail and Metro extensions to inform the incoming Mayor and Cabinet of opportunities. It is envisioned that this prospectus will be shaped in collaboration with both internal and external partners while also being supplemented by commissioned studies into the strategic and economic rationale for investment. Feedback from partners is currently being reviewed and it is envisaged that stakeholder workshops with external partners will commence in early 2024.

Northern and TransPennine Annual Business Plan Drafts – Officers at the North East Rail Management Unit (NERMU) and members (via a Rail North Working Group) were invited to comment on both the Northern and TransPennine Annual Business Plans. Those comments have been provided to Transport for the North and the Rail North Partnership. The plans will now go through further checks and reviews prior to final DfT Governance checks and submission to the Secretary of State in March for final sign off.

LNER London to Newcastle / Berwick Ticket Simplification Pilot – From 5 February LNER will pilot a new fares structure on direct journeys between London and Newcastle/Berwick/Edinburgh only. Tickets are available to purchase as of 16 January.

There will now be three fares, all one way: Anytime, Advance, and a new “70-minute Flex” ticket, replacing Off-Peak and Super-Off-Peak tickets.

The 70-minute Flex is effectively a new advance ticket that is non-refundable, LNER only, direct only, and dynamically priced. Travellers can get a train that is up to 70 minutes before or after the time of their original booking.

The existing off-peak tickets are refundable, fixed price, and can be used on any operator and via any permitted route.

Note that as mentioned above, this pilot applies only on direct LNER journeys between London and Newcastle/Berwick/Edinburgh. Direct journeys between London and Durham or Morpeth, for example, are not part of this pilot.

A diagram showing the simplification pathway is included as an appendix to this report.

4. Making the right travel choice

4.1 Local Growth Fund (LGF) EV Charger Programme – Electric Vehicle charging infrastructure, with space for 2 vehicles to recharge, has now gone live at Church Street car park in Gateshead.

4.2 Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Fund – Progress continues on the LEVI funding application process with work beginning on putting together a draft call off agreement.

5. Private transport: travelling by car and using road infrastructure

5.1 Tyne Tunnels Update

Road Tunnel – In November 2023 there were 1.639 million vehicle journeys through the Tyne Tunnels, which is a year-on-year increase of circa 62,000 journeys from 1.577 million in the same month in 2022, reflecting the continued growth in traffic using the tunnels. At the same time, non-compliance, which is a measure of the number of customers who failed to pay when payment was due, continues to remain below target (3%), demonstrating that the vast majority of users are able to make payment within the payment window.

At their meeting on 18 January, the Tyne & Wear Sub-Committee approved an increase to the Tyne Tunnels tolls of 20p for Class 2 vehicles (from £2.20 to £2.40) and 40p for Class 3 vehicles (from £4.40 to £4.80). This will take effect from 1 May 2024, subject to the Secretary of State making the relevant order in accordance with legislation. The increase in tolls is required to maintain a “self-funded” balance on the Tyne Tunnels Account and keep pace with the Shadow Toll payable to the operator (TT2 Limited) under the concession agreement, which has been contractually triggered by movements in rates of inflation over the last year.

Pedestrian and Cyclist Tunnel – The Pedestrian & Cyclist Tunnel continues to be open 24/7 and work on the bespoke inclined lifts is progressing well, with the work now in the final stages of testing and certification. Once certified, the inclined lifts will enter a ‘bedding-in period’ during which they will be open to the public and their performance under sustained use will be monitored. It is anticipated that the inclined lifts will need to be taken out of service at points during this period for maintenance.

5.2 Tyne Bridge Restoration Works – Lane closures on the Tyne Bridge began on Monday 29 January to allow for pre-enablement works to begin, the restrictions are in place to protect the public and workers as unloading takes place and scaffolding is erected. Traffic across the bridge will be reduced to one lane in each direction from 9:30am till 3:30pm, Mondays to Fridays until 1 March.

Previous to this work, alternative nesting provision for kittiwakes was erected for when the kittiwakes return for their breeding season later this year.

The DfT have now released the £35.2m in funding they have allocated for the project, so further stages of works will be able to begin following the completion of this phase.

6. Transport Usage Trends

6.1 Most recent Metro passenger numbers were estimated to be 92% of corresponding 2022 levels. Bus passenger numbers in December were estimated to be around 99% of December 2022 levels. At a range of sites across the region, traffic volumes were around 6% up on December 2022 levels, whereas cycling was around 35% down in December on November 2023 levels. There were 3 named storms in December, which may have influenced figures.

7. Reasons for the Proposals

7.1 This report is for information purposes.

8. Alternative Options Available

8.1 Not applicable to this report.

9. Next Steps and Timetable for Implementation

9.1 Next steps are set out under the respective items, where applicable.

10. Potential Impact on Objectives

10.1 Successful delivery of the various transport schemes and investment proposals outlined in this document will assist the JTC in delivering its objective to maximise the region's opportunities and economic potential.

11. Financial and Other Resources Implications

11.1 The report provides an update and overview of progress against the seven Delivery Plan categories in implementing the objectives of the North East Transport Plan and achieving the vision of 'moving to a green, healthy, dynamic and thriving north-east.'

11.2 The North East Transport Plan includes proposed / required investment totalling £7 billion to achieve the aims and ambitions of the JTC, the majority of which is dependent on future funding decisions by central government. The financial and other resource implications aligned to the plan were agreed as part of the Transport Budget and Levies 2021/22 report to the JTC on 19 January 2021 and in subsequent reports to augment and amend the budget as appropriate.

12. Legal Implications

12.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

13. Key Risks

13.1 Appropriate risk management arrangements are in place for each programme of work overseen by the delivery agencies responsible.

14. Equality and Diversity

14.1 Successful delivery of schemes to improve public transport, walking and cycling will help to address transport-related social exclusion.

15. Crime and Disorder

15.1 There are no specific crime and disorder implications associated with this report.

16. Consultation/Engagement

16.1 Many of the schemes and proposals outlined in this report have been, or will be, the subject of engagement with appropriate stakeholders or the wider public.

17. Other Impact of the Proposals

17.1 No specific impacts.

18. Appendices

18.1 None.

19. Background Papers

19.1 None.

20. Contact Officers

20.1 Tobyn Hughes, Managing Director, Transport North East

Tobyn.hughes@transportnortheast.org.uk

21. Sign off

- 21.1
- The Proper Officer for Transport:
 - Head of Paid Service:
 - Monitoring Officer:
 - Chief Finance Officer:

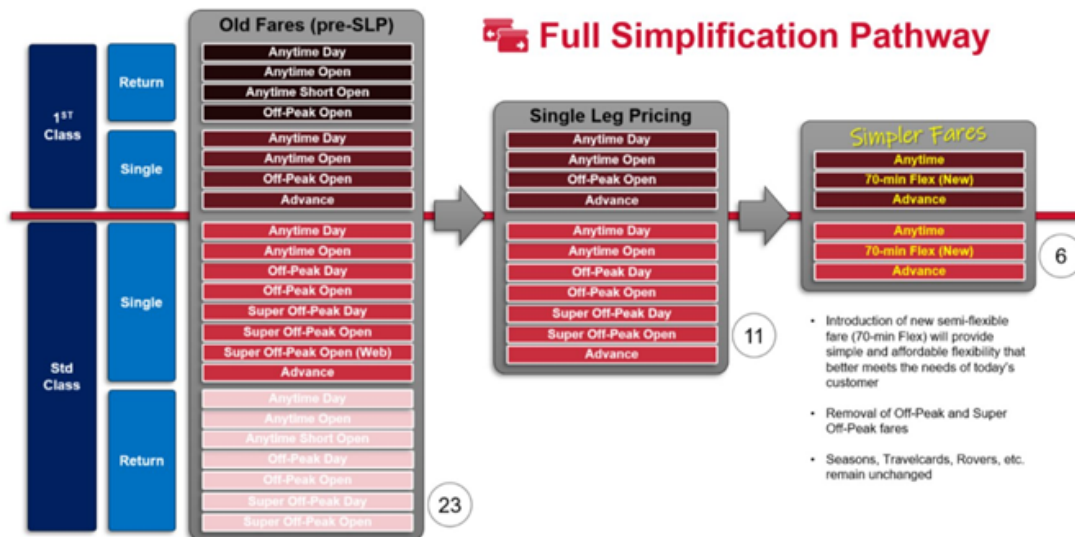
22. Glossary

22.1 All abbreviations or acronyms are spelled out in the report.

Appendix 1: Durham Bus Station



Appendix 2 – LNER Ticket Pilot Simplification Pathway



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