

# Proposed reductions to bus service subsidy

August 2013

North Yorkshire County Council is already committed to saving £92m over the four years ending on 31 March, 2015. Following recent announcements by the Government over future funding it now needs to find a further estimated £66m between 2015 and 2019.

Members of the Council have agreed to start a number of public consultations on our proposals for saving this money. Earlier this year the Council did some general consultation to gauge public support for reducing expenditure in particular areas. Reduced spending on concessionary fares and public transport were ranked high at that time. Whilst the Council is still committed to investing in public transport we have to look at reducing the amount of money we spend to support bus services in the county by £1.1m. However, no decision to withdraw bus subsidies will be taken without careful consideration of the results of this consultation exercise. This consultation document sets out our proposals to achieve this reduction and includes:

1. background information about bus services in North Yorkshire
2. information about the equalities impact assessment (EIA)
3. information about the bus service changes we are proposing
4. proposed timescales and how you can find out more about the proposals
5. glossary of terms
6. a consultation questionnaire to complete.

This consultation paper does not include any arrangements for the future review of Post 16 Transport arrangements, as agreed by the County Council in July. That review will take place in due course.

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## **1. Background information about bus services in North Yorkshire**

### **Local Bus Services**

80% of the bus services in North Yorkshire are provided by private bus companies on a commercial basis because they are profitable. They are free to decide which routes they run, what fares they charge, how frequent the service is and when and how it is changed. The Council has no responsibility for these services. Changes to these services, including the withdrawal of the whole service, can be made by giving 56 days' notice to the Traffic Commissioner and there is no requirement to consult with users or the Council.

Under the Transport Act 1985, the Council has a duty to: "secure the provision of such public passenger transport services as the Council considers it appropriate to meet any public transport requirements within the county which would not, in their view, be met apart from any action taken by them for that purpose." This means we have to identify public transport requirements which would not otherwise be met and then provide what is needed. The Council is entitled to take account of the funding available when deciding what is needed and where

At present we spend £4.4m a year on subsidising the 20% of bus journeys which are not commercially viable. They are provided by private bus companies and are referred to as subsidised services because the Council pays the difference between the cost of providing the service, the fares paid by passengers and reimbursement for concessionary fares paid by the Council. We use competitive tendering to get the best price for these services. We also work with the Community and Voluntary sectors to enable them to provide alternative services such as car schemes and Dial a Ride services.

In 2012/13, 3.3m passenger journeys were made on our subsidised services – the average subsidy per passenger journey is £1.35. In most cases the services subsidised by the Council are the only ones available to the communities they serve.

The Council also pays the cost of concessionary bus passes. It is expected that this will cost us £8.7m in 2013/14. This is a statutory scheme which cannot be changed by the Council.

In 2000 we produced a bus strategy which explains how and when we would consider providing funding for bus services. This was reviewed as part of developing our Local Transport Plan in 2011. The Bus Strategy gives priority to providing journeys to work, education, health and shopping and personal

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business. As part of this consultation exercise we are proposing to update our bus strategy.

The Council ensures that information about public transport services is available by encouraging operators to meet agreed standards for leaflets and roadside displays providing data for the national Traveline Service. We provide timetable information on our website and a “timetables by post” service for those who don’t have access to the internet.

In a survey earlier this year we found that 72% of people felt very or fairly well informed about bus information.

### School Transport Services

We are not proposing any changes which will affect pupils entitled to free home to school transport under the Council’s current Home to School Transport Policy.

In 2011 the Council agreed that we should review all subsidised home to school transport provision to ensure greater fairness and equality in provision. We are now proposing changes to the schools transport network which caters for fare paying school children who are either going to their normal school but live under the statutory distance or are going to a preferred school. As part of this proposal we will assess the overall impact on the Council’s funding and the continued viability of schools and this will form part of our final report in January 2014.

## **2. Information about the equalities impact assessment**

An equalities impact assessment was included as part of the report that was considered by The County Council at its meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> July. This document will be updated in light of comments received through the consultation process.

## **3. Information about the bus service changes we are proposing**

Our overall strategy is to ensure that as many communities as possible continue to have access to a public or community transport service and that these services give value for money. Our first priority is to provide services which meet the day-to-day transport needs of local communities. Subject to the outcome of the consultation the following proposals will become policy which will be reflected in our Bus Strategy. The following table describes our proposals in general terms. An information pack is available for each District Council area which gives details of how individual services would be affected.

LOCAL BUS SERVICES	
What we will do to reduce our costs	What we will do to lessen the impact
<b>POOR PERFORMANCE</b>	
<p>Withdraw the subsidy from contracted services which are not well used. These will be journeys where there are three or fewer passengers and/or the subsidy per passenger journey is more than £6 based on the costs and passenger journeys.</p> <p>Please note that different criteria will be applied to services which operate school days only.</p> <p><b>Indicative saving £156k</b></p>	<p>It may be possible to improve performance and retain services if volunteer drivers are available.</p>
<b>FREQUENCY</b>	
<p>Not provide contract services of more than one journey every two hours; reduce the number of journeys provided to better reflect local demand and the availability of alternative journey opportunities.</p> <p><b>Indicative saving £794k</b></p>	<p>Where the frequency of a service is to be reduced, we will give priority to journey-to-work trips and aim to make sure that we keep the best used journeys. If necessary we will increase the size of the vehicle to make sure that in normal circumstances, we can accommodate the number of passengers wishing to travel. In some cases additional journeys may be provided commercially.</p>
<b>TOWN SERVICES</b>	
<p>Withdraw the subsidy for “town services” in urban areas.</p> <p><b>Indicative saving £386k</b></p>	<p>In some cases “town services” may be retained on a commercial basis by operators.</p> <p>The Council may also be able to continue to provide services using funding from local developments, for example construction of new supermarkets or large housing projects.</p> <p>Where commercial services or services subsidised by contributions are not viable or available, we will introduce Dial a Ride Services at least three days each week. These services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• will only be available to registered users – there is no registration charge;</li> <li>• must be pre-booked. Block bookings will be accepted;</li> <li>• can provide a door-to-door service for passengers with mobility difficulty; and</li> <li>• all passengers will be charged a fare, however, this will be discounted to £1 per journey for concessionary pass holders.</li> </ul>

SCHOOL TRANSPORT SERVICES	
None of these proposals will affect pupils who are eligible for free transport under the Council's Home to School Transport Policy.	
What we will do to reduce our costs	What we will do to lessen the impact
<p>Review the network of services for pupils who are <b>not</b> entitled to assistance under the Council's Home to School Transport Policy and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not provide services which take pupils to a school which is not the normal school for their home address (a preferred school).</li> <li>• Not provide services for non-entitled fare paying pupils to the normal school where the subsidy per passenger journey is more than £1.50.</li> <li>• Where we are able to provide fare paying services to a school the minimum fare will be £1 per journey.</li> </ul> <p>NOTE : There are a range of different circumstances which are encompassed by the proposals for school transport services. If you currently pay for home to school transport then it is likely that you will be affected by this proposal.</p> <p>If this proposal is implemented we will only provide enough seats for pupils who have an entitlement under our home to school transport policy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Indicative saving £400k</b></li> </ul>	<p>Where we propose to withdraw services to a preferred school or a normal school we will provide passenger information to bus operators who may decide to provide additional capacity on a commercial basis to cater for this demand.</p>

#### 4. Proposed Timescales and how you can find out more about the proposals

Consultation period	9 August 2013 – 25th November 2013
Report to Area Committees	At meetings in August, September and October – details available from our website.
Report to Scrutiny Committee	At a meeting on 19th December 2013
Report to The Executive	7 <sup>th</sup> January 2014. This will report the comments received, agree what changes will be made and a timescale for implementation.

Proposed implementation of Local Bus changes subject to outcome of the consultation & EIA	From 7 <sup>th</sup> April 2014
Proposed implementation of the school transport changes subject to outcome of the consultation & EIA	From 1 <sup>st</sup> September 2014

You can get more information by phoning 08458 727374 or emailing  
[Passenger.transport@northyorks.gov.uk](mailto:Passenger.transport@northyorks.gov.uk)

The following additional information is available via the links on our website or by contacting our Customer Service Centre on the above number:

- An online questionnaire; if you have printed a printed version of this consultation a copy of the questionnaire should be included along with a return envelope.
- A list of all local bus services subsidised by the Council showing which services are affected by our proposals and those which aren't. You can also contact us about specific services if you are not sure and we will advise you if they are affected.
- Local bus service information packs based on district/borough Council areas. This includes a current timetable for each service affected by our proposals and our proposed new timetable, where appropriate.
- A list of school transport services that are affected by our proposals
- A list of current contracts and details of the services which are provided as part of each contract. This includes their annual value and the latest passenger usage figures from our contractors.

**Please now give us your feedback on these proposals by filling in our questionnaire online via this [link](#).**



## 5. Glossary of Terms

Commercial Bus Service	A service that is provided by a bus operator purely at their own discretion for profit
Subsidised Bus Service	A service that is provided by a bus operator at the request of the Council and funded by the Council
Subsidy per passenger journey	The cost to the Council of providing a subsidised service divided by the number of passenger journeys.
Concessionary Bus Pass	A free bus pass issued to those over 60 years of age or with a disability for use on “off Peak” local bus services
Bus Strategy	A document produced by the Council to set out its policy relating to local bus service provision in the county
Town Service	A bus service provided mainly in the urban service centres/market towns
Traveline	A internet based public transport information facility
Timetables by post	A timetable information service provided by the Council which individuals can sign up to who do not have internet access.
Low Usage	A service that has less than 3 passengers per journey using it
Reduced Frequency	The service is going to run every 2 hours rather than the current hourly service
Dial a Ride	A scheme where passengers can ring and register to use the service and then book and pay each time they use it
School Transport Service	A service provided for school children who are entitled under the Council’s Home to School Transport Policy.
Preferred School	A school that is not the normal school for the pupils home address
Normal School	As school that is the normal school for the pupils home address
Equalities Impact Assessment	A document that is produced by the Council to consider the needs of different people in the community and to consider how best to meet those needs.