

Date: 28 March 2023**Report: YDNPA PUBLIC TRANSPORT STATEMENT****Purpose of the report**

1. To agree an Authority statement on public transport for the National Park Authority.

RECOMMENDATION

2. That the Authority agrees the draft statement in the Annex as the Authority's broad position on public transport.

Strategic Planning Framework

3. The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework.

Background

4. The National Park Authority is not the body responsible for public transport, and has no statutory powers or resources to determine the level of provision. Nonetheless the Authority's purposes and objectives do mean we have an interest and a voice in the matter. Consequently, we should seek to set out our own position with a view to influencing those who do have the relevant powers/resources.
5. Public transport has an important part to play and in enabling visitors to access the National Park, and move around within it, with minimal damage to its beauty, wildlife, cultural heritage, and the climate. As part of our socio economic duty we can then play a role in encouraging the relevant bodies to improve public transport to enable residents to access the jobs and services they need.
6. Responsibility for public transport within the National Park rests with Local Transport Authorities (LTAs). These are Westmorland and Furness, Lancashire, and North Yorkshire councils. All LTAs are required to publish statutory Local Transport Plans (LTPs), for maintaining and improving all aspects of local transport over a five-year period. In addition, Members will be aware that under Section 62 of the Environment Act, these Local Authorities have a statutory duty

to 'have regard to the purposes for which National Parks are designated' when undertaking their own functions.

7. Of course the National Park receives a considerable numbers of visitors from beyond the boundaries of the three Local Transport Authorities and these visitors are covered by a myriad of transport authorities and private sector providers. Influencing these bodies is important but considerably more difficult.

The current transport situation

8. The car is currently the dominant mode of transport of both residents and visitors to the National Park. It is estimated that the National Park hosts around 5 million visitors per year. The latest visitor survey reported that 82% of respondents had travelled by private car, 4% by public bus or coach, and 2% by train. However, the proportion travelling to the National Park by private car has been falling steadily since 2008 (90% at that time travelled by private car). The National Park has a relatively small (23,500), dispersed population and people often have to travel long distances to access services and facilities. It is estimated that over 80% of households in the National Park own one or more cars, higher than the national average.
9. Car travel is a significant contributor to the overall greenhouse gas emissions footprint of the National Park with emissions from visitors travelling to the National Park accounting for 25% of total annual emissions. Although these emissions are likely to continue to fall over the coming years, particularly as we move to an outright ban on petrol and diesel vehicles from 2030, the impact on the climate is a real and present issue.
10. This objective may be a common one among other local authorities. For example, York & North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership's January 2023 "Route Map to Carbon Negative" details the ambition to reduce private car usage (by 48% by 2030) and increase the use of buses and trains. The Route Map, which was adopted by the National Park Authority in September 2022, aims to develop 'a sustainable transport system to enable the tourism industry in York and North Yorkshire to decarbonise and to improve active travel infrastructure and promote the region as a hiking, cycling and running destination.'
11. Cars can also cause traffic congestion issues, particularly at 'hotspots' at summer weekends and bank holidays, undermining the special qualities of the area, and people's enjoyment of them.
12. Public transport currently provides a basic level of coverage across many areas of the National Park, but services are generally poorly integrated, and severely limited in terms of frequency and capacity in many areas, and do not effectively meet the needs of either visitors or residents. For example, the Leeds-Settle-Carlisle railway line is generally regarded as one of the most scenic lines in the UK. However, the line fails to fulfil its potential for communities or tourism due to the lack of bus connectivity to and from the intermediate stations along the line. Northallerton station on the East Coast Main Line is only linked with the National Park on Sundays and Bank Holidays.

13. Bus services in the National Park are limited and fragmented. Significant funding reductions by transport authorities locally and over the whole of the UK over the past ten years have resulted in a much depleted network. Volunteer-run community organisations try to cover gaps but their funding is limited and insecure. Many services only operate off-peak on Mondays to Fridays. North Yorkshire Council currently does not support services operating primarily for leisure or tourism or for those operating on a Sunday or during the evenings. Several popular visitor destinations in the National Park are not served every weekday even during high summer. There is no direct daily public transport running along Wensleydale between the main market towns of Northallerton, Leyburn and Hawes. The Westmorland Dales has no regular bus services despite Kirkby Stephen station being a potential rural transport hub.

14. For those without access to public transport, difficulties arise for residents getting to work or school, or to other services; and for potential visitors in reaching and returning from the National Park. Many of those who might benefit the most from the health and wellbeing opportunities provided by the National Park are currently excluded from them; this is an issue of inequality of access. For residents there is a risk of transport related social exclusion.

Conclusion

15. Setting out an Authority statement on public transport could be beneficial in discussions and potential future partnership working with those bodies that have responsibility for public transport within the National Park - the new North Yorkshire and Westmorland & Furness Unitaries and Lancaster City Council. It could also assist in lobbying for improved public transport to the Park, but this will be much more difficult. Such a statement will certainly be helpful as the Authority and its partners set out their objectives for the area in the next Management Plan (2025-2030).

David Butterworth

Chief Executive

11 March 2023

Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority statement on Public Transport

The purposes of the National Park Authority are:

- **to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park;**
- **to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public.**

In pursuing these purposes, the Authority has a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities.

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Management Plan (NPMP) is the overarching strategy for delivering the purposes and the duty. The NPMP is prepared by a Steering Group of public, private and voluntary sector organisations, and representatives of local businesses. The 2019-24 Plan sets out a shared 40-year vision, which includes ambitions that the National Park should be:

Home to strong, self-reliant and balanced communities with good access to the services they need.

A friendly, open and welcoming place with outstanding opportunities to enjoy its special qualities.

Resilient and responsive to the impact of climate change, storing more carbon each year than it produces.

We want to see:

1. An acceleration of the reduction in use of carbon-emitting vehicles by visitors to, and residents of, the National Park.
2. A rail and bus network that provides a viable alternative to the private car for visitors and residents alike, and for all who do not have access to a car. Such a network needs to be attractive in terms of route network, accessibility, hours of operation, frequency, capacity and fare levels.
3. Increased use of rail travel, particularly by visitors. The Leeds-Settle-Carlisle and Bentham railway lines should form the backbone of the public transport network in the west of the National Park, with appropriate integrated bus and demand responsive transport, including to/from the intermediate stations, with through ticketing. More evenly spaced train services and an increased capacity for cycles is desirable. Bus services should also provide links from/to other key railheads near the National Park.
4. A significant increase in bus service coverage and frequency. This should be based on the population level of rural settlements.

5. All key visitor destinations in the National Park, for example Bolton Abbey and Malham, accessible by public transport seven days a week.
6. Provision of Sunday services. It is inconsistent with the objective of promoting the area as a tourism/well-being destination to not provide bus services on a weekend or for leisure purposes.
7. Improved coordination between bus and rail operators to enable synchronised bus and train timetables and integrated ticketing.
8. Development of a demand responsive approach to transport provision for more remote parts of the National Park, using, e.g., pre-bookable shared taxis.
9. Improved coordination between the LTAs. Given that the National Park straddles three LTAs, with many visitors travelling from at least three more LTAs, issues of cross border coordination and integration arise.
10. Widespread promotion of public transport use for visitors and residents.

We will:

1. Use the National Park Management Plan process to consider the case for convening and facilitating partners to deliver a sustainable transport framework for the National Park, including reducing carbon emitting vehicles and the use and promotion of public transport.
2. Use our Members who are appointed to the Authority from North Yorkshire, Westmorland and Furness, and Lancashire County Council to influence those bodies in the provision of improved public transport.
3. Liaise with partners to promote the delivery of the elements outlined above, for example in providing input to the development of Local Transport Plans.
4. Use the Local Plan process to support development that would facilitate the utilisation of public transport and the development of other aspects of sustainable transport and active travel.
5. Through our work programme review, determine the priority given to our own public transport work. This is currently 'limited'.
6. Promote the use of public transport in and to the National Park through the relevant work programmes. We will work with others to ensure that accurate and up-to-date information on public transport is available on our website.