

# Proposed Bus Service Improvements in Hambleton & Richmondshire - RESPONSE TO NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, August 2021

## SUMMARY

**This response document has been prepared on behalf of HARBUS, the bus user forum for Hambleton and Richmondshire.<sup>1</sup> HARBUS operates in tandem with the Rural Transport & Access Partnership (RTAP) for the same area, involving the voluntary sector, public authorities, health agencies, service users, transport providers and community representatives. RTAP and HARBUS have made submissions to the North Yorkshire Rural Commission and to the Future of Transport: Rural Strategy, which can be viewed here [Partnerships & Networks – Hambleton Community Action](#)<sup>2</sup>**

In this document, we describe what we believe is required in our area to achieve the National Bus Strategy's aim to transform bus services with an improved core network of bus routes, higher frequencies, minimum standards on all routes, simpler fares and new buses.

The core network should have an hourly service during the day, and a reduced service on some evenings and on Sundays. These improvements will be essential to tackle the climate emergency, by providing an alternative to car use for journeys. These will also improve the lives and opportunities of many other people who cannot always access a car for their journeys. Anything less would be insufficient to tempt people back to using buses, and to generate the demand to make services sustainable in the future. Merely tinkering with current service levels will not achieve the objectives of the Strategy.

## INTRODUCTION

The Government's recently announced Bus Back Better Strategy aims to transform bus services across the country with simpler fares, thousands of new buses, improved routes and higher frequencies.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said: *"We want everyone across this country to have the transport services they need to improve their lives and opportunities – to do that, we must invest in the here and now. Through today's buses funding we'll be bringing about a transformation in bus services to every community."*

North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) has now signalled its intention to enter into an Enhanced Partnership with bus operators to deliver the strategy and is required to submit a Bus Service Improvement Plan to the Department for Transport by the end of October.

This is a significant opportunity to reverse the recent cycle of decline of local bus services in Hambleton and Richmondshire, and to help achieve the required modal shift away from

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<sup>1</sup> HARBUS meets on the 4<sup>th</sup> Monday of each month, alternating start time 10am and 6:30pm

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<sup>2</sup> <https://hambletoncommunityaction.org/groupsupport/partnershipsandnetworks/>

private cars that is needed to tackle the climate emergency, and generate many other economic, social and environmental benefits for the area.

Whilst we understand NYCC's concerns that service improvements should be sustainable, it is important to recognise the thrust of the Government's Bus Strategy *"to dramatically improve bus services"* and to set out *"a vision for delivering the step-change in bus services that are required by the Strategy"*.

Proposals therefore need to be bold and imaginative to make the required step change to encourage people to use bus services and reduce the impact of traffic on the environment. The Council needs to support behavioural change to create a more sustainable transport system, leading to net-zero emissions. People need to be **encouraged** to use bus services: more people using the services should increase their viability and reduce the need for public subsidy. Proposals need to be equitable, so that everyone has access to a basic level of service at a time when they need it.

To address concerns about sustainability of services, consideration should be given to building support in local communities for the services, similar to the successful Community Rail Partnerships on the railways (e.g. The Esk Valley Community Rail Partnership for the Middlesbrough-Whitby route).

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. Stability and continuity of the network is most important, as people may build their lives around it. Improved services will require many months of operation before people adjust their lives to them.
2. Public transport needs to offer a sizeable proportion of the population a reasonable service, otherwise people will resort to private transport, believing (not unreasonably), that there is no alternative open to them.
3. If connections between services are not provided (or do not work) people are unlikely to use the services.
4. The needs and concerns of the people who live, work and visit an area should be the driving force behind transport planning and bus service delivery, to achieve value for money, reduced air pollution and other environmental benefits. **Co-design, rather than response consultation, should be the default mechanism for achieving this.**
5. The Council should, therefore, be obliged to assess existing data on traffic flows to guide transport provision, and to improve liaison with local community organisations to understand local needs.
6. There is no human right to transport, but an effective improvement plan will recognise that transport is fundamental to enabling people to access other rights enshrined in domestic and international law - for example, the right to work, to education, to leisure, to family life, to health.
7. In the longer term, closer working is required between the Council and Health Authorities in order to achieve benefits arising from integration of transport services.

## BUS ROUTES

8. A core network approach is required across the county, with connections advertised and maintained in the main centres of population/market towns, and at local railway stations with train services.
9. The following routes should comprise the core network for the Hambleton and Richmondshire districts, linking the market towns, railway stations, hospitals and other key locations such as Catterick Garrison<sup>3</sup>:
  - Northallerton - Darlington & rail station (direct service)
  - Northallerton - Middlesbrough (via Friarage & James Cook Hospitals), possibly integrated with hospital transport. This should interchange with rail services in Northallerton, and perhaps continue to Thirsk to link with the bus service to York. If the operational difficulties of long routes can be addressed, a Hambleton Spine Service could be created, linking Middlesbrough, James Cook, Stokesley, Northallerton + rail station, Thirsk Station, Thirsk, Easingwold and York
  - Northallerton - Stokesley (if not included in Middlesbrough route above)
  - Northallerton - York via Thirsk & Easingwold (if not included in Spine Service above)
  - Northallerton - Ripon via Thirsk & station (connecting with 36 service to Harrogate & Leeds)
  - Northallerton - Richmond (via Princes Gate Catterick [ex 54 route], via Brompton on Swale [route 55] and via Scotch Corner new retail park)
  - Northallerton - Hawes along the A684 via Bedale and Leyburn (as currently operated on Sundays by route 856). The existing Little White Bus (LWB) capacity could be reallocated to part-scheduled part-DRT coverage to link into this core route. The service could possibly revert to the historic pattern of 2-hourly on the A684 and 2-hourly via Askrigg/Carperby
  - Northallerton - Masham via Bedale
  - Catterick Garrison - Darlington via Richmond; a direct express service to Darlington Railway Station should be considered
  - Richmond - Ripon via Leyburn and Masham (route 159)
10. Core routes should have a minimum hourly service throughout the day Monday to Saturday and 2-hourly Sundays, with capacity of at least 25 passengers.
11. Each core route should provide a late evening service on at least some days of the week.
12. The core route network should be supported by a network of local services, which may in some cases be provided on a demand responsive basis.
13. Town services within Northallerton, Thirsk and Richmond need to operate frequently throughout the working day from 7am to 7pm, with interchange at the local railway stations (Thirsk and Northallerton). Minimum hourly services should be provided

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix for schematic of proposed core network including connections to other forms of transport

during the evening and on Sundays. They need to be expanded to all the areas of housing, business, retail and industrial development.

14. Other local services should provide as a minimum:

- a daily journey to work service towards an employment centre in the morning peak, and a return journey in the evening peak
- a daily journey to local shopping and recreational centres in the morning and return later in the day. Ideally these journeys should allow for parents' needs to take and collect children to/from school/nursery

15. Upper Wensleydale requires a regular bus service to Garsdale, to link with train services on the Settle & Carlisle Railway, to provide access to other parts of the Dales and Eden Valley, as well as Leeds (St James's Hospital etc), and onward connections to the south, Leeds and Manchester Airports, Carlisle and connections to Scotland. Alternative rail services at Northallerton are currently too far away to be accessible by public transport.

16. Bus services need to be co-ordinated with adjoining local authorities, and advertised, to allow for longer distance journeys, such as linking the East Coast and North York Moors with the Dales, and westwards to Sedbergh, Kendal, the Lake District and Oxenholme for the West Coast Main Line.

17. A daily service from Thirsk to Helmsley is required to connect with route 128 and other services there. This service could be extended to Northallerton or to Ripon.

18. Additional capacity should be provided on summer weekends to help facilitate increased sustainable tourism into the North York Moors and Yorkshire Dales National Parks, and the Howardian Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This provision should secure and expand the popular DalesBus and Moorsbus networks which are currently dependent on short-term voluntary fundraising, ensuring they are integrated with other services and continue to provide cross-boundary links into the area.

19. The new Hambleton Crematorium to the west of Thirsk needs to be accessible via the public transport network.

20. 'Demand Responsive Transport'(DRT) services may be very useful in some areas, but there is a need for a network of fixed scheduled services which are easily understood and convenient for locals and visitors, bearing in mind that the Dales are a popular tourist destination. Tourists are unlikely to engage with local arrangements for demand responsive services. It is important that scheduled services have sufficient capacity – i.e. higher capacity than 16 for most routes.

21. When DRT services are being considered, these should be in areas which have the environment which best supports DRT, rather than being used as an "option of last resort".

22. In Swaledale and Wensleydale the services need to revert from the volunteer-reliant LWB minibus operation to a 25/30 seat bus that would facilitate increased public transport usage and can meet peaks in demand.
23. Bus service reliability needs to be closely monitored and improved where necessary to allow passengers to make connections, appointments and for employment.

## INFRASTRUCTURE & MARKETING

24. Bus stops, timetables and shelters should be provided at the main stopping points, should be well maintained, and provide clear and up-to-date timetables.
25. Where possible green/living roofs to bus shelters should be created, which could be sown and maintained by the local community (e.g. proposed in Richmondshire).
26. Printed timetable leaflets and area booklets should be freely available for all services to supplement on-line and roadside information.
27. Bus tracking and “real-time” information needs to be available to bus passengers for all services.
28. “Real-time” bus information should be displayed at popular bus stops: a qualifying threshold figure for passenger use needs to be specified. Lower cost battery and solar-powered displays are now available to allow provision in more locations.
29. Phone-based apps need to be able to pick up real-time information on all services: currently location data is not available for NYCC, LWB or Dales & District services.
30. Open architecture hydrogen recharge and electric charging points should be available across the county to facilitate the use of low emissions technologies in public (and other types of) transport, or where no public transport exists.

## FARES & TICKETS

31. The Council should incentivise bus operators to accept multi-operator ticketing and through ticketing with railway services, to make travelling easier, with a view to adopting smart card technology as soon as possible.
32. A simple fare structure (e.g. £2/£4 single or £5 for a day ticket) for whole routes would encourage greater usage.

## VEHICLES

33. All bus services should be operated by vehicles which are fully accessible to passengers with mobility difficulties, shopping trolleys and buggies, to ensure that services can be used by everybody who needs them.
34. Bus operators should be encouraged to explore ultra-low emission conversion technologies that will extend the life of older fossil-fuelled vehicles (e.g. diesel engines adapted to run on hydrogen) as well as electric vehicles, and to consider improving capacity for wheelchairs, buggies and bicycles.

35. Bus operators should be encouraged and incentivised to work collaboratively to avoid duplication of services on some routes.

36. Bus operators should be encouraged to find creative and innovative ways to manage fluctuations in capacity, such as carrying goods or parcels.

**CONTACT:**

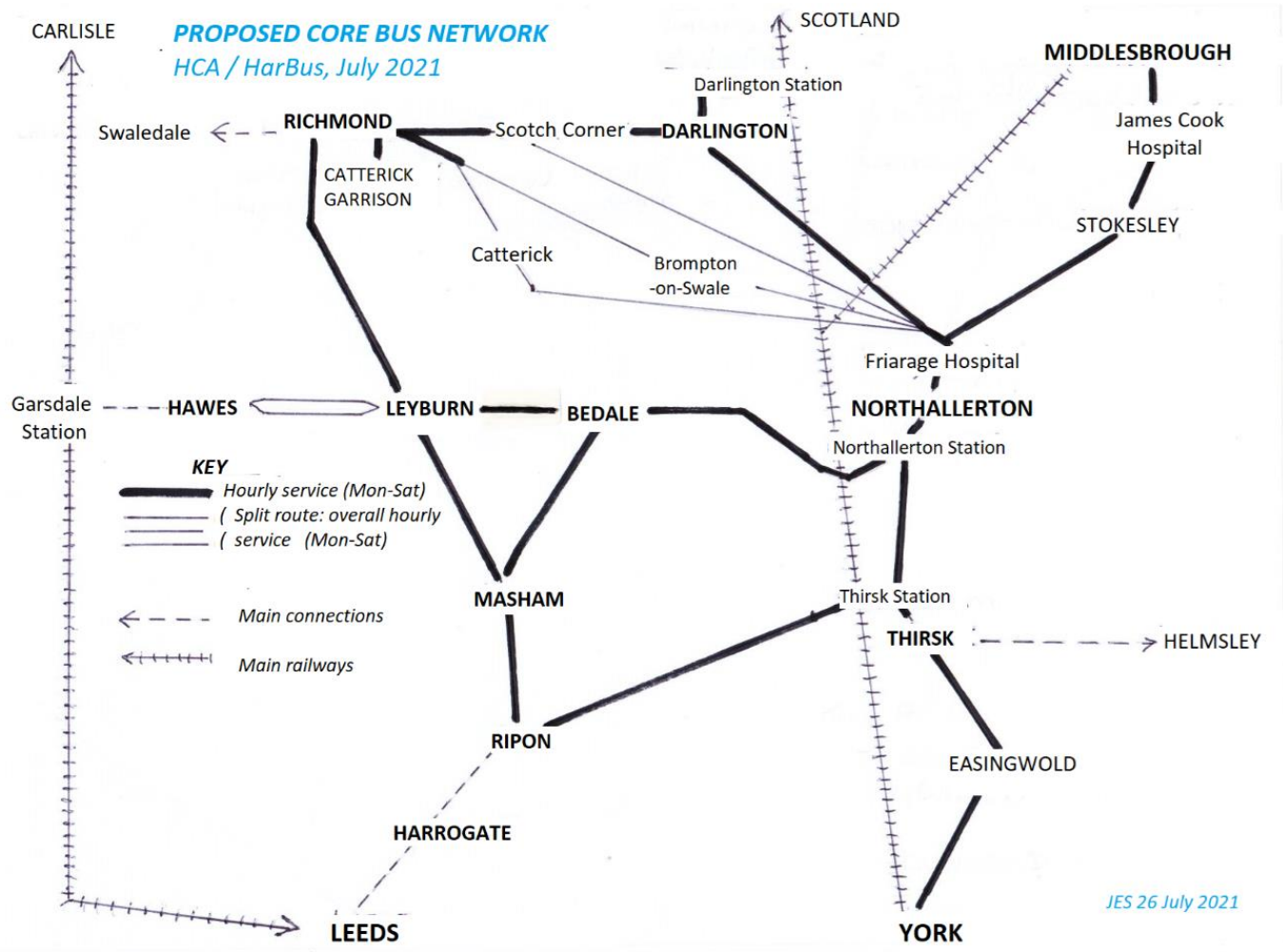
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APPENDIX – schematic of proposed core network<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Artwork kindly provided by J Slaughter