

**Committee: Cabinet**

**Date of meeting: 21 October 2021**

**Title of Report: Cabinet Working Group: Transport in Cumbria**

**Report by: Pete McSweeney, Chair of Cabinet Working Group for Transport in Cumbria**

**Cabinet Member: Keith Little, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport and Cllr Stewart Young, Leader**

## **What is the Report About? (Executive Summary)**

1. Report of the Cabinet Working Group for Transport in Cumbria. The report is based on witness sessions held by the group, national and local policy context, and research.

## **Recommendation of the Executive Director**

2. That members consider the findings and options presented by the Working Group.

## **Background to the Proposals**

3. In March 2021 Cabinet approved the establishment of a cross party Member working group and agreed the Terms of Reference for the group. The establishment of the group evidences the commitment of the Council to ensure places in Cumbria are well connected and thriving and provided a valuable opportunity to draw on knowledge and a range of interested parties, experts and stakeholders
4. Transport plays an important role in removing barriers for communities through tackling social isolation, maintaining well-being and enabling people access to health, education, employment and other key services. Many older people, particularly in the County's rural areas and for those that don't have access to a car, rely on local transport services for health, wellbeing and social connection. Furthermore, car owners who make at least occasional use of public transport thereby reduce their carbon footprint.
5. As a sparsely populated rural county, many communities are a long distance from their nearest key service centres. Many smaller communities have little or no access to bus services which can increase levels of social isolation. In addition, the railway network generally services the outer edges of Cumbria which precludes convenient access for many residents. This is compounded by the fact that the population is ageing more rapidly, and for many people without access to cars, transport provision is limited.
6. Over the last decade central government cuts have resulted in local authorities having to scale back local authority funded transport services and review subsidised bus routes. Rural authorities like Cumbria have been hardest hit.

Commercial bus providers have also faced reductions in Government funding. Opportunities are presented through the National policy direction specifically the National Bus Strategy: Bus Back Better to assess and review bus service provision in Cumbria with the aim to enhance the service available to communities. Similarly, other policies such as the 'Great British Railway' Williams - Shapps plan for rail provide an opportunity to review rail service provision. Urgency has been added by the impact of the 2020-21 Covid pandemic on public transport usage.

## **7. Overview of Findings**

### **7.1.1 Impact of the COVID pandemic**

The impact of the COVID pandemic was covered by witnesses and particularly from commercial providers who indicated that numbers of passengers are increasing as recovery from the nationally enforced lockdowns continues however, passenger numbers are not back to pre-COVID levels and that going forward work needs to continue to attract people back to public transport to ensure that the downward turn does not remain permanent.

### **7.1.2 Barriers:**

Lack of suitable transport options impacts people's access to employment, education and training, health and vital services and is a key driver of rural isolation and loneliness. Suitability of a non-car transport option includes various issues such as the costs of the transport option and timetabling. Local Authorities in rural areas have significantly less money available, students face little to no choice of further education providers and courses due to the poor transport links. Commuting times for employment and accessing services are significantly increased in rural areas impacting also on net zero carbon ambitions.

### **7.1.3 First and last mile:**

The first and last mile, i.e. the beginning and end of a trip using public transport, where it is difficult and or even impossible to access by a short walk is significantly increased in a County such as Cumbria leading to a need to think innovatively and creatively in providing solutions that align with ambitions to reach net zero carbon emissions and to encourage and achieve increased use of active travel, i.e. travelling by walking or cycling.

### **7.1.4 Infrastructure:**

#### **Rail travel**

Infrastructure plays an important role in making using *rail travel* feasible and accessible for many. For example, through adequate parking, cycle lanes approaching stations and storage, car hire (which should align with net zero ambitions so be electric) links to other modes of transport and enabling inclusive travel. Walking routes to bus stops should feel safe and secure.

Positive examples of improvements are evident at some stations such as Arnside where the access road to the southbound platform was resurfaced by Network Rail which enabled wheelchairs and pushchairs to access that platform.

Issues such as not being able to travel South if in a wheelchair without travelling North first to a station where there is wheelchair access to the other side of the platform is clearly a significant barrier to increasing use of public transport in an inclusive way. Poorly designed or located bus stops can impede access to bus services for wheelchair users and other mobility impaired people.

### **Park and Ride**

Park and ride facilities can provide a positive service for both residents and the visitor economy. This is potentially complex to ensure that service provided aligns with local need and takes in to account the additional factors visitors have (e.g. travelling as groups, with kit, children and potentially dogs makes it easier to use own transport and how a local solution can be made attractive is key to success).

### **Bus travel**

Good quality bus stations and provision of bus shelters with up-to-date timetable information help support usage of bus services

#### **7.1.5 Bus services:**

Discussion evidenced the desire to work in partnership to enable positive impact through bus transport, such as connectivity of areas of low employment with areas of high vacancies, collaborating with communities and employers to drive needs led provision of service. Stagecoach indicated that such discussions had begun pre-pandemic. Leadership is potentially required to drive this as a direction of travel in addition to potentially ad hoc initiatives being brought to fruition.

Evidence provided highlighted that commercial providers of bus services included the need for all journeys to be sustainable to be able to continue. I.e., where there is no subsidising of routes through a national, regional, or even county-wide approach. Lobbying of providers to internally subsidise could lead to some services being maintained and providing valuable connectivity for communities.

#### **7.1.6 Integration of modes of transport**

Through ticketing and aligned timetabling of modes of transport is important when looking at a county wide sustainable solutions to transport contributing to the lifting of barriers for rural communities alongside solutions for the first and last mile issue.

National policy direction and in the recently published National plans for rail and Bus Strategy allows for this however, the group are not satisfied as the Bus

Strategy appears to have an over reliance on demand responsive transport which can contribute but will not be the whole solution for rural areas.

### **7.1.7 Leadership**

Throughout the witness sessions a clear theme was the need for leadership and co-ordination to enable joined up, integrated solutions for the whole of Cumbria. Transport for Cumbria cannot be delivered, the issues addressed, or barriers lifted without the co-ordination of commercial providers, community provision, infrastructure improvements and community needs led driven solutions explored.

### **7.1.8 Sustainability**

For any solution to be successful there needs to be a degree of certainty and confidence in its continuance to enable a shift from individuals to use it as a primary source of transport. Therefore, solutions need to have certainty around funding and need to be able to have time to become established.

Evidence presented to the working group included, from two different sources, the experience that when a service has been lost to a community, they will have found alternative means of transport and therefore simply reinstating or providing an alternative is not enough as there is a lack of confidence. From experience of witnesses' time is required to build up this confidence and investment will be required, or a route may be removed before it has the chance to become viable.

Road charging for visitors is a potential source of funding that could be channelled into investment in transport for Cumbria. Another option could be a tourist tax which is globally becoming popular to address issues arising from high levels of tourism seen in places such as Japan, Germany, and Italy.

Road pricing which reflects road usage is also on the horizon as a national policy direction and the impacts and potential for contribution to sustainability of transport provision should be monitored.

#### **Options:**

#### **Option 1: County-wide Transport Strategy**

Consider the usefulness of and develop a County-wide Transport Strategy that includes and addresses the following areas identified through options 2 – 5. (paras 8.1.2 – 8.1.5 inclusive)

#### **Option 2: Integration**

Use the opportunities presented through national strategies and policy direction to consider and develop proposals for the integration of transport modes, to enable a network across the county that ensures public transport is a viable option for journeys. Encompassing multi modal ticketing, timetable alignment community provision, commercial providers, and demand responsive transport.

Taking in to account the reality of a rural context meaning the first and last mile is often much more than one mile.

Taking into consideration the inclusive transport agenda and the drive for active travel to take a key role in the future of transport.

Use the opportunities presented through national strategies and policy direction to drive the integration of modes of transport through multi-modal, multi-journey and area ticketing covering all operators. Better alignment of timetables to enable easy interchange between public transport services of all modes will also be essential.

**Option 3:** Consider the key role physical infrastructure can have in increasing the accessibility of public transport and develop proposals that enable integration of modes of transport for example:

- Station improvements enabling other services to be provided and integrated with rail e.g., buses, car hire and cycling and to ensure stations are inclusive
- Park and ride schemes for residents and for tourism purposes
- Bus Station improvements
- Where issues are identified by local communities, consider making improvements to bus stop access routes. Measures could include improving surfaces on access routes, improved maintenance of vegetation, improved lighting, CCTV and regular cleaning and maintenance of bus shelters. On busy roads, ensure safe pedestrian crossing facilities are available in the vicinity of bus stops.
- Consider providing more bus priority measures where buses are regularly delayed or journey times increased by other road traffic.

**Option 4:** Explore and analyse the appropriateness of road charging as an approach for Cumbria and monitor the impact of national road pricing strategies and how both could contribute to the sustainability of transport provision in Cumbria. It is proposed that this be undertaken through a working group being established to analyse the approach.

**Option 5:** Re-consider the decision that Cumbria County Council will provide scheduled transport solutions due to the negative impact on local providers who provide private hire seven days a week.

## **8. Cumbria Transport and Infrastructure Plan (CTIP) and Local Government Re-organisation (LGR)**

The group acknowledge the opportunities that the development of the CTIP and that LGR both present in ensuring that there is high level strategic ambitions and intent that can drive and provide a framework for localised solutions. In addition to this it is felt that it is crucial that during the upcoming period of transition that strategies such as CTIP are in place to ensure that Cumbria's voice is unified and strong nationally to enable successful influencing and bidding.

This thinking needs to be contributed to the development of the two new organisations to ensure opportunities are not lost.

## 9. Conclusion

The Cabinet Working Group welcomed the opportunity to speak to local providers, commercial transport providers, officers from CCC and those representing the community to enable an evidence base on which to provide considered options for inclusion in this report to ensure the future of transport is sustainable, fit for purpose and accessible.

The options included could contribute to the lifting of barriers such as access to services, employment and education and to all Council Plan priorities, particularly:

- Places in Cumbria are well connected and thriving
- The economy in Cumbria is growing and benefits everyone

## Appendices

Appendix 1 – Cumbria Transport Working Group Report

## Key Facts

**Electoral Division(s):** All

Executive Decision	Key Decision Included in Forward Plan	Exempt from call-in	Exemption agreed by scrutiny chair	Considered by scrutiny, if so detail below	Environmental or sustainability assessment undertaken?	Equality impact assessment undertaken?
Yes	Yes	No	N/A		N/A	N/A

**Approved by the relevant Cabinet Member/s on 30.09.2021**

## Background Papers

None

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