

**Cabinet Working Group
Transport in Cumbria
September 2021**

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Cabinet Working Group: Transport in Cumbria

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

Introduction

1. In March 2021 Cabinet approved the establishment of a cross party Member working group and agreed the Terms of Reference for the group (Appendix 1). 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
2. The following report is based on witness sessions held by the group, national and local policy context, and desk top research.
3. The Membership of the Working Group was as follows
 - Cllr P. McSweeney (Chair)
 - Cllr T. Lywood
 - Cllr A. Markley
 - Cllr R. Liddle
 - Cllr. D Whipp
 - Cllr A Connell
 - Cllr N Hughes
4. Officer Support was provided by:
 - Claire Notman, Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Advisor
5. The following witnesses spoke with the group over four witness sessions throughout June and July hosted via MS Teams.
 - Rob Jones – Stagecoach
 - Matthew Worman – Avanti West Coast
 - Owain Roberts – Northern Railway
 - Lorraine Smyth – Cumbria Action
 - Angela Jones – Cumbria County Council
 - Phil Greenup – Cumbria County Council
 - Kevin McGilloway – Fell Runner
 - Jock Cairns – Western Dales Bus
 - Matthew Sutton – Kirby Lonsdale Coach Hire
 - Austin Shields – Cumbria County Council
 - Dawn McGough – Cumbria County Council
 - Chris Anslow – Lancashire County Council (retired)
6. Key national context includes:
 - National Bus Strategy: Bus Back Better

- Great British Railways: Williams-Shapps plan for rail
- Bus Service Improvement Plans
- Inclusive Transport Strategy
- Active Travel

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. Experience of witnesses' identified that time is required, possibly up to 3 years, 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 Switzerland, 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.

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. Options:

9.1.1 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)

9.1.2 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.

9.1.3 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.

9.1.4 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.

9.1.5 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.

10. Background

11. 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.
12. 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.
13. 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.

14. Summary of witness sessions

The section below summarises the evidence gathered from witnesses under the key lines of enquiry and supplementary questions and issues raised by Members during the evidence sessions.

Witness 1: Rob Jones – Stagecoach

Rob Jones gave the group an overview of the challenging 15 months. Business is now recovering well, and passenger numbers are two thirds of where they were. Concessions are not coming back as strongly and are currently at half the amount compared to two years ago. Across the County usage is circa 20% visitors and 80% locals, although in the heart of the Lakes, this variance is much more in favour of tourists.

It was identified that Stagecoach would be willing to work with other operators to provide an integrated model and that discussions were happening with rail operators for example to maximise opportunities national policy direction is giving in addition to discussions to provide required localised solutions for issues such as connecting areas of unemployment with areas of high vacancy rates.

Witness 2: Matthew Worman – Avanti West Coast

Matthew provided key context in that the franchise is currently – underwritten by DfT under ERMA agreement since the first lockdown which was introduced to stop train companies folding. Avanti are beginning to notice a bounce back in passenger numbers. Currently not accelerating as quickly as would have hoped and it is believed this is attributable to – social distancing (can only sell 40% of capacity¹) and people working from home also having an impact on the London market, though at a local level this impact is being seen much less in Cumbria, given the leisure market.

The network in Cumbria is significant when looking at the current trend for staycations and there are opportunities to work with Cumbria Tourism and with Stagecoach for integrated ticketing and destination marketing. Must give people a reason to travel on rail through promoting destinations.

Witness 3: Owain Roberts – Northern Railway

Northern Trains Ltd operate five different routes in Cumbria Furness line, Cumbria Coast, Lakes Line and Settle and Carlisle route and finally Tyne valley route.

Investment over 2-3 years has meant, station improvements e.g. ticket machines and car parking. Stations have shelters and customer information screens. A lot has been invested however; it is fair to say the future is somewhat uncertain with regards to further investment. The industry has suffered with reduced foot fall. During the first lockdown in March/April 2020 customers numbers fell to less than 10% of what we would expect to carry.

Last month saw passenger numbers come back up to approximately 55% of pre covid times.

Great British Railways provides opportunities and has implications, changes to ticketing for example the single operator ticketing is likely to disappear. There will be opportunities to improve and expand on what is already happening for example using software to show customers how busy their train is likely to be.

Witness 4 Lorraine Smyth – Cumbria Action

Lorraine indicated that there are a lot of positive things happening in Cumbria regarding transport but that it needs to be more joined up and there is a real opportunity to do this now. And articulated a need for a strong vision for Cumbria. Visioning is about taking the blinkers off and thinking big.

Lorraine strongly advocated that communities need to be part of the solution, in shaping and working in partnership for solutions.

Road charging is not the answer, but part of it and what is required is a research piece to analyse the whole picture and the possibilities.

¹ Correct at time of witness session: 29 June 2021

ACT are keen to work with CCC and are keen to do so.

Witness 5: Angela Jones and Witness 6: Phil Greenup – Cumbria County Council

The challenges are well known and recognised including the reality that the first and last mile is much more than a mile in our rural areas.

There is an appetite and support across organisations and providers, but it is a shared challenge and a national challenge – confident we are starting to get suggestions but some investments are needed for evidence base initially and to look ahead to a 10-15 year plan to be sustainable and viable. It is possible but needs time and investment.

The transport and Infrastructure plan will be key for having a co-ordinated plan and vital that public awareness is raised.

CCC do not subsidise but it is important that other funding streams are explored and potentially accessed as appropriate. It is important that there is a strong offer across rural and urban areas.

Witness 7: Kevin McGilloway – Fell Runner and Witness 8: Jock Cairns – Western Dales Bus

There is a need for the community and towns where there is a need to come together and want to do something about the gaps in provision for community solutions to be successful. I.e. ownership.

ENCTS re-imburement is at 58% which is not sufficient for smaller buses as there has not been the additional benefit of an increase in passengers.

Witness 9: Matthew Sutton – Kirby Lonsdale Coach Hire

Once subsidies are removed and services lost people find other ways and it is vital that any provision re-introduced is more attractive than what people are currently doing. E.g. park and ride needs to be cheaper than parking in the towns. It will take time for confidence to grow for any provision being introduced so needs time to grow.

Members discussed the possibility of school buses being used to provide a service also, Matthew highlighted that this is problematic as the service is only feasible on the days that school is on and therefore it is not a sustainable solution across the whole year.

Witness 10: Austin Shields – Cumbria County Council and Witness 11: Dawn McGough – Cumbria County Council

Officers updated the group on the progress and process of the development of the Bus Service Improvement Plan for Cumbria, which is to be published 31 October 2021. Challenges in terms of integrated ticketing as there is currently a disparate picture across the county but will be working with operators as appropriate.

CCC will be working with those representing rural areas, such as RSN also as appropriate in developing further.

Assurance was sought and given to members, regarding the many schemes that will be in place, that there will not be an undermining of existing provision, everything will be intended to complement and not compete, integrate and align to provide the best possible outcomes.

Cumbria does not have the quieter months as previously seen and as such train companies are keen to promote and welcome passengers back post pandemic throughout the year.

There is evidence that train companies are willing and keen to work with bus companies for integrated ticketing options. And there are hopes and aspirations for integrated timetabling although this is more complex and rail would rely on flexibility from bus providers.

Witness 12: Chris Anslow – Senior Transport Manager, Lancashire County Council (retired)

Experience working in Lancashire has led to the realisation that putting on a service does not equate to public using the service. Improvements in transport provision are often met with scepticism regarding the sustainability and longevity of the provision.

Lessons learnt included the priorities of safety, especially on dark nights and the positioning of bus stops in rural areas, looking at how concerns such as this can be alleviated and acting upon, can impact the uptake and usage.

What is needed is an overall objective and vision for the county, a long term strategy that can be implemented incrementally with localised strategy and rural strategy. It involved a lot of work and the consultation involved is sometimes immense.

Physical infrastructure gives people a confidence and sense of permanency that can help with feelings of scepticism as does good integration.

15. Conclusion

15.1.1 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.

15.1.2 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**

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Working Group Terms of Reference

ToR Cabinet working group

March 2021



Terms of Reference for Cabinet Working Group: Transport

a) The Membership of the Working Group will be cross party, comprising of 7 Members:

- (i) A Chair
- (ii) Two representatives from each political party

b) The Working Group will examine and review current passenger transport services in Cumbria, identifying gaps in meeting the needs of local communities and to identify opportunities to enhance local sustainable transport provision.

c) External attendees may be invited to the meeting, such as to present information or offer expert advice. The Working Group will seek views from a wide range of representatives including passenger groups, bus operators, community groups and other interested stakeholders.

d) The Working Group will prepare a report setting out options to enhance local sustainable transport provision for consideration by Cabinet, based on the evidence obtained and evaluated by the Working Group.

e) Meetings are not open to the public, but any report to the Cabinet will be published.

f) Meetings will be arranged by the Working Group and will be held as and when the group determines.

g) The Working Group has no decision-making powers.

h) The Working Group will cease when the review is concluded and no later than the 31st March 2022.

i) The Working Group will be supported by appropriate officers to be identified by the Executive Director for Economy and Infrastructure.