

COUNCIL
18 JULY 2024

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL OVERVIEW

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform and update Members on the Leader's Portfolio since the last meeting of Council. The following are some of the areas of work under the Leader's Portfolio.

Strategic Transport

Bus Service Improvement Plan

2. Working with the bus operators and local authorities through the Enhanced Bus Partnership, Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) has submitted an updated version of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) as required by government. This sets out achievements so far and vision for the future of bus services in the area, focussed on an ambitious five-point delivery plan:
 - (a) A Sustainable network for the future;
 - (b) Bus priority improvements – new infrastructure and digital investment to prioritise bus on core corridors and improve customer experience;
 - (c) Improved fare offer – simpler fares, a new offer for young people and targeted promotions to drive growth;
 - (d) Enhanced customer experience – putting the needs of customers at the heart of service delivery and improving information provision with one brand identity; and
 - (e) Decarbonising the bus fleet – one of the first regions in the UK to have an entirely zero emission local bus fleet.
3. Part of the 2024/25 BSIP funding allocation has been used to launch a fare offer for passengers aged under 22. The offer commenced on 16 June 2024 and means anyone aged under 22 can travel for no more than £1 on single journeys (note it is a capped fare, so no child fares will increase as a result). In addition, a £3 day ticket for the same age range that can be used across services in the Tees Valley has been implemented.
4. The proposal mirrors the offer already in place across the North-East and was an ambition set out in the November 2022 Tees Valley BSIP. Operators will be reimbursed on a 'no better no worse' basis, meaning being a part of the scheme is cost neutral to them. This is the same principle we apply when reimbursing them through the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS). The offer will initially be in place for 12 months from the start date and the budget allocation across this period is £3.5m.

Darlington Station

5. The May Bank Holiday marked a little over a year since the LNER surface car park closed and construction started on the multi-storey car park and station building at Darlington Station. Work is continuing to be delivered on programme and completion of the first section of the building remains on target for September 2024, with final completion and handover to Network Rail / LNER for fit out in February 2025.
6. Linked to the new car park / station building, the Eastern gateway highway works, which will see improvements to Neasham Road, are expected to be delivered following the building completion.
7. On the opposite side of the station, preparatory work on the Western gateway is continuing, with pre-demolition work at an advanced stage. The current target dates are for the remaining two properties to be demolished over the Winter and the improvements to be delivered by Autumn 2025. Final programmes are subject to confirmation on the appointment of a contractor.
8. Alongside the TVCA led works, Network Rail continue to make good progress with their parts of the project. Works to Smithfield Road Bridge are due to complete in September. Installation of the pre-cast platform units has commenced for Platforms 5 and 6. Further works are continuing within the existing station in preparation for the installation of the new footbridge later this year.
9. LNER and TVCA have co-funded the production of a digital model covering all of the works at Darlington Station. Produced by a local business, Core Systems, this has enabled a virtual video to be released showing how the station will look following completion of the project and allows customers to understand in advance how they'll be able to navigate their way through the station.

City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement 2 (2027-2032)

10. Development work continues on the projects identified and agreed by the TVCA Cabinet in January 2024. TVCA is working with all local authorities on the development of the programme and engaging with government on the process for funding release.

Climate Change

11. The last meeting of the Cross-Party Climate Change Working Group was held on 25 April. The group discussed the carbon footprint of the council's catering services, how the council can support our residents to reduce purchase of high carbon intensive products and ensuring we use artificial intelligence safely.

Tees Valley Combined Authority

12. At the Annual General meeting appointments were made to the Boards and Committees and I retained the Transport and Infrastructure portfolio.

External Meetings and Engagement

13. I have attended various meetings and engagements since the previous meeting of Council, some of which are listed below:

- (a) The Installation of the new Chancellor of Teesside University, Baroness Chapman
- (b) Briefings with the borough's MPs
- (c) Meetings of TVCA, including chairing the Transport Committee, and various briefings
- (d) Meetings with other Tees Valley leaders
- (e) The Memorial Service at St. George's Hotel, Teesside Airport, organised by MSG Memorial Association
- (f) Darlington Health and Wellbeing board meeting, and workshops
- (g) Meetings with Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner
- (h) D-Day 80th Anniversary event at St Cuthbert's Church
- (i) Armed Forces Day event, Market Square
- (j) Citizenship Ceremony
- (k) I joined TCPS Association's celebration of the 175th anniversary of the first sod being cut for the Tees Cottage Pumping Station
- (l) Towns Board to discuss Long Term Plan for Towns
- (m) Various meetings of Transport for the North

Councillor Steve Harker
Leader of the Council