

LTP3 Resident Focus Group

June 2010

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Introduction

As part of the LTP3 consultation, one focus group with residents took place in June 2010. The group were recruited via the talkabout citizens' Panel.

In total, five participants attended the group. Each member was offered £15 to cover expenses and to say thank you for attending.

Throughout this report we have included details of the exercises and evidence gathered at each stage of the discussion.

Below are details of each group member for context. Where verbatim comments have been included, we have referred to relevant respondent as follows:

Respondent A: Male, age 57. Lived most of his life in York. Works as an ambulance driver in the city and feels he is extremely observant of the area's roads and transport issues.
(Male, 57, ambulance driver)

Respondent B: Female, age 44, BME. Has lived in York for 8 years and is a lecturer at Askham Bryan college. Has travelled extensively and used many different modes of transportation.
(Female, 44)

Respondent C: Female, age 63. Has lived in York all her life and is the fourth generation in her family to do so. Has had three businesses in York and consequently travelled in and out of the city a great deal. Lives in Naburn.
(Female, 63, rural)

Respondent D: Male, 29. Moved to York in 2000 to start university. Works for the NHS at Clifton Moor.
(Male, 29, outer city worker)

Respondent E: Female, age 25. Has lived in York for 1½ years and works for Aviva. Used to commute from outside of the city but moved centrally as disliked the journey.
(Female, 25, ex-commuter)

Factors affecting respondents' vision

The group were asked if there was anything they felt might affect their vision becoming a reality in 20 years time.

There was a strong consensus that the development of out of town shopping areas and an increase in congestion are the main two factors that will adversely affect the city in the next two decades;

"Building things outside of the city centre will affect it, like Monks Cross, or the Designer Outlet, taking trade way from the city centre, it will spread the city centre out so it's bigger...that will affect it definitely, if it carries on"

(Male, 29, outer city worker)

"I feel that York is a unique place and I feel fortunate living here...but you just walk outside and everywhere you look there's history and I would never want that to be damaged and at the moment maybe we are damaging it with all the vehicles coming into York so maybe something outside York, transport that can bring people in the city so they can enjoy the history of York." (Male, 57, ambulance driver)

The group were unaware that the work on Lendal bridge will eventually include re-laying the flagstones and their concern over the changes to this surface are a good example of their fear that the city is being 'modernised';

"I don't like the tarmac on Lendal though, it looked much nicer, much more in keeping with the city with flagstones. I'm hoping they're going to put them back at some point" (Female, 25, ex-commuter)

Out-of-town shopping centres were also perceived to be taking shoppers away from the town centre and having a detrimental affect on tourism, employment and trade in the city.

The needs of the community

The group was asked; given that York has a relatively high proportion of people with a disability or limiting long term illness and an increasing elderly population and student population, what are the needs of the different population groups (disabled, young people, working people and older people etc.) and how should their respective needs be prioritised?

In order to help respondents to think about the needs of a range of residents, short, fictional profiles of potential residents were read aloud and discussed in turn.

ELDERLY RESIDENT BETTY – Betty is 82 years old. She tries to walk to her local shops three or four times a week to pick up a newspaper and essential groceries. Betty likes to use the bus to travel into the city centre when she can, or a taxi if she has to carry heavy bags. Betty does not own a car and lives alone. If the weather is very bad, Betty prefers to stay at home.

The group agreed that often bus stops are too far from elderly residents homes to allow them to travel this way around York. It was suggested that a collection service, that called at different villages each day, would be a solution. One respondent suggested this already existed in the form of 'York Wheels'. No one else in the group was aware of this service.

One member of the group cited the experience of an elderly lady who she befriended as a volunteer at Age Concern;

"...she always used to walk into town but she said the other day, 'oh, if only there was one of those little buses I could get on at the end of the road', it's too far to walk into town now but there isn't a bus stop near enough"
(Female, 63, rural)

The group acknowledged that York has an aging population and that tackling the needs of older people should be a priority for the Council;

"Younger, fitter people can walk or cycle but these people do need some sort of service too so they are housebound and can get out and socialise and things".
(Male, 57, ambulance driver)

Respondents quoted local press stories, which they perceived to be correct and from the council, which evidenced their view there is an issue with the transport needs of the elderly in York. For example, one group member said The Press highlighted a current issue with free bus passes in York and that these will be restricted in order to maximise the number of paying passengers on buses.

WORKING MOTHER SARAH – Sarah is a mother of a little boy age 3. She lives about half an hour's walk from the city centre and she works near the racecourse. There is a car park at work and Sarah usually drives her son the half-mile to nursery so she can drop him off on the way there. Sarah would like to cycle but isn't sure how safe it is and doesn't want to arrive at work feeling untidy.

Generally, the group empathised with the issues raised in this profile and agreed that parents commuting with children to school and nursery put significant pressure on the roads:

"It's amazing how when the schools are on holiday and the traffic just stops."
(Female, 63, rural)

"I walk to work and I stand up in front of students and sometimes I worry about looking untidy but work have made arrangements for us to freshen up when we get there" (Female, 44)

There was a strong consensus that employers should be responsible for encouraging walking and cycling to work by providing shower facilities - *"...that would make it make it much more viable for people"* (Male, 29, outer city worker)

No member of the group was aware of the proposed town centre cycle hub and shower block by Lendal Bridge.

One member of the group regularly cycles with both a seat and trailer for two children. She admitted that she did not feel it was a safe method of travel and that every journey is made with trepidation - the long term benefits, however, outweigh this;

"I do it because I want to encourage them to cycle" (Female, 63, rural)

When asked what advice they would give somebody like 'Sarah', the group agreed that a personalised travel service would resolve many residents' hesitation at changing their current method of travel.

"If you look at the route that people are on there is nearly always a way to go..."
(Female, 25, ex-commuter)

Drivers in the group did not feel that cyclists carrying children were an issue on the roads but did feel that young people *by themselves* often cycled in a dangerous manner, without lights or helmets and without consideration for other road users.

YOUNG PERSON SAM – Sam is 16 and usually gets a lift from his Mum into the city to see his friends. Sam is really looking forward to his 17th birthday when his parents have promised him driving lessons and he can get his first car.

The group agreed that measures should be introduced to encourage the city's youngest drivers to seek alternative transport where possible. In particular, some

members of the group expressed concern that planning in the city actively promotes driving in 17 to 24 year olds;

"I have a big beef about young people having cars at that age, particularly at the 6th form college where they have this huge car park for students!...They should be the ones encouraged not to use their car." (Female, 63, rural)

"Young people should be encouraged to cycle or walk. They should want to as well, for their own benefit." (Female, 25, ex-commuter)

The group felt that parents and colleges should help to organise car pooling to limit the number of lone student drivers – perceived to be a problem by the majority of the group.

"There is a lot of people who pass their test and have a car and it's just recreational..." (Male, 57, ambulance driver)

Conversely, respondents also empathised with younger people and gave examples of their own children or young people they knew, where driving was unavoidable. A driving licence was also seen as an attribute on a CV;

"If someone either pays for driving lessons, or has someone pay for them and they pass their test and they buy a car legitimately, I don't think you can stop them, it's a freedom you've got...you can't take that away from them I don't think..." (Male, 29, outer city worker)

"A lot of jobs, a driving licence or qualification is something you've got to have" (Male, 57, ambulance driver)

"The job market means that for many young people they have to travel by car as they have to take any job they can..." (Male, 57, ambulance driver)

WHEELCHAIR USER GEORGE – George is 45 and lives outside of the city centre. George uses a wheelchair and usually uses the bus to get around the city. Sometimes there isn't enough room on the bus so George has to wait for the next one.

The group felt they rarely saw wheelchair users on buses but that a similar situation applies to those waiting with prams.

Alternative methods of transport were perceived to be much more appealing to disabled respondents, such as parking with a blue badge, accessible taxis or travelling in a converted car.

Respondents acknowledged that the council needs to ensure public transport is accessible but that, in reality, buses were not suitable. Those that had friends who used a wheelchair agreed that they would *"never consider using"* a bus to get around the city.

"A wheelchair can get onto a bus but I don't think buses cater for wheelchairs very well" (Male, 57, ambulance driver)

"If I was in a wheelchair I'd hope for a more convenient way, a more friendly way of getting around...I'd prefer a car or someone to give me a lift where possible..."
(Male, 29, outer city worker)

Some members of the group suggested that the number of standing passengers on buses should be limited as this is intimidating to residents in wheelchairs at peak times.

"I think people that are planning and are going to spend council money on wheelchair users they should maybe spend a day in a wheelchair...nobody steps aside for them or helps them..." (Male, 57, ambulance driver)

The group agreed that residents with mobility issues should not be expected to change to a more sustainable method of transport if this compromised their comfort.

COMMUTER MEENA – Meena is 41 and lives in rural York. She works just outside the city centre and drives to work every day. Meena gets frustrated with the congestion on the main roads leading into the city as well as how much petrol she has to buy, but doesn't see how else she can get to work without using the car. She would need to get at least two different buses and there aren't any cycle lanes near to her home.

The group recognised the difficulties highlighted in this profile and struggled to think of potential solutions. After general discussion, it was suggested that employers should offer flexitime where possible so staff can avoid congestion.

STUDENT TOBY – Toby is 20. He studies Geography at the university and lives in a shared house near the Barbican. Toby tends to walk to and from the city centre. He does not have a car in York and uses taxis to pick him up from the supermarket with his shopping. Toby would like to cycle more but he's not sure where he can leave a bike in the city and is worried that it might get stolen.

Opinion in the group was divided as to whether there is adequate provision for parking cycles in the city. One respondent mentioned that markets in Parliament Square obstruct cycle parking.

Good examples of cycle provision were given from Europe, for example Amsterdam, particularly systems which provide one large park for bikes near a main station, using a raffle ticket system to check bikes in and out.

Environmental issues

The moderator explained to the group that the LTP3 guidance refers to the need to reduce greenhouse gases and infers reductions of other emissions that contribute to poor air quality. They were asked; what other environmental aspects need to be considered?

The group were generally aware that the environmental impact of transport is an issue that needs to be tackled in York;

"I...can't imagine any other way, without absolutely ruining what's beautiful about York, you have to preserve that above all else, even if we have to ban cars from coming in..." (Male, 57, ambulance driver)

"There are hot spots in York that are over and above the national level of pollutants – Fulford Road, Tadcaster Road, Gillygate – and that's because traffic is at a standstill..." (Female, 63, rural)

The group agreed that fewer traffic lights and an increase in one way streets would enable the movement of traffic on main roads

"If the traffic was moving I think it would be less polluting" (Female, 63, rural)

Respondents felt that only a limited number of residents will change their transport habits where they currently drive;

"People might say they will, but when it comes to taking their child to the doctor or supermarket shopping late at night, I think they'll choose what's convenient for them" (Male, 29, outer city worker)

They felt that improving existing vehicles would be a more effective way of helping to reduce the impact on the environment – electric models, for example.

"People might do something to modify their cars, because they won't give up their cars. People who live in rural areas, they've got to have them..." (Female, 63, rural)

The group disagreed with the moderator's suggestion that buses are an 'environmentally friendly' form of transport and this perception is fuelled by regular sightings of city buses with very few passengers.

"Buses are polluting, particularly if you are stopping behind them in a car with the fan on." (Female, 63, rural)

Busy buses are more likely to be perceived as environmentally helpful;

"...if it's full you know that's 50 or 60 people not going in cars"
(Female, 25, ex-commuter)

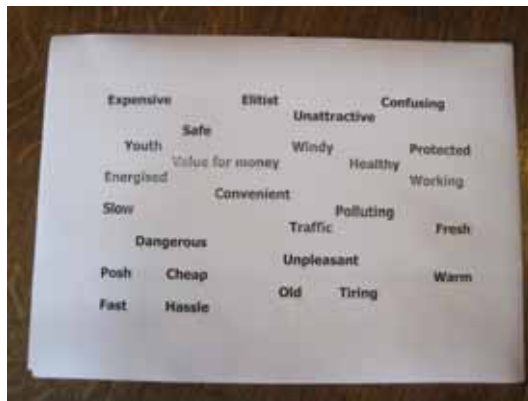
Please see the following section for a more detailed analysis of respondents' views on buses.

Using alternative forms of transport

Two exercises were used to help respondents think about using alternative or more sustainable forms of transport in the city.

Initially, the group were given a number of adjectives and asked to specify if they associated them with a range of transport methods.

Following this, participants were asked to show what forms of transport they usually use for different types of journeys, using post it notes arranged on a large sheet.



The following analysis combines these two exercises. Specifically, respondents were asked; what forms of transport, other than the private car, do you think you could use more, what measures could be put in place for you to use them more and how likely would you be to use them if the measures were put into place?

Travel by bus

Overall, respondents had a poor perception of buses in the city and felt that their views also reflected those of friends and family. All participants either currently use buses or have some experience of travelling on buses in York in the past.

Initially, the group discussed the physical impact of buses on the city, agreeing they are 'too big'; for example, at the top of Blossom Street turning left onto Queen Street where they are forced to use both lanes.

Respondents described York's buses in terms of an intrusion, incongruous to the city or like an animal "...snaking through the middle of York...".

Cost of tickets was a clear issue to the group who felt that the prices of First bus tickets did not reflect value for money. Comparisons to other cities were made, for example in Cambridge, described as a 'bigger city, with better buses and cheaper'.

The group agreed with one respondent who felt that ticket prices have more than doubled compared to six years ago.

Competition between bus companies was perceived to be a potential factor in ticket prices; respondents felt that First is the only significant bus operator and only also aware of Coastliner and Pullman, who some respondents assumed operate to fill in timetable 'gaps' left by First.

When asked to comment on the idea of an integrated bus ticket, respondents generally felt that the idea is good in principle although again challenged its relevance to York's buses;

"Is there that much competition? Are there even that many competitors to make that worth it...?" (Male, 29, outer city worker)

The key word associations with buses in York were 'confusing' and 'time consuming'. Information on bus routes and times are perceived to be almost indecipherable or so daunting that potential bus users are discouraged from attempting to travel this way. Inconsistent bus routes (i.e. a perception that routes are different on different days) were cited as a barrier to using buses.

"There's so many of them and they're all going on different route on different days and they're so busy as well, with all the commuters"

"I don't have the confidence to get on the buses on my own because I will probably end up lost" (Female, 25, ex-commuter)

The First website was specifically cited as being difficult to use;

"All the different colour route and numbers" (Female, 25, ex-commuter)

Respondents felt that there needs to be less information at bus stops and that information needs to be clearer. A central bus station was suggested as a potential solution;

"...there's nowhere for centralised information, there's no one you can ask..." (Male, 29, outer city worker)

The group agreed that thinking about travelling by bus requires a significant amount of online research and that this is not always fruitful;

"We're all reasonably fit and healthy and we would cycle or walk or things like that but the elderly, who probably need the buses more than we do, would find this very confusing" (Male, 57, ambulance driver)

The group agreed that road works exacerbate the confusion around routes and times;

"So many diversions at the moment, that's making it worse" (Female, 63, rural)

The perception of the bus system in the city clearly deters the group from using buses. Crowded queues in the city centre at peak times convey a chaotic impression, that travelling by bus is somehow 'messy'.

The group reflected that, consequently, they would not choose to commute to work using the bus service. Its perceived erratic and disorganised nature is deemed an inappropriate method of travel for work, which needs to be punctual and 'slick'.

Bus routes are also perceived to conflict with residents' internal 'map' of the city. This means that someone may spontaneously decide which bus to take based on its destination but then find the route does not cover where they expect it to;

"I wouldn't have thought of one going from Heslington would go all the way over to Acomb, for instance" (Female, 63, rural)

The impression that routes are convoluted is reinforced by respondents' experiences of travelling on the buses, which seem indirect and a slower method of travel than other options;

"I work at Clifton Moor and I find it quicker to walk there than get a bus and much, much cheaper" (from Hull Road)

"The bus stops outside my house but the bus takes nearly as long as walking, going all the way round that it goes" (Male, 29, outer city worker)

In conclusion, the group felt that they may use buses if they were cheaper and if this was coupled with a reliable, predictable service with easily accessible and understandable information.

Travel by train

Respondents discussion of train travel suggested that the purpose of a trip often dictated the method of transport. The train, for example, was cited as the ideal method for visiting York for a leisure trip, specifically enjoying the history of the city.

Some members of the group felt that York Station has been overdeveloped;

"The alterations around Tea Room Square are very confusing...you can't park anywhere properly there. If you are trying to improve public transport the train should be caught up in that too."(Female, 63, rural)

"Picking somebody up...there's very little parking, very little room, at certain times in the day it just grinds to a halt" (Male, 29, outer city worker)

Those respondents who said they walk to the station or use a bus were satisfied.

Travel by bicycle

Overall, respondents felt that cycling is unsafe, in the context of increasing traffic in the city. This perception is reinforced by word of mouth experiences of cycling accidents or other incidents;

"A few of my friends have been knocked off their bikes including by pedestrians not looking where they are going" (Female, 25, ex-commuter)

Those in the group that regularly cycle are aware of routes that avoid 'danger spots';

"I was knocked off on Fulford Road so now use the river route. I'm surprised they put a cycle lane down Fulford Road when there is one, that goes right along the river, that is a lot, lot safer" (Female, 63, rural)

Cycling, particularly to commute to work, is seemingly a topical issue in offices in the city. Members of the group referred to office discussions about the pros and cons of cycling and the debate clearly divides residents.

Members of the group who do not cycle acknowledged that work has been done to increase the amount of cycle lanes in the city, but there was some agreement that cyclists still do not consistently use them.

Some respondents who cycle felt that there are not enough spaces in the city to park bicycles (others disagreed with this) but all cyclists agreed that cycle routes around the city are generally good. A route to Tang Hall via the hospital was specifically mentioned.

In conclusion, the group felt that cycling was appropriate for people who do not have to travel far and who are confident of avoiding accidents on the road but that it was not a viable option for commuting further distances;

"A lot of people live too far out, you'll never get everyone cycling to work" (Male, 57, ambulance driver)

Travel by car

The main word association highlighted by the group was 'elitist'. Driving and parking in York is perceived as expensive and a luxury for those who can afford it

Congestion in York was largely considered to be caused non-city residents; those travelling into York from outer York, visitors from nearby towns or tourists. The ring road, in particular, was emphasised as a significant problem with members of the group agreeing there are *"certain times of the day when the outer ring road grinds to a halt"*.

Some responsibility was also attributed to residents travelling out of the city to out of town shopping developments. Rather than use the ring road, the group felt that residents contribute to central congestion by using alternative routes based on their local knowledge of the roads;

"Even though you're held up, you still feel you're 'nipping' through town..."
(Female, 63, rural)

"People use the back streets to avoid the ring road at all costs"
(Male, 29, outer city worker)

One member of the group – an ambulance driver – described the challenges of travelling through the city in an emergency, particularly on Gillygate;

"...if you're trying to get through in an emergency, there's almost nowhere to go..."
(Male, 57, ambulance driver)

One respondent in the group gets their grocery shopping delivered instead of using a car but this option was not considered to be viable by other members of the group who felt they prefer to choose fruit and vegetables themselves. This method was also considered to be expensive and the group felt that the location of supermarkets, outside of the city, forced residents to use their car.

Walking

Walking was considered the *"easiest way of getting round York"*, particularly as it is free and the city centre is relatively small.

The group talked about walking in the context of leisure, using words such as 'refreshing', especially along the river, and respondents who work in the city used their lunch breaks for strolling.

Distance was the most likely reason that respondents said they, or people they knew, did not walk.

Specifically, walking home from work was not considered to be an option as it is *"too tiring after a long day"*. The group agreed with one member who felt that family commitments have an influence on methods of transport taken;

"Women, particularly, need to get back and cook a meal, walking is a bit of a leisure thing". (Female, 63, rural)

Information

Throughout the group, respondents referred to ways they receive and find out information.

In summary, word of mouth clearly currently has a significant impact on residents perceptions of transport in York;

"Colleagues tend to talk about transport and the journey they've had in on the bus and what route's changed and how they're having to go from here or there...that's how I find out about things; word of mouth." (Male, 29, outer city worker)

Where members had used them, cycle friendly routes on the website are considered to be good and the council website was also described as clear and useful by those who had used it. Council staff, however, were not perceived to be knowledgeable about routes, timetables or options for travelling.

All the group remembered receiving leaflets through the door about cycle routes in the area and thought these were inspiring and *"easy to personalise"*.

Respondents receive information from local newspapers; *"just general, what's happening, roadworks."* (Female, 44)

Radio York and Local Link were also specifically mentioned about being good sources of information about transport.

Respondents' priorities

When asked to identify one main priority for the Council in relation to transport, the group identified the following:

Cost of bus travel; *"how much you are paying for your fare and what you are getting for your money and how far you can go..."*

"To make it reasonable it would have to be more like half the price it is now"
(Male, 29, outer city worker)

City signage; The group agreed that signage and road markings in York are confusing and potentially dangerous where drivers are distracted from looking out for other road users.

"The city is being taken over by road and car park signs, the roads have got so much on them now. Just looking at Fulford road coming down this evening, its like a chicane..." (Female, 63, rural)

From a pedestrian perspective, more than one group member had witnessed or personally experienced an accident caused by accidentally walking into a car park sign that obstructs the pavement on Gillygate.

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