

For over 40 years Moorsbus has played a key role in enabling access to the North York Moors: *‘for all, regardless of wealth or social class’* in the words of the original National Parks’ legislation.

As bus services have diminished over the years, public transport access to the North York Moors is now at its lowest since the Park was designated over 60 years ago.

Moorsbus has increasingly shouldered sole responsibility for providing accessibility to a large area of the National Park – including its two national park centres. It is responding to climate change, reducing CO₂ emissions, improving road safety, as well as contributing positively to health, well-being, social cohesion and supporting the local economy.

Moorsbus was funded for many years by the National Park Authority, with a significant contribution from North Yorkshire County Council. Cited as a role model in government reports (both tourism and transport), it was called *‘the best recreational bus service in Europe.’* Funding from both the NPA and NYCC ceased as a result of austerity measures in 2013, triggering a group of supporters to set about restoring its ethos and services.

Today, Moorsbus is run entirely by volunteers from the Moorsbus Community Interest Company, with a supporting group, the Friends of Moorsbus, helping fundraise and provide passenger feedback and suggestions for service improvements. To ensure regulatory compliance and the highest levels of safety, reliability and professionalism, the actual services are contracted with local bus operators. It provides rail / bus interchange at a number of stations.

In 2019 the network operated on 69 days, funded through a combination of fares, pass reimbursement, grants, donations and fundraising, including from the North Yorkshire Moors Association and a small but regular series of grants from individual parish councils. Survey results show it to be one of the UK’s highest rated bus operations for passenger satisfaction.

Other national innovations include the ‘Donate Ticket’ whereby passengers (especially those who benefit from ‘free’ travel through a concessionary pass) can make an on-board donation through the ticket system. Moorsbus worked with an artist to create an on-bus video of artwork linked to an exhibition at the ‘Inspired by...’ gallery at Danby.

Plans for 2020 were cancelled as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, but in consultation with our contractors and others we would wish to see the services re-launched in 2021, whilst recognising that funding opportunities are under pressure, and the potential income from fares is also reduced.

Moorsbus offers a cost-effective way of delivering National Park purposes, including key elements of the Authority’s Sustainability Objectives and DEFRA’s ‘8 point plan for England’s National Parks’.

Rural transport:

expensive to provide, expensive to use

A sparse rural population can never provide enough passengers to generate a reasonable return without continued investment. This is made worse by the fact that many - but certainly not all - rural dwellers have access to a car, making the cost of providing services for a small population even more expensive.

The elderly or disabled can use a national bus pass but this sees only a marginal return for Moorsbus (e.g. about £1 for the full journey from York to Danby). Most rural bus journeys are longer than urban ones, this giving a very poor return per pass-user.

There is a level of fares beyond which passengers will not pay. As this cost is shared between fewer passengers, it creates a domino effect: fares become more expensive, beyond the reach of the less well-off, and prohibitive for most.



13% of Park households don’t have a car; 38% in Middlesbrough are car-less

Car ownership within the National Park is high. 87% of households own at least one car compared to the regional and national averages of 70% and 73% respectively. But although the household may have a car, it is not necessarily available for use by other members of the household when the car driver is using it. There is an assumption that car ownership is universal, so the 13% of households in the National Park who don’t have a car find services and opportunities even more difficult to access.

Conversely, some urban communities just outside the Park have far lower levels of car ownership (Middlesbrough 62%; Scarborough 71%; Redcar & Cleveland 72%; Darlington 72%; York 74%). These communities are amongst those who traditionally

viewed the Moors area as their cultural inheritance and their 'breathing space'. Yet many of them are denied access as there is limited public transport to the area. Moorsbus has provided some access for these communities, which also have some of the country's highest social deprivation indices.

Socio-demographic mix: who doesn't visit the people's parks?

It is not just the surrounding urban areas which are restricted in their access. Overseas visitors – a target for the Park – usually rely on public transport. Whilst they may get to York, they find it difficult to penetrate the North York Moors.

In addition, city dwellers are increasingly finding a car may be a hindrance to city living. But likewise, they may find it increasingly difficult to access the North York Moors.

Often the young and the elderly find that they have either no car, or no driving licence.

Over the last 20 years, surveys of Moorsbus passengers have consistently shown a profile of visitors from the lower socio-economic groups, as well as a more limited number from environmentally-aware upper segments.

The Council for National Parks has said:

Affordable and reliable transport options are a social justice issue. For too many it's a barrier to enjoying these places and as such we have a massive over reliance on private cars.



Sustainability

Throughout its planning and operations, Moorsbus works hard to achieve the most effective sustainable balance: locally and globally, now and for the future, involving its passengers and operators in the task.

Environmentally, Moorsbus attempts to reduce car usage by providing a cost-effective alternative for some journeys. This may help in reducing the need for additional parking, road improvements, signage, whilst lessening visual intrusion, congestion and other

environmental problems. The buses used are ultra-low emission vehicles, with timetables planned around safe and smooth operations.

Socially, Moorsbus offers a friendly and accessible service which helps combat loneliness and social isolation especially among the elderly. By encouraging 'Walk & Ride', we are helping to improve health and the enjoyment of tranquillity.

Economically, Moorsbus generates thousands of pounds for the local economy, often directing money into smaller establishments in more remote locations.



Understanding visitor patterns

An objective view of who visits the North York Moors and their visiting patterns, has shown us that many visitors 'graze' from site to site on their visit, using a variety of attractions, refreshment stops, views and walks as part of their visit. Others wish to undertake a long linear walk of maybe 5 or 6 hours. The routes and timetables try to reflect both these opportunities.

Conversely, there are those who don't come to the area at all. Moorsbus wants to understand why, and through improved marketing and services, give them the opportunity to visit. Currently many are denied such a choice, especially overseas visitors.

Moorsbus acknowledges that all tourism is at some cost to the environment, but the use of public transport and the activities promoted create a smaller carbon footprint than many other approaches.

Moorsbus Community Interest Company 2021

www.moorsbus.org

Connecting you with the North York Moors