



## **WYCA Local Transport Plan Consultation – Leeds Civic Trust response**

FAO West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Leeds Civic Trust has reviewed WYCA's draft Local Transport Plan, and while it addresses some of the region's transport challenges, we believe it lacks the ambition and urgency needed to truly transform our transport system and achieve the low-traffic future needed for our health, our economy and our environment (Low Traffic Future, 2023). The plan has no measurable objectives of what 'transformation' might look like by 2040 and could better reflect on the national policy context, for instance, grasping opportunities for longer-term funding and more local control of priorities presented by the new government. We urge WYCA to adopt a more forward-thinking approach that: (1) better acknowledges the scale of the challenges facing West Yorkshire, including the growing climate emergency and rising health inequalities; (2) integrates the principles of placemaking and the 15-minute city; and (3) draws inspiration from bold and visionary strategies in the UK and internationally. We look specifically at the city of Leeds, given our interests.

### **1. Acknowledging the Challenges**

You cannot take people on a journey if you are not honest about the starting point. The plan falls short in setting out the scale of the critical issues we face, in particular the climate crisis, increasing health inequalities, car dependency, and the decline in bus patronage. Since the pandemic, Leeds has experienced a rise in car use, particularly in the city where there has been a 4% increase of cars entering the city centre between 2019-2023 (Leeds City Council, 2023), adding to poor air quality with some areas exceeding legal NO<sub>2</sub> limits (Friends of the Earth, 2022). The plan needs to set an explicit aim to reduce the number of journeys made by cars to tackle the resulting environmental and health impacts, together with an acknowledgement of the unfairness and inequity resulting from car dependence in a region where many households do not have access to a vehicle. For instance, in Leeds 29% of the population do not own a car (Census, 2021). This will require policies to limit car usage (such as parking and access controls) along with improvements in other transport modes.

There also needs to be a greater recognition of the scale of the challenge of providing the bus services that will be required, including the levels of investment needed. Bus patronage has dropped by 12% since 2019, with 42% of residents citing unreliability as a key reason for not using public transport (WYCA, 2023). The move to bus franchising provides opportunities for WYCA to fully integrate transport across different modes.

Similarly, cycling remains underutilised, with less than 2% of all journeys in Leeds made by bike—well below the city's 2030 goal of 7% (Leeds City Council, 2023) despite investment in cycling infrastructure. This demonstrates the importance of working closely with communities at the earliest possible stage. Co-producing transport solutions with local communities, particularly in hardly reached areas where 64% of households lack access to a private vehicle (ONS, 2022), is essential. The Local Transport Plan must fully recognise the scale of these challenges and commit to bolder action to reduce car dependence whilst enhancing active travel and public, shared and community transport options.

### **2. Integrating 15-Minute City and Placemaking Principles**



There is a growing recognition of the need to manage travel demand by ensuring that new housing and other developments are located and designed to make it easier to travel to and from them without depending on private cars. We would like to see a commitment to this way of planning enshrined as one of the LTP principles. In addition, adopting the 15-minute city concept and prioritising placemaking could make WYCA's Local Transport Plan far more ambitious and transformative. In a 15-minute city, residents can meet their daily needs within a short walk or bike ride, significantly reducing the need for car journeys. Research indicates that this model can cut private car use by up to 60% (C40 Cities, 2021), supporting WYCA's decarbonisation efforts. WYCA's plan should be clear that practical interventions should be underpinned by a hierarchy, starting by prioritising pedestrians, active travel and public transport, with car use (including EVs) a last resort or when no other option is available. Additionally, placemaking can enrich community life and strengthen local economies (Project for Public Spaces, 2020). By creating more walkable and vibrant neighbourhoods, WYCA can promote sustainable transport while fostering healthier, more resilient communities.

### **3. Learning from Others**

Places across Europe, such as the Netherlands and Switzerland, offer valuable lessons in creating integrated, low-car transport systems that prioritise active travel. Utrecht, for instance, has made cycling the backbone of its urban mobility plan, while Switzerland's meticulously coordinated public transport ensures seamless connections across all modes. In the UK, York's draft transport strategy is bold and ambitious, with plans to ban private cars from the city centre and aim for a 20% cycling modal share by 2030— well ahead of WYCA's current targets (City of York Council, 2023). By adopting similarly bold measures, WYCA could promote healthier neighbourhoods where sustainable transport is the preferred option for all.

Clearly WYCA cannot achieve a low traffic future without collaboration. Other public sector bodies especially the NHS contribute to current high traffic levels and have much to gain in a low traffic future. Similarly the business sector, and many third sector bodies must be essential collaborators and communities' participation will be vital. We would like to see WYCA set out their strategy for collaboration on the next stage of developing the LTP.

In conclusion, we urge WYCA to revise the Local Transport Plan with greater ambition and vision. By learning from successful European models and embracing concepts like the 15-minute city, WYCA can build a sustainable, inclusive, and equitable transport network that addresses the climate emergency, improves public health, and meets the diverse needs of all residents. We welcome the opportunity to work closely with WYCA to contribute to the development of the Local Transport Plan.

Kind regards,

Leeds Civic Trust