

York Shopmobility Focus Group, Monday 14 June 2021, 1-2pm

Attendees

8 participants: including York Disability Rights Forum (YDRF), 3 of whom had not used the Shopmobility service before

Shopmobility team: Trevor Philips, Jo Ellis, Peter Turner

Martin Higgitt Associates: Martin Higgitt, Craig Grimes

CYC Transport: Carrie Brookes, Jav Safder

CYC Communications/ Regeneration: Will Wilcock, Katie Peeke-Vout, Katherine Atkinson

This note includes feedback from the chat facility during the meeting, from 3 people who could not attend the meeting and sent comments by email or via telephone interview, and also feedback from former discussions and engagements (included in grey shaded boxes), with the aim to record all insight regarding Shopmobility to date.

1) Aim: discussion with users and potential users of the Shopmobility service, for us to listen/ understand:

- what the Shopmobility service needs to be for you to use it, to improve your access to the city centre?
- where would be the ideal location for the service, and what makes it the ideal location?
- what facilities are required in this location?

2) Introduction

The pandemic has changed the entire local economy - nowhere more obvious than in York's city centre. There has always been a competition for space in the city centre, which is more so at a premium now.

This summer, we're talking to all groups accessing the city centre as part of the review of city centre access and parking. This review was agreed by the Executive in Nov 2020. There were a number of specific items that this review is required to cover, which in-part was informed by the independent review of York's disabled access offer. These items are:

- a) a full review of the **Shopmobility** offer
- b) to undertake a study to look at a **city centre shuttle service**
- c) to identify 2 car parks with **gold standard disabled access** - improved parking spaces, facilities and access routes in to the city centre

d) to undertake a study to look at a delivery hub model for the city centre

We have held a number of meetings over the past couple of weeks to understand the views of different groups, including:

- Delivery Drivers and couriers
- Accessible routes in York city centre
- Cycling in the city centre
- Taxi and Hackney Carriage Associations

Over the past year we have been talking to accessibility groups and individuals who have been impacted by the footstreets policy in York's city centre. This engagement has highlighted some challenges the policy creates to accessibility, as well as some very positive responses not just from businesses, but from many disabled residents, particularly blind and partially sighted and older residents.

In November, the Executive agreed to start the process of making the changes to the footstreets permanent, this is a legal process which is expected to start following the decision session of the executive member for transport on the 22 June. This is a separate, statutory process.

3) Presentation of existing York Shopmobility service by Trevor Philips, Chair of Trustees

[York Shopmobility Video - YouTube](#)

The service was established in 1998, and is managed by a small charity. Located on second floor of Coppergate Car Park (formerly known as Piccadilly Car Park), with easy access to city centre. Lifts are large enough to accommodate a wheelchair. Open and staffed 6 days a week, 10-4, undercover, warm and welcoming, electric scooters (15) and manual wheelchairs for hire, either daily or longer hire. Shopmobility parking is free to users, and the parking bays are wide. Have own adapted toilet facility, which is well lit and warm.

4) Discussion

4.1) What do you like about the service?

- Joined the scheme when newly disabled and found it a positive experience.
- Opportunity to try scooters to see what suits your needs.
- Staff immensely friendly and help in lots of ways, with links to other things, very inclusive experience.
- Good for people who have transport - parking is very easy.
- Location is in the centre of the city centre and is well signposted, was aware of the service prior to becoming disabled.
- Good facilities - undercover, accessible toilet, nice and warm, have always been able to hire a scooter (availability).
- Missed the service during lockdown when the car park closed. Don't have ability to get a scooter out of a car, the service negates the need to do this.
- Recommend Shopmobility service to lots of people, positive experience.
- Service is good, staff marvellous and very helpful.
- Great service. Even if I couldn't get everywhere in the city centre, it meant that I could get out and wasn't stuck at home. Shopmobility can meet the needs of a number of people.
- Location of Shopmobility ideal.
- Participant normally uses their own power chair but it prevents them getting into various shops due to steps, and also due to being unable to secure the chair outside the shop as it isn't lockable, and so they worry about the power chair being stolen. Welcomes the idea of hiring a Shopmobility scooter is a 'stopgap' which would allow access to different parts of town, and to leave it at shop entrance of those that have steps - get out and walk short way/ step into shop/ café. This provides a solution as Shopmobility scooters have a key.

Feedback from previous engagement:

- Negates the need to buy your own electric wheelchair or mobility scooter. Buying is expensive, requires home storage and may require a second person or expensive vehicle adaptations to load and unload it
- Try before you buy service

4.2) Are there any concerns about the service/barriers/challenges?

- Shopmobility service is tricky to get to if you do not have transport/ car.
 - Difficulty of getting into city centre from the outskirts of the city.

- Cannot get to city centre by bus to access service. Can't get wheelchair on the bus as the disabled/ pushchair space is always full by time it reaches their bus stop mid-route.
- Shopmobility is good value, but the transport to get there by taxi can be expensive before the hire fee.
- Don't drive and cannot walk more than 20m, so need a parent to drive me to the service, and either to stay with me for the day, or to come back and collect me at 4pm.
- As a charity, the service has a small range of mobility aids and scooters to service a wide range of needs. Some people need specific mobility chairs, using the wrong one for a few hours could damage your health for a few days.
- Some vehicles can't get into Coppergate Car Park to access the service. Could this be dealt with by changing barriers, or can the building just not accommodate them?
- Need more flexible opening times:
 - Working disabled people couldn't access service due to times.
 - Closing at 4pm is too early. Constantly looking at your watch to get back in time, longer hours needed.
- One user found the scooters difficult to use in that they are all a bit different to operate.
- Cost to use Shopmobility - disabled people have lots of costs already.
- Worry about other people in the city centre's perception of mobility scooters/ prejudice against them going too fast in footstreets.

Feedback from previous engagement:

- Cost
- Opening times, time-restrictions don't allow for evening activity
- Attitudes to shared equipment / info re cleaning processes?
- poor location in multi-storey car park

What are the problems with multi-storey car parks as a disabled user?

- size of spaces/ cross hatching
- the floor of the parking - it is level access to the pavement/shops etc
- safety / reliability of lifts
- not segregated from traffic – loading/unloading feels dangerous
- ticket machines/barriers

- requires too much walking to get blue badge verified for the new ticketing system in Coppergate Car Park
- doors to reach the lifts in the car park are not automatic, so present a difficulties if also operating a mobility aid

4.3) Suggestions for improvement

Shopmobility have developed partnerships with hotels and holiday apartments across York over the past 2-3 years, where clients can pre-book a scooter or wheelchair with the accomodation. Shopmobility will deliver it to the hotel who store it for the guest's arrival, and then collect it when they have finished with it. Looking to expand service, have explored idea of a lockable cage/ cabinet facility at York Station/ bus stops, where mobility aids could be pre-booked and accessed using a security code (rather than have volunteers waiting at station), and then leave it back in the same place. This would require investment and locations.

- Could a delivery service be tried for residents as well as visitors? Could someone hire a chair, get it delivered and collected from their house? Or would hotels hold scooter for residents to collect rather than going to Shopmobility?
- Could a wheelchair be delivered to bus drop off point or bus stop? Pre book, and met by city centre marshall to assist at drop off point?
- Idea to deliver/ drop off chairs/scooters was a good one - they do it in Scarborough
- Could York Wheels help people get to Shopmobility?
- On the possibility of long-term rental. A participant stated they would not be able to hire a chair and take it home due to lack of space to store it, and because the house isn't adapted. Hotel or home delivery would help.
- Is it possible for Shopmobility to be moved to a better location in York?
- Does Shopmobility have an online booking system?
- Improve the accessibility of the Shopmobility website so more people can use it.
- Can Shopmobility be better funded to improve premises and website for users of the service.
- Shopmobility York have a 'great' team who could benefit from more publicity.

Feedback from previous engagement:

- Need for more marketing of Shopmobility to residents & visitors, improve web presence: <https://www.facebook.com/Shopmobility-york-306654766067795/> www.shopmobilityyork.org.uk
- Ageing signage; not well lit; more advanced signage, want a shop window
- Hiring a mobility aid 'where I park' would be useful
- 'Parking hubs' where mobility scooter/ wheelchair hire could be considered
- Relevance of stock?

4.4) Once you're parked and have got into city centre using a Shopmobility vehicle, what makes a route accessible/inaccessible?

- Need to plan your route – poor quality of pavements and surfaces, need more dropped kerbs
- Difficult to access many shops, cafes and services with a mobility aid.
- Need to park mobility aid outside front door of shop, but this isn't always possible (due to either physical space, or security of scooter).

Feedback from previous engagement:

- Ease to move around
- lack of suitable toilet facilities (why the only accessible toilet is on silver street, in a cobbled area)
- Too many vehicles -- the overabundance of exemptions means using scooters on the roads -- the best place, is stressful and impractical.
- Expansion of business street clutter and pavement cafes, needs carefully regulating
- Number of rest points – and type of rest points

4.5) Some participants were not users or potential users of the Shopmobility service, as fundamentally the service wouldn't meet their needs/facilitate their access to the city centre

- Shopmobility meets the needs of some people, but not all people. People need options, and to be free to do what works for them, else they cannot get into town. Need a range of services to suit a variety of different people and needs including mental health.
- Shopmobility isn't a solution for someone if:
 - their doctor has told them to move/ walk rather than use a scooter
 - moving from vehicle to vehicle/ scooter is exhausting
 - a spinal injury prevents transfer between vehicles

- their disability (e.g. autism) means they need to get to a safe place/ car quickly, or people with invisible disabilities need to get home quickly for toilet needs
- Removal of blue badge parking exemption from footstreets has made accessing the city centre and essential services like banks very difficult, including evening access. This has removed independence for many people. YDRF, York Accessibility Action Group, York Civic Trust Transport Advisory Group all recommend the city centre stays open to permit holders.
- Participants noted that everyone has a right to be able to access the city centre.

5) Next steps

- Share note of this meeting
- Complete online resident's survey [here](#) by 30 June 2021, or complete paper OurCity survey delivered to every household in June
- Details of [other workshops](#) were shared at meeting (Accessible routes in York city centre Wed 16 & Cycling in York city centre Thu 17)

The review of Shopmobility will be a combination of the feedback we have from those that run Shopmobility, feedback from current and potential users on the pros and cons of the service and suggested improvements, any feedback on the access routes work Martin Higgitt is doing to inform improvements to this location or identify potential other locations and routes to the city centre. These will then be brought together in to a set of recommendations for the service. We will seek feedback on the proposed recommendations ahead of them being reported to the Executive for consideration in September.

Martin Higgitt and his team (MHA) are auditing access routes from the council's car parks and in and around the city. Informal field session 24/06/21 where the team will be looking at cycle access audits and disabled access audits. Also holding an online follow up session 01/07/21. **ACTION: Details of field trip were circulated to participants by email 16/06/21**

The Shopmobility team thanked everyone for their comments, and are very willing to work closely with CYC and Councillors to provide additional services to help disabled users. The Shopmobility team feel that Piccadilly is an ideal position for the service, with secure parking.