DIGITAL INNOVATIONS ROADMAP

FOR THE NORTH EAST OF ENGLAND

THE NORTH EAST OF ENGLAND: A UNIQUE BLEND OF BREATHTAKING LANDSCAPES, RICH HISTORY AND VIBRANT URBAN CULTURE

A DIGITAL INNOVATIONS ROADMAP TOWARDS 2033

Whether it be the rugged coastline of Northumberland to the rolling hills of the North Pennines, the UNESCO World Heritage Site Hadrian's Wall to the architectural marvel that is Durham Cathedral, or the bustling city of Durham to the nightlife of Newcastle – the North East of England is a must-visit destination for any traveller to the UK.

The region has a thriving tech industry, excellent universities and is a hub for talent and growing businesses. Nearby cities are well connected through roads, airports, ferries and trains and the area has an abundance of natural and cultural assets.

This unique blend of breathtaking landscapes, rich history and vibrant urban culture, complemented by the renowned hospitality from welcoming locals, promises visitors an unforgettable experience.

However, despite the many benefits the region has to offer it is an unvisited destination by tourists. This has been driven by misconceptions around accessibility, lack of knowledge of the natural and cultural experiences on offer, and under publicised hospitality and gastronomy.

This is exacerbated by the numerous tourism bodies in the region resulting in a fragmented approach to marketing, and challenges in sharing and leveraging opportunities.

NewcastleGateshead Initiative (NGI) is working closely with VisitNorthumberland and the North of Tyne Combined Authority to elevate tourism in the region, attract investment and boost the local economy. NGI has recognised the importance of digital innovation to drive this growth and has commissioned Monstarlab to develop a Digital Innovations Roadmap to support digital initiatives across the next decade.

This document shares the key outputs of bringing together a number of cross industry stakeholders across the region to collectively develop a future-state vision for tourism in the region and a 10 year digital innovation roadmap to support the region's ambitions.

We are excited for the future of tourism in the region and the role digital innovation will have on this growth. We hope you will join us on our journey.

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DETERMINING THE CURRENT AND FUTURE STATE

To develop a meaningful Digital Innovations Roadmap our approach was to determine the existing tourism offering within the North East – *where we are now* – and prioritise the region's ambitions to set a 'North Star' vision – *where we want to be*.

Exhaustive research was conducted to understand both global and local tourists' trends and behaviours post-pandemic, the digital trends in the Travel & Tourism industry and the perceptions of the region.

These insights were enriched by surveys of both the UK general public and critical stakeholders in the region, highlighting the visitor value for different tourism sectors, as well as the digital maturity of these tourism sectors.

For the first time, key stakeholders across the fragmented region collaborated to assess the current-state of tourism and aligned on the region's strengths and opportunities which can be capitalised for future growth, expediated through digital innovations.

IDENTIFIED STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

Foundational Enablers[1]

Value for Money / The region is a strong value for money destination, out pricing major cities across the UK.

People & Welcome / The locals are welcoming, friendly and hospitable which is recognised by UK and international visitors alike.

Accessibility & Infrastructure / The region offers transport by sea, land and air and is connected to major UK cities through its urban centre Newcastle.

Tourism Drivers[2]

Entertainment / With an abundance of museum and galleries and home to a premiership football club, there are ample opportunities to improve festival and live events across the region.

Culture / The rich history and strong cultural presence in the region make for uniquely immersive experiences.

Nature / A variety of natural landscapes make the region one the most eclectically beautiful across the world.

MICE* / Continuing investment in conference centres, exhibitions and universities make the region appealing for businesses and event planners globally.

[1] Foundation Enablers must be established to sustain a high level tourism e.g. accommodation, safety, accessibility etc.
[2] Tourism Drivers are the destination 'attractions' within set categories that fall under two types: recreational and non-recreational

*MICE: Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions

DIGITAL
MISSION STATEMENT

Creating a digital mission statement ensures alignment across the fragmented region. It guides tourism bodies and businesses within North East England on purpose, objectives and values of digital initiatives undertaken over the next decade.

The digital mission statement was created by the key stakeholders in the region, aligned on the values and experiences critical to them in achieving their 10 year ambitions.

Using the Digital Mission Statement, a set of guiding principles were developed, and corresponding selection criteria facilitate the selection of digital innovations.

In a digital sea of opportunity, this 'filtering' process allows the region to prioritise innovations that achieve any one of their guiding principles and ensures a consistent, long-lasting approach, initiating innovations that will drive fruitful outcomes.

There are four overlying principles guiding the process, and seven selection criteria across three categories: desirability, feasibility, and viability.

"We're on a mission to leverage digital technologies to drive collaboration across our region and provide 'mint' immersive and authentic experiences that add value and ensure ease and convenience for all visitors to North East England"

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THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

I / Leverage digital technologies to deliver world class services**.**

II / Unite stakeholders and foster collaboration.

III / Captivate customers with authentic immersive experiences.

IV / Deliver value, ease, and convenience to both visitors and the destination

THE SELECTION CRITERIA

Desirability /
- Must be easy to use and inclusive for the intended target audience.
- Must enhance a travel experience or solve a real problem for visitors of which there is evidence.

Feasibility /
- Must use existing technology and be future-proof.
- Must have buy in and commitment from all required stakeholders to make it work.
- Must have a clear and manageable plan for technical maintenance.

Viability /
- Must drive the sustainable visitor economy growth.
- Must be financially sustainable with a clear business model for the life of the initiative.
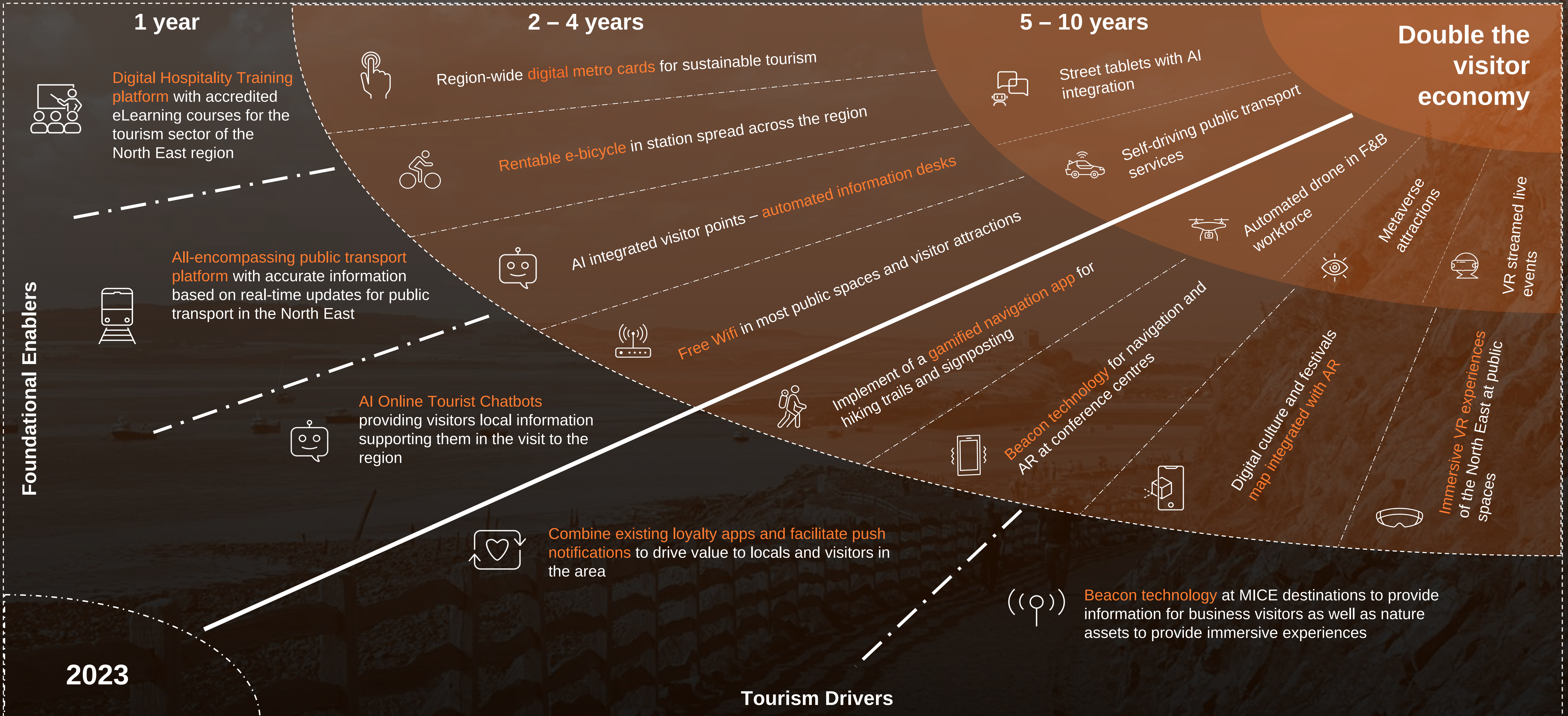
THE DIGITAL INNOVATIONS ROADMAP

A comprehensive approach has been taken to develop the regions' digital innovations roadmap. Extensive research was completed to understand the current digital tourism trends, technological advancements, and global tourism best practices for the region's prioritised visitors' offerings.

This approach ensures the roadmap fosters growth by leveraging the region's strengths and opportunities in the digital landscape.

Considering the rapid pace of technological advancements, the ever-changing habits of visitors, and the potential for disruptions, means maintaining a rigid roadmap over the next decade is unwise. The roadmap will be reviewed and updated annually for specific initiatives and projects to remain relevant and effective.

The Digital Mission Statement, Guiding Principles, and Selection Criteria will ensure consistency but allow agility throughout this period.

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Digital Innovations Roadmap

1 year

2 – 4 years

5 – 10 years

Double the visitor economy

Foundational Enablers

Digital Hospitality Training platform with accredited eLearning courses for the tourism sector of the North East region

Region-wide digital metro cards for sustainable tourism

Street tablets with AI integration

Rentable e-bicycle in station spread across the region

Self-driving public transport services

Automated drone in F&B workforce

Metaverse attractions

VR streamed live events

AI integrated visitor points – automated information desks

All-encompassing public transport platform with accurate information based on real-time updates for public transport in the North East

Free Wifi in most public spaces and visitor attractions

Implement of a gamified navigation app for hiking trails and signposting

Beacon technology for navigation and AR at conference centres

Digital culture and festivals map integrated with AR

Immersive VR experiences of the North East at public spaces

AI Online Tourist Chatbots providing visitors local information supporting them in the visit to the region

Combine existing loyalty apps and facilitate push notifications to drive value to locals and visitors in the area

Beacon technology at MICE destinations to provide information for business visitors as well as nature assets to provide immersive experiences

2023

Tourism Drivers

Data Strategy Phases

01 ASSESS: DATA MATURITY AND REQUIREMENTS

02 DEFINE AND EXECUTE: STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND DATA PROGRAMME

03 ENABLE: OPEN DATA API FOR THE FUTURE

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DIGITAL HOSPITALITY TRAINING PLATFORM

A digital training platform for North East England offers an opportunity for collaboration across the region to train, educate, and provide resources for individuals who are interested in or are already working in the hospitality sector across the region.

The platform would cater to different levels of experience and expertise, from entry-level positions to advanced management roles. It could cover a wide range of topics, including customer service, marketing and sales, tour guiding, hospitality, and cultural sensitivity.

This platform would help the region's visitor economy in several ways; it would standardise the quality of the workforce across the region, reduce training costs for local businesses, create communities and facilitate knowledge share across the region's hospitality sector. This would be particularly beneficial for small businesses, which may not have the resources to provide extensive training.

Improving the baseline standard of the workforce across the region and reducing training costs for businesses would drive recognition of the region's People & Welcome offering, driving growth in both the local and visitor economy.
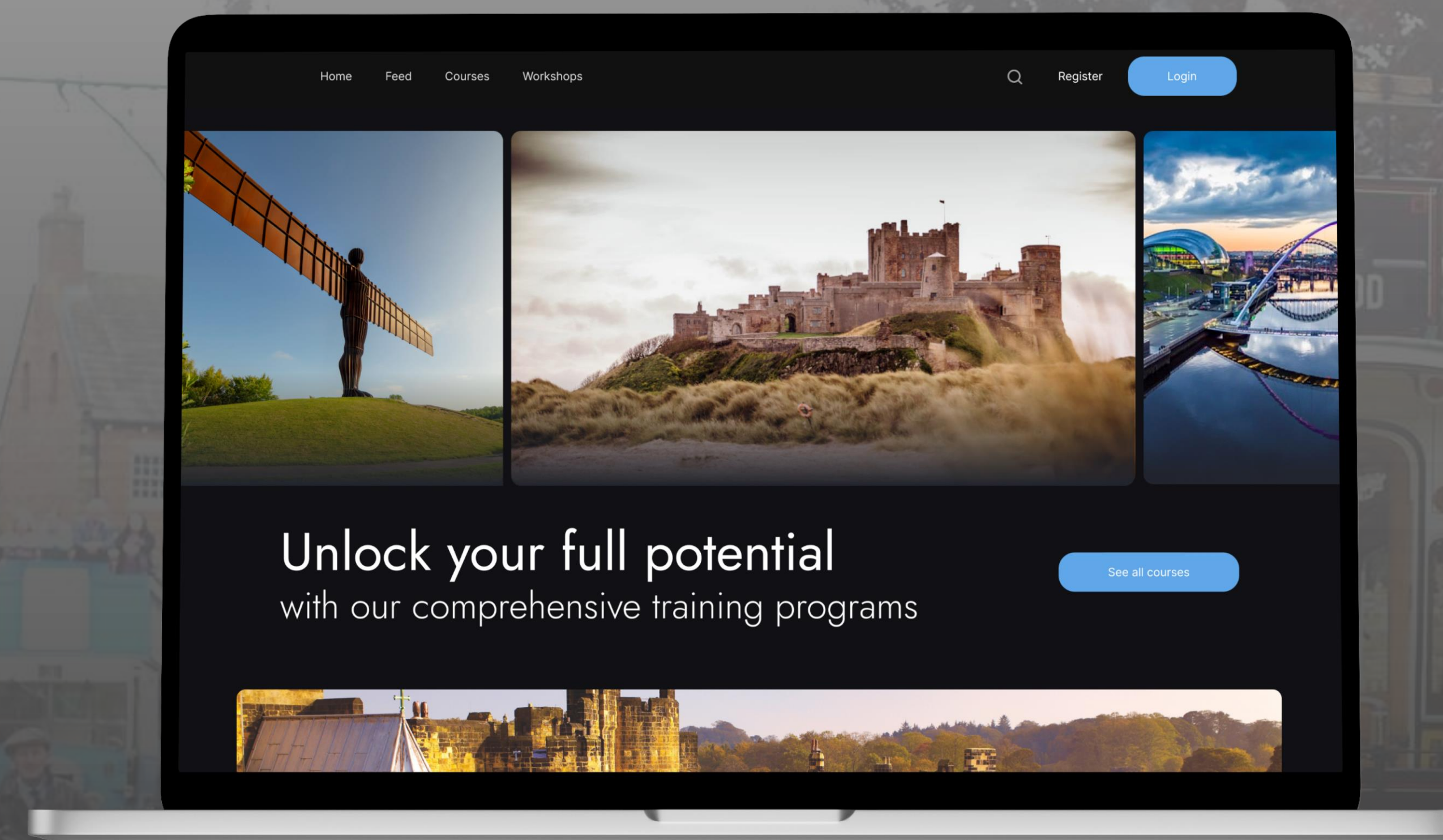
Suggested Features

/ Personal profiles
    Accredited points
    Recommended courses (preferences and/or employer)
    Gamification of completed training

/ Training options
    Webinars / Online training
    Booking system
    Integrated with 3rd party training platforms

/ Knowledge sharing
    Key events / happenings within the sector
    Relevant content e.g., Entrepreneurs' stories

/ Communities
    Chat rooms
    Ambassador network
    Sector specific information groups

/ Push notifications

Unlock your full potential
with our comprehensive training programs

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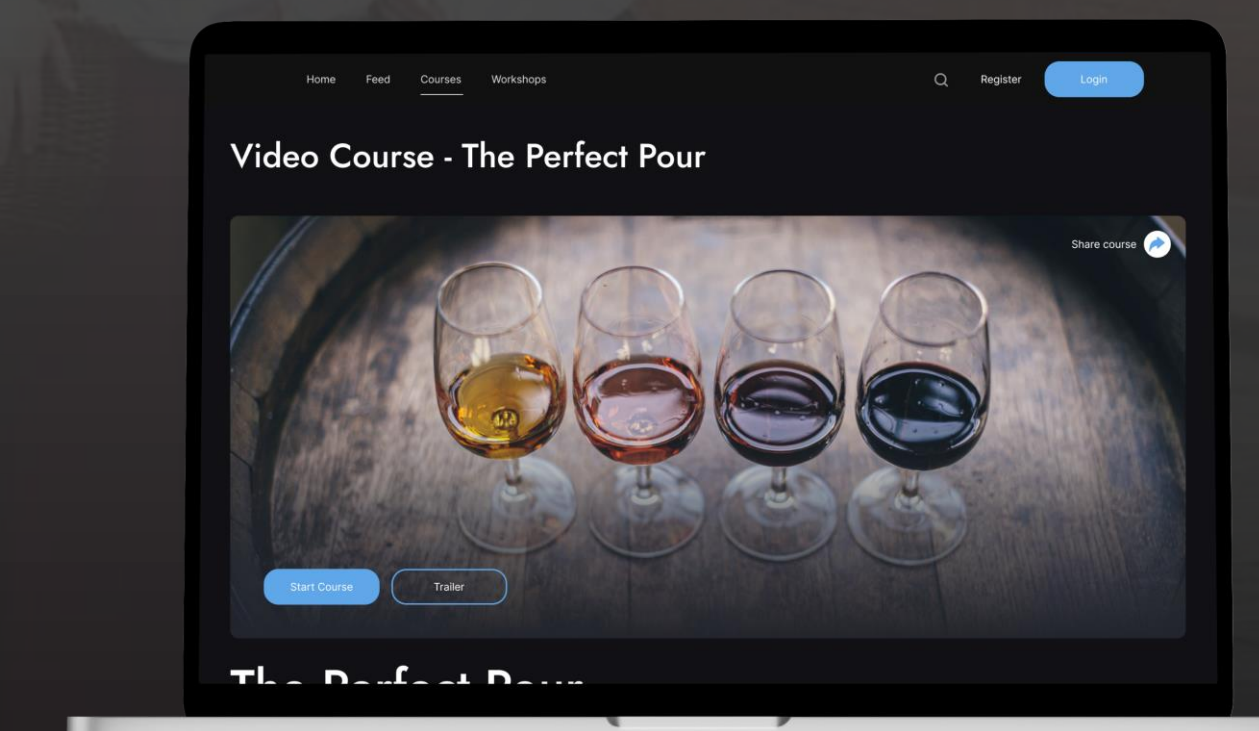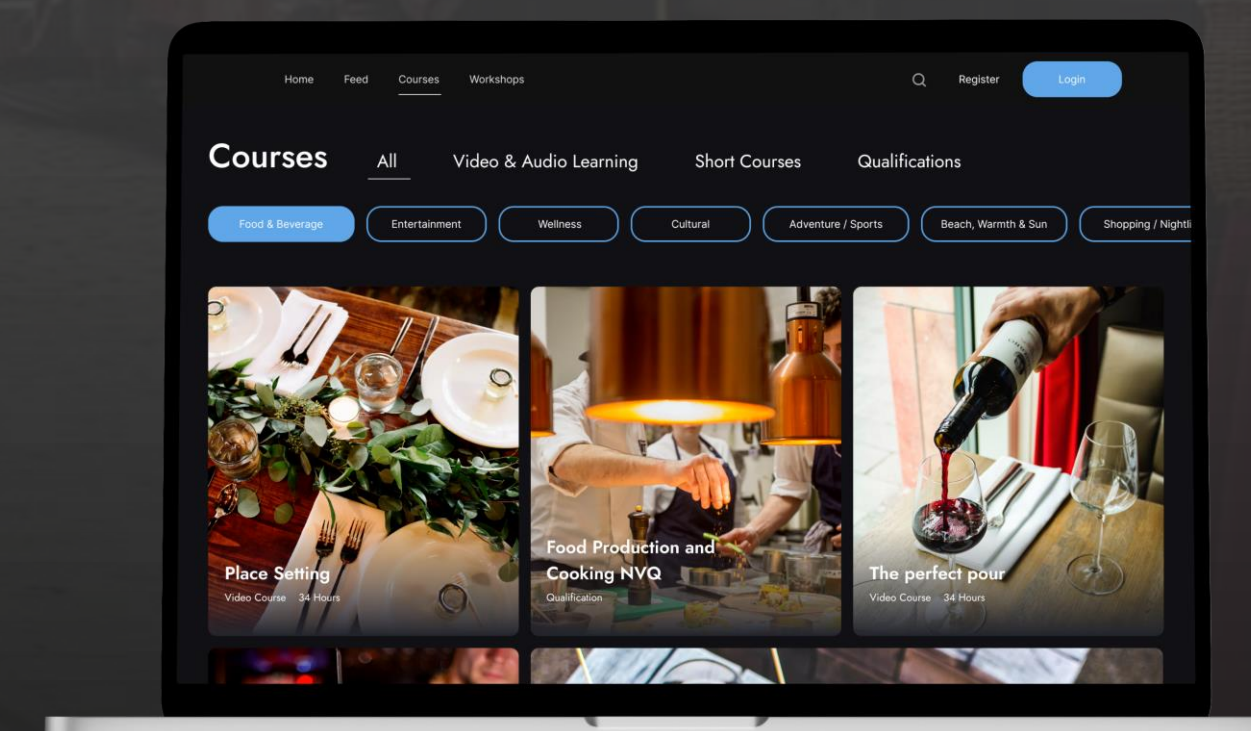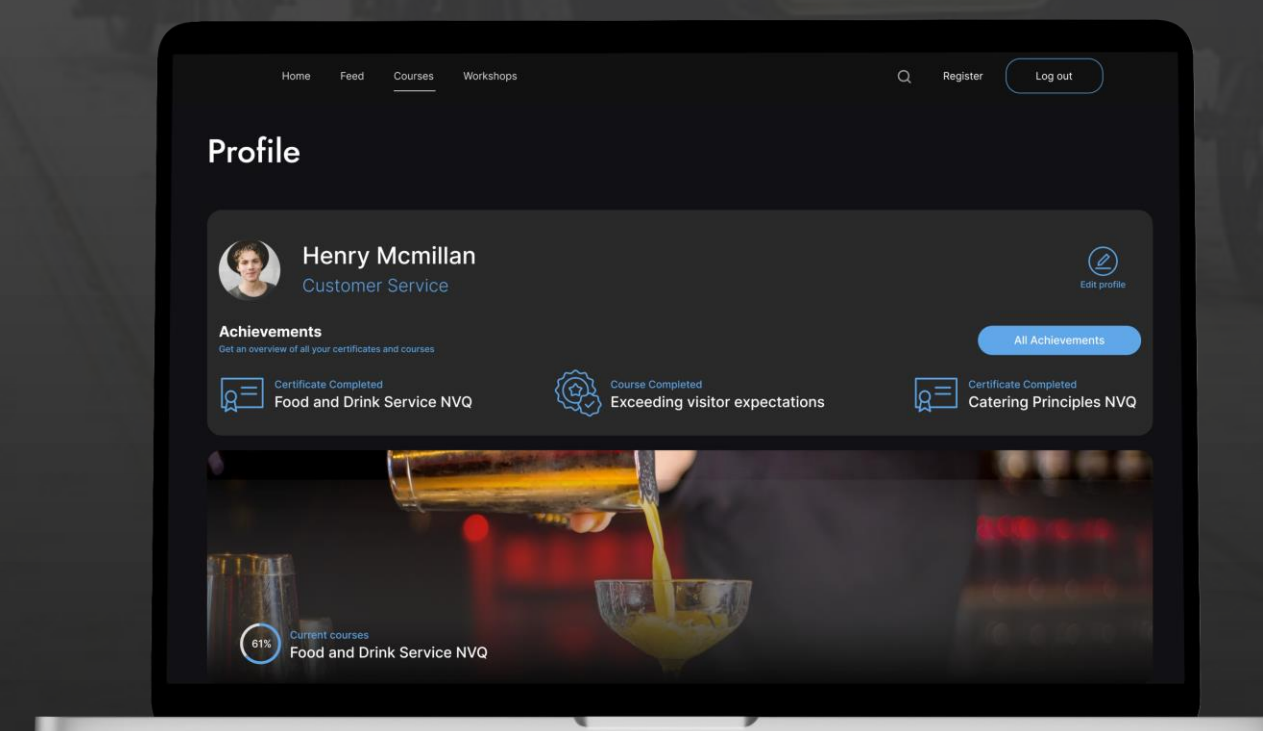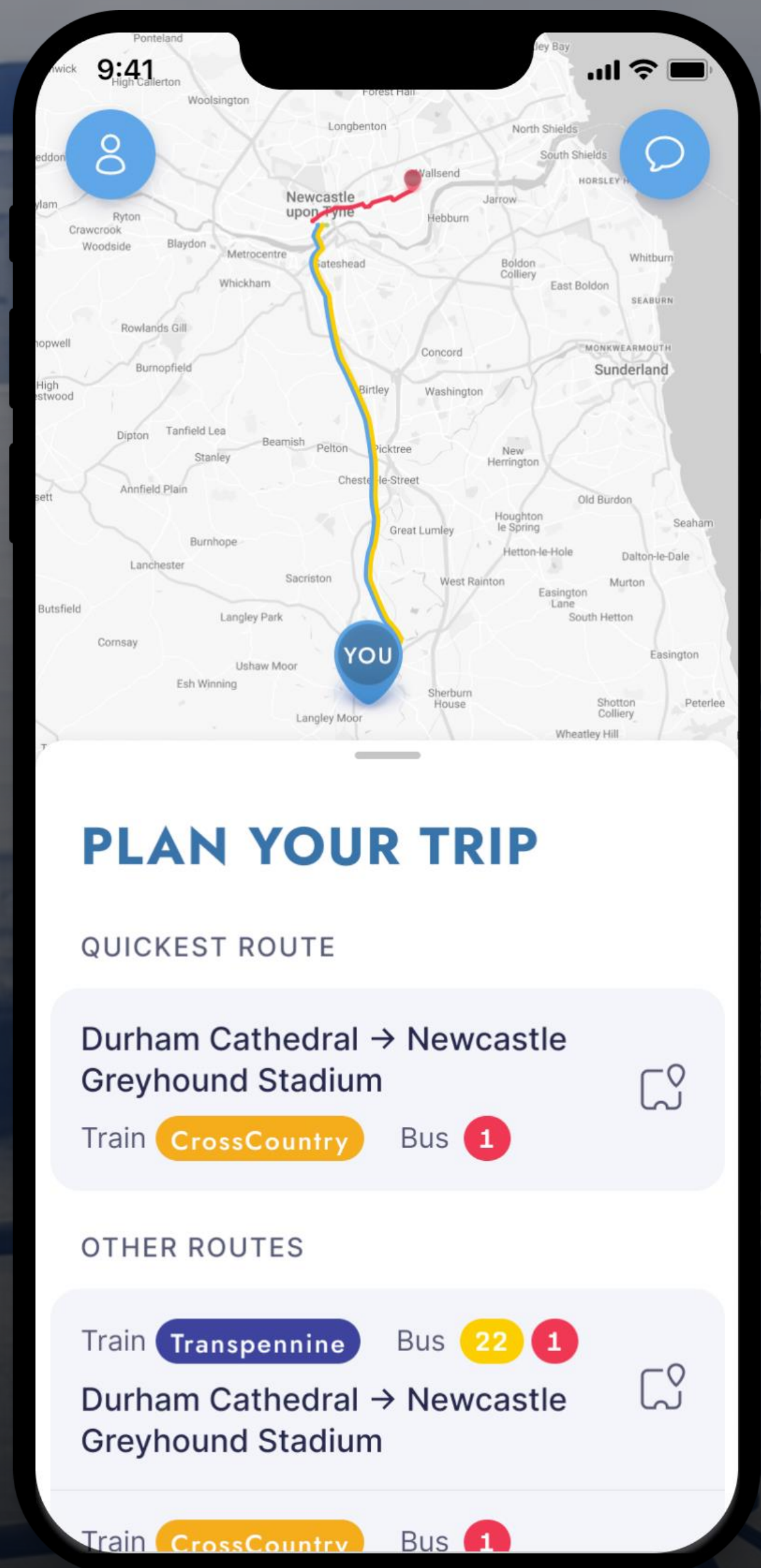
Suggested Features

/ Real time planning information

/ Smart ticketing

/ Easy payment options

/ Wayfinding

/ Multiple language options

/Integrated (widget) on destination websites, airports etc.

/ Customisable with other existing transport websites

/ Minimalistic, clean, clear design, usable for residents, local and international visitors

PUBLIC TRANSPORT PLATFORM

A platform to plan trips across North East England using public transport would be a useful tool for both tourists and locals alike. The platform would enable users to plan their journey by providing real-time information on the availability, schedules, and routes of various modes of public transportation in the region.

The major benefit of this platform is to support visitors navigate the fragmented public transportation system across the region with ease, dispelling the misconceptions of accessibility in the region. Visitors are more likely to explore different areas of the region which would drive increased spending in local businesses, as visitors would be more likely to shop, eat, and stay in different areas of the region.

The platform would also help visitors save time and money by providing information on the most cost-effective routes and travel options. This would make it more affordable for visitors to explore the region and enjoy all that it has to offer.

Finally, the platform could be used to promote public transportation as a sustainable and environmentally friendly option for travel within the region. By encouraging visitors to use public transportation, the region could reduce its carbon footprint and promote a more sustainable visitor economy.

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