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Our ref: //  
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Dear Simon

### **The West Yorkshire Combined Authority's Bus Reform Consultation**

Thank you for your correspondence dated 10 October 2023, sharing with us the consultation on the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) Bus Reform proposals, and providing Leeds City Council (LCC) as a Statutory Consultee with an opportunity to feedback as part of the statutory process. As you will be aware Bus Reform was also subject to a motion at Full Council on November 15<sup>th</sup>:

*This Council fully supports a franchised bus system in West Yorkshire as set out in the recently published West Yorkshire Combined Authority consultation on bus reform. Council calls for a report to be presented to the December Executive Board meeting to provide Council's formal response.*

I am therefore responding to you on behalf of Leeds City Council and this letter combined with the covering Report and Appendices outlines our formal feedback to your consultation process, as approved by the Council's Executive Board on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and in response to the motion on November 15<sup>th</sup>.

LCC recognises the strategic importance of the Bus Service and its role in improving connectivity across our city and wider West Yorkshire, supporting our economic growth and bringing people within easier reach of jobs and opportunities.

The Bus Service is at the heart of the sustainable transport offer and looking ahead can complement and integrate with Mass Transit. A Bus Service which meets the needs of the City in order for our city to achieve its true economic potential, it must occur alongside improved capacity at Leeds City Station, be complementary to both our existing heavy rail system and any proposals for improved rail connectivity between ourselves, Sheffield and the East Midlands.

Our commitment to an improved Bus offer is stated as a 'Big Move' in our Connecting Leeds Transport Strategy and Action Plan which is integral to the success of the city's policies on Inclusive Growth, Health & Wellbeing and tackling the Climate Emergency. <https://www.leeds.gov.uk/parking-roads-and-travel/connecting-leeds-and-transforming-travel/transport-policy>

Further, in the City Council's Local Plans consultation we recognised the development of Bus Reform in Leeds as a key local (and sub-regional) priority, and the policy makes clear that a more flexible Bus Network would be strongly supported. <https://www.leeds.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/local-plan-update>

We have paid considerable attention to the breadth of the work undertaken and would like to thank WYCA and the Auditor for the very thorough process which has been undertaken. Overall, we would like to state that we endorse the process and will support the Mayor in her final decision. Accompanying this letter, we have also sent a detailed response to the Questionnaire which we have responded to in full.

From the responses to the Questionnaire, we would like to further emphasise certain issues:

- We recognise that through the transition and the initial stages of the operation of the Bus Reform solution, the emphasis will be on having a robust efficient service. However, once the operation is established, we would hope WYCA are able to take the opportunity to re-cast the Network and begin to evolve the network to the Hub and Spoke operation and invest in modern Zero Emission buses (with multiple doors) and innovative forms of ticketing which will better meet the needs of the Connecting Leeds Transport Strategy and the corresponding WYCA Strategies.
- While this is imperative to enable the Network to meet the ambition of the Connecting Leeds Transport Strategy, we feel looking further forward it will be equally imperative for the successful operation of a Mass Transit scheme. It is vital that we have Bus Services that integrates and complements the Mass Transit offer, rather than compete against it.
- We appreciate that as the West Yorkshire Combined Authority an overall West Yorkshire solution will always be the preference. However, we do have some concerns with regard to the Lotting system. The three Leeds zones are the most profitable, and we understand that the operations in Leeds will cross-subsidise the other Zones within a Round. We are naturally concerned that this element of cross subsidy may be detrimental to the passenger offer in Leeds and the opportunities to develop the Network.
- Given the proposals from the Department for Transport last year for new powers to be assigned to the Mayor in relation to the Key Route Network and the reference made to this in the Bus Reform consultation, we would be grateful for an early meeting to discuss how any potential new powers might be utilised.

As you will be aware LCC is undergoing a significant Financial Challenge. While we recognise that the Commercial & Financial Cases have made it clear that the costs of Franchising overall to WYCA are comparable or better than the Enhanced Partnership Plus costs we also recognise that your work has modelled for Low, Central and High demand against different funding levels. However, we are concerned that if there is a

sudden and rapid decline (such as a Pandemic) and therefore Fare Box revenue rapidly decreases, we would be concerned that WYCA (and ultimately ourselves) would be left with a stark choice between putting further funding into the Network, or simply allowing the network to go into further decline.

Thank you for the opportunity to feedback Leeds City Council's view on the bus reform proposals in principle. The Council's supports WYCA's proposal and I trust the detailed points we have provided will enable you to strengthen your proposals further. We welcome and endorse the process you are undertaking and look forward to the next steps.

Yours sincerely

**Martin Farrington**  
**Director of City Development**

CC: Councillor James Lewis, Leader of Leeds City Council