

**SCRUTINY BOARD (INFRASTRUCTURE, INVESTMENT & INCLUSIVE GROWTH)**

**WEDNESDAY, 27TH NOVEMBER, 2024**

**PRESENT:** Councillor H Bithell in the Chair

Councillors A Ali, M Ali, N Buckley, K Dye,  
S Leighton, M Millar, A Scopes, M Shahzad  
and I Wilson

**44 APPEALS AGAINST REFUSAL OF INSPECTION OF DOCUMENTS**

There were no appeals.

**45 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public**

There was no exempt information.

**46 Late Items**

There were no late items.

**47 Declarations of Interests**

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests.

**48 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes**

Apologies were received from the following Scrutiny Board members:

- Cllr M Robinson
- Cllr S Lay

**49 Minutes - 6 November 2024**

The Principal Scrutiny Advisor confirmed that in relation to minute 40 further information has been circulated to members regarding careers events.

The Chair confirmed she had also emailed the Chief Officer (Economy & Skills) as agreed to formally endorse the approach to inclusive growth in Leeds.

**RESOLVED:** Members agreed that the minutes were a correct record of the meeting on 6 November.

**50 Work Schedule**

The Principal Scrutiny Advisor asked members to consider the draft work schedule at appendix 1.

Members recommended that the successor 2025/26 Scrutiny Board retains bus provision as a single item agenda in 12 months' time.

Members were reminded that a remote working group to consider the budget proposals that fall within the remit of this Scrutiny Board would be taking place on **9 December 2024 1-2.30pm**. The discussions that take place at this meeting will help inform the joint scrutiny statement that is provided to the Executive Board in response to the budget proposals.

**RESOLVED:** Members noted the Scrutiny Board's work schedule for the 2024/25 municipal year and recommended that the successor 2025/26 Scrutiny Board retains bus provision as a single item agenda in 12 months' time.

## 51 Future of Bus Provision in Leeds

Those individuals in attendance for this item were:

- **Tim Taylor** - Director of Transport Services (WYCA)
- **Cllr Peter Carlill** - Deputy Chair Transport Committee (WYCA)
- **Darren Rushworth** - Regional Secretary Unite the Union
- **Steff Simeone** - Unite the Union Representative at TransDev
- **Kayleigh Ingham** - Commercial Director First Bus
- **Megan Hope** - Operations Director First Bus
- **Paul Turner** - Commercial Director TransDev
- **Paul Moses** - Communications Manager Arriva UK
- **Gary Bartlett** - Chief Officer, Highways and Transportation
- **Cllr Jonathan Pryor** - Executive Member

The Chair began by thanking everyone for attending and extended the thanks of the Scrutiny Board to Tim Taylor for the report provided in advance of the meeting.

In her introductory comments, Cllr Bithell noted that bus provision continues to be a significant priority for the Scrutiny Board and is frequently raised in relation to other areas of work – including the delivery of inclusive growth in the city and plans for mass transit.

She reflected upon post-pandemic challenges around patronage and financing for the sector, and welcomed positive customer feedback about bus drivers. She noted there had been significant developments regarding franchising since the Scrutiny Board's last update in November 2023.

In his introductory comments Tim Taylor highlighted the timeframe for transitioning to franchising, advising the Scrutiny Board that the first procurement of services would begin in quarter four of 2025.

Other highlights from this year included service enhancements funded through the Bus Service Improvement Plan such as 'Superbus' schemes developed in partnership with commercial operators and retaining park and ride service provision in Leeds.

Cllr Carlill noted that patronage levels are still lower than pre-pandemic levels. He confirmed the Combined Authority and the Mayor have previously agreed to retain the current £2 fare cap until the end of March 2025. From April 2025 until December 2025 this will rise to £2.50. The Combined Authority is not part of the national fare cap scheme so must fund costs locally. Cllr Carlill reiterated that the safety across the network, particularly for women and girls, remains a key priority for WYCA.

Darren Rushworth advised the Scrutiny Board that union members are concerned about the impact of franchising on job security and conditions of work. He welcomed the positive way in which providers such as First and TransDev have worked with trade unions to resolve pay claims this year.

Members requested more information about several issues including:

- An apparent decline in bus use by the under 26/student cohort referenced in the appended report.
- National funding allocations for bus service improvements.
- Funding arrangements required to transition to franchising.
- Risk levels for public funding in a franchising structure as opposed to commercial open market.
- Ways in which bus travel can become more attractive than car journeys.
- The consequences for communities of services being cancelled due to a risk of anti-social behaviour, while recognising the need to ensure driver safety.
- Evidence of safety concerns, particularly for women travelling in the evening, at bus stops and during bus journeys.
- Accessibility of bus apps.
- The accuracy of real time monitoring systems.
- Levels of customer satisfaction as compared to the national average.

Paul Turner reassured members that he believes young people are using alternative fares such as season tickets rather than targeted ticketing, and that this is presenting as a decline in the statistics.

Cllr Carlill advised the Board that it is the view of the Combined Authority that franchising presents opportunities to deliver greater stability across the network, and reduces the risk of losing routes and driver jobs. The Scrutiny Board was advised that the combined authority will be able to take more decisions on a network wide basis under a franchising system.

Tim Taylor advised the Scrutiny Board that key features of an attractive service are affordability, reliability and punctuality. He noted the importance of real time bus information and bus prioritisation in this context. Tim cited 'superbus' routes as an example of where patronage has increased due to the

provision of a fast, reliable and frequent service. Such services are only possible using a direct route on main roads.

Representatives from the bus operators agreed that less frequent services are less attractive to customers. The challenge of balancing social benefits of bus routes with commercial realities was explored.

Cllr Carlill outlined the complexity of accessing information about reliability of routes within the overall network as data needs to be provided by multiple bus operators. He noted that it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about links between patronage and incidents of specific route failures.

Members were advised that incidents of concern can be reported via the police or safer travel team. The MCard app also allows reporting with regards to perceptions of safety. It was noted that once available the latest information from MCard reporting could be shared with the Scrutiny Board to provide a richer picture of the current experience of bus users.

Cllr Carlill provided more information about ways the travel safety partnership is seeking to tackle anti-social behaviour and improve perceptions of safety.

Megan Hope outlined the ways in which First Bus are working with partners to deliver education programmes to young people with a view to reducing anti-social behaviour linked to bus travel. She also updated members on the piloting of a crime button on board buses to strengthen support for drivers. She welcomed BSIP funding, which has enabled police to be present on some buses.

Members reflected on perceptions of safety and the wider concerns of women and girls walking to and from bus stops as part of their overall journey, especially at night.

Members further noted that where incidents of concern occur other passengers are often fearful of reporting that activity or intervening to stop the perpetrator.

It was recommended that partners consider ways in which to raise awareness of the option to report such incidents safely via the app. Improving the consistency of messaging about methods of reporting was highlighted as an area that could be considered with the Bus Alliance.

Members requested that consideration is given to expanding the priority of improving the safety of women and girls to include other protected characteristics.

As part of broader communications, members asked whether the data regarding safety could be used to provide reassurances to passengers – e.g. ‘you are safer because...’

Bus operators and Tim Taylor noted an ambition to improve the accessibility of apps.

Tim Taylor provided further insight into some of the challenges for small operators in providing real time bus information. This includes the need to invest in ticketing infrastructure. Contracting arrangements under franchising may improve this situation. Cllr Carlill noted a commitment to remove 'ghost buses' from the real time system.

Cllr Leighton highlighted concerns about changes to local bus routes in her ward and raised concerns about the ease of access to data that could illustrate the impact of those changes.

Kayleigh Ingham acknowledged the challenges experienced by bus users following changes to the routes referred to by Cllr Leighton. She outlined the complexity of the timetabling process and the extended period in which notification of changes must take place. She noted that when changes were announced the operator was unaware of planned highways works which subsequently impacted upon the reliability of the service. She confirmed the action that had been taken to address the situation and advised the Board that the route changes will be withdrawn in the new year.

Kayleigh further confirmed that she is working with Gary Bartlett to look at how a similar situation can be avoided in future.

The general impact of highways works on bus reliability and punctuality was explored. Gary Bartlett informed the Scrutiny Board that patronage has increased along corridors such as the A647, where there has been intervention through the former Leeds Public Transport Investment Programme. This includes bus prioritisation works. WYCA will continue to monitor the impact of that work.

Members were provided with further information about the way in which reliability is measured and monitored.

Additional information was provided about the funding model for superbus schemes.

Reflecting on requests for additional services to anchor organisations such as hospitals, Paul Moses advised members that operators have to balance additional service demands with the impact of introducing more buses to parts of the city that are already very congested.

Gary Bartlett provided an overview of park and ride provision and noted ambitions to enhance services, especially at the weekend. When finances allow there is an aspiration to increase the frequency of services at Temple Green.

Members sought information about the experience of bus franchising in Manchester and the impact on employment. Darren Rushworth outlined some

of the unintended consequences created through a system that provided different working conditions within different parts of the network.

Tim Taylor reassured the Scrutiny Board that lessons will be learned from Manchester and that the Combined Authority wants a stable system for all staff across the industry.

Cllr Bithell welcomed greater flexibility in services that now enable those with caring responsibilities to still access the city centre quickly after the traditional 'peak' commuting periods.

Concern was raised about the volume of speakers providing information at bus stops for those experiencing sight loss. Members asked that in the short-term volumes are increased to improve accessibility. In the longer term, should financing allow, members would welcome the exploration of a wider range of technological solutions such as GPS cage systems to improve accessibility.

Tim Taylor confirmed that he is happy to look at these issues and to meet with the Chair and representatives from the Sight Loss Council.

**RESOLVED:**

Members of the Scrutiny Board noted the contents of the report and made the following recommendations:

- a) WYCA to explore with partners opportunities to improve the standardisation of communications regarding ways in which to report concerns about safety. It was further recommended that this includes consideration of how to improve the accessibility of apps which enable quick, discreet reporting.
- b) WYCA to consider whether the prioritisation of the safety of women and girls should be expanded to include all protected characteristics.
- c) WYCA to assess whether the volume of information provided at bus stops for people with sight loss can be increased. In the longer-term members highlighted an aspiration to improve accessibility through solutions such as GPS cage systems.
- d) Tim Taylor to share data regarding perceptions of safety with the Scrutiny Board to provide a richer picture of the experience of bus users.
- e) A further update should be provided to the Scrutiny Board in 12 months' time.

***Cllr N Buckley left the meeting at 11am.***

## **52 Date and Time of Next Meeting**

The next public meeting of the Scrutiny Board will take place on **22 January 2024** at **10.15am**. There will be a pre-meeting for all Board members at **10.00am**.

Members were also asked to note there is a remote working group to consider the budget proposals that fall within the remit of the Scrutiny board on **9 December 1-2.30pm**.