

SCRUTINY BOARD (INFRASTRUCTURE, INVESTMENT & INCLUSIVE GROWTH)

WEDNESDAY, 2ND NOVEMBER, 2022

PRESENT: Councillor P Truswell in the Chair

Councillors P Alderson, N Buckley,
M Foster, J Garvani, S Hamilton,
Z Hussain, J Lennox, M Shahzad,
N Sharpe and I Wilson

35 APPEALS AGAINST REFUSAL OF INSPECTION OF DOCUMENTS

There were no appeals.

36 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no exempt information.

37 Late Items

There were no late items.

38 Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest. Councillors Buckley, Lennox and Wilson informed the meeting that they sat on the West Yorkshire Combined Authority Transport Committee.

39 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors A Hussain, W Kidger and S Lay.

Councillor Z Hussain was in attendance as substitute.

40 Minutes - 28 September 2022

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

41 Advancing Bus Service Provision

The report of the Head of Democratic Services provided the Board with an update on Advancing Bus Provision within West Yorkshire. Reference was made to the inquiry into Advancing Bus Service Provision which was

undertaken by the Scrutiny Board (City Development) and subsequent recommendation tracking by successor Boards.

The following information was appended to the report.

- Report of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority into Advancing Bus Provision.
- Summary of Bus Infrastructure Investment identified within the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement.
- Executive Summary of the West Yorkshire Bus Service Improvement Plan.

The following were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Helen Hayden, Executive Member
- Councillor Peter Carlill, Deputy Chair WYCA Transport Committee
- Dave Pearson, Director (Transport & Property Services) WYCA
- Kate Morris, Head of Transport Planning, Leeds City Council
- Kim Purcell, Arriva
- Paul Matthews, First Bus
- Paul Turner, TransDev
- Darren Rushworth, Unite Regional Officer
- Andy Dyer, Unite Branch Secretary

Dave Pearson introduced the report.

The following was highlighted:

- The pandemic had had a significant impact on bus patronage and a longer-term impact on travel behaviours. There was a need to recover from this and for services to evolve.
- Bus services had also been impacted due to economic and employment market issues.
- Bus patronage has recovered to 80% of pre-pandemic numbers.
- Impact of inflation on fuel prices and other measures.
- Bus services have been supported by Central and Local Government during the pandemic to enable key workers to travel. There is still some additional funding through the Bus Recovery Grant but this is due to end at the end of this financial year. Some services would not be viable without this funding.
- The West Yorkshire region had been successful in securing funding from Government to support the delivery of the Bus Service Improvement Plan.
- Since the introduction of the Mayor's Fares initiative there has been an initial growth in passenger numbers of 4 to 5% - although it was noted that it is at yet difficult to determine whether this growth is directly attributable to the fares initiative or a combination of the Mayor's Fares and other factors such as schools returning after the summer break.

- There has been extensive public consultation about regional bus services via the Mayor's Big Bus Chat. The outcomes of this will be discussed by the WYCA Transport Committee later this year.
- A bus reform programme has been established to manage an assessment of franchising.
- Partnership between WYCA and the bus operators had been strengthened through the creation of the West Yorkshire Bus Alliance.
- Additional funding has been secured to support the provision of zero emission buses. This followed a successful Zero Emission Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA) bid. WYCA was working with the bus operators to deliver this.

In relation to highways, it was reported that bus operations are an integral part of the Connecting Leeds Transport Strategy and work is ongoing with WYCA and Bus Operators to provide priority for buses, deliver improvements and encourage bus use.

Representatives from Unite the Union addressed the Board. Issues highlighted included the following:

- Drivers and union members had done their best during to keep services running despite the unprecedented challenge of the pandemic and subsequent economic conditions.
- There is a good relationship with the bus service providers and both parties were pulling in the same direction to provide a successful service in Leeds and West Yorkshire.
- In the view of Unite a shortage of bus drivers is in part due to pay, evidenced by the fact that drivers had been able to find better paid jobs elsewhere.
- The need to provide reliable services.

The representatives of the bus operators addressed the Board. The following was highlighted:

- Labour market challenges.
- Changes in patterns of use post-pandemic with some user groups not returning to the buses at the same rate as others – including concessionary travellers.
- Uncertainty regarding future funding for current services due to the end of Government support in March.
- Current disruption in the City Centre with changes to the road network.

In response to comments and questions from the Board, the following was discussed:

- Concern regarding services being withdrawn at short notice and without community consultation. It was reported that usage on some routes had been significantly below the recovery rate of others and it had not been viable to continue them. Other services had been

diverted to compensate where there had been cancellations. Conversations were ongoing regarding the reinstatement of some cancelled routes.

- Profit margins required to enable Bus Operators to re-invest in services.
- Delivery of new vehicles – there was still a balance of 21 electric vehicles to be delivered from the long-standing commitment to deliver 284 in total. The cost of vehicles was discussed, including the significant premium on electric and hydrogen vehicles. It was confirmed by one operator that no diesel vehicles would be purchased after this year.
- The current assessment for franchising would look at different options for ownership of vehicles and bus depots.
- Grants are available from Government to address the difference in price between a diesel and an electric vehicle under the Zebra scheme.
- Part of the funding received towards electric vehicles was to be used for other capacity needs including electricity supply and charging facilities.
- Problems with driver recruitment were not just down to rates of pay but other issues including shift patterns and the operating environment. There were currently 100 vacancies in West Yorkshire with 200 training or waiting to train. Work was ongoing with the Unions regarding recruitment and employment issues. It was also recognised that there was a need to recruit more young drivers.
- There needs to be more buses on direct routes to the hospitals and other facilities. It was acknowledged that services had previously been focussed on city and town centres and employment sites. WYCA has a role in supporting services to more marginal areas and there was opportunity with the Bus Service Improvement Plan to try and address the demand for change. Different types of service are being piloted.
- The need to improve accessibility for people with wheelchairs and pushchairs. Buses all meet national accessibility standards but capacity can still be challenging at peak times. The latest buses can accommodate one wheelchair or three pushchairs. To create further space would be at the cost of regular seating. There was some work ongoing with bus manufacturers with regard to these issues.
- Access bus services are tailored for people with disabilities. These services tended to be to fixed destinations.
- The trial of the East Leeds flexi bus would be reviewed to see if the service was value for money and a decision would be made in the new year regarding the future of the service.
- Real time information screens at bus stops – these are currently mainly provided on routes into the city centre. More are being provided and smart phone users can get real time information at any bus stop via the scanning of a QR code. Changes to the real time technology and work with bus operators had helped to improve the situation with incorrect information being provided.
- The Mayor's Fares scheme – The £2 single fare had brought prices down for a significant number of customers. The scheme was

proposed to last for three years and the impact on bus patronage and travel behaviour would be closely examined during this time.

- Funding from the Bus Improvement Plan would be used to inform a 5-year service plan. This will include outer and rural areas and consider how to keep connectivity for communities who are less well connected.
- The bus companies had been consulted with regard to spending of funds available from the Bus Improvement Plan. There were restrictions on what the funding could be used for.
- There had been consultation with the bus companies regarding the proposed train station at White Rose.
- Transport authorities and the bus operators are required to provide an analysis of routes that would not be viable without additional funding. WYCA is contributing towards almost two thirds of routes across West Yorkshire.
- Drop in customer satisfaction – this could be due to recent issues with reliability and traffic congestion.
- Fall in passengers using concessionary fares – numbers of young people travelling has reached pre pandemic levels. Older people and disabled users have not reached previous levels. There are differing social and demographic reasons including the change of peoples shopping habits.
- There has been communication with the Secretary of State regarding long term funding for bus provision.
- The Bus Service Improvement Plan was devised before the driver shortage emerged. The plan is a live document and would refer to the driver shortage as one of the challenges
- Further information on the ZEBRA scheme will be circulated to Board Members.
- Concerns with congestion and the impact on reliability of services. It was noted that one of the causes was due to drivers not adhering to the highway code at junctions. It was reported that junctions were monitored and traffic signals were adjusted during periods of heavy traffic. The Council will be getting new powers regarding traffic enforcement and cameras may be installed in some locations.

The Chair thanked all in attendance for their contributions.

RESOLVED – That the report and discussion be noted.

42 Work Schedule

The report of the Head of Democratic Services presented the Board's Work Schedule for the remainder of the 2022/23 Municipal Year. Minutes of the last Executive Board meeting were appended to the report.

Members were reminded that there would be a Budget Consultation Working Group meeting on 14 December 2022.

RESOLVED – That the report and work schedule be noted.

43 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Thursday, 8 December at 10.30 a.m. There will be a pre-meeting for all Board Members at 10.15 a.m.