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SCRUTINY BOARD (INFRASTRUCTURE, INVESTMENT & INCLUSIVE GROWTH)

WEDNESDAY, 1ST NOVEMBER, 2023

PRESENT: Councillor A Marshall-Katung in the Chair

Councillors N Buckley, B Flynn, M Foster,
J Garvani, S Golton, S Hamilton,
A Hussain, M Millar, A Rontree, M Shahzad
and N Sharpe

44 APPEALS AGAINST REFUSAL OF INSPECTION OF DOCUMENTS

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents.

45 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no exempt items.

46 Late Items

There are no late items.

47 Declarations of Interests

There were declarations of interest.

48 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies were received from Cllr Wilson (Cllr Rontree attended as a substitute) and Cllr Lay (Cllr Golton attended as a substitute).

49 Minutes - 27 September 2023

The Scrutiny Board approved the minutes of the ordinary meeting held at 10.30am on 27 September 2023 and the minutes of the call-in meeting held at 1.30pm on the same date.

50 Matters Arising

In relation to minute 32 the Chair confirmed that letters had been sent to Mark Harper MP (Secretary of State for Transport), Louise Haigh MP (Shadow Secretary of State for Transport) and Iain Stewart (Transport Committee Chair) in relation to road deaths and injuries involving young people.

It was noted that Richard Holden MP had responded on behalf of Mark Harper MP but that this did not address the issues raised in the original correspondence.

Cllr Marshall-Katung and Cllr Hayden therefore agreed to write back to Richard Holden MP to reiterate their original concerns and will seek the agreement of Dr Ian Greenwood to write jointly as in the first instance.

51 Future of Bus Provision in Leeds

The Chair noted that in recent years Scrutiny Board members have requested an annual update on the future of bus provision in the city.

The Chair considered the increased importance of engagement with the Scrutiny Board in light of the challenges and opportunities facing the bus sector post pandemic, including new trends in patronage and bus revenues.

The Scrutiny Board noted that West Yorkshire Combined Authority is currently conducting a statutory consultation on proposed bus reform, which will run until January 2024.

Members welcomed the “data rich report” that had been prepared for the meeting.

The following individuals attended the Scrutiny Board meeting for this item:

- Cllr Helen Hayden (Executive Member)
- Gary Bartlett (Chief Officer, Transportation & Highways)
- Cllr Peter Carlill (Deputy Chair of WYCA Transport Committee)
- Dave Haskins (WYCA Interim Director Transport Operations & Passenger Experience)
- Rachel Jones (Interim Head of Mobility Services)
- Dwayne Wells (Head of Commercial, Arriva)
- Andrew Cullen (Managing Director, First Bus)
- Kayleigh Ingham (Commercial Director, First Bus)
- Brandon Jones (Head of External Relations, First Bus)
- Paul Turner (Commercial Director, Transdev)
- Andrew McGuinness (Regional Manager, Confederation of Passenger Transport UK)
- Darren Rushworth (Regional Officer Unite the Union)
- Andy Dyer (Branch Secretary Unite the Union)

Current Position

Dave Haskins introduced a report produced by West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA). He noted that the process of reviewing and adapting networks post-pandemic is on-going. There remains some uncertainty as to whether travel behaviour changes will become permanent.

The bus network has reduced over the last decade but not to the extent of most other major conurbations including South Yorkshire, Merseyside and Greater Manchester.

West Yorkshire has a consistently lower level of bus passenger journeys per head than England as a whole. The Scrutiny Board was informed that between June and September overall bus patronage was 78% of baseline levels.

Cllr Carlill welcomed the reduction in volatility over the last year, noting an increase in patronage and the introduction of some new services.

Representatives from the bus operators welcomed increased stability in the network and highlighted close partnership working with WYCA.

Dwayne Wells provided an overview of the experience of Arriva over the last twelve months, informing members that services have been enhanced between Leeds and Shipley to better connect residents to employment hubs.

Dwayne Wells highlighted overall positive recovery in patronage, particularly amongst young people, but noted that concessions remain at 65% of pre-pandemic levels. New services were introduced to the network in September and work is ongoing to recruit new drivers.

Andrew McGuinness emphasised the importance of stability in enabling operators to deliver reliable services and highlighted growth in longer distance services. He provided an overview of the benefits to localities of small, local operators and set out how the sector has worked with WYCA to support improved driver recruitment, training and retention.

Andrew Dyer welcomed improved industrial relations over the last twelve months and the pay award received by drivers. He raised concern about the frequency of changes to the network and the associated uncertainty for drivers. He and Darren Rushworth highlighted the challenge of the current cost-of-living crisis for employees.

Performance – Punctuality and Reliability

The Scrutiny Board was informed that overall performance in relation to reliability and punctuality is below target. Scrutiny Board members queried whether this information could be broken down to provide more detail about localised performance – to identify potential ‘hot spots’ for delays or particularly challenging circumstances for drivers.

Rachel Jones confirmed that WYCA is already considering how such data could be provided following a request from members of the WYCA Transport Committee. Members noted the importance of reliability for those using the bus network to access employment, education and/or health services.

An overview was provided of the priorities upon which the 2022 Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding award was premised.

All operators highlighted the challenge in ensuring reliability and punctuality while city centre road works are taking place, particularly on Whitehall Road. Paul Turner highlighted the impact on drivers where services run late.

Gary Bartlett underlined the close working relationship between Leeds City Council and WYCA, informing the Scrutiny Board that representatives meet regularly to address areas of concern and congestion 'hot spots.' He highlighted the extensive investment in bus priority schemes on the highway delivered via the Leeds Public Transport Investment Programme.

Gary Bartlett advised the Scrutiny Board that congestion in Leeds remains lower than in most other Core Cities. There has, however, been an increase in network openings over the last twelve months – typically 30 – 35,000 openings would be anticipated in that time but there has been in the region of 50,000. Disruption to the network can be caused by factors beyond the control of the Council including maintenance works and emergency repairs by utility providers. Disruption will continue to occur given the levels of investment and development in the city.

In response to concern about congestion in the city centre Gary Bartlett offered to review the available data with partners in the urban control centre with the aim of facilitating improvements to the issues identified.

Cllr Hayden reassured colleagues that the Council works with developers to ensure disruption to the highway network is minimised but reiterated the importance of development and major events to the local economy.

It is hoped a mass transit system will be progressed in the coming years to further improve integrated transport services in the city.

Safer Travel

Concern was expressed about increased levels of anti-social behaviour post-pandemic, which puts drivers and customers at risk. The Board welcomed the establishment of a Safer Travel team, which will include 15 PCSOs - 10 of which are funded through BSIP monies.

A collaborative approach to tackling anti-social behaviour from bus operators, WYCA and West Yorkshire Police aims to reduce crime and protect women and girls, and the young and vulnerable. A reduction in anti-social behaviour at Ossett bus station was provided as an example of successful partnership working in this area.

Mayor's Fares

Further work will be taking place to assess the impact of the Mayor's Fares initiative on patronage. The Mayor's Fares have been funded through BSIP. However, the Government has recently announced a national £2 flat fare scheme, so WYCA is currently engaging with Government to clarify what that means for West Yorkshire.

Real Time Information

Members sought more information about why disparities occur between real time information boards, transport apps and customer experience of local services.

Dave Haskins acknowledged that real time information is often raised as a concern by customers. WYCA and bus operators have been working collaboratively to remove inconsistencies from the system. Some of the technical challenges relating to providing real time data were outlined. In addition, the Board was informed that manual changes are required to reflect rapid decision making where routes are not running on time or have to be cancelled.

Kayleigh Ingham noted the need for 5G technology on board buses to improve connectivity. She informed the Scrutiny Board that a trial of 5G technology has taken place at Stourton park and ride and does appear to have improved the reliability. However, significant investment will be required to roll that out to the whole fleet.

Bus Reform

The current consultation on proposed Bus reform will close in January 2024 and an announcement regarding the outcome of that process is anticipated in spring 2024.

The implications of proposed bus reform were discussed by the Board with clarity sought about the future ownership of assets including zero emission buses. Cllr Carlill set out the key differences between bus reform based upon franchising and an enhanced partnership model.

Kayleigh Ingham raised concerns about short term uncertainty relating to asset ownership if the West Yorkshire Mayor determines that bus franchising should be progressed. She noted that there would be challenging decisions regarding ongoing investment in the network in the 3-5 year period between an announcement and franchising being fully implemented.

Andrew McGuinness added that an unintended consequence of bus franchising in Manchester has been the exclusion of small operators from the network. He informed the Scrutiny Board that CPT will be submitting a formal consultation response to WYCA in relation to bus reform and that will reflect concerns about the impact of franchising on small operators in Leeds.

Investment in Infrastructure

The report presented to members set out proposals for investment in capital infrastructure, which aims to improve bus service delivery. This includes bus priority measures on the highway to improve reliability, punctuality and journey times.

Zero Emission Buses

Further information was provided about the West Yorkshire Zero Emission Bus (ZEB) Programme, which will see the introduction of between 200 and

270 zero emission buses. An overview of the three phases of this programme was provided. Members sought more information about funding arrangements being put in place to secure additional zero emission buses.

Brandon Jones set out the ambitions of First Bus for decarbonisation. He noted that Bramley bus depot is under construction and will be fully electrified by March 2024. He suggested that local and national commitments to decarbonisation may be accelerated further through the enhanced partnership proposal.

Andrew McGuinness highlighted that even the Euro6 diesel vehicle has lower emissions than a car - and that is before adding in 70 passengers.

Park and Ride Services

An update was provided in relation to park and ride services with queries raised about the response of the operator to changes in patronage and customer behaviour post-pandemic.

Gary Bartlett informed members that performance is monitored across all three park and ride sites. Stourton is performing very well, as is Elland Road. There is some concern about Temple Green, where performance is lower. However, performance had been predicted to decrease once Stourton opened.

There are ambitions to deliver a further park and ride service in the north of Leeds but funding will need to be secured in order to deliver that site.

Data and Transparency

Members queried whether more Leeds-specific information could be provided in future reports. Members were informed that the cross-boundary nature of many services and the involvement of multiple operators makes this challenging. It was also noted that many small operators do not have real time information available.

Concern was expressed about the way in which decision makers at WYCA ensure local accountability and engage with local representatives to understand community priorities about bus provision.

Further information was sought regarding the transparency of decision-making processes and the circumstances in which equality impact assessments would be conducted in relation to route changes.

Route Changes

WYCA and bus operators highlighted the challenge of long-term planning for the whole network in an environment where there is often significant uncertainty over sources of funding and access to that funding is fragmented.

The process of an operator removing a route and the subsequent consideration of that decision by WYCA was set out for members.

The Scrutiny Board was informed that many routes continue to be provided by operators to ensure the resilience of the overall network, despite being unprofitable when considered in isolation.

Driver Retention

Members sought a view from representatives from Unite the Union about driver retention. In response, they were advised that the situation for drivers has improved but long hours and disrupted schedules were creating a difficult environment for drivers to work within.

The Chair thanked all the guests for attending.

David Spereall was thanked by the Scrutiny Board for his work as a local democracy reporter and councillors wished him well in his new role with the BBC.

RESOLVED:

Members agreed that a further update should be provided in the next municipal year, including detail on the implications for bus provision in the city following the West Yorkshire Mayor's decision regarding bus reform in the Spring.

52 Work Schedule

Members considered the draft work programme for 2023/24.

Members were asked to note that an additional remote working group has been scheduled for **1 December 9.15am-10.15am**. This will provide further opportunity to discuss the nature of employment data held by the Council ahead of January's meeting at which performance reports will be discussed.

53 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Scrutiny Board will take place on **Friday 8 December 2023 at 10.30am**. There will be a pre-meeting for all Board members at **10.15am**

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