

**NOTES OF THE INFORMAL MEETING OF THE
JOINT DISTRICT CONSULTATION SUB COMMITTEES
HELD REMOTELY ON THURSDAY, 26 AUGUST 2021**

Present:

Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe (Chair)	Bradford Council
Councillor Kim Groves	Leeds City Council
Councillor Manisha Kaushik	Kirklees Council
Councillor Lou Cunningham	Leeds City Council
Councillor Allan Garbutt	Wakefield Council
Councillor Suhail Choudhry	Bradford Council
Councillor Helen Hayden	Leeds City Council
Councillor James Homewood	Kirklees Council
Councillor Rizwana Jamil	Bradford Council
Councillor Naveed Riaz	Bradford Council
Councillor Taj Salam	Bradford Council
Councillor Jane Scullion	Calderdale Council
Usman Ali (Public Representative)	Wakefield
John Birkby (Public Representative)	Leeds
Linda Bishop (Public Representative)	Leeds
James Craig (Public Representative)	Bradford
Howard Dews (Public Representative)	Leeds
Stephen Hetherington (Public Representative)	Bradford
Andrew Jewsbury (Public Representative)	Bradford
Shaun Jordan (Public Representative)	Kirklees
Catherine Keighley (Public Representative)	Leeds
Peter Ketley (Public Representative)	Bradford
Mark Parry (Public Representative)	Leeds
Graham Peacock (Public Representative)	Bradford
John Prestage (Public Representative)	Bradford
David Quarmby (Public Representative)	Kirklees
Keith Renshaw (Public Representative)	Bradford
Judith Rhodes (Public Representative)	Leeds
Barrie Rigg (Public Representative)	Bradford
John Sheppard (Public Representative)	Calderdale
Leslie Webb (Public Representative)	Leeds
Geoff Wood (Public Representative)	Calderdale
Clive Woods (Public Representative)	Leeds

In attendance:

Mark Fenwick	Arriva Yorkshire
Graham Meiklejohn	TransPennine Express
Paul Moses	First Group
Pete Myers	Northern Trains
Mohammed Raja	First Group
Dwayne Wells	Arriva Yorkshire
Andrew Bradley	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Helen Ellerton	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Thomas Lock	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Dave Pearson	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Dominic Martin	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

1. Introductions

The Chair welcomed members of the District Consultation Sub-Committees, and introduced herself, the lead Members of the Transport Committee, and the Chairs of each Sub-Committee.

2. The National Bus strategy and Bus Service Improvement Plan overview

Members received a presentation from the Director of Transport and Property Services on the Bus Service Improvement Plan. Some key themes were presented for discussion: 'Fares and ticketing', 'Bus network design', and 'Bus priority and supporting infrastructure'. Members were asked to feedback what they thought the most important things to consider in this plan would be. This was part of a wider engagement process, and it was hoped this would highlight the priorities from each district area.

The Government's National Bus Strategy had been published on 15 March 2021, setting out an important role for buses in the transport network and noting that a deregulated environment had not worked well for buses. As part of this, Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) had been given a deadline of 31 October 2021 to produce a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). This plan would set out the LTAs' intentions for the bus services in their region, and how they would deliver on the themes in the National Bus Strategy, which were that buses be:

- Faster and more reliable
- More frequent
- Better integrated with other modes of travel such as trains, walking and cycling
- Cheaper
- Easier to use and to understand
- More comprehensive.

The BSIP was also being designed to align with the Mayor's pledges for the bus service, including bringing the bus service back under public control and supporting more environmentally-friendly buses. It would also serve as a bidding document for the Government funding stream behind the National Bus Strategy.

The Bus Services Act included methods through which LTAs can work with bus companies to strengthen the collective role of management of the bus service. In line with this, and recognising the importance of buses to the people of the region, the Combined Authority was proposing to establish a more formal enhanced partnership with bus operators, and also look forward at potentially undertaking a franchising scheme, as had been approved at the June 2021 meeting of the Combined Authority. Final recommendations regarding whether franchising could deliver the aims of the plan more effectively were expected to be made to the Mayor and the Combined Authority in 2023.

Members raised the following questions and concerns:

- Should Northern Rail be included as a fourth partner, given the strong integration between bus and rail and the Combined Authority's existing close relationship with Northern Rail? These linkages would be kept – the Enhanced Partnership as prescribed by the Bus Services Act would be between the LTA, the Highway Authority and the bus companies, but rail and other forms of transport would still be important considerations.
- Faster services would require bus priorities on corridors to implement – existing bus priority lanes had already shown a strong impact.
- Including areas on the outskirts and housing estates would be vital, as well as places like employment zones, anchor organisations like hospitals, etc.
- To achieve the aims of the National Bus Strategy, particularly cheaper fares, buy-in from bus operators would be required.
- Would bus operators be bound by the BSIP? The aim of the BSIP was to develop a partnership with operators, and it was believed this would be beneficial for operators in terms of increasing numbers of passengers. If operators did not commit to this partnership, government funding could be affected, and the Combined Authority had the option of taking further franchising powers to direct bus operators.
- How would success be measured? Targets would be set for patronage, average journey time, reliability, customer satisfaction measures, etc. This would inform the recommendation made to the Mayor and Combined Authority about pursuing franchising. However, it was recognised this would be made more difficult by the effect of pandemic on patronage, which was still in the process of recovering.
- Integration between bus and other modes of transport, particularly cycle, were welcomed but would require proper infrastructure, such as secure structures/facilities for locking bikes. The difficulties of carrying heavier bikes in certain situations was also raised, as was the feasibility of bringing bikes onto buses.

Concerns were also raised that the strategy of a partnership had been attempted before with Local Transport Plans, and that bus services had been in decline for many years before the pandemic, with many cancellations and a loss of public trust in the service – what would make the BSIP succeed where previous attempts had not? Officers advised that this partnership was different in that it involved a structural change; it would fundamentally incorporate the

funding streams, and would push operators to move toward things they had historically been averse to, such as multi-operator ticketing. Additionally, the historical loss of bus patronage reflected the national situation rather than anything unique to West Yorkshire.

It was also noted that for the bus network to grow, a new, modern, integrated approach had to be taken. The overall improvement of the bus service would go beyond the BSIP and would include measures being implemented as part of the Leeds Public Transport Investment Programme and through the Transforming Cities Fund. It would be important to integrate these measures and to work with operators to offer different models, such as the Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) as currently being trialled in East Leeds.

3. Discussion 1: Fares and ticketing

Members were asked to consider several questions relating to fares and ticketing for the bus service.

- Is it right that the ticketing structure gives discounts to regular users and charges walk-in users a higher rate? Does this encourage people to use the service? How will the long-term impact to working from home impact this?
- Are uniform flat fares desirable, or would graduated fares which were simpler than the current offer be preferable?
- Should fares be the same across all districts?
- Would a contactless capping system as used in London work well here?
- Should concessionary fare schemes (currently offered to under-19s and for the elderly and disabled people) be extended to any further customer groups?

It was noted that offering lower fares to new/walk-on customers could work well in encouraging people to try the bus service, as could promotions such as group ticketing.

Members also discussed the fares offered in other areas, such as Edinburgh and London. Edinburgh offered a capped fare on travel through the day, as well as a cap on individual journeys. London used flat fares with the Oyster card. These schemes were praised for being simple to use, particularly if prospective passengers were unfamiliar with the route or may make more spontaneous journeys. However, it was noted that West Yorkshire as a region had different needs and challenges than Edinburgh and London, and we were multi-centered, with a number of city and town centres that are major destination points, and our journeys may be more complicated than those of people in Edinburgh or London.

It was questioned whether the choice was between flat fares and capped fares, or whether both could be implemented together. Officers advised that a combination of both was possible with a flat fare for single journeys and a daily cap, and this would mean that passengers would not need to tap off the bus, which would be required if more complicated fares were used. The M-card day ticket currently worked similarly to a cap system in the region, however, passengers unfamiliar with the bus service may not be aware of this.

Passengers were often given a particular operator's own day ticket, which would not be accepted by other operators.

Members raised the following other questions and comments:

- If an Oyster-card style scheme were implemented, who would pay for the computer system? The Government had identified they would fund this, but there were questions as to how long this would take and what would be required to make existing systems compatible with this.
- Had research been done on what models best drove usage? Certain models, such as flat fares, may seem attractive but be less relevant at a time when only a small minority of users paid through cash. Officers advised that the data and needs relating to our region were being examined closely, rather than simply adopting what models had worked well elsewhere.
- The importance of marketing was highlighted, with buses being noted as appearing less effective at promotions compared to rail. It was anticipated that the loss of patronage caused by the pandemic would cause this to change, with new discount schemes potentially due to be announced soon.
- Flat fares could risk making short journeys more costly, when bus journeys were already viewed to be expensive. The potential of having multiple levels of flat fares was discussed, to better differentiate between long distances and short city journeys.
- The need to consider people who use cash was raised, to ensure that they weren't left behind in regard to these improvements.
- It was noted that in some areas around the world, LTAs were implementing bus services which were free at the point of use and were funded by taxpayers.

4. Discussion 2: Bus network design

Members were advised of plans to categorise bus services into different tiers, with different kinds of journeys having different requirements.

- A core network of 'turn up and go' services, running every 15 minutes or so on major routes, where the priority would be to extend and enhance these routes. These services would be expected to be commercially viable.
- A secondary network which would run less frequently and may need to be partially subsidised. The priority for these journeys would be improved consistency, with new connections.
- A network for tendered services and community connectivity needs, dealing with socially necessary and contracted journeys. These would also need to be made more consistent, with the possibility of replacing some of these services with DRT where appropriate.

This would be part of a 5-year plan to evolve the bus service, without losing the existing capabilities and important role it already played.

Members were asked to consider several questions relating to bus network design:

- Is the above-mentioned evolutionary approach the right one for the region, or would a revolutionary approach (redrawing and starting the

network from scratch) be better?

- What are the priority areas and locations for new bus links and connections?
- Would replacing certain services with DRT be welcomed?
- Which customer groups should be considered as a priority to target with better bus network connectivity?

It was noted that the funding available as part of the National Bus Strategy was a one-off payment, and therefore it was important to consider future maintenance. The Combined Authority's intention was to use the available funding to create a sustainable atmosphere, where the bus service could continue without significant further public funding.

Members questioned whether the strategic development plans, employment plans, etc, of district councils had been considered. Attracting developments that would reduce car usage from the outset would need these facilities built into the network in advance, and currently many housing developments of recent years were poorly served by public transport services, with Hade Edge in Kirklees being highlighted, although it was noted that First Group were currently in talks with local groups on how this area could be better served.

Officers advised that a long-term plan for the bus network was developed in 2018/2019 taking into account what was currently known about future plans, although the pandemic had since impacted on these plans. Mechanisms also existed to acquire initial funding for services in these situations, such as Section 106 agreements or developer contributions, and DRT could also be of use in this scenario.

Members raised the following other questions and comments:

- DRT was highlighted as playing an important role going forward, particularly as transport patterns had changed and were continuing to do so, but the new needs had not yet been modelled. DRT could fill these needs while also gathering data for where future services would best be developed. However, it was warned that DRT would never be commercially viable, as due to the relatively smaller number of passengers per driver they were more expensive to run.
- The potential use of shuttle bus/access bus services, taking people who lived away from main roads to other local destinations such as schools and doctor's surgeries, was discussed.
- The difficulty in tailoring the plan to better connect deprived communities with areas of employment, education, etc, while still ensuring areas with high car-ownership are well-served by buses in order to lower car use and meet carbon targets was discussed. A dichotomy existed between the desire to simplify fares and the bus service in general while meeting the different needs of some of these groups.
- The 'hub and spoke' model was discussed. It was noted that this model required frequent and regular services. A trade-off also inevitably existed between having less frequent direct services, and more frequent services that required bus changes.

5. Discussion 3: Bus priority and supporting infrastructure

It was highlighted that reliability and punctuality were frequently cited as the most important issues to bus passengers, and the lack of these (along with long journey times) were also attributed by those who did not use the bus as the key reasons behind this. In order to improve these measures, it was necessary to consider how bus services could be prioritised over other road users.

A number of potential areas were highlighted, including bus lanes, bus gates, traffic signal priority, and increased kerb space for buses, as well as the enforcement of existing measures such as bus lanes and car parking charges.

Members were asked to consider several questions relating to bus priority and supporting infrastructure:

- What are the factors that cause delay for buses?
- Where should efforts be focused to improve bus infrastructure?
- Should general traffic be slowed down to speed up buses?

It was noted that as part of the Combined Authority's longer-term carbon targets, an overall reduction in car users on the road was required, which may involve a reduction in road space for cars. However, the focus for the BSIP was the best return on investment toward supporting the bus service, with carbon reduction being a longer-term priority.

Members raised the following other questions and comments:

- Members discussed the need for buses to have priority at traffic lights in bus lanes, and the SCOOT system. This had been implemented in some parts of the region, but not all.
- The increase in journey times pre-Covid was raised. Extra time being put into the system could cause unnecessary delays on days with less congestion, as buses would be waiting at the bus stop in order to stay on this slower schedule. However, it was noted this was done to increase reliability.
- The importance of bus priority was highlighted; if buses were to become faster and more reliable, more people would likely leave their cars to use the bus service, resulting in less congestion, making this a virtuous circle, and one that ultimately would likely speed up the remaining general traffic rather than slowing it down.
- Members noted the need to focus on areas outside of city and town centres, with Harrogate Road leading out of Leeds being highlighted.
- It was noted that many car users were people such as care workers who visited patients in their homes, and others who required a car in the course of their work, and it was important not to treat these people punitively.
- The need to consider active travel methods in terms of infrastructure was also raised.
- An interactive map had been used in previous consultations, and DCSC members noted that this may be a useful tool to highlight where bus infrastructure efforts should be focused.
- How would any road schemes factor into our environmental assessments and targets? Would slowing down general traffic mean

creating more standing traffic or congestion, which could negatively impact air quality? Would new buses be needed as part of this plan? It was noted that new buses would be required as part of the plan to decarbonise the bus network. All new buses from now were required to be zero-carbon, though this would require significant investment and questions remained to be answered.

6. Discussion 4: Other key themes

Officers advised DCSC members of other work that had been undertaken or was planned with bus operators to support the BSIP, including on customer service, shared metro branding and joint comms, multimodal integration, and ensuring that how the bus service could support equality, diversity and inclusion – and how it could help more people to be included in wider society – was considered throughout the work.

Members were asked to consider several questions:

- How could the customer experience for bus passengers be improved?
- What role should the bus service play in decarbonisation?
- Had anything been missed?

Members raised the following questions and comments:

- Better coordination of timetabling between different operators would be useful, although the difficulties were recognised, particularly in light of driver shortages. More integration was planned by operators in the near future.
- Members questioned why toilets at bus stations were not free, compared to those at rail stations.
- The importance of bus shelters having accessible, accurate, and up-to-date information was highlighted, as well as the need for protection from the rain. Many bus stop timetables had been removed; this had been done over the course of the pandemic due to the rapid change of services, and timetables were removed rather than remaining with incorrect information. These were in the process of being reintroduced, and it was noted that up-to-date 'next bus' information for particular stops could be accessed through mobile phones, using the QR code at each stop. However, paper timetables were important for those without internet-capable mobile phones.
- It was questioned why digital screens couldn't be installed at every bus stop. The aim was to have these screens at all busier stops throughout the region, but with 14,000 stops, not enough screens were available to install them everywhere.
- Members questioned whether BSIP funding was capital or revenue – there would be elements of both, but only a single payment would be given, so the need existed to make best use of this money over a long period, and to find any needed money for maintenance.
- Express/limited stop buses could be useful, although it was noted that converting existing routes to these could be unpopular.
- It was noted that roadworks were a large contributor to congestion issues.
- Could bus stops be given clearer names to encourage people to have a better understanding of the network, particularly in terms of modal shift?

This would be looked at for certain key destinations, where a more descriptive name could potentially be chosen than intersecting road names. Additionally, audio-visual announcements were being implemented on buses nationally.

- The audio announcements at bus stops were noted as sometimes being very difficult to hear due to road noise. This was currently being worked on.
- Members noted a number of bus stops which appeared to no longer be in use, and asked whether they could be removed.

7. Next steps

The BSIP would be considered at the Transport Committee meeting on 17 September 2021. There would then be a sign-off process through the Bus Alliance executive board, and then the BSIP would be brought to the Combined Authority on 22 October 2021 for final sign-off before submission to the Department for Transport.

Members were invited to send any further comments or feedback via email, and it was noted that there was an intention to have a further, larger bus conversation next year to gather views on the Enhanced Partnership, with a particular aim to hear from those who were not normally reached by such consultations.