

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
KIRKLEES DISTRICT CONSULTATION SUB-COMMITTEE
HELD REMOTELY ON WEDNESDAY, 20 OCTOBER 2021**

Present:

Councillor James Homewood (Chair)	Transport Committee
Councillor Martyn Bolt	Transport Committee
Mark Denton (Public Representative)	Public Representative
Shaun Jordan (Public Representative)	Public Representative
David Quarmby (Public Representative)	Public Representative

In attendance:

Christopher Burton	First Bus
Graham Meiklejohn	TransPennine Express
Pete Myers	Northern Trains
Dwayne Wells	Arriva Yorkshire
Paul Turner	First Group
Sean English	Grand Central Rail
Mark Gregory	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
James Young	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

30. Open Forum

The Chair read a question from a member of the public regarding alternative arrangements made for vulnerable people when bus services were reduced or lost due to road works, and if there are any plans to increase the service of AccessBuses. Officers responded that operators will put measures in place to reduce disruption wherever possible, including re-routing services and organising replacement vehicles. There are challenges whenever a service is re-routed, however operators work closely with the Combined Authority to anticipate and address any issues. There are 33 AccessBuses currently in operation around West Yorkshire, and the usage is being reviewed to track service use as the pandemic restrictions are eased. The fleet is being considered for renewal to some newer vehicles, and there are potential opportunities for the expansion of the fleet.

A question was raised regarding the invitation of elected members to the DCSC meeting. The Chair noted there had already been a response, but responded that the meeting is primarily a forum for between transport committee members, operators, and public representatives. Any guests are welcome to observe or to provide input through the Chair, and meeting details

are published ahead of time on the WYCA website.

31. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Kaushik and Cllr Firth.

32. Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no pecuniary interests declared by Members at the meeting.

33. Exempt Information - Possible exclusion of the press and public

There were no items which required the exemption of the press and public.

34. Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2021

Members noted the notes of the meeting held on 24 March 2021.

35. Notes of the Informal Joint DCSC Meeting held on 26 August 2021

Members noted the notes of the meeting held on 26 August 2021.

36. Introductions

The Sub-Committee members agreed to introduce themselves as they spoke throughout the meeting.

37. Chair's Update and Transport Review

The Chair raised a concern regarding the cancellation of the 205 Arriva bus service between Dewsbury and Pudsey. WYCA have agreed to replace the service from the 25th of October with a contracted service from TLC Travel. The cost is approximately £120,000 per year, and TLC Travel are currently organising staff resources to cover the route beginning with a reduced timetable before instating a full service.

38. Information Report

The Sub-Committee members noted a report which provided an update on matters relating to the Kirklees district. A list of current project activity in the Kirklees district was attached at Appendix 1 to the submitted report.

It was clarified that there are separate resurfacing works on the A62 which are causing disruption, which are in addition to the 'A62 Smart Corridor' works highlighted in the report.

There are still questions regarding the closure of the Dewsbury bus station customer service centre and how it will be replaced. Questions have arisen as a result of a consultation on the topic, and feedback will be important to keep the affected customers informed.

There were questions regarding the nature of the works at Cross Church Street in Huddersfield, the integration of the 'Bradley to Brighouse' project with the project at Cooper Bridge, and the Huddersfield Narrow Canal. Concerns were related to the alignment of the projects with the key design principles of the government's Gear Change document to be designed with cyclists in mind, to be unobstructed, and easy to understand for users. It was noted that projects should have a higher focus on active travel and bus priority, and that projects that do not meet these objectives should be queried regarding funding. Bus priority would play a key part in the modal shift from cars to

buses, helping authorities meet carbon reduction targets.

It was raised that a lead officer for the project from Kirklees should be available to respond to any questions, officers agreed to follow up and invite a suitable representative to future meetings.

Members noted the report.

39. Operator Updates

The meeting was attended by representatives from the rail and bus operators who provided the Sub-Committee members with updates.

TransPennine Express

TransPennine noted that they are operating to a 90% punctuality rate. Punctuality will be monitored around the larger hubs such as Huddersfield and Leeds as more services are reintroduced to the timetable as pandemic restrictions ease. Performance is now measured at all calling points in three key criteria; on time, arrived within three minutes, and arrived within fifteen minutes.

Passenger numbers are roughly 70% of the pre-pandemic figure and is slowly growing over time. Changing customer habits have resulted in lower-than-expected figures for the typical weekday commute, whereas weekend and leisure activity has seen large increases. Routes are being monitored to better serve customer needs. New Nova trains have also been introduced which will provide extra capacity.

Works have completed at Dewsbury station to build an additional shelter and new customer toilets, which are due to be opened shortly following the final snagging process. The new toilet facilities include baby changing as well as accessible toilets for customers.

A question was raised to clarify what is meant by 70% train capacity. Officers explained that the figure is in terms of passenger journeys compared to at the same time pre-pandemic. The new Nova trains will add capacity to existing routes, but it will remain that some routes and times will be more popular than others.

Northern

Northern reported that 88% of their trains are arriving within three minutes of the scheduled time at each station. Northern trains are also running a reduced service with the intention of increasing capacity as restrictions ease.

Passenger numbers are roughly at 70% of pre-pandemic figures, with similar trends of lower commuting travel and higher leisure travel. New ticket offers such as flexible tickets are being advertised to commuters to encourage a return to using train services.

Staffing has been impacted by the pandemic, with some alterations made to ensure availability, this has however lowered the potential flexibility if a driver

is unavailable at short notice and resulted in some cancellations.

Driver training had to be suspended for an eight-month period as social distancing is not possible within small train cabins. A Covid-safe method of training was developed in conjunction with operators and trade unions, and training has since resumed.

Northern was unaffected by the fuel supply issues since fuel is delivered to the depots by rail. Services such as cleaning had been temporarily impacted by staff being unable to get to the stations, but the issue has since cleared. The cleaning of trains will be kept to a high standard even as the pandemic restrictions are lifted.

The Neville Hill depot has now come under the control of Northern which will allow for further improvements to the depot.

The next scheduled timetable change will occur in December 2021, there are no major changes planned for Kirklees.

Cllr Bolt thanked Northern for the update, and for the support to Mirfield in Bloom when there were concerns raised about plants at the Mirfield railway station. The station received a neighbourhood digital award for 'excellence in gardening in a community environment' from The Britain in Bloom contest, and a neighbourhood digital award for achievement from the Royal Horticultural Society.

Grand Central

Grand Central reported that they had been heavily impacted by the pandemic, entering a 'hibernation period' due to social distancing measures and lack of customer demand. The hibernation period resulted in significant losses, but at the time of the meeting the service is back to full operation and reported a similar 70% customer use compared to pre-pandemic levels. Grand Central has fewer trains than the other operators, and is working to meet the demand of the customer base especially at weekends.

There were a number of driver losses over the business hibernation periods which will take some time to recover from. There was an inability to train drivers during the pandemic, though training has now resumed and new drivers should be operating by the beginning of November.

First Bus

First Bus reported that there had been significant driver losses during the pandemic, partly propelled by a government incentive for bus drivers to train as HGV drivers. There were also significant waits for new drivers receiving licenses. It was queried if bus licenses covered the same vehicle class as HGVs, officers responded that many bus drivers previously came from the HGV industry and so already hold the appropriate license.

Customer use is around 75% of pre-covid levels. There are incentives to travel, such as the £1 fare after 7pm, and customer service colleagues are

present in the bus stations and travel hubs to answer any questions from passengers.

A query was raised regarding the customer value for money received from specific services not operating on a full schedule or not arriving at all, making it difficult to plan journeys. Officers responded that First Buses are currently operating at approximately 90% punctuality. There are issues such as driver absences at short notice which account for some service disruption, but to cover this, drivers are transferred from more frequent services so that less frequent services are not negatively impacted.

Concerns were raised that there had recently been a cancellation of the last service of the day which had caused inconvenience to several customers, and that the policy is understood that the last service should operate at the highest priority. Officers agreed that this is generally the case, though there are occasions such as breakdowns which make this impossible. Since 2018 there has been a process across West Yorkshire whereby passengers affected by the cancellation of the last service can claim back any taxi expenses. Officers noted that this could be more widely communicated so customers are aware of this scheme, with suggestions including adding a physical note to bus stops or on digital displays where it can be easily seen.

Transdev

Transdev reported that since their acquisition of the Yorkshire Tiger brand in July 2021 they have introduced six buses between Huddersfield and Denby Dale, and will expand with seven more Euro 6 buses. There is also a new engineering manager who will contribute to the improvement of the entire bus fleet.

Staffing remains an issue, and as a smaller bus operator, fewer staff are available to cover absences. Where possible, cover is arranged to create as little disruption as possible, though there have been some unavoidable cancellations of services.

Some staff have returned to the EU and some have left for other industries or for retirement. New driver training has taken much longer due to backlogs with training and the DVLA sending licenses. Recruitment is ongoing and it is projected that the industry should be operating at or near to pre-pandemic levels by April 2022.

Arriva

Arriva noted that due to the driver shortage there have been a number of cancellations across their service, and thanked customers for their patience while the situation is resolved.

A recruitment campaign is ongoing to recover staffing levels, including fast tracking licenses with the DVLA and a higher rate of pay for existing PCV license holders.

Less frequent routes are being prioritised to minimise disruption. There is a

diversion around Cooper Bridge while work is ongoing, affecting the 202, 203, and 229 services. The diversion requires additional driver resource which is putting some strain on other routes, which is being managed as required.

Passenger numbers are at roughly 75% of pre-pandemic levels, carried by higher leisure customers.

State of the art Sapphire buses have been launched on the 229, 231, and 232 services which include free WiFi and digital and audio displays, and are also lower-carbon Euro 6 engines. The 228, 261, and 271 buses have also received cosmetic updates and will soon be followed by the 126 and 127 buses.

New ticketing options are being launched to encourage bus use that align with new flexible working patterns.

Members thanked for the operators for their updates.

40. Workshop Session - Travel and Transport Post-Pandemic

The Sub-Committee members were given a presentation on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on public travel use in West Yorkshire.

The presentation comprised a breakdown of available data from operators and gathered by customer research. Feedback was sought on three key questions: How has Covid changed your travel habits and perception of safety?

What needs to happen to enable transport to support an economically sustainable recovery?

How do we ensure transport options enable the widest range of people to be included in society?

The following questions and comments were raised:

- Developers of larger planning applications should be pressed to support multi-modal M-Cards so new residents in developments where transport options are limited can make the most of the options they have.
- There should be a more comprehensive understanding of current and upcoming projects so they can be linked to ensure active travel methods are integral to their design.
- Full carbon evaluations should be conducted for every scheme to reduce or eliminate its carbon impact, and developers should be contributing to offset any disruption to the public.
- The lighting of new projects and developments should be considered to ensure all users, especially women and girls, feel confident using them to travel at night and in winter months.
- How do customers find the best value for money among ticketing options, given that some tickets can be cheaper when bought individually compared to using an M-Card.
- Are there options for cheaper regional M-Cards, for example Huddersfield only, which would include all operators within the region. Officers confirmed that there are already five zones that form a map encompassing the West Yorkshire region, which may align with this

suggestion.

- In many cases, travelling by car is the easier and faster option than the train or bus.
- Accessibility onto some train platforms such as Slaithwaite or Marsden is limited or non-existent. It was noted that these accessibility issues have been raised previously but should be raised again to Network Rail as it is unknown if they are included in the Transpennine Route Upgrade.
- Bus services should be given more priority and be more reliable.
- It was suggested that station access should be a recurring theme on future agendas to discuss the topic and raise any issues. In order to give full consideration to an item such as access it would be beneficial to receive a report with the relevant information to be considered ahead of time.

Members noted the presentation and thanked officers for their presentation.