

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON FRIDAY, 1 DECEMBER 2023 AT CONFERENCE ROOM 1/2,
WELLINGTON HOUSE, 40-50 WELLINGTON STREET, LEEDS, LS1 2DE**

Present:

Councillor Amanda Parsons-Hulse (Chair)	Calderdale Council
Councillor Andrew Pinnock (Deputy Chair)	Kirklees Council
Councillor Joanne Dodds	Bradford Council
Councillor Sabiya Khan	Bradford Council
Councillor Anna Watson	Bradford Council
Councillor Joe Atkinson	Calderdale Council
Councillor Dot Foster	Calderdale Council
Councillor Harry McCarthy	Kirklees Council
Councillor Kayleigh Brooks	Leeds City Council
Councillor Oliver Newton	Leeds City Council
Councillor Izaak Wilson	Leeds City Council
Councillor Tony Hames	Wakefield Council
Councillor Charlie Keith	Wakefield Council
Councillor Dave Merrett	City of York Council

In attendance:

Mayor Tracy Brabin	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Mick Bunting	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Alison Gillespie	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Sarah Naylor	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Simon Warburton	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Katie Wright	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

10. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mark Thompson and Julie Medford.

The meeting was confirmed as quorate, with 14 members present (out of 11 needed to meet the quorum).

11. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

Cllr Dave Merrett declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of the Northern Transport Activists Roundtable, York Bus Forum and as a concessionary bus pass user.

12. Possible exclusion of the press and public

There were no items requiring the exclusion of the press and public.

13. Minutes of the last meeting held on 29 September 2023

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2023 be approved.

14. Chair's comments and update

The Chair provided a verbal update on the government's newly published Level 4 Devolution technical document and accompanying Scrutiny Protocol.

- The Protocol is a best practise guide for combined authorities on how to conduct scrutiny most efficiently.
- Compliance with the Protocol is required if the Combined Authority is to progress towards Level 4 Devolution, receiving any further powers or funding.
- West Yorkshire's Scrutiny was highlighted in the Protocol as an example of best practise under principle 7; for using external (and Member) technical experts to advise members on specific topics at committee meetings.

The Scrutiny Protocol sits under the Corporate Scrutiny Committee's remit, which has established a working group made up of members from all three scrutiny committees. Members are welcome to volunteer by informing the scrutiny officers.

The Chair also reminded members that CfGS training on scrutinising finances is available later in the month and she encouraged members to take part.

Resolved:

- (i) That the Chair's verbal update be noted.
- (ii) That members who would like to be part of the Scrutiny Protocol Working Group contact the Scrutiny Officer.

15. Mayors Question Time - Tracy Brabin

The Chair thanked the Mayor Tracy Brabin and officers for attending the Committee.

Officers in attendance to support the Mayor included the Executive Director for Transport, the Director of Transport Operations & Service Transformation and the Head of Place and Environment Policy.

The session was split into topic areas and members were able to ask any questions under those topic areas, and any follow ups. The topic areas were the Autumn statement, Bus Reform, Decarbonisation, Mass Transit and Housing.

The Mayor thanked the committee for their work and was pleased that the West Yorkshire Combined Authority was mentioned in the Scrutiny Protocol as a best practice example in using technical expertise and understands that the next steps in implementing the Scrutiny Protocol may be to consolidate the three scrutiny committees into one, as advised, pending a formal review and final decision by the CA.

Autumn Statement

The Mayor expressed her views on the Autumn Statement in response to members questions:

- After HS2 for the North was cancelled, she hoped there will be further scrutiny nationally into where the funding has gone, believing that funding should be reserved for transport projects in North.
- She welcomed the continued commitment to WY mass transit and has pressed government for long term devolved funding model (“single settlement funding”) which allows far more flexibility in deployment of funds as an alternative to the separate, smaller funding pots that is currently the case – which will support delivery of big schemes like mass transit.
- She welcomed the commitment to provide funding for a new train station at Bradford as part of the Network North Plan but noted there was no reference to the development of Leeds train station, which requires work to improve capacity to deal with increased footfall, particularly at the weekends.
- £8.3 billion was allocated for road resurfacing across England which the Combined Authority welcomed, alongside the additional £8.55 billion for City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS), which included mass transit funding and many other major infrastructure schemes.
- Overall, she felt the Autumn Statement could have been better, more specific and did not address the key issue around local authority funding cuts, which affects the CA significantly as the local authorities are the main delivery partners of their mutual schemes and strategies.

Bus Reform

Franchising and funding for bus services

- The Mayor noted that for several years bus services have been underfunded and bus companies are private companies whose goal is make profit.
- The public consultation on bus franchising is still ongoing, so the Mayor was not able to comment on the final decision at this time. The consultation results will be reviewed in January and February, with the final decision made in March 2024.
- Investment in buses remains a challenge and this is set out in the publication of the bus reform assessment. Whichever model is recommended following the consultation, it will not by itself reverse the

long-term issues with buses.

- The CA will need to work with bus companies to strengthen understanding of the market and the business when creating any franchised network.
- The Mayor noted transport in London often has a number of revenue options to fund other transport services and schemes, and hopes Mass Transit revenue will help fund WY transport in future.
- Bus frequency fell across several areas in Yorkshire, and nationally, but London was less affected partly due to additional support by central government and the ability to draw on revenue. WY areas would benefit from London-style revenue options, to increase patronage and ensure the network is self-sustaining in future.

“Mayor’s Fares” scheme

- The Mayor agreed that non-bus users may not be aware of Mayor’s Fare and more could be done to advertise them.
- 62% of respondents were aware of Mayor’s Fares and has saved £11 million for the public.
- Nearly 30 million journeys have used buses in West Yorkshire, during the Mayor’s Fares scheme; nearly 800,000 a week.
- She noted 50% of those people using buses more regularly have gone from cars. The “Walk it, Ride it” campaign is also important to promote both using the bus and walking.
- She is encouraging businesses to provide Mcards for their employees to use public transport to travel to work.
- Mayor’s Fares will continue to 2024 and will be reprofiled as part of Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) budget due to inflation. Further information will be made available to the Scrutiny Committee.

Late buses in the Night-Time Economy (NTE)

- The availability of buses for people working in the night-time economy (NTE) and NHS is important. However, the Mayor noted these are operational decisions by operators based on which routes are profitable and viable.
- Liverpool has trialled night buses, through revenue sourced funding, and it will be interesting to see the results of the consultation when available.
- The CA is working hard with the business community to build the evidence case for services in the evening and working with Department for Transport to press them about the future of the BSIP model.
- The “Mayor’s Big Bus Chat” collected data about the times buses need to be available for the public.
- The CA needs to make a case for a revenue source to fund more NTE targeted programmes and is considering greater use of flexible transport services and working with taxi firms to better support those who work during NTE.

Real time information and “ghost buses”

- The Mayor agreed that the public should have access to accurate live information on bus services so they can plan their journeys.
- 90% of the public now use Mcard products, including digital forms, the

basic offer to the public should include at least a paper timetable in terms of printed materials and information.

- Maintenance of the shelters is a challenge but is a priority for the CA, which does have a responsive online presence (through Metroline) but understand this is not always accessible for all.
- The issue of “ghost buses” and real-time information (RTI) accuracy were the focus of a recently established working group. Across the three large operators, electronic ticket machines will be upgraded to 4G to improve tracking and the working group discussed additional custom communication to the public around real time bus information system.

Access to free buses passes for retired women.

- The retirement age for women has now increased to 65, meaning women must wait longer for a free bus pass. The Mayor noted the issued and will consider it further.

Decarbonisation

Net Zero 2038 and carbon emissions

- The Mayor noted there has been an increase in regional emissions by 6% in 2021 which was 5% lower the 2019 level (of 11%).
- She noted 2038 is an ambitious target and the CA only has a limited set of tools to achieve this, but it was best to stick to the 2038 target to drive delivery rather than push back the target or water down the goal.
- The CA needs to choose a pathway for decarbonisation, and additional work has been commissioned to further understand the pathways before a choice is made. The Climate Committee is due to get an update on this work at its next meeting and this can be reported to scrutiny in future.
- The Mayor added that in the meantime several carbon initiatives are underway which include:
 - Insulating over 900 properties, with 880 in areas of high deprivation, through a pilot scheme.
 - A solar power programme is due to be approved soon, with a target to deliver 1,500 solar battery systems.
 - Grants that support businesses who make their process greener.
- The Mayor noted the Infrastructure Commission’s advice that they would not support the use of hydrogen in homes and would instead focus hydrogen use on transport.
- Carbon impact assessment should be part of a business case for projects to get ensure carbon impact is considered for every scheme.
- The government have not yet published guidance regarding carbon assessment tools however the CA has worked closely with government to understand the likely metrics to design a carbon assessment tool to use in the meantime and will adjust it accordingly when the government does publish the final methodology and guidance.

Motorbike access to bus lanes

- It was noted that bus lane regulations and highways policy is not within the Combined Authority’s powers and is still a local authority one, but most of the council areas in West Yorkshire did allow motorbikes in bus

lanes, while others did not, which is inconsistent approach and probably better if there was a single uniform policy across the county.

Walking

- Walking and bus use is integral to the decarbonisation.
- The Mayor was pleased to fund a “walk to school” programme to encourage parents to walk children to school and support the “Walk it, Ride it” campaign and supported programmes to improve walking routes.

Workplace levy charges and other revenue streams

- The Mayor noted she would expect the Combined Authority to look at any options for revenue streams but at this point could not say if workplace levy charges is something under consideration.

Mass Transit

- The Mayor noted there may be a high cost associated with the programme in West Yorkshire as the region doesn't have old railway lines or vacant land to repurpose like other areas did when they developed their projects in the past, such as Greater Manchester's tram.
- She added that West Yorkshire deserves and needs a Mass Transit system, but it must represent good value for money.
- She does not think the role of mass transit is to mirror existing infrastructure e.g., motorways, but possible routes have been identified and options are being analysed and circulated for consultation with stakeholders.
- “Park and Ride” schemes are also part of the solution, but it does not have to be either/or, decarbonisation or mass transit; it can and should be both.
- Some technical challenges and risks with tram systems which have been identified include that trams stop often to collect passengers and there are safety risks if a tram breaks down near a motorway.
- Phase One currently includes new routes/corridors from south of Leeds city centre to parts of Kirklees, including Dewsbury. This is similar the Salford Keys line in Great Manchester which was all new build.
- A second route/corridor is included for east routes between Bradford and Leeds and is similar to the rail system which already operates between the two cities trying to provide a fast service for passengers and also serve communities in between and not doing either effectively.
- The Mayor added that if West Yorkshire is going to have faster lines, they will not be able to stop along the way and so Mass Transit is part of this solution, and she is pleased to continue to consider corridors not just in Leeds but surrounding areas too.
- It is also important to ensure mass transit, rail and buses are interconnected and businesses need to be made aware of how it is beneficial to their workforce.

Affordable Housing

- The Mayor's target for 5,000 sustainable houses is important, however, since this target was set housing has been impacted by inflation, the

impact of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

- To date 3,183 affordable homes have been started and 2,750 are due to be completed by the end of 2023 through CA funding.
- She is working with West Yorkshire Housing Associations to come together to help deliver the target; the CA signed a Strategic Place Partnership with Homes England, one of three in the county.
- Local authorities have responsibility for social housing, and the CA is considering how it can help them deliver their plans in this area.
- The Brownfield Housing Fund allocates £89 million for 'unlocking' housing in the region; however there is still red tape and deadlines set by government which create challenges with delivery.
- The Mayor was pleased to see several schemes to build social housing in Calderdale in areas which have previous been challenging to build on.
- The CA is contracted to deliver 1,113 affordable homes through the Brownfield Housing Fund. This fund was not designed for affordable housing, but the CA persuaded government to include that criterion as a goal.
- She noted the challenges with modular housing is that companies are going bankrupt. She is not averse to modular housing but needs to consider the wider market.
- The Mayor reassured the committee that she is raising the issue of Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) with central government.
- She added that tackling lower quality landlords is important to delivering affordability and was pleased to see lifting of housing benefit cap.

Resolved:

- (i) That the Committee's feedback and conclusions be considered further.
- (ii) That the Mayor be thanked for attending and answering the Committee's questions.

16. Work Programme

The Chair provided an overview of the current work programme and the next meeting's draft agenda (26 January 2024).

Resolved:

- (i) That the work programme be noted.
- (ii) That the date of the Flexi Bus Working group on 26 January 2024 be noted.

17. Date of the next meeting - 26 January 2024