

Report to: Transport Committee

Date: 15 May 2020

Subject: **COVID – 19: Current Status of the Transport Network**

Director: Dave Pearson, Director, Transport Services

Author(s): Bus Dave Pearson Rail Richard Crabtree

Is this a key decision?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information or appendices?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, state paragraph number of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, Part 1:	

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1. To provide the Transport Committee with an overview of the current status of the transport network for Bus and Rail during the period of the COVID 19 emergency and actions taken in this regard.
- 1.2. To review the emergency delegation arrangements agreed at the meeting of 13 March 2020

2. Information

Bus

- 2.1. Since government advice was issued on 16 March advising members of the public to avoid unnecessary travel, bus services have seen a dramatic decline in passenger numbers. In response to a decreasing number of customers, the number of commercial services running has therefore reduced accordingly, with bus operators generally running Sunday timetables, with an expanded service at peak times and on the busiest routes. To enable older people attend early morning shopping provision, the ENCTS free bus pass was temporarily extended to enable use before 0930 on weekdays for the period of the lockdown.

- 2.2. On 30 March, the timings of these services were revised further in order to run a targeted 'key worker' timetable, taking into consideration feedback from members and the public. Where peak-time buses are becoming busy, operators are doubling up on service provision, in order to facilitate social distancing. Operators are working together to ensure that their timetables complement each other so services are not duplicated or removed completely. Tendered services, have also been reduced, refined or suspended in line with the requirement to support journeys for key workers. Currently approx. 50% of bus mileage is in operation.
- 2.3. Patronage and service levels will continue to be monitored regularly. At the time of writing ridership is around 15% of typical levels and had been growing slowly in April. The use of free bus passes by older/ disabled people is at around 10% of regular levels. The West Yorkshire Bus Alliance has established a arrangements to enable the Combined Authority and operators to communicate the latest updates and make decisions collaboratively.
- 2.4. The Combined Authority's bus stations have remained open during this period with revised management arrangements to promote social distancing. Travel Centres in bus stations were closed on 26 March following the new arrangements to close non essential retail activity. At the time of writing usage was at 10% of usual levels increasing slightly in April in line with bus use
- 2.5. AccessBus services were reduced to supporting essential shopping trips from 16 March. Contact was made customers to establish whether they were able to access shopping deliveries by family, friends or community services. This resulted a gradual reduction of the service to a complete closure from 10 April. The buses and drivers have been made available to the NHS and communities.
- 2.6. The sudden loss of fare revenue has had a major impact on Local Transport Authorities and the bus sector nationwide the following has been initiated to support the sector from March to June;
- Continued payment of the Bus Service Operators Grant to bus operators for commercial services and to local authorities for tendered services at the rate operating prior to the pandemic.
 - Government has also asked Local Transport Authorities to maintain concessionary fare and tendered bus service payments to bus operators at the value that was being paid immediately before the emergency. A briefing paper was circulated to the Committee on 7 April setting out how this decision has been made. This provides c£6 million per month
 - On 3 April the Government announced an emergency Covid-19 Bus Service Support Grant which provides bus operators and the Combined Authority with short term supplementary funding. The Combined Authority will receive an additional £0.77 million over a 12 week period

which will assist in funding the shortfall in fares revenue on bus contracts where the CA takes the revenue risk

- Local Transport Authorities awarded additional funds for bus services in the Better Deal For Bus Users programme reported to the previous meeting of the Committee are able to utilise this funding to support bus services during the emergency and the ensuing recovery period. The Combined Authority was awarded £1.086 million from this fund which will assist in the process of reinstating the network.

2.7. The funding made available is to support the provision of a bus service for key workers and essential journeys during the period of the emergency. The Combined Authority attached conditions to the continuation funding it has provided and Government has set conditions for the COVID-19 Bus Service Support Grant which, in addition to securing the key worker network, require an “open book” approach to all public funds paid to bus operators during this period.

2.8. At the time of writing, discussions were in progress with Department for Transport regarding funding for bus services beyond June. Acting through the Urban Transport Group, the Leaders and Elected Mayors of the City Regions have written to the Secretary of State to ensure all public sector funding is managed by Local Transport Authorities including West Yorkshire Combined Authority. A verbal update will be provided to the meeting.

2.9. The following arrangements have been made to protect bus passengers and staff;

- Cleaning / hygiene- higher standard of cleaning especially touchpoints , drivers issued with hand sanitiser
- Driver protection/ PPE – bus companies that didn't have “assault screens” have been fitting them and are sealing where necessary to reduce air flow. Some companies are giving drivers gloves, masks not being used by bus drivers, cleaners in bus stations are wearing masks
- Social Distancing –signs / floor markings etc to promote. Duplicate buses put on busy trips. In the absence of more definitive guidance maximum 50% of bus capacity has been the measure used.
- Cash – promoting contactless payment but have not withdrawn cash due to concerns about social exclusion implications of this. Nationally Arriva introduced exact fare.

2.10. At the time of writing, consideration was being given to the next phase of the COVID-19 emergency as some “lockdown” restrictions are relaxed and more people travel. This presents a number of challenges for bus services;

- Social distancing – maintaining two metres distancing will reduce the capacity of a bus to around 20% and will present difficulties in managing bus stations, interchanges and busy bus stops.
- Funding – the additional costs of any service higher frequency will not be met by the additional fare revenue. The current public sector funding

arrangement ends in June and a further public funding will be needed to maintain and increase service levels

- Network – ensure the services are meeting the requirements of the economy and the population as they adapt to a phased return to work and new travel habits
- Customer confidence – people may be reluctant to use public transport due to the proximity with other travellers. A high level of confidence in social distancing and hygiene provisions will need to be fostered

Rail

- 2.11. In response to the threat posed by the COVID-19 outbreak and national advice on social distancing, demand for rail services dropped significantly. During April the industry reported around 95% reduction in demand on local services compared to normal, with even fewer people making long-distance trips. The busiest trains have tended to be on lines that are normally busy for commuters such as Skipton to Leeds, where up to 50 passengers per service have been observed. However, single figures of passengers per train has been more typical. Data from Leeds station shows some of the most marked declines in use have been on Saturdays and Sundays, with virtually no travel for leisure and retail purposes. Rail demand has remained flat throughout 'lockdown', with only a very marginal increase in use evident in early May.
- 2.12. A number of rail staff have had to self-isolate or are vulnerable, which has reduced the ability to operate services. In response to these issues, rail services across the region were significantly reduced from week commencing 24 March with the aim of protecting the resilience of the services needed for essential use and key workers. Train operators have worked closely together to ensure that services continue to cover as much of the network as possible whilst enabling freight operators to continue critical supply chains.
- 2.13. At the time of writing Northern is currently operating approximately 50% of its normal services and TransPennine Express (TPE) 40%. In general, in this region, every line on Northern's network has at least one train per hour on weekdays (every other hour on Sundays), stopping at all stations, and more where services overlap. Services on the Harrogate Line were stepped up to half-hourly in April to help serve the new Nightingale Hospital based in Harrogate Conference Centre. Trans-Pennine is running hourly fast services from Leeds over the Pennines to Liverpool and York, plus stopping trains towards Huddersfield and Manchester; both TPE and Northern are operating between Leeds and Selby/Hull.
- 2.14. Cross-Country trains are also running hourly on their Scotland – York – Leeds – Wakefield – Sheffield – South West route. LNER's London trains have been cut to generally one every other hour, running only from Leeds. Grand Central suspended all services from 3 April, having initially run a reduced service. Its trains provide Bradford – Halifax – Wakefield – London services. First trains generally run between 06:00-07:00 and last trains between 21:00-22:00.

- 2.15. Services continue to be reviewed and adjusted based on the outputs from consultations between the main train operators, the Rail North Partnership and officers through the North of England Contingency Group which have a call on weekly basis. In addition, Transport Focus (watchdog for Transport users) is carrying out a piece of work nationally to survey rail usage patterns and to seek feedback on rail journeys. Information of key worker trips is also being collected by Metroline and used to inform these discussions. Attention on Contingency Group calls and in engagement with the industry is now turning to how services are stepped up and how this is effectively managed and co-ordinated in the context of emerging national advice.
- 2.16. Data indicates, as would be expected with a greatly reduced service and fewer passengers, punctuality levels are good with PPM (Passenger Performance Measure) figures well in excess of 90%. It is notable that despite an increase in trespass incidents, for example, the impact on services is much reduced when fewer trains are running. Another clear lesson is that normal timetables do not allow sufficient time at stations for passengers to get on and off trains (dwell times) during busy periods.
- 2.17. Where possible train capacity is provided to meet demand and to provide space to allow for social distancing; daily passenger counts are being carried out by conductors to monitor this. Open counter ticket offices have been closed but those with windows remain open with amended rosters to comply with social distancing. Passengers needing tickets have been asked wherever possible to use cards, not cash. Social isolation markings at stations have been introduced where required and waiting rooms are closed. Catering on trains has also been suspended.
- 2.18. Many staff at Northern have transferred to the cleaning teams to provide enhanced touch point cleaning on trains and stations, including ticket machines. Penalty Fares are in operation for TPE but for Northern Rail they have been suspended. Gate lines remain in use to minimise anti-social behaviour and non-essential travel; social distancing measures have been applied.
- 2.19. The Communications and Marketing team have implemented a Coronavirus campaign focused on conveying the key messages of discouraging the use of public transport unless necessary; social distancing while travelling; checking travel information; paying by contactless where possible and washing hands before and after travel. These messages are being conveyed via a range of channels including the media, social media, targeted online advertising, posters in bus and rail stations, digital screens, real-time displays, and video screens.
- 2.20. The Department for Transport has suspended normal franchise agreements with all revenue and cost risk moving to the government for an initial 6 months to September 2020. Train operators continue to run services day to day for a predetermined management fee. This has ensured that trains necessary for key workers and essential travel continue to operate. Anyone who has an advance ticket can refund it free of charge and all-season ticket holders can

claim a refund for time unused on their tickets (this can be carried out remotely so passengers are advised they must not go in into ticket offices to carry this out). Train operators are also accepting tickets for each other's services for necessary journeys.

- 2.21. The constraints on operator resources, as well as the difficulty of maintaining social distancing in the confines of an enclosed train cab has delayed driver training. The main impacts of this are:
- LNER has not been able to complete driver training for the route between Leeds and Huddersfield, which will delay introduction of the new daily service from Huddersfield and Dewsbury to London and return. This was due from the May timetable change. The service will be introduced at a later stage when possible.
 - Driver training at Northern and TransPennine Express on new trains has been delayed. This will have knock-on impacts later in the year against original plans for the introduction of new trains. There has also been a marginal impact on delivery of Northern's new trains.
- 2.22. Work is ongoing to evaluate and respond to the risk associated with a return to increased service levels but there are number of challenges to overcome. Both TPE and Northern are working to try and preserve route and traction knowledge, in some cases using diversionary routes. For Northern especially this is challenging with significant numbers of drivers and conductors off for several weeks at a time. The ongoing situation will continue to be monitored closely by officers.
- 2.23. In the medium term there are several impacts resulting from the transfer of the industry to Emergency Measures Agreements, which means that requirements under franchise agreements are suspended. The implications of this are considered further at Item 6.

Travel information and payment

- 2.24 Alongside the reduction in patronage on public transport, there has been a significant reduction in levels of MCard sales since the lockdown phase was announced. Customers are still able to purchase MCard products via the MCard app, at ticket vending machines and on buses. Many operators are encouraging the use of contactless and exact cash fare as on bus payment.
- 2.25 Travel centres in bus stations closed on 26 March in line with Government guidance and will remain closed until further notice. Travel information remains available at wymetro.com and via Twitter @metrotravelnews. In line with any updated Government guidance, the ongoing implications of social distancing on our ability to operate travel centres within bus stations will continue to be monitored.

Emergency Decision Making

- 2.26 At the Committee meeting on 13 March 2020 the following delegation was agreed in anticipation of disruption to the Committee business due to the COVID 19 emergency

That the following delegation be exercised should there be disruption/cancellation of Transport Committee meetings during the Coronavirus situation:

(a) To delegate authority to the Managing Director and Directors of the Combined Authority to take any action and decisions as they consider to be necessary, which would ordinarily fall to be taken by the Transport Committee to ensure the timely progress of the business of the Committee.

(b) This is subject to consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of Transport Committee, and in consultation with members of the Committee (via appropriate communication channels).

- 2.27 The above arrangements were utilised to enable the relaxation of the concessionary fare scheme, closure of Travel Centres and the financial arrangements described 2.6. Subsequently arrangements have been made to enable meetings to be held using video conferencing. Whilst this is enabling the Committee to take decisions in line with the meeting timetable, the current emergency may throw up situations which require a more immediate decision. It is therefore proposed to retain the delegation at least until the next meeting of the Committee but to use it only where a decision is required in response to the COVID-19 emergency.

3. Clean Growth Implications

- 3.1. Air quality has seen improvements during the crisis. Local real-time road-side monitoring shows harmful NO₂ emissions on a downward trajectory half-way through 1st week of lockdown. Particulate Matter (PM) emissions are static, possible from domestic wood burners and an increase in domestic bonfires.
- 3.2. There is not a current set of metrics on this however, road transport CO₂ emissions can be inferred from a 1-2-1 relationship with NO₂ monitoring as above. Aviation emissions are significantly reduced by the reduction in flights.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1. There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1. There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

6. Staffing Implications

- 6.1. There are no staffing implications directly arising from this report.

7. External Consultees

- 7.1. Arriva Yorkshire, First West Yorkshire, Transdev and Yorkshire Tiger provide regular status updates which have been included within this report.
- 7.2. Rail industry partners have commented on the accuracy of this report.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1. That the Committee notes the updates provided in this report.
- 8.2. That the Committee endorses the approach to funding bus services during the March to June period as set out in paragraph 2.6
- 8.3. That the Committee endorses the approach to Government to ensure that the Combined Authority co-ordinates public sector funding for bus services during the continuation of the COVID -19 emergency.
- 8.4. That the delegated decision making arrangement approved by the Committee on 13 March be maintained for use on urgent matters relating to the COVID-19 emergency and reviewed at the next meeting.

9. Background Documents

- 9.1 None

10. Appendices

None.