

Report to: Transport Committee

Date: 15 May 2020

Subject: **COVID – 19: Implications For The Combined Authority Policies**

Director: Dave Pearson, Director, Transport Services

Author(s): Dave Pearson, Liz Hunter

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 implications of the COVID 19 emergency on Combined Authority transport policies.

2. Information

General transport implications

- 2.1. The final impact of COVID 19 on the Leeds City Region will not be known for some time. It is already clear that the impact will be significant and is likely to have a lasting impact for both individuals and the economy. This will necessitate a review of our strategies relating to industry, employment and skills, business support, innovation and inclusive growth, in order to position the region as strongly as possible for economic recovery.
- 2.2. In the short term the impact on public transport of the lifting of the lock-down and subsequent re-start will be guided by a number of factors from social distancing rules, including whether masks will have a role to play, the potential demand depending on which sectors are unlocked and when schools return and the amount of Government funding available to support services, as covered in item 5.

- 2.3. Beyond the lifting of the lock-down, the transport strategy, and emerging work on the carbon pathway to zero emissions by 2038, already had a set of policies and targets through which we wanted to transform the transport experience for the public. Through the recovery and beyond, enabling this to happen will continue to be important.
- 2.4. It is recognised that work needs to consider the possible implications on the public transport system from the crisis and the options for how transport can support the immediate economic recovery. The potential longer-term changes to how people will travel and the implications for our economic, transport, social and environmental objectives also need to be considered.
- 2.5. As demand for travel is directly linked to the economy, when that starts to recover, it is expected that transport usage will change too. When the West Yorkshire economy recovered from impacts of the last recession, car trips steadily increased.
- 2.6. However, there are a number of other variables that we need to consider from this crisis that are not necessarily directly linked to the economic recovery. For example the impact of social distancing on public transport patronage and capacity, the level of public sector intervention required to maintain public transport services, and the value that has been seen of centralised co-ordination of public transport (at various level), and the increased use of technology to enable home working in particular are all likely to have lasting impacts.
- 2.7. Whether the reported benefits to air quality, carbon, noise and the ability for people to walk and cycle without the level of pre-crisis traffic, will continue, will depend not only on people's behaviour through the recovery and beyond but also the measures national and local Government put in place to support public and active travel.
- 2.8. The rest of the paper looks at specific modes and topics and starts to give a flavour of the types of issues and funding that need to be considered for the recovery. As the situation is moving rapidly a verbal update can be given at the meeting.

Bus

- 2.9. The sudden loss of fare revenue and the anticipated slow rate of recovery has had a profound effect on the bus sector. Within days of the start of the emergency, Halifax bus operator TJ Walsh ceased trading and others went into a "mothballed" state. The injection of public funding to support the sector initiated in April was aimed at maintaining cash flows during the height of the crisis however longer-term public support will be required to enable the bus network to recover. The Combined Authority will play a pivotal role in rebuilding a bus service which meets the changed economic and social environment post Covid-19 and will work through the existing Bus Alliance to engage with operators.

- 2.10. As lockdown and social distancing measures are removed patronage will return, but this could be slow to build up, carrying many risks. The type of industries returning through a phased return will influence the likely coverage and usage of the network. For example, travel to offices may be slower to return than locations where some social distancing could be maintained. This will influence which corridors are likely to be busier than expected. Also the extent of social distancing rules will impact on capacity and patronage and there may need to be specific public transport approaches required.
- 2.11. There are a range of next steps to be worked through including an understanding of the likely demand flows as lock-down is lifted, the public sector input needed and how it can best be used to ensure a bus network that meets the needs of West Yorkshire residents following the crisis. It is also likely that new approaches will be needed to encourage people that public transport remains safe to use through regular cleaning, as is already happening at bus stations.
- 2.12. The Committee are aware of the work initiated in late 2019 to identify bus reform options. The destabilising effect of COVID 19 on the economics of the bus sector and its increasing reliance on public funding will be a major factor in shaping the Combined Authority's future interventions to secure an effective bus service.

Rail

- 2.13. The Department for Transport (DfT) suspended normal franchise agreements in March with all revenue and cost risk moving to the government for an initial 6-month period. This arrangement is governed by Emergency Measures Agreements entered by the operators with DfT. Train operators will continue to run services day-to-day for a predetermined management fee. Northern and LNER are governed by Services Agreements as part of the Operator of Last Resort arrangements, but the principles of Emergency Measures Agreements are being applied for consistency.
- 2.14. The continued operation of the railway is coming at a significant cost to DfT as revenue has substantially reduced, whilst fixed operating costs remain high. It is clear there will be a sharp focus on ensuring financial efficiency during this period, with likely (but currently unknown) impacts on short-term investment plans. It will take many months for revenue to increase significantly, with a strong likelihood of long-term changes to rail markets. Under these circumstances it is difficult to anticipate a return to the commercial rail franchises in the short-term.
- 2.15. Rail network capacity across the North was at its operational limits before the crisis. Impacts on demand on the short term will create the time and space needed to effectively plan for how future patterns of growth are accommodated. Local knowledge, insight and expertise will be valuable in informing this planning, with a direct relationship to the work being overseen by the Economic Recovery Board.

- 2.16. The previous passenger rail delivery model was already proving financially and operationally unsustainable, which drove the need for reform. The Government indicated in late March that it will publish the Williams Rail Review as a White Paper by the summer recess, although further delay is possible. The Review will shape the future governance and commercial arrangements for the rail network. The current crisis is likely to accelerate the case for implementation, both in terms of the value of more effective co-ordination across the rail industry and that the Emergency Measures Agreements have effectively delivered 'concessions' already.
- 2.17. As with bus, there are a range of next steps to be worked through including an understanding of the likely demand flows as lock-down is lifted, the role of local and regional bodies in the decision-making and how the Combined Authority can best ensure a rail network that meets the needs of West Yorkshire residents following the crisis.

Walking and cycling

- 2.18. As with all modes, the longer-term impact on walking levels and the likelihood of achieving our Transport Strategy targets is not yet certain. Reductions in walking associated with reduced travel demand overall are expected to reverse once destinations start to re-open, continuing the upward trend in walking levels that has been experienced in recent years. Longer term trends have potential to be more positive than negative, especially in walking for leisure given the experience that people may be having in taking daily exercise in local areas. Any increased use of local amenities and businesses during the current period could result in increases in walking to access these areas in future, especially if aligned to wider action to develop "15 minute cities" as proposed in cities like Paris and Portland, Oregon.
- 2.19. As the second most commonly used mode of transport, walking will remain vital for access to work, shopping and services, and providing everyday exercise in the economic recovery – especially as the most affordable mode of transport.
- 2.20. The current limitations of pavement space illustrated by social distancing between passing pedestrians highlights an issue that existed on many streets before the crisis, of inadequate pedestrian facilities. Adopting and implementing enhanced standards for footway widths in the future as part of wider plans to improve conditions for people on foot, as well as action on temporary obstruction such as obstructive pavement parking will help
- 2.21. Considering the shorter term requirements of social distancing, some local highway authorities have been investigating if changes to infrastructure can be made to improve conditions for pedestrians – for example, the removal or temporary suspension of pedestrian control buttons on crossings and replacement with automatic pedestrian detection, to remove the need to touch a surface and hence reduce the risk of transmission and infection. Such automated signal changes could also be of general benefit in the longer term to people walking and cycling, with timings made automatic. Some changes have already been made, for example in Bradford City Centre.

- 2.22. The Government has recently published new temporary guidance on publicity requirements relating to temporary or permanent Traffic Regulation Orders. These are intended to assist authorities considering creation of new orders to allow temporary or permanent changes to traffic movement to support safer pedestrian and cycle movement – in common with many other cities across the world. Any temporary or permanent measures of this sort introduced during the current crisis could provide longer term opportunity for more permanent changes to the way streets are used and traffic managed, providing an illustration of the benefits that these kind of changes could offer to communities, in a similar way to the Streets for People Demonstration Projects. Partners are considering potential measures of this sort that could be implemented during the current period, supported by the Combined Authority.
- 2.23. Cycling offers an important opportunity in the economic recovery. As, along with walking, it offers affordable mobility that improves health and supports social distancing where there is continued need for this to be maintained for access to work, shopping and services. People's experiences of travelling by bike may have increased during this period, as a way of following making essential journeys whilst maintaining social distancing, and following the government's guideline of daily exercise taken outside. Where lower traffic levels are currently being experienced, this may make cycling feel safer and more attractive on residential streets, local high streets and even busier main roads. This effect may be particularly noticeable on normally high trafficked main roads, and highlight how cycling without the risk of mixing with heavy traffic volumes and speeds can be a convenient and attractive transport option.
- 2.24. Working with partners to enable and encourage cycling and walking is as important as ever and there have been good examples of organisations seeking to promote active travel at this time that can be built on through the recovery.
- 2.25. Like walking, if more people start cycling in the current situation and want to continue during recovery period, the Combined Authority and partners could enable this through activity to support increased uptake, including continuation and enhancement of the current behaviour change programmes aimed at enabling more walking and cycling, positive investment in cycling facilities on busier routes, as well as support for creation of "low traffic neighbourhoods" to enable cycling amongst all ages on residential streets.
- 2.26. Given that it is likely that traffic volumes on busier routes could return to pre-crisis levels as the economy recovers, this may increase the need for investment and reallocation of road space in protected cycle facilities. This will require greater levels of investment. Transforming Cities Fund and our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans are important steps in planning for and making this investment, and further funding could be sought from Government, depending on its approach to investment post crisis.

Road Safety

- 2.23 In 2018, 71 people died as a result of vehicle collisions in West Yorkshire. That was a 65% increase on the previous year and represented the highest number of deaths on our roads since 2008. Conversely, the number of people sustaining serious injury reduced slightly to 801 which is the lowest ever recorded total for West Yorkshire. The loss of any life is an unacceptable price for mobility and current numbers necessitate a strong focus on infrastructure design and behaviour, speed and vehicle related issues in the short and longer term, targeted at reducing the risk of casualties from road traffic crashes, both between motor vehicles and between vehicles and people walking or cycling.
- 2.24 The impact of COVID 19 has been seen in speeds increasing due to the empty roads and reduced enforcement. This may lead to a different type of injury collision e.g. related to different time of day, demographics, road users etc. There are also potential risks related to M.O.T extensions and the safety of vehicles, and the relaxation of EU regulations on maximum driving hours. So, whilst killed and serious injuries might be anticipated to fall in 2020 due to the overall reduced exposure to risk with reduced cars on the roads, policy and action to improve road safety is still required. Mitigations are available in respect of reduced Zero Tolerance Drink Driving, speed limits, increased enforcement, improved infrastructure and road safety communications campaigns.
- 2.25 Health professionals have suggested a programme of emergency speed restrictions on main roads that could see speed limits reduce e.g. from 30mph to 20mph and 50mph/40mph to 30mph. This will require the support of the Police if enforcement is to take place. Some of the partner councils, as the Local Highways Authorities in West Yorkshire, have started to review speed limits on local roads due to the increases in mean speed, to understand the scale of the challenge and resource implications, and at the same time discuss with the Police where increased roads policing activity would yield positive benefits without unduly impacting on their COVID 19 response.
- 2.26 There is also a road safety communications campaign being developed by the NHS/Public Health, Police and road safety teams for roll out across West Yorkshire aimed at increasing awareness to reduce the potential for road traffic collisions and incidents as much as possible during and after lockdown. This will support the Road Safety GB 'Take Extra Care' campaign encouraging all road users to do their bit to reduce the strain on the emergency services in the coming weeks and months, by taking extra care if they must make an essential journey. The campaign will be rolled out through Social Media and through usual Police, health and road safety channels, with a ramping up of activity as lockdown is released.

Air Quality and Carbon

- 2.27 Poor air quality has a general detrimental impact on people with breathing issues and is being linked to the exacerbation of COVID 19 infection,

hospitalisation and death. Poor air quality is also linked with a number of underlying conditions which cause additional risk to COVID 19 patients, such as heart disease and hypertension. Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) is a key concern with regard to poor air quality. NO₂ inflames the lining of the lungs, and it can reduce immunity to lung infections. Concentrations of NO₂ primarily occur near major roads, resulting from vehicle emissions. The presence of NO₂ in the air also contributes to the formation and modification of other harmful air pollutants, such as particulate matter (PM). Particulate matter is also a pollutant in its own right, which is linked to poor health outcomes.

- 2.28 With decreased motorised traffic, we are seeing from real-time, road-side monitoring in West Yorkshire that harmful NO₂ emissions are on a significant downward trajectory from half-way through the first week of COVID 19 lockdown. PM emissions have however been static a consequence, potentially, of the use of domestic wood burners (during a cold snap) and an increase in domestic bonfires (possibly linked to council refuse tips and waste recycling centres being temporarily closed due to COVID-19). Levels of NO₂ are for example already at expected Clean Air Zone “completed scheme levels” in West Yorkshire without any intervention. Should current levels of NO₂ be maintained we would improve local air quality to make it easier for people with breathing problems, and we could potentially see, in future, respiratory illness and related admissions to Hospital come down.
- 2.29 The ability of the partner councils to monitor air quality in West Yorkshire has been reduced by austerity cuts. There will be a requirement to reinvest quickly in Air Quality monitoring to improve our understanding of changes in air quality, and to act accordingly based on evidence, as the lockdown is released and economic activity resumes.
- 2.30 There is no direct, local measure of carbon emissions from transport, with data calculated from a variety of proxy data, but road transport CO₂ emissions in West Yorkshire can be inferred from a 1-2-1 relationship with NO₂ monitoring, and thus substantially down. Aviation emissions will also be significantly reduced. COVID 19 impacts have dramatically reduced domestic and international flights and is expected to mean that 2020 aviation emissions are unusually low.

Travel information and payment

- 2.31 For some people the current crisis and lockdown will have led to more use of digital connectivity which might encourage them to book and pay for travel online in the future. There have also been questions raised about the use of cash on bus in particular and Arriva in our region are currently asking for the exact fare. With the more vulnerable members of our society who would potentially be more inclined to use traditional sources of information and payment in lock-down at the current time, it is difficult to quantify the extent to which the overall demand will change at the current time.
- 2.32 There is also the increased likelihood of people wanting to work more flexibly, for example more from home. In order to help the transport network cater for

different demands, we will continue to consider how the MCard could be made available on different platforms, including the MCard app for iPhone users (due to be launched later this summer). We will also work with bus and rail industry partners and with Transport for the North to deliver ticketing offers which offer people improved value for money. Different ticketing offers and behaviour change incentives (including the development of a mobility credits scheme) may need to be considered to encourage people to return to using public transport as part of the recovery. Whilst the development of new ways to book and purchase travel are important, we also recognise that not everyone has a bank account or easy access to mobile or on-line services so solutions also need to be developed to cater for these requirements.

Infrastructure

- 2.33 The delivery of infrastructure projects during the period of lock-down has also been impacted from the ability of construction firms to enable social distancing at work to limited materials from certain sources for example quarries. Investment in infrastructure has a beneficial impact on the economy and Government could decide to invest more. The implications for business cases, growth forecasts and approach to risk will all need to be considered, including for the mass transit work too.

Economic Recovery Board

- 2.34 A new West Yorkshire Economic Recovery Board has been established that brings together civic and business leaders from across the region. The Board met for the first time on the 30th April and agreed three priorities that will drive a targeted recovery plan for the region: developing resilient and thriving businesses, boosted by innovation, high skills and entrepreneurialism; developing an inclusive economy that provides people with a decent standard of living; and promoting environmental sustainability in all parts of the region.
- 2.35 The West Yorkshire Economic Recovery Board will meet frequently to agree and implement an economic recovery plan for the region and provide a collective voice for the region to Government. It builds on existing partnership working between local agencies in response to the pandemic. One of the workstreams that the Board will oversee is our transport recovery.

Next steps

- 2.36 There is already considerable efforts being made to be ready for the re-start and consider recovery. It is recommended that the Committee endorse the following immediate next steps:
- To enable effective planning, agree that the Combined Authority continues to call for clarity from Government on social distancing rules and the funding to support public transport.
 - For the Combined Authority to work with operators on priorities for services to cater for the return of demand.
 - For the Combined Authority to find ways to engage with the public to keep them safe when using public transport.

- For the CA to consider options for cycling and walking prioritisation to enable safe social distancing and encourage people to walk and cycle post recovery.
- For the Combined Authority to continue to understand the impact of the COVID 19 on the economics of the bus and rail sector, their increasing reliance on public funding and the different models to ensure effective outcomes for passengers.
- To ensure that the highlighted benefits of local knowledge and co-ordination of public transport services are consolidated through the Combined Authority's devolution and Mayoral Combined Authority-ready workstreams to ensure that bus and rail networks respond to local needs and priorities.
- For the CA to continue to consider the impacts of COVID 19 on our wider transport objectives such as air quality, carbon and modal shift to public transport and to review options to promote active and public transport as part of the recovery.

3 Clean Growth Implications

- 3.1 The response to the recovery from the last economic recession was for car trips to increase. There was some decline in urban centres nationally as social and technological change began to impact on travel patterns, but West Yorkshire bucked this trend, with car trips increasing to our centres.
- 3.2 The Transport Strategy aims to provide more and better-quality travel options to reduce trips made by car and the mode share of the car. In the immediate recovery private car trips might be favoured for social distancing reasons and van trips might be expected to maintain recent growth as households maintain home delivery of goods. At the same time the lockdown has delivered mass behaviour change and shown society has capacity to adapt. This could be the opportunity to decouple economic growth from growth in car travel, and potentially travel generally. This will not just support the carbon targets but also have benefits for our air quality and noise reduction from traffic, and potentially the economic sustainability of our smaller towns and local centres.

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 As the work develops, it will be tested with partners and lessons will also be drawn from other city regions.

8 Recommendations

8.1 That the Committee notes the updates provided in this report and endorses the next steps set out in paragraph 2.36.

9 Background Documents

9.1 None

10. Appendices

None