

Report to: Transport Committee

Date: 4 September 2020

Subject: **COVID-19 Impacts and Recovery**

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Is this a key decision?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input 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:	

- 1.1 To provide the Transport Committee with an update on current issues relating to the impacts of COVID-19 on transport operations and proposals for the recovery.
- 1.2 To consider the next steps for the Transport Recovery Plan that was endorsed at the Combined Authority on July 27th.

COVID-19 Transport Recovery Plan

- 2.1 A Transport Recovery Plan has been created to draw together in one place the role of transport through the restart and into recovery and what is needed to ensure transport can effectively and efficiency perform that role. The Transport Recovery Plan sits alongside a wider Economic Recovery Plan. Delivery of the Transport Recovery Plan will be overseen by Transport Committee; the Chair of the Transport Committee will report progress to the Combined Authority's Economic Recovery Board.

- 2.2 The plan was adopted at the Combined Authority on the 27th July, see **Background Documents**. This sets out the actions we are already taking and would take if further funding were released from Government.
- 2.3 This report sets out the current position regarding the impacts of COVID-19 on the transport system and progress with early actions in the Recovery Plans. Impacts and actions on walking and cycling are covered in a separate report see Item 7 on this agenda. It is recommended that the Committee considers the Transport Recovery Plan further in November in the light of developments in the pandemic and its economic and social impacts.

Bus Service Impacts & Recovery

- 2.4. The West Yorkshire Bus Alliance recently collated the aggregated operator performance data for the April – June quarter and comparative analysis was undertaken in relation to previous years to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown period:

Table 1: Operator Performance Comparison April – June 2018 and 2020

Measure	Average (%)		
	2018	2020	Percentage Change
Reliability	98.2	99.7	+1.5
Punctuality (Origin)	92.8	96.6	+3.8
Punctuality (Intermediate)	83.8	88.7	+4.9

- 2.5. Across all of the measures performance has significantly improved. This is due to the reduced traffic levels on the roads which enabled a reduced bus service to operate more easily and efficiently.
- 2.4 During August, bus services were operating at 90% of normal service mileage, this will increase to around 100% from the start of September. Social distancing limits the capacity of buses to around 50%. Overall patronage is at 45%, whilst off peak and weekend bus use has grown steadily through the summer, morning and evening peak use has remained low.
- 2.5 Compliance with mandatory face coverings is generally good but there has been some reluctance amongst some customer groups and in certain areas. The Combined Authority has been working with local PCSOs to reinforce rather than enforce the need for face covering.
- 2.6 AccessBus services were resumed from late July initially in Calderdale and Wakefield before rolling out to the remainder of West Yorkshire in August. Social distancing limits the capacity of each bus to five passengers.
- 2.7 Elland Road Park & Ride resumed from 24 August 2020. Temple Green P&R site is being used as a COVID-19 testing site and will be unavailable for the foreseeable future.

Bus Service Funding

- 2.8 The reduced demand and consequential loss of revenue arising from COVID-19 will have a significant impact on the financial stability of local bus services. At present this is mitigated by emergency funding however when this ends there is a risk that operators may shrink networks to maintain their trading viability. In the longer term, there may be long-lasting behavioural change and change in working patterns, with potentially more people working from home, which could further reduce bus demand and may change some of the geographical focus on the bus network.
- 2.9 On 8 August, Government announced the continuation of the COVID-19 Bus Services Subsidy Grant (CBSSG) which provides funding support to operate bus services at pre COVID-19 service levels despite the significant reduction in fare revenue. This is paid direct to bus operators for commercial bus services and to Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) including the Combined Authority for tendered bus services. The Government has put this funding on a rolling eight-week basis and has indicated that it will give notice of reduction or termination when the rules regarding social distancing on public transport are eased or lifted.
- 2.10 As part of this arrangement, Government has asked LTAs to continue to pay for concessionary fares at the level operating prior to the pandemic. In the case of West Yorkshire, use of the senior/ disabled free bus pass in July 2020 was 38% of the levels observed in July 2019 yet payment has been made assuming the 2019 number of journeys. This means the Combined Authority is paying around £2.5 million per month for journeys which are not being made. Whilst this funding is necessary to sustain 100% service levels at 45% of fares revenue, it is not a satisfactory way of deploying public funding.
- 2.11 Following a discussion on this at the May Transport Committee, the Chair has written to the Secretary of State expressing concern that this is not a sustainable method of funding bus services and an alternative locally accountable approach should be taken. A copy of this letter is included as an Appendix 1 of this report Government have acknowledged these concerns and have advised its intentions to review bus funding and governance models in a forthcoming review of bus policy expected to start in the Autumn.

Preparing for the return to school/ college

- 2.12 Government guidance on home to school travel provides that social distancing is not a constraint on capacity for dedicated bus services where there are only pupils travelling. There are however many pupils who travel to school/ college using regular bus services where social distancing reduces the available capacity of the bus. Additional buses will be needed to enable such pupils, and other users of the respective bus service, to travel safely. Arrangements are in hand to commission around 60 additional buses to support this. There is ongoing liaison with Further/ Higher Education establishments to ensure the

bus network can accommodate the additional demand arising from the return to college. The Combined Authority has been awarded £1,900,000 from Department for Education to meet the cost of additional provision in the region over the first half term.

- 2.13 The Department for Education has also issued specific guidance for the provision of home to school transport which sets out the precautions to be taken to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission on school transport.
- 2.14 The Combined Authority has also been awarded £150,000 from Department for Transport for Travel Demand Management, meeting the cost of survey, planning and communications costs. An online survey was commissioned to gauge and understand the travel to school intentions of school pupils. Over 5,000 people responded. The results illustrated around 4% of respondents who habitually travelled to school would now switch to walking or getting a lift in a private car.
- 2.15 Bus fares will operate as normal for students returning to school/ college. A campaign to promote the MCard under 19 products has begun as part of the urgent need to restore revenues for MCard products.
- 2.16 At the time of writing arrangements were being finalised and details of the services were being communicated to pupils and parents through schools and on the wymetro.com website. Pupils are being encouraged to walk or cycle to school where they are able.

Rail network impacts and recovery

Services and demand impacts

- 2.17 Since the previous report to the Transport Committee on the implications of COVID-19 on the rail network there has been a further step up in the number of rail services operating. Despite the increase timetables have continued to remain reliable with PPM (Passenger Performance Measure) for all operators well over 90% and CASL (Cancellations and Significant Lateness) remaining at good levels. Close monitoring will continue as more services are added and resources potentially become more stretched, although operators have been asked to be very cautious here and protect performance levels.
- 2.18 Demand for rail services has shown a gradual increase week on week and is now operating at approximately 30% of normal levels and generally social distancing is possible on most services. The leisure market has increased considerably on weekends and on days in the week when the weather is good, particularly on services to Skipton and Ilkley. Northern continue to monitor demand to ensure services are stepped up in the correct place and have removed social distancing markers on trains apart from where space is required for conductors to carry out specific duties. Passenger flows are also monitored at Leeds Station and for the week beginning Monday 13th July

2020, there was a reduction of 75% against the week beginning 2nd March 2020, and an increase of 19% against the previous week.

- 2.19 As previously advised the challenge of maintaining social distancing in the confines of an enclosed train cab is delaying full resumption of driver training. A trial has begun but with very limited numbers at this stage. In turn this is impacting on how quickly services can be added back into the timetable. This restriction of newly qualified drivers is emerging as a serious constraint, as existing drivers retire or otherwise move on the available pool of drivers is gradually declining, compounded by several new types of trains. Trials are underway to test safe ways of working, and early results are positive.
- 2.20 On the 15 June the use of face coverings was introduced on public transport. Rail operators have reported that the use of these has gradually increased, particularly as the message from government has been strengthened. Messages on the use of face coverings has moved from educating to enforcement with penalties being issued to those not wearing them unless they are medically exempt, have a disability or under the age of 11. There are schemes/tools available for those customers who are exempt from wearing face coverings to help them feel more comfortable when travelling but these are not a prerequisite for travel.

Service changes in September 2020

- 2.21 Committee will be aware that, since the COVID-19 crisis began in March, rail services have been operating to a series of temporary timetables with reduced services. These have been modified a number of times as the situation has eased, and the next modification is planned to come into force on Monday, 14 September; it is expected to mark a major step towards returning services to their normal levels, although they will still not be 100% normal as resources are still restrained. While full details of specific train times have not yet been received, an overview is possible.
- 2.22 On Northern, the uplift represents approximately 88% of the normal services, although this varies significantly from line to line. The main changes relevant to our area are summarised below:

Weekdays:

- Additional trains (but not full normal service):
 - Leeds to Carlisle and direct services to Lancaster
 - Harrogate line (in the peaks)
 - Hallam line (Leeds – Wakefield – Barnsley – Sheffield)
- Reinstatement of full normal service:
 - Leeds – Garforth – York
 - Halifax – Leeds – Selby – Hull
 - Calder Valley to Manchester and Blackpool
 - Bradford to Huddersfield
 - Wharfedale and Airedale line local services

- Pontefract lines (via Castleford and via Wakefield)
- Leeds – Wakefield Westgate – Doncaster / Sheffield
- Dearne Valley (York – Pontefract – Sheffield)
- Penistone line continues running full normal service
- Huddersfield – Wakefield line is **not** restored or increased beyond currently skeleton service of three trains per day – we are discussing this with Northern

Sundays:

- Additional trains (but not full normal Sunday service):
 - Leeds – Skipton – Lancaster
 - Hallam line (Leeds – Wakefield – Barnsley – Sheffield)
- Reinstatement of full normal Sunday service:
 - Harrogate line
 - Leeds – Garforth – York
 - Calder Valley to Manchester and Blackpool
 - Leeds via Bradford to Huddersfield
 - Penistone line
- Pontefract lines (both routes) continue running full normal Sunday service
- No changes to services below normal Sunday levels:
 - Leeds – Skipton – Carlisle long-distance services
 - Airedale and Wharfedale line local services
 - Leeds – Wakefield Westgate – Doncaster / Sheffield

2.23 A table is provided at Appendix 2 with more details on a line by-line basis, which also compares the impact of the proposed September timetable to normal service levels.

2.24 On TransPennine Express (TPE) relatively few changes to services' timings are planned for September. However, the local services between Leeds and Huddersfield, and between Huddersfield and Manchester, will revert to 3-car trains. They have been running as extended 6-car trains recently, helping with social distancing. This is because TPE must return to using their "normal" shorter platforms at busier stations as the number of services on the network increases. Beyond that, most Scarborough trains will continue to be shuttles to/from York rather than running via Leeds and Manchester to/from Liverpool, and the Newcastle – Manchester Airport trains will continue not to run (the Redcar – Airport and Newcastle – Liverpool trains however are operating). Transpennine will be operating approximately 86% of their usual services overall.

2.25 Grand Central, who are currently only operating 2 trains per day between Bradford / Halifax and London will be offering a full timetable by 21 September. Reservations remain compulsory on their services.

- 2.26 LNER will see a step up of services in September to approximately 85% of their usual timetable for weekday services. Weekend services will stay at a lower frequency and will be planned on a week by week basis due to Network Rail engineering works at most weekends in the Autumn as part of the East Coast Upgrade work. LNER is aiming to introduce:
- Almost all their peak services
 - Additional services between London and Edinburgh
- 2.27 At the time of writing no significant changes in West Yorkshire are anticipated for Cross-Country, who are operating a broadly normal hourly service through this region (reservations become compulsory from 7 Sept).
- 2.28 It should be noted that further changes are likely to take place in December, the normal time for the main annual rail timetable change. Information will be shared with the Committee as it becomes available.

Funding and Emergency Measures Agreements

- 2.29 Emergency Measures Agreements (EMAs) have been applied to franchised passenger operators since March, and the Operator of Last Resort operators (Northern and LNER) are also being managed on this basis. EMAs transferred all financial risk to the DfT, with operators taking a margin for running services. Service levels and investment have been defined by DfT in this period.
- 2.30 The EMAs are due to run until 20 September 2020. The arrangement has provided welcome certainty and sustained services through a crucial period, but also centralised decision making to DfT. An announcement is expected to be made by the time the Committee meets to make clear what arrangements will follow, with a wide-spread expectation that some form of emergency measures will continue to be required. More details on the interface of this announcement with rail reform are considered at **Item 8**.

Transport Recovery Plan Actions

- 2.31 The key actions in respect of the Transport Recovery Plan anticipated in the period before the next meeting of the Committee.
- Restoration of bus service levels to 100% and arrangements described in this report to support the return to schools, colleges
 - Rail service restored to 88% from 14 September as described in this report
 - Installation of Tranche 1 Active Travel measures, including supporting behaviour change measures (more details are provided in Item 7 on this agenda)
 - Introduction of MCard Mobile app and promotion of flexible day tickets on bus

- Introduction of bus capacity indicators on real time information systems

2.32 All measures are subject to any changes in the pandemic, further restrictions may necessitate measures to discourage travel. A lifting of social distancing constraints is expected to facilitate an increase in demand and would enable the promotion of public transport.

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 during the early stages of lockdown and it can be inferred from this that CO₂ emissions were similarly reduced

3.2. It is therefore important that the Transport Recovery Plan seeks to ensure that the recovered transport network delivers a more favourable situation with regard to air quality and carbon generation than existed prior to the pandemic

4. Financial Implications

4.1 COVID-19 is having a significant impact on the Combined Authority's revenue budget. This is manifested in reduced commercial income, increased bus station costs, lost commission from MCard sales and increased costs of bus service contracts where fares revenue is used to offset costs. These issues are being monitored closely and, as reported to the Combined Authority on 27 July, there exists a risk that the ensuing funding gap may need to be met from reserves.

4.2 The Combined Authority has received £2.1 million of CBSSG funding up until 4 August which will offset the bus service costs incurred by the Authority. Details of the value of payment beyond 4 August will be determined by DfT in early September following submission of returns from the Combined Authority.

4.3 At the request of the Secretary of State (as described in paragraph 2.10), the Combined Authority has made concessionary fare reimbursement payments using 2019 passenger data. Whilst this area of expenditure remains within the budget set by the Authority in February, this arrangement remains under review on a month by month basis and will cease when the other emergency funding arrangements end.

4.4 The Combined Authority has been awarded £1.9 million from Department for Education to meet the cost of additional school transport provision in the region over the first half term. The Combined Authority has also received £150,000 from Department for Transport to assist with the costs of planning and communicating arrangements for school / college transport.

5. Legal Implications

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

- 5.2 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).

- 5.3 The above arrangements were reviewed at the previous meeting and it was agreed to retain them at least until this meeting of the Committee but to use it only where a decision is required in response to the COVID-19 emergency. Given the continued civil emergency, it is proposed to retain the arrangement until the November meeting of the Committee.

6. Staffing Implications

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

7. External Consultees

- 7.1 The content of this report has been developed with input from bus and rail operators.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 That the Committee notes the updates provided in this report.
- 8.2 That the Committee considers an update of the Transport Recovery Plan at the November Committee meeting.
- 8.3 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

Transport Recovery Plan, Item 6, Appendix 2, West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 27 July 2020, available via this link:

<https://westyorkshire.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=133&MIId=963&Ver=4>

10. Appendices

Appendix 1 Letter from Cllr Groves to Secretary of State dated 3 June 2020

Appendix 2 Overview of Northern September 2020 proposed timetable changes and comparison to normal timetable