

Report to: Transport Committee

Date: 20 November 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.

Travel Advice

- 2.4 Following the introduction of further “lockdown” measures from 5 November, the travel guidance issued by the Combined Authority is currently as follows in line with Government guidance;
- Reduce journeys and avoid travel in and out of your local area
 - Limited capacity, allow extra time and check before you travel
 - Maintain social distancing
 - Wear a face covering and carry hand sanitiser
 - Pay contactless
 - Consider cycling and walking
- 2.5 At the time of writing public transport service levels have been maintained into the “lockdown” period. This enables support for essential journeys as the Government guidance allows for travelling to work , education, medical appointments, visiting venues that are open (including essential retail), exercise and for caring responsibilities. This will be kept under review in the light of reduced levels of demand.

Bus Service Impacts

- 2.6 Bus service operation increased to 100% from the start of September. Social distancing limits the capacity of buses to around 50%. Overall patronage is at 55% Appendix 1 illustrates how bus use increased in September with the return to school/ college but has subsequently levelled off as further COVID infection restrictions have been introduced.
- 2.7 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.
- 2.8 Arrangements were made to provide transport to schools and colleges. 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. Around 60 additional buses have been deployed to provide the necessary capacity.
- 2.9 As demand for bus travel has increased due to the return to school/ college, there are now instances where buses are at their reduced capacity and

therefore passengers are prevented from boarding. Bus operators and the Combined Authority are working together to manage this situation and to deploy capacity to reduce this risk as far as possible.

- 2.10 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. As reported to previous meetings, this is currently mitigated by emergency funding on an eight week rolling notice period. If and when emergency funding there is a risk that operators may shrink networks to maintain their trading viability. A separate report on this agenda sets out the Combined Authority's proposition to Government for a longer term devolved funding settlement to support the recovery of the bus network.
- 2.11 During the spring and summer there were frequent changes to bus services. Digital information has been kept up to date however this was not possible for bus stop timetable displays and printed timetables. Inserts were installed at bus stops advising people to access digital channels. A process of installing timetables at the busiest bus stops is now under way.
- 2.12 Initially the bus station travel centres were closed following the COVID restrictions introduced on 5 November. However, on closer examination of the regulations a partial re-opening has been possible from 16 November.

Rail network impacts

- 2.13 A summary of rail patronage is provided at Appendix 1. This highlights the severe impact on rail use and revenue caused by the COVID-19 crisis. The additional revenue support required by the railway has now reported to exceed £4bn nationally. Rail demand remains proportionately lower than bus demand compared to 'normal' in West Yorkshire. Commuting demand is particularly weak, where the traditional strength of rail is bringing large numbers of people into city centre employment, which is the sector where there has been most likelihood of being able to work from home.
- 2.14 Operators report a somewhat stronger leisure market, and this is evidenced by Saturdays remaining the busiest day of the week for footfall at Leeds station. The reduction in leisure travel since the end of the summer holidays has driven the reduction in demand observed in late September and October, together with increasing travel restrictions and reinstated advice to work from home where possible. Operators report business travel has remained largely absent from the network, especially for long-distance trips.
- 2.15 As the impact of the COVID-19 crisis continues to extend, the financial sustainability of the current situation remains a concern. However, DfT continues to support the current level of services being provided.
- 2.16 Since the previous report to Transport Committee on the implications of COVID-19 there was a further increase in the number of services operating. Despite this increase, services 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. At the time of writing the impact of the autumn leaf-fall season was not yet clear. Close monitoring will continue as more services are added and resources potentially become more stretched, although operators have been asked to be very cautious and protect performance levels.

- 2.17 Driving training has now restarted for both TPE and Northern but at a reduced rate. Both operators have ensured the new timetable still allows for the capacity required to maintain a rolling training driver programme, recognising that the restriction of newly qualified drivers is emerging as a serious constraint. This constraint is expected to remain well into 2021.
- 2.18 An escalating risk to rail operators and Network Rail is the need for self-isolation, including through 'test and trace' notifications. Contingency plans are being put in place especially where large number of staff work together, such as the signalling centre in York where control staff and signallers manage a large part of the region's railway. Northern have also begun to look at a three-level contingency plan for the delivery of rail services.
- 2.19 Conductors are now routinely on passenger duties where social distancing can be managed, providing on-board customer engagement and a reassuring presence. This assists with face mask compliance as conductors can 'encourage' use and help direct deployment of Travel Safe Officers and the British Transport Police. Both Northern and TPE have invested in additional cleaning staff and have further enhanced cleaning regimens on-board trains.
- 2.20 The COVID-19 crisis has seen several changes to rail timetables in recent months. Since September, services have largely settled down into more stable patterns, though many are still running at reduced levels or hours of operation. The next timetable changes are expected on 13 December 2020 and 16 May 2021, in line with the usual December and May cycle.
- 2.21 A summary of the current service patterns and anticipated changes are included at Appendix 2. Where services are not running to normal timetables this is due mainly to shortage of available staff. Officers continue to work with Northern to establish if there are ways to mitigate specific local impacts. The likelihood of planned increases in services happening in December will be reduced if the current trajectory of the COVID-19 crisis means demand remains at currently low levels.

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 for 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 £2.8 million of CBSSG funding up until end September 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 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. As of September 2020, the Combined Authority is "overpaying" concessionary fares by £2.5 m per month
- 4.4 The Combined Authority has been awarded funding from Department for Education which is meeting the cost of additional school transport provision in the region.

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. It has not proven necessary to use this delegation and it is now proposed that the delegation arrangements are withdrawn.

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 delegated decision-making arrangement approved by the Committee on 13 March be rescinded.

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 Summary of rail patronage data

Appendix 2 Summary of anticipated future timetable changes.

