

Report to: Transport Committee

Date: 12 March 2021

Subject: **Covid-19 Update**

Director: Dave Pearson, Director Transport & Property Services

Author: Dave Pearson, Director Transport & Property Services

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 an update on the current impacts of COVID on transport and on the actions set out in the Transport Recovery Plan that was endorsed at the Combined Authority in July 2020.

2. Information

Travel Advice

- 2.1 Following the introduction of “lockdown” restrictions on 4 January, the Combined Authority issued travel guidance in line with regulations and Government guidance limiting travel to essential journeys. On 22 February, Government set out an indicative “roadmap” of which the key transport implications are;
- **Step 1 - 8/29 March** - “Stay at home” message replaced by “Minimise Travel” on 29 March. Full school transport resumed from 8th March – Travel Centres opened w/c 1 March to facilitate.

- **Step 2 - 12 April** Non-essential retail returns but “minimise travel and still work from home if you can” message remains.
- **Step 3 - 17 May** Indoor hospitality and entertainment returns. “Minimise travel” advice lifted but “work from home if you can” remains.
- **Step 4 - 21 June** Remove all legal limits on social contact and remaining reopening. Social distancing capacity constraints on public transport may be lifted at this point.

Supporting our Bus Passengers

- 2.2 Since the current lockdown restrictions came into force on 4 January, bus patronage has fallen to around 30% of that seen in the corresponding month pre pandemic. Bus stations have remained open although Travel Centres were closed in January/ February to re-open when schools restart. Many school buses have continued to operate to provide access for students of critical workers and provision will step back up with the reopening of schools in March. The latest available patronage data is included at **Appendix 1**.
- 2.3 Government sought a reduction in bus network mileage commensurate with the reduced demand during lockdown. The West Yorkshire Bus Alliance agreed the following approach to this;

During the period of “Stay At Home” restrictions, we shall be maintaining bus services at a level which ensures critical workers can get to work or education and enables people to make essential trips to attend medical appointments, to shop for essentials, to take outdoor exercise, and for caring responsibilities. We also seek to ensure we do not disproportionate impact particular communities or social economic groups where there may be an impact on their resilience to the health and economic impacts of the pandemic.

- *The service changes do not impact on service levels to major hospitals, community vaccination centres and other critical worker locations*
- *The service changes do not leave any community unserved by buses between 0700 and 1900*
- *Any frequency reductions do not cause lead to overcrowding of remaining peak journeys*

- 2.4 Application of the above resulted in a reduction in overall mileage of around 15%. At the time of writing, these reductions will be reversed in March as restrictions ease.
- 2.5 Arrangements were introduced to support travel to Community Vaccination Centres by bus as follows
- Holders of free ENCTS bus passes can travel free of charge before 0930 to get to their vaccination appointment.
 - A shuttle bus between Huddersfield Bus & Rail stations and John Smiths Stadium Vaccination Centre

- The route of the Wakefield Free Citybus was amended to serve the Spectrum Vaccination Centre
- An additional stop was installed on Elland Road Park & Ride to enable people to use this service to get to their vaccination appointment
- AccessBus is supporting access to local vaccination venues

Supporting our Rail Passengers

- 2.6 Since the previous report there has been a step down in the number of rail services with a temporary lockdown timetable in place. The level of service provision and demand will continue to be monitored and adapted as the COVID-19 restrictions are lifted in the next few months. TransPennine Express was due to reinstate an additional morning service in each direction serving Slaithwaite and Marsden from 8 March to coincide with the reopening of schools.
- 2.7 The timetable is operating reliably. PPM (Passenger Performance Measure) for Northern remains above 90% but for TPE in the most recent rail reporting period there has been a slight decline, dropping into the 80's. CASL (Cancellations and Significant Lateness) for both operators has increased to approximately 3%. Some major incidents impacted on the period, such as a lineside fire at Bradford Interchange and a derailment at Sheffield. Flooding and extreme weather have also had a significant impact.
- 2.8 An ongoing concern for performance is train crew shortages which is currently low but is providing challenges when rostering staff. Several factors are impacting in this area – elevated level of absence due to self-isolation which is fluctuating in different areas of the business and is unpredictable; a slight increase of staff with long term COVID-19 symptoms; and the final category which is the clinically extremely vulnerable.
- 2.9 During the January/February lockdown period rail patronage fell to around 10-15% of pre COVID-19 levels for Northern and 5-10% for TransPennine Express. The busiest services were mostly peak weekday services although social distancing was possible on all services. Northern has put in place a clear plan to manage and monitor the impact of school children returning to the network from 8 March. The Combined Authority is again offering support with standby buses to facilitate social distancing at locations where high volumes of school children are expected. Leisure travel has been evident but in very low numbers. Passenger flows are also monitored at Leeds station and for the week beginning 15 February 2021 levels were 14% of levels observed a year earlier but had increased 6% on the previous week. The latest available patronage data is included at **Appendix 1**.
- 2.10 The one-way system which has been operating at Leeds station since May 2020 to help aid social distancing has been relaxed on a trial basis. This will hopefully improve throughflow at the station without compromising safety as passenger numbers are low.

- 2.11 Driver training, for both Northern and TPE has continued during the lockdown albeit at a significantly reduced rate for both operators with the additional COVID-19 measures which must be adhered to. Both operators have ensured the current timetable still allows for the capacity required to maintain a rolling training driver programme. Nonetheless the restriction of newly qualified drivers is emerging as a serious constraint on the industry, which will have implications throughout 2021.
- 2.12 Northern has reduced ticket office opening times on Sunday at some stations due to lockdown and the inevitable reduction in demand. At Leeds station this also impacts on the travel centre which will be closed all-day although the ticket office will remain open with no change to its hours of opening. The Information Point at Leeds will also operate reduced hours. These changes will be monitored and reversed as and when required.
- 2.13 The ongoing operation of the railway with reduced passenger numbers is coming at significant additional cost. This additional support is now understood to exceed £10bn since March 2020.

Bus Funding- Update

- 2.14 A paper was provided to the previous meeting setting out the financial issues for the Combined Authority arising from the impacts of COVID-19 on the viability of the bus network. The current Government COVID Bus Subsidy Grant (CBSSG) is continuing under a rolling 8-week notice period. At the time of writing, notice has not been given and the existing arrangement is expected to continue until June 2021. A further announcement is after the Budget on 3 March 2021.
- 2.15 Government has indicated that a new arrangement for funding will follow CBSSG managed locally through a Recovery Partnership. Details of the value, process and conditions attached to this funding are awaited. Preliminary discussions have been held with bus operators seeking to use the established Bus Alliance as the vehicle for the Recovery Partnership. Transport Committee on 20 November 2020 endorsed the development of an Enhanced Partnership (as defined in the Bus Services Act). The Recovery Partnership will be a key transition between the current voluntary Alliance and the formal Enhanced Partnership.
- 2.16 Government requested that Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) continue to make concessionary fare payments to bus operators despite the significant reduction in patronage. In consultation with the Chair of Transport Committee, the Combined Authority has complied with the Government request and will continue to do so up until the end of CBSSG. When the nature of the Government "recovery" funding is known, a further paper will be prepared for the Combined Authority and Transport Committee and will look at the role of concessionary fare reimbursement in the context of supporting the recovery of the bus network.

- 2.17 In July 2020, the Transport Committee re-established the Local Bus Services Working Group to provide oversight of the application of the criteria for the supported local bus services and input into the procurement process for tendered services. A meeting of the Working Group will be called following any Government announcement on recovery funding to review the position regarding bus services directly funded by the Combined Authority.

3. Tackling the Climate Emergency 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. 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. Inclusive Growth Implications

- 4.1 Maintaining public transport for critical workers is key to ensuring continued public services during the lockdown restriction. The restoration of an effective, stable and affordable public transport network will be key in ensuring the post pandemic economic recovery is inclusive particularly to communities with limited access to private transport.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 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. The financial implications of COVID were considered in detail by the Committee at its previous meeting.

6. Legal Implications

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

7. Staffing Implications

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

8. External Consultees

- 8.1 No external consultations have been undertaken.

9. Recommendations

- 9.1 That the Committee notes the updates provided in this report.

10. Background Documents

- 10.1 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?CIId=133&MIId=963&Ver=4>
- 10.2 During the Coronavirus outbreak, we are publishing a fortnightly economic monitor and a weekly dashboard to help better understand the changing situation. This includes information on public transport patronage. They are available via this link: <https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/documents/economic-monitor/>

11. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Summary of public transport patronage data