

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TRANSPORT COMMITTEE HELD REMOTELY ON FRIDAY, 12 MARCH 2021

Present:

Councillor Kim Groves (Chair)	Leeds City Council
Councillor Manisha Kaushik (Deputy Chair)	Kirklees Council
Councillor Martyn Bolt (Leader of the Opposition)	Kirklees Council
Councillor Neil Buckley	Leeds City Council
Councillor Peter Carlill	Leeds City Council
Councillor Colin Campbell	Leeds City Council
Councillor Andy D'Agorne	York Council
Councillor Sinead Engel	Bradford Council
Councillor Miss Jo Hepworth	Wakefield Council
Councillor James Homewood	Kirklees Council
Councillor Hassan Khan	Bradford Council
Councillor Taj Salam	Bradford Council
Councillor Daniel Sutherland	Calderdale Council
Councillor Kevin Swift	Wakefield Council
Mark Roberts	Beer Hawk Ltd

In attendance:

Councillor Alex Ross-Shaw	Bradford Council
Councillor Helen Hayden	Leeds City Council
Councillor Peter McBride	Kirklees Council
Councillor Jane Scullion	Calderdale Council
Dave Pearson	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Liz Hunter	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Tom Gifford	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Patrick Bowes	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Richard Crabtree	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Kit Allwinter	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Farah Tam	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Dominic Martin	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

45. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Simon Pringle and Peter Caffrey.

46. Declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests

There were no pecuniary interests declared during the meeting.

47. Exempt information - possible exclusion of the press and public

There were no items that required the exclusion of the press and public.

48. Minutes of the meeting of the Transport Committee held on 15 January 2021

Resolved: That the minutes of the last meeting of the Transport Committee be approved.

49. COVID-19 Update

The Committee received an update from the Director of Transport & Property Services regarding the current impacts of COVID-19 on transport and on the actions set out in the Transport Recovery Plan.

A small increase had been recorded in passenger numbers on bus and rail. Current data suggested that capacity may soon become a limiting factor, particularly considering the social distancing measures in place. This was expected to become more pressing when the non-essential retail and hospitality sectors opened in April and May. Some work had already been done to help address this, including displaying capacity information on the side of buses and bus occupancy indicators on real-time information screens and apps. The Combined Authority would continue to work with transport operators to manage the increased demand. Members were also advised of the expected roadmap for the return of bus and rail services to full levels of provision.

Uncertainty over the future of bus and rail funding was highlighted, and it was noted that the Chair and West Yorkshire leaders had written to the Secretary of State in January expressing their concerns in this regard. The Combined Authority was in the process of using the Bus Alliance to manage preparations for funding to transition into the recovery period, but a great deal of uncertainty still remained and many people in the region could be left lacking access to transport if bus provision was not funded, which made it a matter of urgency.

The National Bus Strategy was expected to be published soon, and the Combined Authority had provided feedback to Government. The Chair had written to the Secretary of State requesting further information on when the strategy would be published and on what it would contain, and would continue to push for meetings with the Government to get reassurance about funding.

Members questioned what support had been provided to the bus service to this point. It was explained that three main forms of support were received:

- A roughly £15 million per year Bus Services Operators Grant that was distributed directly to bus operators. This was still being maintained in full.

- A Covid-19 Bus Subsidy Grant claimed directly from the government by bus operators. Figures of what had been claimed by operators had not been shared by the government. Local Transport Authorities had also received a payment under this grant; the Combined Authority had received roughly £2.5 million since last year, which had been used to support the tendered network, to make up the gap between fares revenue and actual revenue, and support additional costs including cleaning.
- The Combined Authority continued to fund the free bus pass scheme at the full rates for the previous year, despite the significant drop in journeys undertaken. This amounted to effectively £30 million of support for the bus services in 2020/21.

The expected increase in demand as lockdown ended was discussed, particularly in regard to leisure activities such as holidays within the country and journeys into towns and cities for shopping. Members hoped that this pent-up demand would be a strong driver for the economic recovery. The potential impact of this demand on the above-mentioned capacity issues was noted, but discussions had taken place with transport operators regarding which routes were expected to have the highest usage in upcoming months and the intention was to be well-prepared for any surge.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

50. Connectivity Plan Engagement

The Committee received an update on the current status of public and stakeholder engagement on the West Yorkshire Connectivity Infrastructure Plan, WY Mass Transit Vision 2040 and associated documents following their publication in January 2021.

The Chair thanked Members for all their support in producing the Connectivity Infrastructure Plan (CIP). The plan sought to address the challenges of both the climate emergency and inclusive growth, and positive feedback had been received from MPs at a briefing session. The importance of gathering as much feedback as possible was emphasised, and Members were advised that the upcoming District Consultation Sub-Committee meetings had been opened to a wider audience of district councillors for the purposes of soliciting their feedback on the plan. Discussions were also underway with the LEP Business Communications Group in hopes of potentially working together to engage with businesses directly.

It was noted that there were a number of unanswered questions within the plan, particularly surrounding the required funding. Members were advised that the presented pipeline of schemes would increase the Combined Authority's ability to access Government support, and that becoming a Mayoral Combined Authority would give access to the £4.2 billion Intra-city Transport Fund. Ultimately it was hoped that the Government would view this as an ongoing priority rather than a one-off investment, particularly in the light of historic under-investment in transport in the West Yorkshire region.

Members questioned how well passenger demand could be predicted as the

region began to move on from the pandemic. A number of scenarios were being developed following industry assumptions and would be continually tested against new data, with more modelling due to take place in the next stages of work. It was highlighted that the plans were aspirational, as it was vital to encourage people to move away from private car use and toward public transport or active travel in order to meet our net-zero carbon emission targets, and this modal shift was at the heart of the work being done.

Committee members raised the following other issues regarding the CIP and engagement:

- Concerns were raised of who would own a potential mass transit system, how infrastructure would be shared, and how modal integration could be achieved whilst maintaining competition. This would be explored later in the development process, but it would be ensured that the model chosen fitted with the priorities of the region as a whole.
- Members were advised that a key facet of the CIP would be trying to provide the public with a simple, seamless, integrated experience, with public transportation working together rather than as competitors. The enhanced partnership was a step in this direction. However, Members questioned what effect a lack of competition could have on prices.
- Members questioned how wide-reaching the consultation was, how seldom-heard groups were being reached, and whether contacts within each individual district were being fully used, particularly in terms of accessibility and usability groups. It was noted that unfortunately the pandemic had prevented much offline consultation work, but every effort had been taken to make digital engagement as accessible as possible, with different methods of feedback available, from a detailed survey, to polls, to an interactive map.
- It was highlighted that the overriding message that had been received from members of the public was that they wanted transport to be clean, local, easy, accessible, and reliable.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

51. Active Travel - Update

Members considered a report summarising developments aimed to improve conditions and opportunities for walking and cycling within West Yorkshire and received an update on the delivery of relevant schemes.

The need to enact a modal shift toward active travel was discussed, with shorter journeys being replaced by walking and cycling – a goal of 50% of trips being taken via active travel methods was highlighted. Greater integration for multi-modal journey was also raised as a key goal.

Members were advised that as part of a new commitment to active travel, the Department for Transport were proposing a multi-year funding settlement

based on the strength of the Combined Authority's pipeline of schemes. This would allow the Combined Authority to engage with more complicated projects, and to develop schemes more steadily without having to wait for undetermined funding further down the line.

Members raised the following questions and concerns:

- It was requested that more discussion of the link between business recovery and the high street be included in future papers, particularly including potential methods of enhancing what local shops can offer. The Cargodale service running in Calderdale was mentioned as an example of the potential that existed in this area.
- The extended delay of delivery of promised cycle storage services in Otley was raised and would be followed up after the meeting.
- Members discussed the Bradley to Brighouse Greenway and were pleased that this infrastructure would be in place prior to the expected housing growth in Kirklees and Calderdale.
- The Huddersfield Narrow Canal route to Marsden was praised. It was acknowledged that there remained some work to be done along this route, but Members emphasised the importance of remembering to promote the good things about cycling in the region rather than only focusing on what could still stand to be improved.

Members also questioned what progress had been made on work to improve active travel provision through Skelton Grange on the Transpennine Trail, as accessibility issues existed in regards to a bridge on the route. It was reported that a series of meetings were underway with the various stakeholders, including local landowners, and the development of a potential alternate route through the nearby Thwaite Mills estate appeared to be a promising option.

Concerns over proposals being changed after receiving approval from the committee were discussed. Members were advised that the transition to a Mayoral Combined Authority would involve changes to the governance structure which may impact on how this was managed going forward and were reminded that any concerns could always be raised between meetings.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

52. Carbon Impact Assessment

Members received a report providing an update on the work commissioned by the Combined Authority to develop a Carbon Impact Assessment tool and to incorporate this into the Assurance Framework.

Members questioned whether a list of projects being considered under Phase 3 of the Carbon Impact Assessment tool rollout could be made available. It was advised that the list was still at an early stage, but would be shared with Members after the meeting.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

53. Leeds City Region Transport Update

Members considered a report providing an update on current issues covered elsewhere in the agenda, including the Bus Expert panel, the Department for Transport's Future of Transport Rural Strategy call for evidence, and the Levelling Up Fund and Existing Local Pinch Point Expressions of Interest.

The report included an update on the Restoring Your Railways fund, and Members were advised that no bids had been submitted to the current round of this fund. The Queensbury Tunnel was discussed as a potential bid, and its national significance as one of the longest cycling tunnels in Europe was highlighted. However, Government funding had been allocated between Highways England, the Combined Authority, and Bradford Council to examine route options and costs for active travel in the region, including opening the Queensbury Tunnel, and this work was still underway. Once the work had been completed and a full understanding of the options and costs had been gained further conversations with the Department for Transport would likely take place regarding what could be delivered.

It was noted that the MCard mobile phone app had been launched, which was believed to be the first deployment of a mobile phone day ticket that could be used for both bus and rail. This was part of the Combined Authority's response to the different travel habits people would be adopting in the post-pandemic landscape.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

54. Summary of Transport Schemes

The Committee considered a report informing them of transport-related approvals from recent meetings of the Investment Committee and of the Combined Authority.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

55. Draft minutes of the district consultation subcommittees held in October 2020

Resolved: That the minutes of the following District Consultation Sub-Committee meetings be noted:

- a) Leeds – 12 October 2020
- b) Calderdale – 13 October 2020
- c) Wakefield – 15 October 2020
- d) Bradford – 19 October 2020
- e) Kirklees – 21 October 2020