

Report to: Transport Committee

Date: 2 July 2021

Subject: **Bus Service Improvement Plan**

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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:	
Are there implications for equality and diversity?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1. Government requires all Local Transport Authorities to prepare and submit a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) jointly with bus operators by the end of October as a process of bidding for funding. This report provides Transport Committee with an update on the development of the BSIP and the process for its approval.
- 1.2. Bus services have been supported through Covid by a combination of local authority and Government funding. This report updates members on the current position and next steps.

2. Information

Mayoral ambitions and bus reform in West Yorkshire

- 2.1. The Mayor has pledged to “bring buses back into public control, introduce simpler fares, contactless ticketing and greener buses”, and action to deliver on this is now underway.
- 2.2. At the West Yorkshire Combined Authority meeting on Thursday 24th June, members approved the publication of Notices of Intent to:

- Conduct an Assessment of the need for a Franchising Scheme - setting out a 'roadmap; to bringing buses back into public control (from approx. late 2025 onwards).
- develop an Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators - to be operational from April 2022 and deliver benefits to passengers in the short term.

National Bus Strategy

- 2.3. West Yorkshire's plans for bus reform also sit alongside wider national ambitions for reform of the bus industry.
- 2.4. The National Bus Strategy, Bus Back Better, was published by the Government on Monday 15 March. It sets out a key role for the bus, outlines the future of bus funding and the commitments needed from Local Transport Authorities and bus operators. The Strategy can be accessed here: [Bus back better - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/bus-back-better).
- 2.5. There is a close alignment between the Government's Strategy and the twenty year West Yorkshire Bus Strategy which the Combined Authority adopted in 2017. The Government Strategy has an emphasis on a number of key themes including more frequent, faster and reliable bus services, with the delivery of bus priority being cited as a key part to achieving this.
- 2.6. The Strategy also places emphasis on lower, flat fares and setting the price of multi-operator tickets to be competitive 'at a price little if at all higher than single-operator tickets'.
- 2.7. The strategy seeks to strengthen the role of Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) through devolution of funding. £3bn for bus was first announced by the Government in February 2020 and confirmed in the National Bus Strategy.
- 2.8. Access to further funding however is to be granted on the basis that LTAs commit to using powers provided by the Bus Services Act 2017 – i.e., establish an Enhanced Partnership and / or Franchising. The Combined Authority has now fulfilled this requirement, as per paragraph 2.2.

Bus Service Improvement Plan

- 2.9. Government requires the submission of a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), by the end of October, as a means of accessing the funding set aside nationally to deliver change for bus users. The timescale for developing the BSIP is proposed as follows;
- **Early August** – Transport Committee Workshop – to give direction on the content of the Plan.
 - **Mid-August** – Joint District Consultation Subcommittee – to consult on the key themes for the Plan.
 - **17 September** - Transport Committee - finalise plan content.

- **End September** – Bus Alliance – obtain bus operator agreement and finalise local authority engagement.
- **21 October** – Combined Authority recommended to approve final document.
- **31 October** – deadline for submission to Department for Transport

2.10. The Bus Service Improvement Plan will set the ambition and aspiration of the Combined Authority for bus and customers in West Yorkshire, irrespective of the regulatory framework used to deliver it.

2.11. The Bus Service Improvement Plan will build on the West Yorkshire Bus Strategy adopted by the Combined Authority in 2017. The vision for the Bus Strategy sets out;

To create a modern, integrated and innovative bus system, which puts customers first and contributes to the delivery of the economic, environmental and quality of life ambitions as set out in the Strategic Economic Plan and the West Yorkshire Transport Strategy.

2.12. To deliver the Bus Strategy vision, the Bus Service Improvement Plan seeks to:

- Contribute to improved economic productivity in West Yorkshire.
- Provide cleaner, greener buses supporting sustainable travel and contributing to the environmental targets of West Yorkshire.
- Support inclusive growth and social well-being ambitions of West Yorkshire.

2.13. To achieve this, the Bus Service Improvement Plan requires a set of objectives for delivery. It is proposed the objectives are as:

- Establish bus as a key mode of choice for travel in West Yorkshire.
- Establish a financially sustainable bus service.
- Improve operational delivery to provide the passenger with a service they can feel confident in using.
- Improve connectivity for communities facing deprivation, inequality, and exclusion.
- Ensure the bus service is integrated to deliver sustainable connectivity

2.14. The table below sets out the key themes, outputs and outcomes that the Bus Service Improvement Plan will set out to deliver.

Theme	Outcome	Output
Network design and bus priority highway infrastructure	-Improved punctuality and reliability of all services. - Fully refreshed network design with more frequent services and faster journey times providing improved connectivity for communities across the region.	- New and amended routes/services to improve connectivity in key areas – particularly on secondary and community networks. - Long term service development plan aligned to future growth/demand.

Fares and ticketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Simpler, affordable and fairer bus fares - More flexible and better integrated ways to pay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Single fares set / products under the MCard brand; - Consultancy research into most appropriate fares model to achieve outcomes – e.g. flat, zonal, capped etc. - Delivery of pay as you go, capped contactless travel across multi-operator journeys.
Customer service, information and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consistent level of accessibility support across the network / all services - Centralised travel enquiries and customer support service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AV facilities to be available as standard on all services region-wide; retention of printed information offer and reintroduction of bus stop timetables; agreed standards around wheelchair/pram and luggage space. - New service level agreements on handling customer feedback network-wide; roadmap to better coordination of customer support for bus passengers under Metro brand.
Vehicle emissions and decarbonisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A carbon-zero bus fleet and network, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An updated zero emissions roadmap; all vehicles EURO 6 standard or better by 2026; ZEBRA bids – £30-35m investment in more electric buses and supporting infrastructure.
Multimodal integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better integration of bus as part of a wider public transport network, that supports sustainable travel door to door. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved and more seamless modal interchange points, with common wayfinding/information principles and improved service scheduling (particularly at rail stations) - Ongoing enhancements to multimodal ticketing. - Fare offers, incentives and other initiatives to support passenger behaviour change

2.15. The Bus Service Improvement Plan will provide the core content of an Enhanced Partnership Plan which will be developed with bus operators setting out how the Bus Service Improvement Plan will be delivered from April 2022. This will be presented to the Transport Committee in late 2021.

Bus Funding

2.16. Since April 2020, Government has issued emergency funding to bus operators and Local Transport Authorities, the Coronavirus Bus Services Support Grant

(CBSSG), and continued to pay Bus Services Operators Grant (BSOG) at pre pandemic rates. It requested that Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) continue to make concessionary fare and tendered service payments to operators at pre pandemic rates. As previously reported, the Combined Authority has paid operators based on 2019 concessionary fare patronage and will continue to do so until the end of the emergency CBSSG funding.

- 2.17. The Government emergency CBSSG funding is being provided under a rolling 8-week notice period. It is anticipated that notice will be given by end of June making the end of this funding in early September.
- 2.18. The Government has said that further funding will be available to support the recovery of bus fare revenues from September 2021 until March 2022 however full details were awaited at the time of writing. It is expected that Government will continue to utilise the current CBSSG mechanism to pay operators and will ask LTAs to continue to make concessionary fare payments at pre pandemic rates. Unlike CBSSG, LTAs will have a role in signing off operator claims and will have visibility of the total quantum of public funding.
- 2.19. If the accumulated value of this funding is insufficient or if revenues do not recover at the rate anticipated, then there exists a risk that bus operators may reduce or withdraw services. It is expected that LTAs must agree to bus operator claims to Government which will enable some transparency and influence in the process. It is therefore appropriate for the Combined Authority to establish the principles under which this funding would be deployed. The following principles were agreed by at the Combined Authority meeting on 24 June.
 - To maintain connectivity to communities currently served by buses
 - To maintain the integrity of the current bus network for the remainder of 2021/22 in advance of reviewing it from April 2022 under the Enhanced Partnership

3. Tackling the Climate Emergency Implications

- 3.1. Ensuring that the bus network continues to provide access to employment, training and leisure opportunities across West Yorkshire will ensure sustainable travel and mode shift to public transport can happen.

4. Inclusive Growth Implications

- 4.1. It is important that the bus network continues to provide access to employment and training opportunities across West Yorkshire.

5. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 5.1. It is important that the Bus Service Improvement Plan addresses the accessibility needs of all communities across West Yorkshire.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1. Government has set aside £25 million for LTAs to assist with the costs of adopting the Bus Services Act provisions with an initial payment of £100k to each Local Transport Authority which has now been received by the Combined Authority. This funding will support the legal and technical work necessary to develop the Bus Service Improvement Plan, which will seek to draw down further on the £25m.
- 6.2. Whilst the Combined Authority is paying for concessionary journeys that are not being made, the spend has remained within the budget set aside for this purpose.
- 6.3. Similarly, spend on supported bus services remains within budget however, if recovery funding arrangements are insufficient leading to the risk of service withdrawal, the Combined Authority may need to spend more to maintain community connectivity whilst fare income recovers from the effects of the pandemic.

7. Legal Implications

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

8. Staffing Implications

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

9. External Consultees

- 9.1. This report has been prepared in consultation with bus operators and local Council officers.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1. That the Transport Committee endorses the approach and key themes for the development of the Bus Service Improvement Plan as set out in this report.
- 10.2. That the Combined Authority notes the update on emergency funding for bus services for the remainder of 2021/22 and endorses the approach set out in this report

11. Background Documents

- 11.1. The National Bus Strategy can be accessed here: [Bus back better - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94122/bus-back-better-2020-2025.pdf).
- 11.2. Bus Service Improvement Plan guidance can be accessed here: [Bus service improvement plan - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94122/bus-service-improvement-plan-2020-2025.pdf)

11.3. The West Yorkshire Bus Strategy can be accessed here: [Bus strategy - Combined Authority | Unlocking potential, accelerating growth \(westyorks-ca.gov.uk\)](https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/bus-strategy)

12. **Appendices**

None