

**NOTES OF THE INFORMAL MEETING OF THE  
TRANSPORT COMMITTEE  
HELD REMOTELY ON FRIDAY, 14 MAY 2021**

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**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 Caffrey	Calderdale 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 Taj Salam	Bradford Council
Councillor Daniel Sutherland	Calderdale Council
Councillor Kevin Swift	Wakefield Council
Mark Roberts	Beer Hawk Ltd

**In attendance:**

Mayor Tracy Brabin	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Councillor Jane Scullion	Calderdale Council
Councillor Peter McBride	Kirklees Council
Councillor Helen Hayden	Leeds City Council
Dwayne Wells	Arriva Yorkshire
Alex Hornby	Transdev
Paul Matthews	First Group
Martin Hirst	First Group
Graham Meiklejohn	TransPennine Express
Pete Myers	Northern Trains
Patrick Sibley	Arriva
Ben Still	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Dave Pearson	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Alan Reiss	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Liz Hunter	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Caroline Allen	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Helen Ellerton	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

**1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Simon Pringle.

**2. Declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests**

There were no pecuniary interests declared during the meeting.

**3. Exempt information - possible exclusion of the press and public**

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

**4. Minutes of the meeting of the Transport Committee held on 12 March 2021**

Members noted the minutes of the previous meeting for information, which would be taken for approval to the next meeting of the Committee.

**5. Mayoral introduction**

Members of the Committee welcomed the new Mayor of West Yorkshire, Tracy Brabin, to the meeting.

Mayor Tracy Brabin thanked the Committee and congratulated Members on their work representing their communities throughout the difficult times of the pandemic and for all the work the Committee had achieved to this point.

The Mayor noted that an integrated transport system would be a lynchpin of her focus for recovery from the effects of the pandemic, and was encouraged that government funding would be available while the region moved toward greater public control of the transport network.

**6. DCSC feedback**

In March 2021, the latest cycle of District Consultation Sub-Committees had taken place. Elected members from each district had been invited to the meetings to give feedback on a consultation item regarding the Combined Authority's Connectivity Infrastructure Plan (CIP).

The Chairs of the Sub-Committees reported that the meetings had been very positive, and that opening attendance to include district councillors had provided useful feedback from the public's representatives regarding the CIP. It was hoped that the wider reach of these meetings could be used again in the future, and that lessons could be taken from the experience on how to better engage with the public and make future meetings more accessible.

**7. 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.

From Monday 17 May, the country would enter stage three of the government's roadmap out of lockdown. This was expected to further open up the economy. The rail service timetables would change at the weekend in preparation for the expected increase in demand.

It was noted that the latest figures were that bus patronage was at 63% of normal expectations for this time of year, with rail usage being slightly lower. Usage levels had increased since the last meeting in line with the progression out of lockdown, with the West Yorkshire and Merseyside regions noted as having particularly strong returns to bus usage.

The difficulties of fulfilling social distancing measures while meeting the increase in demand was highlighted, although it was noted that since the report had been published a revised risk assessment on buses had been carried out which should ease these concerns to a degree.

Committee Members were advised that as reported in the media, a defect had been discovered on a number of Northern Rail's newer trains. Since the report had been published, new Hitachi trains operated by London Northeast Railway and TransPennine Express had been identified as potentially having similar issues and had been withdrawn for inspection. Some disruption to rail services was expected due to this, but the Combined Authority had been assured a technological solution was in the process of being deployed.

The bus replacement service between Huddersfield and Castleford was discussed, with Committee Members noting that the rail service had already previously been reduced to a peak hours service. It was noted that passenger use of this link was less than on other routes, and assurances had been received from Northern Rail that this link would be restored once trains were back in service.

Members questioned whether social distancing measures would be abolished on buses and trains after the final stage of progression out of lockdown were reached on 21 June. It was advised that the government's review of social distancing was separate than the roadmap out of lockdown, and that any implications for public transportation regarding face coverings and social distancing measures would only be known after the results of this review were shared – this was expected to take place toward the end of May, with further information being made available after the decision on whether to proceed to stage four of the roadmap was made in early-mid June. It was noted that health advice had already been updated, and this had allowed transport operators, as well as other businesses, to review their risk assessments in light of the effective guidance.

## **8. National Bus Strategy Update**

The Committee received an update from the Director of Transport & Property Services on the publication of the National Bus Strategy and the current

position of bus service funding.

The government's National Bus Strategy had been published since the last meeting of the Committee. It emphasised the importance of the role of buses in the transport network, and the aims of the strategy were closely aligned with the 2017 West Yorkshire Bus Strategy. The desire to reduce fares as well as to deliver highway schemes allowing buses to travel through the network more seamlessly and to create more reliability was highlighted.

It was noted that the National Bus Strategy created a timescale around the release of government funding. The Combined Authority would have to commit to a course of action by the end of June in order for the region to continue to be able to access its share of the £3 billion bus funding budget. The Bus Services Act set out the available options of an enhanced partnership or franchising, and a decision on this would be made at the Combined Authority meeting on 24 June. The report also highlighted the upcoming October deadline to submit a Bus Service Improvement Plan, which Members would shape through a future workshop, as well as the requirement to express interest to submit a bid to the Zero Emission Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA) scheme by June.

The Combined Authority had been working closely with bus operators to develop an enhanced partnership, which would set clear targets and standards to ensure the chief aims of the strategy – to increase patronage and inclusivity, and reduce carbon emissions – were met. If these targets were not met, this would be vital evidence when moving toward a franchising process.

The existing funding arrangement supporting the bus service throughout the pandemic was expected to come to an end in August or September and be replaced by a further funding arrangement, the details of which are not yet known. An element of risk existed around this in coming months, as insufficient funding for bus services would create pressure on both the operators and the Combined Authorities.

Committee Members raised the following questions and concerns:

- The election of the region's new mayor was hailed as a strong opportunity to address the failings of the current system and to find something that delivered for the general public.
- The significant time and financial costs of moving toward franchising were noted. It was suggested that a greater public awareness of the complex process involved be promoted by the Combined Authority. Members also noted that flexibility from the government would be helpful in allowing the region to pursue the goals that the public evidently supported, particularly in effect to dates regarding the Bus Service Improvement Plan.
- Members noted that the most recent government guidance established that the region would be able to proceed along the route of an enhanced partnership, and work to allay shorter-term funding concerns, whilst still moving toward franchising in the longer-term. However, concern was raised that this could lead to franchising falling by the wayside and no progress being made.

- The depth of strong public feeling about this issue was recognised by Members, and a great deal of feedback had been received from the public on this issue.
- Members highlighted the importance of flexibility for passengers, particularly now when flexible working hours and locations were becoming more relevant than ever before, and multi-operator and intermodal ticketing were expected to be of great benefit for both passengers and businesses.
- The LEP representative advised Members that many businesses within the region were involved in next-generation technologies that could be useful in developing a zero-carbon bus fleet, and offered to support of the LEP to connect these businesses with the Combined Authority to support a potential ZEBRA bid.

The difficulty of creating a useful plan with so many uncertainties existing at present in terms of both future funding arrangements and patronage levels was discussed. However, it was also noted that passenger numbers had been falling on many routes for years before the pandemic, and this reimagining represented a potential opportunity to not just reclaim passengers lost to Covid but also to bring a new group of users to the bus service who had not considered it before. The completion of work on fast bus corridors - as well as the funding from Leeds Public Transport Investment Programme and the Transforming Cities Fund - left the region well-placed to pursue this goal, and Members questioned whether this could be made more evident in the report.

Members also discussed the difficulty of encouraging the public to move from private car usage onto public transport, particularly if a direct service did not exist or if bus journeys were to take significantly longer than cars over the same routes. The Leeds to Huddersfield and Roberttown to Cleckheaton routes were highlighted, and Members questioned whether business plans and key dates for meeting improvement targets would be made available moving forward. It was noted that the core bus network had been examined in 2019 as part of the Connectivity Strategy Consultation, and the next piece of work – due to take place over the next two to three months as part of the Bus Service Improvement Plan – was to identify the wider network connections that needed to be made and to pick up examples such as those mentioned.

## **9. TransPennine Route Upgrade TWAO response**

Members considered a report updating them on the Combined Authority's response to the Transport Works Act Order for the proposed improvements between Huddersfield to Westtown (Dewsbury), which had been submitted by Network Rail to the Secretary of State for Transport on 31 March 2021. The Combined Authority's response was due to be submitted to Network Rail by 17 May 2021. Some final legal clarification was being sought, and as soon as this was received the final version of the response would be shared with Committee Members.

This work offered great benefits for passengers throughout the region, despite the challenges involved, and was highlighted as being particularly vital for Huddersfield and Dewsbury. Members expressed concerns that only a fraction of the funding required to electrify the line had been identified, particularly as

the upgrade had been in discussion for over ten years.

Members discussed their disappointment at the lack of detail that Network Rail had provided at Network Planning meetings, as well as a lack of information about the length of disconnected roads, the impact of divergences, or what mitigation would be put in place for residents. The consideration shown for local businesses was also questioned, with examples being raised of Mirfield businesses that had received CPO notices with no prior contact to try to resolve any issues. Additionally, a disparity in the information that had been provided to local residents depending on their status as renters or homeowners was also discussed; mention of this would be added to the Combined Authority's response to the submission.

Potential disruption to the Calder Valley line during the construction phase was highlighted as an additional concern, as this was an important connection to Manchester with a large amount of freight traffic. The impact of the programme on active travel was also noted, with the Calder Valley Greenway being intersected in multiple places.

Officers advised they had been in contact with Network Rail in efforts to ensure they took all forms of disrupted travel into account in their planning. The need for Network Rail to provide a communications plan had been particularly emphasised, to better set out how they could work with affected parties to ease the challenges of the construction period.

It was also noted that quarterly working group meetings were planned, which would include work on a disruption and displacement plan to aim to minimise the negative impact of construction. These discussions had previously been held at the Partnership Board of Transport for the North (TfN), and it was intended that taking the lead through a Combined Authority working group would allow concerns to be addressed at a more local level, as well as to allow Members to address other Kirklees schemes and to better determine how to realign services among other lines.

## **10. Committee Arrangements**

Members received an update from the Head of Legal and Governance Services summarising changes to the Committee arrangements of the Combined Authority in the wake of becoming a Mayoral Combined Authority, as agreed at its April 22 meeting. These changes would come into effect from the 24 June annual meeting.

It was noted that the aim of these changes was to create a wider remit amongst the Combined Authority's decision-making committees, in order to increase the pace of delivery while maintaining the effective public-private partnership that fed into the Combined Authority and LEP boards.

No significant changes to the Transport Committee had been included, due to the short timeframe and the Committee's challenging agenda. A review of the Transport Committee would take place over the next year, with any changes likely to be implemented from the following annual meeting of the Combined Authority.

The review would consider questions such as:

- Whether the Committee's terms of reference needed to be revised to reflect the changing landscape.
- How clear delineation could be achieved between the work of the Committee and any Scrutiny Committees, avoiding any overlap.
- The model of the District Consultation Sub-Committees going forward, and whether there was scope to build on the successes in this area.

Members emphasised the importance of public participation in the work of the Committee, and the hope that effective means to reach out to the public was strongly considered in any future changes.

## **11. Leeds City Region Transport Update**

Members considered a report providing an update on current issues not covered elsewhere in the agenda, including the Rail North Committee report, the sale of Arriva Yorkshire's Yorkshire Tiger operation, and the March and April TfN meetings approving the business plan and budget and the draft decarbonisation strategy.

Members questioned how wide-ranging decisions made at TfN were discussed and held accountable at a local level, with it being noted that Transport Authorities were frequently only made aware of decisions that have impact on local services at a late stage in the process. The Castleford service was highlighted as an example of this, and Members hoped that the relationship between Transport Authorities and TfN could be more collaborative in future.

Officers advised that this was expected to be examined as part of the upcoming Williams review, as well as through the changing dynamics between operators and government that had developed in response to the pandemic. This examination could provide the Combined Authority to both strengthen the working relationship and act as a better champion for passengers, by providing local expertise and knowledge that could be fed into these wider decisions.

The report also highlighted the release of the MCard mobile app, which was welcomed as part of efforts to allow passengers greater flexibility and ease of use in intermodal and multi-operator travel.

## **12. 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.