

Report to: Transport Committee

Date: 5 November 2021

Subject: **Transport Network Update**

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

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To provide an update on the current performance of the transport network in West Yorkshire, including an overview of the Combined Authority's activity and responses.

2 Information

Summary picture

- 2.1 The recovery of travel demand is stronger in weekend and leisure travel together with journeys to education. Many organisations are continuing to support working from home, and this is reducing peak demand especially on public transport.
- 2.2 Shortages of bus, taxis and HGV drivers is having an effect both on public transport reliance and supply chains nationally and locally. On 12 October, the Mayor held a roundtable with representatives of the haulage and bus industries to identify both short term actions to address the immediate consequences of the problem and longer term options to help build resilience

into the system and in particular where the Combined Authority can support actions to develop skills and training in both industries.

Use of the network

Overview

- 2.3 The general picture on bus and rail services remains one of a steady recovery as commuter demand slowly build, with the return to work following the summer break seeing increases. In general, recovery of the bus network continues more strongly than rail, although locally both modes are now at their busiest since before the pandemic. Usage remains higher at weekends, particularly for rail, indicating a stronger return of leisure trips and this is reflected in town / city centre footfall.
- 2.4 Road traffic levels remain stable, having returned to near-normal levels some months ago. Ensuring these travel behaviours do not become embedded is a priority. Encouragingly, active travel levels remain higher than before the pandemic, suggesting evidence of positive long-term change.
- 2.5 The latest available proxy data for transport network use is included at **Appendix 1**. We continue to work with rail industry colleges to secure reliable data for locations other than Leeds for future reports. However, no other locations in West Yorkshire are equipped with the same passenger counting equipment that provides such consistent and accurate evidence.

Bus network

- 2.6 At the time of writing, bus use was at 70-75% of that which could be expected in October, rising to over 80% at weekends. Service levels were restored to 100% of pre pandemic rates in April. Service reliability is impacted by the reduced availability of bus drivers and engineers. There are national issues regarding high driver turnover and delays in PSV licences which have impacted on service delivery locally.
- 2.7 Bus operators advise that they have around 10% vacancies for drivers at present – twice what they would normally have. Recruiting new drivers is challenging and delays in licencing and testing are adding to the problem. This is giving rise to operators reducing output to maintain a resilient service. This largely involves reducing higher frequent services from 5 or 6 buses an hour to 4. However, some more structural changes have been made which are detailed in the next section of this report.
- 2.8 The Department for Transport introduced a new Bus Recovery Grant scheme from September until March which, along with LTAs continuing to pay concessionary fare reimbursements at pre pandemic rates, is aimed at funding the loss of fares revenue following the pandemic. Payments will be adjusted to reflect the reduced service levels in response to driver shortages.

- 2.9 Home to school transport is back to pre-pandemic service levels although this sector is also facing challenges due to shortages of bus and taxi drivers. Some action has been necessary to revise routes to ensure resilience

Rail network

- 2.10 In line with this guidance from Government and listening to concerns about customers not wearing face coverings, Northern and TransPennine Express (TPE) continue to advise customers to wear a face covering when they travel. Nonetheless, it has been reported that the numbers of passengers wearing facemasks has continued to fall.
- 2.11 Passenger numbers on trains continue to gradually rise with Northern reporting levels at 75% compared to pre-COVID levels. Commuter levels are being monitored and are at approximately 38% for Northern. TransPennine Express (TPE) demand is approximately 64% of pre COVID levels with a good number of forward bookings. The number of occasions where social distancing at 1 metre plus will not be possible is also increasing particularly on busy weekend services. Longer distance operators are faring better; LNER reports the leisure market has virtually recovered to pre-pandemic levels (around 95%). Business travel has been slower to recover, but significant growth has been experienced since summer, with levels now around 40% of pre-pandemic levels.
- 2.12 Passenger footfall is monitored at Leeds station. During September average daily footfall was 1/3 down on the pre-pandemic levels (over 60,000 per day, compared to around 90,000 per day pre-pandemic), but driven by Fridays and especially Saturdays with footfall much closer to and even exceeding pre-pandemic levels, offset by quieter days earlier in the week (more typically 50,000 to 60,000 per day), which is a pattern that has continued into October. Overall, weekend passenger footfall has recovered much faster than weekday footfall. The latest figures are available via the [COVID-19 economic-transport dashboard](#).
- 2.13 Weekends during September continued to be busy for both operators with levels on leisure routes above pre covid levels in many cases. TPE reported a slight decline in walk up passengers during recent weeks on weekday services. Continuation of working from home and use of video technology is having an impact on both the commuter and business markets. Northern are monitoring commuter levels on a weekly basis and they have shown a small increase. Nationally, there was a slight decline in rail use in September (after the summer holidays), which has not been replicated in West Yorkshire, indicating a more robust commuter market locally.

Summary of network changes

Bus network

- 2.14 From 25 October, Arriva Yorkshire registered service changes to reduce output. These include operation of service 110 from Wakefield to Leeds with a connecting service between Kettlethorpe/ Hall Green to Wakefield Bus Station together with some changes to frequencies. Discussions have been held with Arriva to seek assurances that service levels will be reinstated when the driver shortage issue eases.
- 2.15 The company has also withdrawn service 205 which operates between Dewsbury and Pudsey via Morley. This service provides some links which cannot be made by other bus services and is the only bus service for some communities in south Pudsey and Crackenedge, Dewsbury. The current use of the service together with pre pandemic use was assessed and financial support for 205 would fall within the guidelines for socially necessary bus services adopted by the Transport Committee. Arrangements have therefore been made to secure the continuation of service 205 from Monday 25 October. Following an open procurement process, TLC Travel Ltd has been awarded a contract to operate service 205 from 25 October. The company will need to recruit additional staff for this contract within the prevailing difficulties with the availability of bus drivers affecting the country at present. TLC Travel will operate a reduced timetable using existing staff and buses until such time as the company has the resources to resume the full service.

Rail network – December 2021 timetable changes

- 2.16 As is normal on the railway, new timetables will be introduced on Sunday, 21 December 2021. At the time of writing full details are not available, and the following represents our best understanding of the position based on available information.
- 2.17 On **Northern Trains**, the main changes of which we are aware are as follows:
- Additional trains on the Leeds – Skipton – Lancaster – Morecambe line.
 - Second hourly train introduced on the York – Knaresborough section of the York – Harrogate – Leeds line (i.e. 2tph throughout, currently 1tph)
 - Resumption of hourly trains on the Halifax – Bradford – Leeds – Hull route (currently only every two hours)
 - Semi-fast trains Leeds – Wakefield Kirkgate – Barnsley – Sheffield increased back to twice hourly from hourly, with additional train running through after Sheffield to Lincoln (alongside existing Nottingham train)
 - Service gap in the morning around Wakefield / Pontefract resolved

Note that these changes apply to weekday (Monday to Saturday) services – details of Sundays have not been received. Notably, the Huddersfield – Wakefield – Castleford service remains withdrawn save for three daily trains each way, apparently reflecting ongoing staffing issues. Combined Authority officers have expressed concern and are seeking early confirmation from

Northern that the service will be fully reinstated by, at the latest, the May 2022 timetable change.

- 2.18 On **Trans-Pennine Express**, the main change affecting our region is that the Scarborough – York service (currently a shuttle) will be extended back through Leeds to Manchester (some to Liverpool), meaning more trains on the core York – Leeds – Huddersfield - Manchester section (though on Sundays this improvement will only happen from February 2022). Other services passing through West Yorkshire will be largely unchanged. This will provide welcome additional capacity for TPE services, particularly on Saturdays.
- 2.19 **LNER's** London King's Cross services from Leeds are expected to return fully to pre-Covid levels (i.e. generally twice per hour) in December. No changes are planned at this stage to the twice-daily Bradford Forster Square / Shipley – London service. The new once-daily Huddersfield / Dewsbury – London train is expected not to start until May 2022. We understand that **Cross-Country** and **Grand Central** will be broadly continuing with the current timetables (Grand Central having recently reinstated its fourth daily Bradford / Halifax – King's Cross and return trains).

Passenger network performance

Bus network

- 2.20 At the time of writing the latest performance data from 1 July 2021 to 30 September 2021 is being collated and will be provided in the January Transport Committee report.

Rail network

- 2.21 The performance reports for TPE, Northern and LNER are included in **Appendix 2**.
- 2.22 Since the last period performance was reported to the Transport Committee punctuality has declined for Northern but cancellations have improved. TPEs performance has remained reasonably static. Time To 3 (Percentage of recorded station stops called at within 3 minutes of the planned time) for Northern and TPE has remained below 90% and for the most recent period sits at 84.3% and 88.0% respectively. Cancellations for Northern have decreased to 2.26% and TPE have increased slightly to 2.3%.
- 2.23 As detailed in the previous report to Transport Committee, Test and Trace and increased COVID-19 levels impacted significantly on both operators' performance in early summer. In line with changes to the Test and Trace system on the 16 August the number of isolations reduced, improving industry's resource position. Cancellations are still occurring due to staff availability / Covid but at a significantly reduced level. Punctuality figures are seeing a gradual decline as patronage increases and dwell times increase at stations.

- 2.24 There have been a small number of cable theft incidents which have impacted on performance. Network Rail has investigated these and where necessary installed covert cameras near access points at the location to help identify and convict suspects should a repeat event occur. It has also increased mobile operations manager patrols so they are of a higher frequency to act as a deterrent to offenders in former hot spot locations. Network Rail is also working closely with the British Transport Police to identify repeat sites/repeat offenders using their scenes of crime intelligence.
- 2.25 Driver training for Northern is now accelerating because of the easing of COVID-19 restrictions and enhanced risk assessment, facilitating improved training efficiency. There is still a significant backlog but Northern anticipate that both the improved training position and being able to programme more training in as they move out of a holiday period will help considerably.

Passenger satisfaction and attitudes

West Yorkshire Transport Recovery Survey

- 2.26 Fieldwork for the 6th wave of the Combined Authority's COVID-19 Transport Recovery Survey series was completed on 13th October, and analysis of the results is currently underway. The results will be published with communications support (press release and social media) in early November, and a summary reported to the next Transport Committee meeting.
- 2.27 The questionnaire was unchanged since the last wave and is designed to provide insight into the attitudes and impacts of COVID-19 on transport by surveying a statistically representative sample of the West Yorkshire population (accounting for age, gender, ethnicity and district). Questions cover mode share by purpose in the short-term vs pre-COVID-19, satisfaction with the public transport network, walking & cycling, home working as well as asking respondents to quantify expected future travel demand.
- 2.28 Results of wave 6 of the survey series (the first since all restrictions eased) will capture the impact on travel behaviours following the start of the academic year as well as changes associated with revised commuting routines as people return to the workplace. A further wave is planned for early 2022.

Transport Focus Surveys

- 2.29 Transport Focus continue to conduct nationally representative research around travel use, with circa 2000 members of the public (not all of which are passengers on public transport).
- 2.30 Noting that this has a relatively small sample size, key findings from the latest Travel during Covid-19 survey (link provided in Background Documents) conducted between 8 – 10 October are:
- 86% of bus passengers felt safe in relation to COVID-19
 - 58% of non-users would feel safe if they had to make a bus journey
 - 88% of rail passengers felt safe in relation to COVID-19

- 64% of non-users would feel safe if they had to make a rail journey
- 2.31 In comparison to the previous report from August, passenger perception of safety has marginally improved for regular users of both bus and rail, and continues to steadily improve for non-users.
- 2.32 A new national weekly survey has also recently been conducted around passenger experience and satisfaction. Again noting the small sample size of 500 passengers (outside of London), the following key findings were:
- 88% of bus passengers were satisfied with their journey overall
 - 89% of rail passengers were satisfied with their journey overall

Update on Combined Authority activity

Current Usage Indicators

- 2.33 **Appendix 3** includes a summary of a number of usage indicators of Combined Authority “Metro” branded activity which give a comparison between current levels of demand and that experienced pre pandemic, where available.
- 2.34 Development work on these indicators continues, and for this meeting most of the data is now presented in charts so that trends are easier to see. Work will continue to establish a ‘dashboard’ approach to reporting of these indicators.
- 2.35 Usage of all services was impacted by the reduction in travel arising from the pandemic. Customer volumes at bus station travel centres remain low whereas demand for travel information services is in line with public transport use. Some measures (e.g. use of the Metro website, park and ride use) have slightly dipped in summer, which may be related to the summer holidays. Calls to MetroLine continue to recover and are now approaching pre-pandemic levels.

Fares and Ticketing

- 2.36 The new MCard Mobile App was responsible for 60% of total MCard sales in August. Data is not currently available for September, but it is anticipated that this figure will rise following the return to school. The MCard App is proving popular with the Under 19 market.
- 2.37 The ability to “gift” tickets has been developed in the app, which allows third party organisations to gift tickets to people via their smartphones instantly. Several educational establishments are using this function to gift tickets to pupils who qualify for bursary funding. Refugee Action has been involved in testing and are gifting tickets to asylum seekers who are new to the area.
- 2.38 The West Yorkshire Ticketing Company Ltd, who own MCard, has agreed to extend the Rail to Refuge scheme to bus and rail in West Yorkshire. Rail to Refuge is a joint initiative between rail companies and Women’s Aid in which

train operators cover the cost of train tickets for women, men and children escaping domestic abuse travelling to refuge accommodation. The gifting function in the MCard Mobile App will be used to send MCard bus and rail tickets to those escaping domestic violence.

Bus Alliance Update

- 2.39 A new governance structure for the Bus Alliance was introduced in April. The current focus of the Alliance is to collaborate on developing a Bus Service Improvement Plan as set out elsewhere on this agenda.
- 2.40 Since the last meeting the MCard Mobile Fare Deal for under 19s, and the Leeds element of the Core Bus Network programme (visually signposting passengers to the high frequency network as set out in the accompanying report) have been launched.

3. Tackling the Climate Emergency Implications

- 3.1 Air quality improved during the periods of lower traffic levels earlier in the pandemic with local real-time road-side monitoring showed harmful NO₂ emissions on a downward trajectory and it can be inferred from this that CO₂ emissions were similarly reduced. It is important 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.
- 4.2 The increase in flexible ticketing options and further development of the MCard product range are specifically intended to increase affordable options for accessing employment and services, to contribute to the Authority's inclusive growth objectives.

5. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 5.1 Ensuring an effective, stable and affordable public transport network is key for equality and diversity. The interventions highlighted on MCard to aid refugees, and to those seeking to escape from domestic violence demonstrate the ways in which our activity can actively contribute to ensuring equality.
- 5.2 The Fare Deal for under 19s set out in this report is a specific initiative to increase affordable mobility options for young people. This increases life chances in respect of education, training, employment, and social opportunities at a crucial life stage, which can help to overcome equality barriers.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 COVID-19 has had 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. It is therefore key to the Combined Authority finances that the actions described in this report restore patronage and revenue.

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 No external consultations have been undertaken.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1 That the Committee note the updates on the current performance of the public transport network provided in this report.

11. 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?CIId=133&MIId=963&Ver=4>

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/>. This now include a transport-economic recovery dashboard via this link

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjojZDdjMjNjNGE0NTY1Yi00YTgyLTNmZGI0MjE1NzQxNzExM2ExliwidCI6IjM0ZTkzYmZjLWVjYtNDM0NS1hNGZILTgwNWl2N2U0ODBjMCI6ImMiOjh9>

Transport Focus is publishing regular 'Travel During COVID-19' attitudinal and satisfaction surveys of potential and actual public transport users. These can be accessed via this link:

<https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/home/coronavirus-latest/coronavirus-insight/>

The Combined Authority's COVID-19 transport survey results are reported on the website here: <https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/documents/covid-19-transport-survey/> This includes the latest Wave 5 data. Wave 6 will be available here in early November.

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Insights on transport network use

Appendix 2 – Rail network performance data

Appendix 3 – Metro branded activity measures