

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
TRANSPORT COMMITTEE
HELD ON FRIDAY, 17 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER,
CIVIC HALL, CALVERLEY ST., LEEDS LS1 1UR**

Present:

Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe (Chair)	Bradford Council
Councillor Kim Groves	Leeds City Council
Councillor Manisha Kaushik	Kirklees
Councillor Martyn Bolt (Leader of the Opposition)	Kirklees Council
Councillor Neil Buckley	Leeds City Council
Councillor Suhail Choudhry	Bradford Council
Councillor Allan Garbutt	Wakefield Council
Councillor James Homewood	Kirklees Council
Councillor Rizwana Jamil	Bradford Council
Councillor Naveed Riaz	Bradford Council
Councillor Taj Salam	Bradford Council
Councillor Daniel Sutherland	Calderdale Council
Councillor Andy D'Agorne	York Council

In attendance:

Councillor Eric Firth	Kirklees Council
Councillor Jane Scullion	Calderdale Council
Dave Pearson	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
James Nutter	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Dominic Martin	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

15. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Thornber, Cllr Keith, Cllr Cunningham, Simon Pringle, Mark Roberts, Cllr Morley, and Cllr Hayden.

16. Declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests

There were no pecuniary interests declared during the meeting.

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

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

18. Minutes of the meeting of the Transport Committee held on 2 July 2021

Resolved: That the minutes of the Transport Committee meeting of 2 July 2021 be approved.

19. City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement

The Transport Committee received an update on the development and submission of a City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) funding bid to the Government for the period 2022-2027.

The Combined Authority's CRSTS bid had been submitted on 10 September 2021 and was for a five-year settlement covering 2022/23 to 2026/27. Two potential funding bands had been set for the region, ranging from £570 million to £920 million, with the amount awarded depending on bid quality. The bid built on the work done as part of the Connectivity Infrastructure Plan, and delivery of a mass transit system was noted to be central to the bid.

The potential of the funding to deliver transformational change was highlighted, particularly via a mass transit system, and it was hoped that this would increase economic opportunities in the region.

Members highlighted a potential impact on any Dewsbury to Bradford corridor for mass rapid transit, particularly along the Spen Valley Greenway, of an expression of interest received from a distribution warehouse which could potentially encroach upon the former rail corridor, but it was noted that any routes for mass transit were still to be decided upon. It would be important to deliver the right routes as part of any implementation of mass transit, as well as the right business case solution.

Members also emphasised the need to ensure that goals to support carbon reduction were reflected throughout all major schemes undertaken by the Combined Authority, raising recent objections to plans to widen the A629 in Huddersfield, which would require a number of mature trees to be cut down in order to increase the flow of traffic on the route. However, it was noted that buses were a strong priority in Kirklees, and many schemes to support this were in the planning and consultation stage, with all due care and consideration being made to any representations by the community or stakeholders. £10 million had been included within the bid for the district, aimed at supporting interventions to incentivise modal shift toward bus use.

The uncertainty around several aspects of transport in the region was discussed, particularly in regards to the eastern leg of HS2 and accompanying station work in Leeds, the potential new eco-friendly terminal at Leeds Bradford Airport, Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR), and recently-announced East Coast Mainline delays until 2023. It was noted that many of these issues would need to be resolved by the Government, and concerns were raised around how a substantial bid could be put forth which included all the region's needs when there was still this degree of uncertainty around major factors. This would be discussed further under the Leeds City Region Transport Update item.

The outcome of the bid was expected to be announced with the Comprehensive Spending Review on 27 October 2021.

20. Bus Service Improvement Plan

The Transport Committee received an update on the development of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and an overview of the key content that would be included in the final document.

As discussed at the last meeting of the Transport Committee, all Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) were required to produce a BSIP by the end of October setting out their regions' ambitions and plans for recovering bus patronage after the effects of the pandemic, as well as growing the proportion of bus users. The BSIP was currently in development, and engagement had been ongoing with bus operators, representatives of passengers, businesses, and other stakeholders. Feedback was invited from Members, either at the meeting or afterward, which would then be used to guide the development of the BSIP. The BSIP would go to the Combined Authority for approval on 22 October, and the final version would also be circulated to Transport Committee Members in October.

Members welcomed the ambition to improve on the bus service rather than only to return to the pre-pandemic status quo. However, it was noted that less money was flowing through the system, with patronage still not exceeding two thirds of what it had been prior to the pandemic.

Planned 'turn up and go' services on major routes were discussed, along with the definition of a 'core' network, with Members highlighting that the region included many rural communities as well as those in more urban areas that were not well-served by buses, and there was a strong need to ensure they were not excluded from any development. These terms typically referred to services where buses would run every ten minutes or more frequently. Officers noted the need to balance the service available for well-used routes with those that were less-used but were still very important to their communities, and a challenge to be addressed by the BSIP would be determining how these more frequent services could be expanded to wider areas where possible while still fitting into the wider economy of the bus service.

Members raised the following other questions and concerns:

- It was noted that the Government had agreed that the bus service network should maintain connectivity to serve all communities, so no shrinking of the network should result from the BSIP.
- The need for a new model for rural and semi-rural areas was discussed, and the importance of connectivity for these communities – particularly the region's market towns - was highlighted. Demand Responsive Transport was noted as a promising way forward in this area, along with other methods to evolve and transform the network in an ambitious way that reflected the adaptability that had been shown over the pandemic.
- Working conditions for the staff of the bus service were discussed. Drivers held a vital role in the region's transport needs and were depended upon, and a shortage of drivers was already a problem

nationally. Ensuring that drivers worked in good conditions with flexible working practices, good rates of pay, and that were able to work in patterns that accommodated them would support the provision of a reliable and punctual bus service. Members noted it would be useful to see details from operators on the levels of driver shortages they were experiencing, to ensure it did not lead to routes being closed. This would be discussed later under the Transport Network Update item.

- The need for strong coordination and availability of information was noted, particularly in regards to real-time information displays at bus stops as well as information for operators regarding roadworks. Systems for these existed, but there were difficulties with ensuring that up-to-date data was regularly inputted, particularly because of the upheaval caused by the pandemic and the current period of driver shortages.
- Making the bus service simpler to use for non-habitual users was identified as an important point. Colour-coded routes had been implemented in Leeds to address this, and the intention was to expand this across the region.
- Timelines were requested by Members, to allow the rate of progress to be measured going forward. Officers advised that the final version of the BSIP would include timelines and KPIs.
- The need to provide new bus services where opportunities existed was discussed, with the lack of a direct service between Huddersfield bus station and Leeds in particular being raised. Members also discussed working with stadiums to coordinate regarding availability of public transportation to football games.
- The importance of communicating and celebrating successes was noted, and the under-19s fare scheme launched in July was highlighted as having led to a significant increase of bus patronage by young people.

The importance of bus priority schemes was discussed, and the congestion experienced by buses at Cooper Bridge in Kirklees was particularly noted. However, the implementation of bus priority lanes was limited by a lack of available space, particularly in areas of the region with more hilly terrain such as Calderdale.

Resolved: That the Transport Committee endorses the progress made to date in developing a Bus Service Improvement Plan and provides any comments on the content of the Plan as set out in the submitted report.

21. Transport Decarbonisation Activity

The Transport Committee received an update on transport decarbonisation activity. The Combined Authority had declared a climate emergency in June 2019, and at the same time committed to becoming carbon-free by 2038, with significant progress due to be made by 2030. The West Yorkshire Climate and Environment Plan was due to be considered at the October meeting of the Combined Authority, and if approved this would set out the Mayor and Combined Authority's response to the climate emergency.

The report also updated Members on work done to develop the Zero Emission Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA) bid, which was due to be submitted to the Department for Transport by the end of January 2022. The Combined Authority's response to the Transport for the North (TfN) Decarbonisation Strategy consultation was also included.

Members welcomed the work being undertaken toward a more emission-free bus fleet for the region, but noted that some districts had not made as much progress in this area as others. Differences in terms of topographies and the length of typical journeys created difficulties for electric buses in some regions. An additional £2 million of funding over the original ZEBRA bid had been requested for Calderdale and Kirklees partly to mitigate this.

The relatively small proportion of buses in Kirklees and Calderdale meeting Euro VI emissions standards was discussed, particularly in comparison to Leeds, and it was questioned whether the additional funding mentioned above would be enough to address this disparity. However, it was noted that Leeds had benefitted in this area from a previous unsuccessful attempt to deliver a trolley bus scheme, as the money for this had been retained and this had allowed a partnership with First which had funded many of these buses – this was noted as being a one-off circumstance. Additionally, both Leeds and Bradford had been able to use ring-fenced funding to support their delivery of clean air zones. It was also noted that bus operators had a significant influence on fleet replacement, and after the economic effects of the pandemic many were prioritising more profitable routes and areas for investment.

ZEBRA was recognised as a positive step forward toward reducing emissions, but it was cautioned that the questions regarding its performance in hilly areas remained to be answered. It also only addressed 10% of the West Yorkshire bus fleet, and the need remained for further government funding to decarbonise the rest of the region's buses.

Members also noted that a wider discussion remained to be held regarding what power sources would be the best choice for further renovation of the bus fleet, whether it be electric, hydrogen, or something else. It would be important to take lessons from the work already done, including the recently-completed Stourton Park and Ride, which was noted as an example of the good progress being made in this area.

Members noted that the TfN Decarbonisation Strategy set strong targets for reduction of car, van and HGV use, and for the reduction of sales of SUVs and other large cars, but questioned how this could be delivered – the absence of specific actions was seen as something lacking in the report as a whole. Officers advised that these comments would be fed back to TfN.

The scale of the challenge going forward would be very significant, with further work to be done on freight. Members noted that although local councils and the Combined Authority had shown strong ambition in the targets set, it was important that delivery begin as soon as possible. Plans such as those to phase out petrol and diesel cars would require a great deal of work to implement the required infrastructure such as electrical charging points for both cars and electric bikes, and it would be important to use an integrated

approach that considered all these factors, as well as to critically examine any future schemes that may contribute to an increase in carbon emissions.

Securing devolution of further government funding and powers for the region's own decarbonisation agenda was suggested as the best way to meet this challenge. It was also noted that the Government allowing the Combined Authority to reallocate funding for road schemes to public services would also have a strong impact; many of these road schemes were no longer fit for purpose, and supporting a modal shift toward active travel would have an important benefit on air quality, which was particularly important as part of efforts to reduce levels of respiratory illnesses such as asthma.

Resolved: That the Transport Committee note the contents of the submitted report.

22. Rail Strategy

The Transport Committee received an update on the West Yorkshire Rail Strategy work programme. The Strategy would build on the Rail Vision, which was published for consultation earlier in the year as part of the Connectivity Infrastructure Plan and had been well-received by stakeholders and members of the public.

The report outlined publication dates for chapters of the Rail Strategy and requested that Transport Committee Members be involved in the production of the Strategy through a series of workshops and informal meetings to take place later in the year.

Resolved:

- a) That Transport Committee note the update on development of the Rail Strategy.
- b) That Transport Committee endorse the proposed involvement of members in finalisation of the West Yorkshire Rail Strategy.

23. Transport Network Update

The Transport Committee received an update on the current performance of the transport network in West Yorkshire.

It was noted there had been further recovery of bus passengers, with patronage levels at roughly 65% of the pre-pandemic average at this time of year. Commuters and young people travelling to school and college had seen stronger returns to bus usage. However, it was cautioned that a significant gap still existed between current and pre-pandemic patronage.

Members questioned whether, with working patterns having changed significantly since the period before the Covid-19 pandemic, it still served as a useful point of comparison. Significant differences had already been observed, with peaks spreading throughout the day and with some towns/cities, particularly those less dependent on office-based commutes, recovering better

than others. It was cautioned that many aspects of travel patterns were still in a state of flux, and it would be important to ensure that decisions were not made now under assumptions that there would be no further change.

The impact of workforce issues, particularly the availability of bus drivers, was discussed. Operators across West Yorkshire were currently facing a shortage of approximately 10%, or 250 drivers. Staff turnover was at 15-30%, which was double the pre-pandemic rate. A number of factors were raised as contributing to this:

- Working practices and conditions, as discussed above in relation to the BSIP.
- The on-going effects of the pandemic, such as illness and issues caused by isolation.
- Changes of circumstances and a move toward different career paths, triggered by the pandemic.
- Difficulties and delays with new drivers getting licenses – frequently by the time a license arrived, another job had been found. This would require engagement with both the Government and DVLA.

Members noted that a reduction of services was not acceptable, given that bus operators were being subsidised at higher levels than ever before. Officers advised that where services were being reduced, school journeys and communities with more infrequent service were being prioritised to avoid any reduction on these routes, and that measures such as signing-on bonuses were being implemented to increase numbers of drivers but a long-term investment into staffing would be vital going forward to guard against future issues of this kind.

The shortage of HGV drivers was also discussed, and Members suggested that better infrastructure – including places for drivers to make safe and comfortable overnight stops, venues to eat, etc – would help in addressing this.

Questions about demand management and the needs of future passengers were highlighted, particularly in regards to the connectivity strategy. Feedback had already been received that people throughout the region felt they needed better connections to anchor organisations such as hospitals and doctor's surgeries, and it would be critical to react quickly to this going forward.

Members also received an update on the East Leeds Flexibus scheme, and one of the new electric minibuses being used for this was available for viewing outside of the meeting. Officers would report back on the success of the project at a future meeting.

Resolved: That the Committee note the updates on the current performance of the public transport network provided in the submitted report.

24. LCR Transport Update

The Transport Committee received update on current issues not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

Members noted again the uncertainties raised earlier in the meeting regarding large-scale projects such as HS2, NPR, and also discussed the Integrated Rail Plan, which was hoped would be published before the end of October. The successful delivery of these projects would be a significant boon for the region and it would be important for Members to lobby to support their completion where they could, although further work remained to be done regarding the proposed East Coast Mainline changes to ensure that any timetable changes worked to the benefit of the region.

The Department for Transport had launched a consultation on proposals to give Metro Mayors and their Combined Authorities greater powers and accountability relating to Key Route Networks, which were strategic networks of the most important and most-used roads in the region. The Combined Authority had been working with district council highway teams to create a model to manage these networks, and the importance of an equal partnership in this work, and in the wider relationship between the district councils and the Combined Authority, was noted. The Combined Authority's proposed response to the consultation would be shared with Members in the following week.

Resolved: That the Committee notes the updates provided in the submitted report.

25. Summary of Transport Schemes

The Transport Committee considered a report informing them of transport-related project approvals from the previous two meetings of the Combined Authority.

A real-time information system had been approved which would link to many systems and projects across the region, and which was hoped would improve the reliability of service and allow data to be fed to other information providers, such as Google Maps. Members emphasised the previously-discussed importance of providing reliable up-to-date information to passengers, but noted that challenges existed where services changed frequently, and in the need to clearly communicate information to customers without leaving room for confusion.

Resolved: That the submitted report be noted.

26. Transport Committee Review

The Transport Committee received an update on the scope, process and timeframes for the Transport Committee Review.

The Transport Committee Review had been commissioned at the Combined Authority's Annual General Meeting in June, after arrangements for the other thematic committees of the Combined Authority had changed following the election of the Mayor. The review would be taken to the Combined Authority meeting in December and following an independent review of remunerations it was hoped that the proposed changes could take effect for the next municipal

year. Members were invited to provide feedback on the review, during the meeting or afterward, and several Members had already held discussions with the Chair.

Members highlighted that as well as looking at the resourcing and remit of the Committee itself, it was vital to ensure that the Combined Authority's teams were resourced sufficiently, and had the appropriate structures and teams in place to deliver the projects being discussed. It was also noted that the increase in Government funding being awarded on a competitive basis highlighted the importance of better resourcing of the development pipeline so that stronger bids for funding could be made.

Resolved:

- a) That the update provided in the report is noted.
- b) That members of the Committee use the opportunity to discuss the Review and note the deadline of 1 October 2021 to provide feedback as set out in the submitted report.