

**Report to:** Transport Committee

**Date:** 7 January 2022

**Subject:** **Transport Network Update**

**Director:** Dave Pearson, Director Transport & Property Services

**Author:** Richard Crabtree, Rail Development Manager

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 throughout the autumn slowed in December with the emergence of the COVID-19 Omicron variant and further Government restrictions. Shortages of bus, taxis and HGV drivers continues to impact public transport reliability and supply chains nationally and locally.
- 2.2 This paper was finalised during the first part of week commencing 20 December 2021 when the situation with the COVID-19 Omicron variant was evolving quickly. This was anticipated to have further impacts on the transport network, and verbal updates will be provided to the Committee as required when it meets.

## Use of the network

### Overview

- 2.3 The general picture on bus and rail services through the autumn was one of a steady recovery as commuter demand slowly build. In general, bus patronage recovered more strongly than rail. Usage remained higher at weekends, particularly for rail, indicating a stronger return of leisure trips and this is reflected in town / city centre footfall. However, the recovery stalled in December following the emergence of the Omicron variant and the introduction of Government “Plan B” measures.
- 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 press rail industry colleagues to secure reliable footfall data for locations other than Leeds for future reports, but this will require installation of new equipment currently only available at Leeds station.

### Bus network

- 2.6 At the time of writing, bus use was around 75% of that which could be expected in December, rising to over 80% at weekends, a small reduction in patronage was observed immediately following the “work from home” advice on 13 December. Service reliability remains 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 continue to have higher vacancies than they would normally experience. Whilst recruiting new drivers remains challenging issues regarding licencing and testing are easing. However, staff availability is now impacted by drivers isolating due to the new COVID-19 variant. This has given rise to reductions in service frequency and short-term cancellations.
- 2.8 Whilst home to school transport was restored to pre-pandemic service levels in the autumn term, this sector also faced challenges due to shortages of bus and taxi drivers. Some action has been necessary to revise routes to ensure resilience

### Rail network

- 2.9 From the 30 November face coverings became mandatory again on public transport. All staff and passengers on trains and stations are required to wear a face covering at all times, unless exempt. Enforcement on the rail network can only be done by the British Transport Police, who have the necessary

powers. Passengers are being encouraged to contact the British Transport Police to raise any issues, including compliance with mask wearing. Train operators have refreshed posters to reinforce the message. Compliance is generally stronger during the day than on evening services.

- 2.10 Passenger numbers on trains continue to gradually rise with Northern reporting levels at 74% compared to pre COVID-19 levels. Commuter levels are being monitored and are at approximately 35-38% for Northern, ticket sales suggest that people are travelling one or two days a week. TransPennine Express (TPE) demand is approximately 68% of pre COVID-19 levels and forward bookings remain good. It was reported to the last Transport committee that the leisure market for LNER was around 95% of pre-pandemic levels. This has dropped slightly in the most recent period to 87% because of engineering work at weekends. Business travel has been slower to recover, but significant growth has been experienced since summer, with levels now around 40% of pre-pandemic levels.
- 2.11 Passenger footfall is monitored at Leeds station and for the week ending 5 December 2021 levels were 74% of levels of the same week in 2018 (note that we have changed to a 2018 comparison as 2019 data from the source used has known limitations through autumn/winter). Footfall had increased 4% on the previous week however it fell again during week commencing 13 December as COVID-19 restrictions were reintroduced.
- 2.12 Weekends during November continued to be busy for both local operators with levels on leisure routes above pre COVID-19 levels on some weekends, although Storm Arwen negatively impacted on journeys on the 27/28 November. On the run up to Christmas Saturdays remain busy with the flows into major conurbations and shopping centres increasing. Operators are monitoring the busiest services and trying to add additional carriages if and where possible. Continuation of working from home and use of video technology continues to have an impact on both the commuter and business markets for all operators.
- 2.13 The Government has asked that people return to working from home where possible from 13 December 2021. It is anticipated that patronage will reduce again across the network, with operators already reporting a visible decline.

### **Summary of network changes**

#### **Bus network**

- 2.14 No significant changes to the bus network have occurred since the last meeting however several operators are planning changes from mid-February in response to the ongoing funding uncertainty and workforce issues. Members of the Committee will be briefed on these changes later in January when more information is available.

## Rail network – December 2021 timetable changes

- 2.15 New timetables were introduced on Sunday 12 December 2021 which will remain in place until May 2022. These were summarised at Item 6 at the November meeting of Transport Committee. Early indications are that the new timetable is operating well.

## Passenger network performance

### Bus network

- 2.16 The latest performance data from 1 July 2021 to 30 September 2021 is attached at **Appendix 2**. This illustrates a decline in punctuality and reliability in September associated with the driver shortage issues previously reported. Data for the final quarter of 2021 is being collated and will be reported to the next meeting however a worsening in punctuality and reliability in October and November has been observed.

### Rail network

- 2.17 The performance reports for TPE and Northern are included in **Appendix 3**.
- 2.18 Since the last period performance was reported to the Transport Committee performance has seen a decline. Time To 3 (Percentage trains calling at station stops within 3 minutes of the planned time) for Northern and TPE has dropped well below 90% and for the most recent four-week period sits at 74.6% and 72.3% respectively. Cancellations for Northern have increased to 2.58% and TPE have decreased slightly to 2.2%.
- 2.19 Performance has been impacted by seasonal issues; leaf fall and the associated adhesion problems it causes on the railway; and Storm Arwen caused significant disruption with damage to overhead lines and fallen trees. Northern's autumn performance was affected because the Rail Head Treatment trains, which use water jets to clear the rail of compressed leaves, were not run as expected on several days due to driver shortages. Also, the Salisbury train crash, which happened at the end of October and thought to have been caused by low adhesion, resulted in train operators being asked to apply even more caution than they would do normally during the autumn period. On a positive note, Northern have been testing water jets attached directly to trains it operates, and Network Rail have installed lineside traction gel dispensers, which will spray sticky gel onto the railhead as trains pass. One of the first of these was installed at Burley Park, which is a known trouble spot. We will request feedback from the industry on how effective these initiatives have been once the full autumn review has been carried out in January.
- 2.20 As reported to the previous Transport Committee driver training for Northern had been accelerating with the easing of COVID-19 restrictions and enhanced risk assessment, facilitating improved training efficiency. It was hoped that this would mean the backlog would be cleared by May. However, the further

impacts of the Omicron COVID-19 variant and potential impact it may have to the training programme will have an impact, which is yet to be fully understood.

- 2.21 TransPennine Express (TPE) have notified the Combined Authority of industrial relations issues which are impacting on availability of staff and in-turn, services are subject to delays and short-notice cancellations. TPE are advising customers booked on those services of their alternative travel choices or how they can obtain a refund. Ticket acceptance has been arranged with Avanti West Coast, Northern and EMR and LNER. Buses for rail replacement services are being made available. Cross Country services are also being affected due to Industrial Action with revised timetables in place and passengers advised to check before they travel.
- 2.22 At the time of writing, the increasing incidence of COVID-19 was leading to short-notice cancellations with all operators, as increased numbers of staff are required to self-isolate. The industry is doing what it can to ensure as much notice of cancellations is given to passengers to minimise impact. This is likely to continue over the Christmas and New Year period, with an expectation that emergency timetables will be introduced early in January to provide greater certainty to passengers. More information will be known about this when the Committee meets, and a verbal update provided.
- 2.23 Over the Christmas period Network Rail was due to carry out track upgrades at Leeds station, remodelling the track layout between platforms 4 and 6 as part of a project to increase reliability and reduce the impact of future unplanned disruption. Advance notice was provided to customers and replacement buses were due to be provided for services unable to run into Leeds station. Information on this disruption has been circulated through multiple channels, including via the Metro website and social media accounts. A verbal update will be provided to the meeting.

### **Passenger satisfaction and attitudes**

#### **Transport Focus Surveys**

- 2.24 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) on a weekly basis.
- 2.25 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 10 -12 December are:
- 84% of bus passengers felt safe in relation to COVID-19
  - 49% of non-users would feel safe if they had to make a bus journey
  - 79% of rail passengers felt safe in relation to COVID-19
  - 58% of non-users would feel safe if they had to make a rail journey
- 2.26 In comparison to the October survey reported to the last meeting, confidence in public transport declined slightly as concerns about Omicron grew.

- 2.27 A national weekly survey is now in place to assess passenger experience and satisfaction. Again, noting the small sample size of 500 passengers (outside of London), the following key findings were:
- 84% of bus passengers were satisfied with their journey overall
  - 87% of rail passengers were satisfied with their journey overall

### **Update on Combined Authority activity**

#### **Current Usage Indicators**

- 2.28 **Appendix 4** includes a summary of several usage indicators of Combined Authority “Metro” branded activity which give a comparison between current levels of demand and that experienced pre pandemic, where available.
- 2.29 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**

- 2.30 Usage of the new MCard Mobile App continues to grow and is now taking over 60% of sales transactions. The ability to “gift” tickets has been developed in the app, which allows organisations to buy tickets and send them to the smartphones of their employees/ clients instantly. Several educational establishments are now using this function to gift tickets to students 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.

#### **Bus Stations**

- 2.31 Bradford Interchange has become what is understood to be the first Station of Sanctuary in the UK as part of Bradford’s adoption of City of Sanctuary status. This initiative provides for services and support to refugees and others arriving at Bradford Interchange who require signposting to the services available to them.
- 2.32 A new changing places toilet facility has opened at Keighley Bus Station as part of a full refurbishment of toilets at the site. Work to refurbish Leeds Bus Station will complete in the spring and construction is underway for the new Halifax Bus Station.
- 2.33 An emergency bleed control kit has been donated for installation at Pudsey bus station following a fatal stabbing nearby earlier in the year. Arrangements are being made to install kits in Combined Authority run bus stations in 2022.

### Bus Alliance Update

- 2.34 The Bus Alliance was the mechanism by which the Bus Service Improvement Plan was co-developed with bus operators. The current focus of the Alliance is to plan for the Enhanced Partnership as set out elsewhere on this agenda. The Bus Alliance has also been the means of collaboration on the bus service response to the ever-changing challenges of the pandemic.

### Rail Operators' Forum

- 2.35 Cllr Groves led a meeting of the Train Operators Forum on 21 November 2021. This was attended by rail operators, Network Rail, Transport Focus, Transport for the North and Cllr Bolt.
- 2.36 Discussions included initial reactions on the Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) which was released in the week of the meeting. Operators outlined work which was starting to happen in relation to Great British Railways and how they are being involved in the transition to this new body.
- 2.37 Operators also detailed how they are adapting to the changing market conditions and rebuilding rail demand including introducing digital innovation and other customer service initiatives. This included looking at key information from surveys carried out by Transport Focus of what customers need and expect.
- 2.38 Transport for the North provided updates on integrated ticketing with bus and stressed the importance of ensuring the right solution is found for Leeds station in terms of capacity following the IRP announcement

## **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 NO<sub>2</sub> emissions on a downward trajectory and it can be inferred from this that CO<sub>2</sub> 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=eyJrIjojZDdjMjNINGEtNTY1Yi00YTgyLThmZGI6M2ExliwidCI6IjM0ZTkzYmZjLWVjYtNDM0NS1hNGZILTgwNWl2N2U0ODBjMCI6ImMiOjh9>

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 6 data summarised at the November meeting of the Committee.

## **12. Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Insights on transport network use

Appendix 2 – WY Bus Alliance Operator Performance Report from July to September 2021

Appendix 3 – Rail network performance data

Appendix 4 – Metro branded activity measures