

**NOTES OF THE INFORMAL MEETING OF MEMBERS OF THE
TRANSPORT COMMITTEE
HELD REMOTELY ON FRIDAY, 7 JANUARY 2022**

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 Colin Campbell	Leeds City Council
Councillor Suhail Choudhry	Bradford Council
Councillor Lou Cunningham	Leeds City Council
Councillor Allan Garbutt	Wakefield Council
Councillor James Homewood	Kirklees Council
Councillor Rizwana Jamil	Bradford Council
Councillor Charlie Keith	Wakefield Council
Councillor Naveed Riaz	Bradford Council
Councillor Taj Salam	Bradford Council
Councillor Daniel Sutherland	Calderdale Council
Mark Roberts	Beer Hawk Ltd

In attendance:

Councillor Eric Firth	Kirklees Council
Councillor Helen Hayden	Leeds City Council
Councillor Alex Ross-Shaw	Bradford Council
Councillor Jane Scullion	Calderdale Council
Pete Myers	Northern Trains
Ben Still	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Dave Pearson	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Helen Ellerton	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Andrew Bradley	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Richard Crabtree	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Gary Taylor	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Ian Parr	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Edwin Swaris	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Dominic Martin	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

38. Chair's Note

The Chair noted that due to the recent rise in Covid-19 cases, this meeting was being held remotely as an informal consultative meeting. No decisions could be made at the meeting; if there was need for a decision to be taken, the Managing Director would exercise his delegated authority to do so, with regard to the recommendations of the Members present at the meeting.

39. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Simon Pringle, Cllr D'Agorne, and Cllr Morley.

40. Declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests

There were no pecuniary interests declared at the meeting.

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

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

42. Minutes of the meeting of the Transport Committee held on 5 November 2021

Members noted the minutes of the Transport Committee meeting of 5 November 2021.

43. Transport Network Update

Members received an update on the current performance of the transport network in West Yorkshire, including an overview of the Combined Authority's activity and responses. It was noted that the papers had been finalised before Christmas, and the impact of the pandemic had progressed in the interim.

Members questioned how quickly the buses in the region could be expected to return to full service levels once the Omicron variant had peaked and cases began to decline. Officers were working closely with bus operators and would review the data regularly, and once government advice to work from home was lifted, operators were expected to respond quickly to encourage recovery of patronage levels. Members also noted that some flexibility was required from operators, such as potentially using buses currently assigned to the Park and Ride service to support other routes depending on demand.

Public transport in the region was vital, with many people having no other means of travel to their places of work, or at risk of becoming isolated from society. Increasing passenger numbers would be a crucial but challenging step going forward, and the number of passengers taking a typical five-day office commute would be unlikely to return; new markets, including leisure and weekend travel as well as the night-time economy, would need to be

examined. A key aspect would be in increasing the confidence of the public in the safety and cleanliness of public transport. There were also concerns over work force availability in the longer term that would need to be addressed.

It was noted that although there was a significant rise in positive results from testing, a number of those affected would have very mild or no symptoms. Members noted that data on this could be an argument for the ease of Covid-19 restrictions. However, it was highlighted that substantial pressures were being experienced by the NHS as a result of the increase in cases, and officers advised that as employers, operators were held to national laws that required safety processes to be followed regardless of whether positive-testing employees were symptomatic. The potential for a circuit break lockdown after Christmas was also discussed.

44. Bus Policy Update

Members received an update on the work of the Bus Policy team, including next steps on the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Bus Enhanced Partnership.

Members noted their disappointment that the amount of funding expected to be received was now below the £168 million which had been identified as the amount of revenue funding required to provide the bus service needed by the region. However, it was expected that the full bid of £22.4 million for Zero Emission Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA) funding would be awarded, although this remained to be confirmed, with an announcement expected in March.

The ongoing shortage of drivers was raised, along with the importance of supporting recruitment to the sector in the long-term. The Combined Authority had engaged with operators to determine what business support could be offered in this regard. Members questioned whether the Enhanced Partnership could be used as a mechanism to assist with this; officers advised that although it was not an appropriate tool for addressing labour issues directly, as concerns such as hours and pay were for the operators to resolve in their capacity as employers, the closer engagement with and between bus companies that it allowed could be useful in finding solutions. Members also highlighted the importance of considering franchising options as well, noting that adopting the Enhanced Partnership had been a requirement from the Government in order for the Combined Authority to access funding.

The share of low-emission buses in the region was discussed, with Members noting that Calderdale and Kirklees had a smaller proportion of such buses than other districts in the region. Members queried whether the additional £4 million which had been added to the Combined Authority's initial ZEBRA bid with the intention of supporting Kirklees and Calderdale would be used toward new buses in these districts. Officers advised that the Combined Authority's Zero Emission Bus programme, if funded, would enable zero carbon buses within these districts. It was also noted that there remained a commitment from FirstGroup to deliver 95 further Euro VI standard buses to Leeds; this had previously been delayed for a variety of reasons, but there had been significant developments in the interim and officers would continue to pursue

this.

Members emphasised the importance of improving air quality in all districts within the region, noting that pollution caused significant damage even when not immediately visible, and highlighted useful actions that could be taken independently of operators such as considering potential sites for hydrogen plants.

45. Bus Service Funding

Members considered a report on the current position regarding bus service funding and on the bus transport related cost pressures faced by the Combined Authority as it prepares its budget for 2022/23.

At the time the report had originally been drafted, bus patronage had been expected to rise to up to 80% of pre-pandemic levels by the end of March. However, the rapid spread of the Omicron variant had caused this expectation to be significantly downgraded, and combined with the Government having made no commitment to continue bus funding after the end of March, there was a large amount of uncertainty for both bus operators and the Combined Authority which impacted on financial planning for the upcoming year.

Members discussed potential increases in the price of fares. It was strongly felt that any rises should be kept to a minimum, with the other pressures facing passengers such as inflation or increasing energy costs being highlighted, and that increases in fare prices would work counter to efforts to encourage modal shift among the public. It was also emphasised that local taxpayers had contributed significantly to subsidies for bus operators throughout the pandemic. However, recent work by operators and Combined Authority officers to simplify fares and achieve better interconnected travel were praised.

The possibility was also raised of the bus network shrinking due to funds not being available if government bus funding did not continue after March, and officers were currently in discussions with operators about their plans. Members pressed the importance of government continuing the funding, noting that if a high-quality transport service was desired and modal shift were to be significantly achieved, government investment was needed. If the necessary infrastructure and funding was provided to make the network reliable and affordable, it was expected that passenger numbers would rise, as had been seen elsewhere in Europe. The Mayor had written to Baroness Vere, Minister for Buses, urging the confirmation that government bus funding continue, and Members expressed their support in this.

46. Integrated Rail Plan

Members considered a report on the contents of the published Integrated Rail Plan (IRP), its implications for the region and recommended next steps.

Members expressed their disappointment in the contents of the IRP, noting that it left significant concerns unaddressed, such as capacity issues at Leeds

Station. It was highlighted that Leeds was the only comparable city of its size nationally that was served by a single rail station, and with an additional station through HS2 no longer planned, Members questioned what could be done to provide necessary capacity to those journeying from East Leeds and other areas where expansion was likely.

The Trans Pennine Route Upgrade was strongly welcomed, and other positive aspects such as the electrification of lines between Leeds and Bradford were also raised. However, Members questioned how some of these would work practically, such as whether passengers travelling from Bradford would need to change trains upon arriving at Leeds in order to continue their journey on non-electrified lines. It was felt that in many areas, the IRP fell short of the plans that had been developed by the Combined Authority, both in cost-effectiveness and overall benefit, and its silence on matters such as the electrification of the Calder Valley line was disappointing.

The need for the region to work together using devolved powers independently of Government to deliver mass transit and rail improvements was emphasised, and Members noted that the success of each district depended on that of its neighbours. A strategic partnership had been put in place with Network Rail colleagues, and this would be used to determine what could be implemented while campaigning continued for the Government to reconsider the funding of larger projects.

Members also raised the following questions and comments:

- Clarity was requested in future regarding language referring to a 'West Yorkshire and Leeds' mass transit system, with it being noted a single system would be serving all of West Yorkshire rather than there also being a separate intra-city system for Leeds.
- It was noted that the evidence for the IRP had not been presented, and Members noted the need to keep pressing for an opportunity to examine this.
- The negative impact of the IRP to the West Yorkshire Rail Vision was highlighted. Similarly, it was raised that the region would likely be held back by the IRP in its efforts to expand freight.
- Connection outside of the region as well as within it was noted as being extremely important, particularly regarding links with Manchester.
- Members noted the potential to draw £4 million down from the City Region Sustainable Transport Scheme (CRSTS) to support mass transit development.
- Members queried the plans mentioned in the IRP for a £100m study to be conducted, noting this figure seemed very high. Officers advised they had written to the Government for more information on this and would report back when they had more information.
- The need to ensure the resilience of existing stations and infrastructure within the region was discussed, including Mirfield Station, with the importance of encouraging rail use being highlighted.
- It was noted that recent upgrades at Leeds Station had been publicised on social media as being part of the IRP, whereas this work had been

planned for several years and was not connected to the IRP.

The Penistone line was also highlighted as an important strategic link between North and South, particularly in regards to Huddersfield's connectivity, and Members noted it had not been mentioned in the IRP. Officers advised that the Penistone line would be addressed in the West Yorkshire Rail Strategy, which was currently in development and would come to the Transport Committee at a future meeting.

Members noted their support for the Mayor in lobbying Government for a better offer for the region.

47. Leeds City Region Transport Update

Members received an update on current issues not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

It was questioned whether the consultation on Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) that had been undertaken as part of the Connectivity Infrastructure Plan had gathered a sufficient number of responses and enough detail to inform future decisions. However, Members noted that MRT plans were at an early stage of development, with the form to be proposed not yet being determined. More detailed consultations would follow later in the year after more funding confirmations had been received, and it was expected that a greater number of responses would accompany these.

Members praised the work done in developing these plans and noted the great care that was being taken to achieve the best possible result for the region. Some issues were raised regarding a potential MRT corridor along the former Spen Valley Greenway, but these would be better addressed further into the planning process.

48. Summary of Transport Schemes

Members considered a report informing them of transport-related project approvals from recent meetings of the Combined Authority and other committees.

After a query by Members, it was confirmed that Thorpe Park Rail Station and the accompanying Park and Ride were still proceeding to schedule and that there were no delays foreseen. It was noted that a private sector contribution was being made for White Rose Station, and further conversations with Thorpe Park and Leeds Bradford Airport may be helpful regarding a similar contribution for this scheme.