

**Report to:** Transport Committee

**Date:** 4 March 2022

**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 throughout the autumn slowed in December/ January with the emergence of the COVID-19 Omicron variant and the Government Plan B 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 week commencing 21 February 2022 when the impact on travel of the lifting of Plan B restrictions was taking effect 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.

- 2.3 A separate report on this agenda sets out the current position regarding bus funding.

### **Use of the network**

#### Overview

- 2.4 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 following the emergence of the Omicron variant and the introduction of Government “Plan B” measures.
- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 Bus and in particular rail services have been impacted by the high winds and flooding which have accompanied several significant storms during February
- 2.7 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

- 2.8 At the time of writing, bus use was around 75% of that which could be expected in February, rising to over 80% at weekends. 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.
- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 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

- 2.11 Since 27 January 2022 it is no longer mandatory to wear face coverings on public transport. However, rail operators continue to encourage customers to wear face coverings on board the train and in crowded spaces. Posters, websites, and on-board announcements have been updated to reflect the 'encouragement' message. The initial indication is that compliance of wearing face coverings has fallen slightly since this most recent change in the requirement, but a significant number of passengers are still choosing to wear them especially on services during daytimes.
- 2.12 On the 8 December as a result of the rapid spread of the Omicron variant the government introduced a move to Plan B which advised that people work from home if they can; predictably passenger numbers on trains reduced but following Christmas showed a steady increase week on week. Since Plan B was lifted on the 27 January passenger numbers have gradually risen with Northern reporting levels at 65% compared to pre COVID-19 levels. Commuter levels are being monitored and are at approximately 35% for Northern based on season ticket sales; it is anticipated that this figure is slightly higher if other ticket types are considered but is difficult to quantify. TransPennine Express (TPE) demand is approximately 57% of pre COVID-19 levels which is a 18% reduction on the levels reported to the previous Transport Committee. LNER demand is currently at 88% of pre-covid levels and is showing a steady increase week on week. Engineering work is anticipated to impact on demand during weekends in February and March.
- 2.13 Passenger footfall is monitored at Leeds station and for the week ending 20 February 2021 levels were 61% of levels of the same week in 2020 (just prior to the pandemic). Footfall had increased 1% on the previous week. This was a slowdown in recovery, likely impacted by disruption caused by the February storms.
- 2.14 Weekends continue to be the busiest services for both local operators, although poor weather has impacted on this over the two most recent weekends. The leisure market is predominantly retail at the moment with customers accessing town centres/shopping locations. Overcrowding continues to be monitored and currently there no specific areas of concern although events and management of those are still critical as there have been isolated problems. Where possible operators are encouraged to add additional carriages and anticipate this extra demand where they can.

## Summary of network changes

### Bus network

- 2.15 Arriva Yorkshire were due to make several changes to their networks in Wakefield and Kirklees from the weekend of 26 February 2022. As detailed in the accompanying Bus Funding report on this agenda, this has necessitated the Combined Authority to fund short term replacement services

- 2.16 Arriva has advised that these service changes are in response to changes in travel patterns and a reduction in patronage due to the pandemic. It is hoped that this new network will be viable when the additional COVID-19 support is withdrawn. The changes will bring a small overall mileage reduction for Arriva Yorkshire, who will continue to operate approximately 96% of pre COVID-19 mileage in West Yorkshire.
- 2.17 In Wakefield service 117 was withdrawn and partially replaced between Wakefield, Ossett and Shawcross with new service 122. The link between Ossett and Leeds was threatened with withdrawal, however Station Coaches introduced a replacement service which maintains these links on an hourly basis.
- 2.18 In the five towns area, services 184, 187 and 188 will be withdrawn and replaced by new services 158 and 186. Service 186 will operate hourly every day between Wakefield and Castleford via Normanton, continuing to Pontefract in the daytime and terminating in Castleford in the evening. Some communities will see a reduction in frequency, but this new service will restore bus services to Front Street in Castleford and provide a new link between Airedale and ASDA.
- 2.19 New service 158 will operate hourly (Monday to Saturday daytime) between Castleford and Ferrybridge via Fryston Village and Stansfield Road partially replacing services 184 and 188. The direct link between Knottingley and Castleford will be withdrawn, an hourly link between the towns has been provided by Ross Travel.
- 2.20 In Kirklees service 200 will no longer operate via Windsor Road in Howden Clough and Woodlands Estate in Gomersal which will speed up journey times, however passengers on these sections of route will need to walk further to access the service from the main road.
- 2.21 There will also be a number of evening frequency reductions across Kirklees and Wakefield, with some evening journeys withdrawn.
- 2.22 As noted in paragraph 2.28 below, we have to date still not yet obtained a commitment to the reinstatement of the Castleford – Normanton – Wakefield – Mirfield – Huddersfield train service: taken together with the Arriva bus service reductions, this could be expected to create real hardship in the affected parts of Wakefield and Kirklees districts, and it underlines the pressing need for action.

#### Rail network – emergency timetables

- 2.23 In the January report to Transport Committee, it was detailed that the new Omicron variant of COVID-19 was impacting significantly on staff resource and the ability for Train Operators to deliver a reliable service. This has been compounded by a deterioration in industrial relations for both TPE and Northern leading to a reduction in available staff due to no longer agreeing to work non-contracted rest days. To mitigate this, temporary emergency

timetables were introduced in January, and the train operators have advised that they will be in place until the resource position / industrial relations position improves; no date has been given when this may be expected.

2.24 The reductions are detailed in **Appendix 2**, but in summary the main changes are:

- On TPE, essentially a continuation of what was operating before the December timetable change, with Scarborough served by a shuttle from York rather than through trains from Manchester / Liverpool, meaning one train fewer per hour between York / Leeds and Manchester through most of the day.
- On Northern:
  - Several trains cancelled between Leeds and Pontefract / Knottingley (by both routes)
  - A few peak-only extra trains cancelled on the Harrogate line
  - Several trains cancelled on the Halifax – Bradford – Leeds – Selby – Hull service
  - Every other train cancelled on Huddersfield – Halifax – Bradford (leaving one every two hours)
  - Small number of cancellations on the Leeds / Bradford / Ilkley / Skipton electrics
  - One train each way cancelled Leeds – Sheffield (affects both routes)
  - The already minimal (three per day) remaining service Huddersfield – Wakefield – Castleford fully cancelled but replaced by buses (see paragraph 2.28 below)
  - The already minimal (three per day) service Sheffield – Pontefract - York fully cancelled (replaced by buses Moorthorpe – York only)

Other lines are running normal services as per the December 2021 timetable.

2.25 LNER was also operating a reduced weekday service due to staff absences but reinstated its December 2021 timetable from Monday, 14 February.

#### Forthcoming rail service changes – May 2022

2.26 While we have not yet been provided with details of proposed changes to rail services in the normal May timetable change (it will commence on 15 May), we are aware of two issues.

2.27 LNER has advised that the once-daily Huddersfield – Leeds – London King's Cross through-train, planned to be introduced in May 2022, has been deferred. This is because of the ongoing work on the wider East Coast Main Line timetable (arising out of the 2021 consultation which identified significant issues with the original ECML proposals). This is not unexpected in the circumstances.

2.28 At the time of writing, we have been unable to obtain a commitment from the Rail North Partnership (RNP) to the reinstatement of Northern's Huddersfield – Wakefield – Normanton – Castleford service. The Huddersfield to Wakefield

link has been a long-standing service, but the extension to Normanton and Castleford was only introduced in May 2019. It was cut to a “parliamentary” service of only three trains per day (none on Sundays) during the first COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, and has not been restored since. At present even this service is running with replacement buses, taking almost twice as long as the train journey.

- 2.29 The December 2021 timetable is now considered the new ‘baseline’ under the new operational arrangements for the railway. Any service variations need to be agreed by the RNP, with a decision on financial support from DfT. The Combined Authority has provided detailed evidence to the RNP setting out why restoration of this services is a priority. In summary, it shows that:
- despite the chequered history of the service in recent years, demand levels are high, especially though not only between Huddersfield and Wakefield ;
  - the service is not only around twice as fast as public transport alternatives (train via Leeds or bus) but is faster for most journeys that even uncongested off-peak car travel;
  - the line disproportionately benefits residents in deprived areas, measured across a variety of criteria including income, occupation, access to services, car ownership and other socioeconomic factors;
  - its restoration would radically improve access for large numbers of people to the areas of highest employment density in Kirklees and Wakefield, and to leisure facilities with region-wide catchments;
  - higher education institutions in Huddersfield such as the University draw a significant proportion of their students from the catchment of the service;
  - there is an excellent synergy between the rail services and the WY Core Bus Network: the one complements the other; and
  - forthcoming developments in both Huddersfield and Castleford will yet further increase the relevance of the service and the size of its markets.
- 2.30 We understand that there is still a possibility of the service could be reinstated from the May 2022 timetable change and continue to press RNP to obtain agreement that this should happen.

### **Passenger network performance**

#### **Bus network**

- 2.31 The latest performance data from 1 October 2021 to 31 December 2021 is attached at **Appendix 3**. This illustrates a decline in punctuality and reliability in September associated with the driver shortage issues previously reported.

#### **Rail network**

- 2.32 The performance reports for TPE and Northern are included in **Appendix 4**.

- 2.33 Since the last period performance was reported to the Transport Committee punctuality declined in period 9 but improved in the most recent Period 10. Cancellations have increased period on period. Time To 3 (Percentage trains calling at station stops within 3 minutes of the planned time) for Northern and TPE remains below 90% and for the most recent four-week period sits at 83.46% and 75.2% respectively. Cancellations have increased for both operators with Northern at 4.21% and TPE at 7.92%.
- 2.34 Prior to January the increasing incidence of COVID-19 was leading to short-notice cancellations with all operators. Following the introduction of the emergency timetables in January, detailed in para 2.14 above, early data suggests that both Northern and TPE have performed better with short-term cancellations reducing during the latter part of period 11 (last two weeks of Jan) but the position will continue to be monitored closely.
- 2.35 Performance has also been impacted by seasonal issues; the most notable has been storms Malik and Corrie which caused significant disruption to the railway with damage to overhead lines and fallen trees. Services were suspended on Airedale and Wharfedale lines and messages put out advising passengers not to travel. Further significant disruption was caused by storms Dudley, Eunice and Franklin in February, which will be reflected in the figures reported at the next Committee. An autumn review has also been carried out, and discussions are ongoing as to how next autumn is made more resilient from a train service delivery perspective. Railhead 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 and operators felt more could be done to make them more reliable.
- 2.36 To help combat high levels of external events impacting on performance – namely juvenile trespass and bridge strikes. Work is being undertaken with the British Transport Police to prepare for a week of action in April where officers saturate hotspots known for trespass/vandalism/railway crime. Network Rail are also looking to strengthen bridge mitigations especially in the Wakefield area to reduce the number of bridge strikes which are occurring.
- 2.37 As reported to the previous Transport Committee meetings 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 staff resourcing issues are putting this at risk and it remains under scrutiny.
- 2.38 TPE have notified customers of strike action on four consecutive Sundays commencing 13 February after the RMT union announced plans for its conductors to hold Industrial Action. At the time of writing TPE operated a very limited, and heavily reduced service on the following routes:
- Manchester Piccadilly – York via Huddersfield and Leeds
  - York – Scarborough
  - Cleethorpes – Doncaster

- Doncaster/Sheffield – Manchester Piccadilly
- Edinburgh – Carlisle

2.39 Customers are being asked to consider their journey options on those days as significant disruption is expected. Active discussions have taken place with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority/Lead members and operators to help minimise disruption. Ticket acceptance is in place with other rail operators and with the local bus operators in West Yorkshire. Refunds will also be available to customers who have booked tickets and decide they no longer wish to travel on affected Sundays due to the strike action.

### **Passenger satisfaction and attitudes**

#### Transport Focus Surveys

- 2.40 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.
- 2.41 Key findings from the latest Travel during COVID-19 survey (link provided in **Background Documents**) conducted between 28 - 30 January were:
- 82% of those who used a train and a similar proportion of those who used a bus say that they wore a face covering when they did so for the whole of their journey.
  - 74% of people overall still agree that they feel safer using public transport with people wearing face coverings.
  - 89% of those who used a train and 86% of those who used the bus (outside of London) felt safe doing so
  - 52% say that COVID-19 is a major concern and 61% say that they have been avoiding unnecessary activities
- 2.42 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:
- 87% of bus passengers were satisfied with their journey overall, with little change over the last month with younger people generally being less satisfied.
  - 85% of rail passengers were satisfied with their journey overall, down from 90% the previous week.
  - Overall bus passenger satisfaction (compared to rail) was higher on value for money (68% vs 63%), but lower for punctuality (75% vs 83%).



## Update on Combined Authority activity

### Current Usage Indicators

- 2.43 **Appendix 5** 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.
- 2.44 Use of all services continues to be impacted by reduction in travel arising from the pandemic. In line with patronage (or proxies thereof), demand for travel information is increasing. The number of journeys planned (using the journey planner, Moovit) were 65% higher in January 2022 compared to the same period in 2021, building on increases at the end of last year. Weekday calls to MetroLine in January 2022 were 30% higher than the same period last year.

### Fares and Ticketing

- 2.45 Use of the MCard app continues to grow, and latest data suggests it now accounts for 68% of sales transactions per month. Monthly sales in January topped £1m.

### Bus Stations

- 2.46 Work to increase our capacity and responsiveness to community needs and safeguarding continue across all bus stations with staff undertaking child protection, suicide prevention and dementia awareness training.
- 2.47 Halifax Bus Station is progressing well and moved to the next major stage in late February as a new temporary facility opens. This will remain in place for about 18 months while the old bus station is demolished, and the new facility constructed in its place.
- 2.48 Leeds Bus Station refurbishment will complete in April and will include a safe place which will enable us to progress to a Station of Sanctuary at Leeds. Work started on the new look travel centre in mid-February. A temporary travel centre is located in the centre of the bus station near Greggs whilst these works are underway. The new facilities will also include improved real time information displays and audio information

### Bus Alliance Update

- 2.49 The Bus Alliance was the mechanism by which the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) was co-developed with bus operators. At the time of writing the funding announcement on BSIP is still awaited. The recent focus of the Alliance has been developing and finalising the Enhanced Partnership as set out elsewhere on this agenda. The Bus Alliance continues to be the means of collaboration on the bus service response to the ever-changing challenges of the pandemic.

## Rail Operators' Forum

- 2.50 The Train Operators Forum was held on 9 February 2022. This was attended by rail operators, Network Rail, Transport Focus and Transport for the North.
- 2.51 Discussions included the current industrial relations issues; how they are impacting on West Yorkshire and the steps being taken to ensure that wherever possible customer disruption is being kept to minimum and changes are being communicated effectively. TfN outlined work which was starting to happen in relation to Great British Railways and the transition to this new body.
- 2.52 Operators contributed to a 'lessons learnt' on the recent engineering work over Christmas at Leeds Station. It was felt that improved collaboration between Network Rail and operators helped to improve the communications and how the engineering work was managed. Surveys were carried out by Northern on the replacement bus services to gain feedback in this area - which were positive. Kirkstall Forge rail replacement hub worked well but it had been recognised that more staff to assist customers at the hub would be beneficial for future engineering work, especially as passenger numbers grow.
- 2.53 Operators also detailed how they are adapting to the changing market conditions and rebuilding rail demand including introducing digital innovation and marketing initiatives. This included looking at key information from surveys carried out by Transport Focus of what customers need and expect.
- 2.54 Operators thanked Cllr Groves for her hard work over the last four years as Transport Committee Chair/ Lead Member and for the implementation of a successful Rail Forum.

### **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. An important element of the Transport Recovery Plan is to try to embed increased levels of active travel and the opportunity to restore and grow public transport use to maintain improved air quality and achieve decarbonisation ambitions.

### **4. Inclusive Growth Implications**

- 4.1 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. Establishing a Station of Sanctuary at Leeds Bus Station is one way in which we are helping to make the transport network more inclusive and welcoming, alongside the training being provided to our customer-facing colleagues to equip them with the expertise to deal with passengers in the most effective ways.

## **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?CId=133&MId=963&Ver=4>

During the COVID-19 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=eyJrljoiZDdjMjNjNGE0NTY1Yi00YTgyLTNmZ>

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gwNWI2N2U0ODbjMCIsImMiOjh9](https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/home/coronavirus-latest/coronavirus-insight/)

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/>

## **12. Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Insights on transport network use

Appendix 2 – Rail emergency timetables summary

Appendix 3 – WY Bus Alliance Operator Performance Report from October 2021 to December 2021

Appendix 4 – Rail network performance data

Appendix 5 – Metro branded activity measures