

**NOTES OF THE INFORMAL MEETING OF MEMBERS OF THE
LEEDS DISTRICT CONSULTATION SUB-COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY, 11 OCTOBER 2021 AS A REMOTE MEETING**

Present:

Councillor Lou Cunningham (Chair)	Leeds City Council
Mark Parry (Deputy Chair)	Public Representative
Councillor Colin Campbell	Leeds Council
Councillor Kim Groves	Transport Committee
John Birkby (Public Representative)	Public Representative
Howard Dews (Public Representative)	Public Representative
Judith Rhodes (Public Representative)	Public Representative
Eric Smith (Public Representative)	Public Representative
Bill Tymms (Public Representative)	Public Representative
Leslie Webb (Public Representative)	Public Representative
Clive Woods (Public Representative)	Public Representative

In attendance:

Stuart Fillingham	First Group
Richard Isaac	Arriva Rail North Limited
Graham Meiklejohn	TransPennine Express
Pete Myers	Northern Trains
Paul Turner	First Group
Dwayne Wells	Arriva Yorkshire
Edwin Swaris	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Dominic Martin	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Aaliyah Younis	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

30. Open Forum

Members of the sub-committee in attendance were given the opportunity to raise any issues which were not covered on the agenda, and following comments were made

It was felt that the 15-minute frequency of the 'turn up and go' services should be reduced to every 10 minutes. Officers clarified that the 15-minute frequency is the minimum expected, with a higher frequency where possible subject to demand.

Members noted there appeared to be no full integrated network review, in favour of ad-hoc improvements. Officers informed members of the sub-

committee that there is currently a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) bid being made to government due to seek the funding for improvements to the bus network across West Yorkshire. Enhanced partnerships are also being developed with key bus operators to further develop the network beyond the aims set out by the BSIP, and the potential for bus franchising was also being investigated. The last network review was undertaken approximately 18 months ago and highlighted areas of expansion over the next decade.

It was felt by some Members that the progress towards the zero emissions target seemed slow at the present time, and that targets should be more ambitious than Euro 6 engines. Officers advised that there is currently a funding application for zero-emission buses which should allow for some electrification of the bus network, which is supported by all operators. There are infrastructure challenges presented by electrification, and debate continued about the long-term future of electric versus hydrogen power for public transport vehicles. Electric buses do already operate within Leeds, and the intention was to obtain more for the entire region as funding allows, though for the time being it can be more cost-effective to retrofit existing buses with lower-emission engines.

Concerns were raised regarding the cancellation of some lower frequency services in suburban and rural areas which can lead to long waiting times for the next service. It was noted that the WYCA and First Bus websites seemed in some places to provide conflicting information regarding bus cancellations, and it was questioned if there was an available record of cancellations to determine if there is a pattern of cancellations and how any issues can be addressed. Officers responded that any drops in service are reported by the operator to the Combined Authority and are monitored within each district to ensure service standards are maintained.

Officers explained that there is a national driver shortage across the transport industry which has accounted for some drops in service frequencies. The shortage includes approximately 250 bus drivers across West Yorkshire, equating to roughly 7% of roles. Operators are working to tackle the issue by balancing available drivers with the demand for service and altering the frequencies of some services, however there is no immediate solution in what remains to be a challenging landscape. It can be difficult to call in drivers at short notice to cover sickness or absences, and it takes time for any driver to become familiar with a new route. Staffing levels have been under capacity due to several factors including drivers taking early retirement or leaving for other roles in the HGV industry. There is a backlog of recruited drivers who are not yet able to begin work due to delays obtaining licenses, training and tests, and even though the long turnaround times have somewhat eased from several months to several weeks, it could also take some months before the positive impact is felt.

The availability of £1 fares after 7pm was welcomed to increase service use during off-peak times, however there were concerns about how well the initiative has been publicised. Officers confirmed that the £1 fare promotion has initially been a success, with passenger levels increasing in the evening when compared with pre-pandemic levels. The challenge is to maintain the levels for longer periods, and work will be done to advertise the service as

appropriate.

31. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Hayden, Linda Bishop and Brittany Stead.

32. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no pecuniary interests declared by Members at the meeting.

33. Exempt Information - Possible exclusion of the press and public

There were no items which required the exemption of the press or public.

34. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2021

Members noted the minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2021.

35. Notes of the informal joint DCSC meeting held on 26 August 2021

Members noted the reference in the minutes of the meeting to further consultation on the Enhanced Partnership, and questioned how sections of the community that were not normally reached would be included in this. Officers noted that better community engagement was a priority, and would feed this question back to the Communications and Engagement team for a direct response.

36. Chair's Update and Transport Review

The Chair expressed appreciation for the updates on the network developments, and welcomed further news regarding the Flexibus Demand Responsive Transport service, as well as the Stourton park and ride and the levels of usage since it had opened.

The Chair expressed thanks to the transport operators and drivers for maintaining high levels of service throughout the pandemic, and thanked operators for their work to tackle staffing issues and in making adjustments to the regular timetables as required.

The Chair suggested that the DCSC should feed into the region wide consultation launched by the Mayor with the police and crime panel. Ideas for feedback included how safe people feel using public transport, particularly women and girls using services at night.

37. Information Report

Members considered an information report which provided an update on transport issues in Leeds.

38. Operators Updates

Members were provided with verbal updates from several transport operators:

Northern

Northern reported that they are currently operating with approximately 88% of their trains arriving within three minutes of the scheduled time. This was felt to be a high standard, but it was noted that Northern were not currently running a full timetable. Passenger numbers are at about 75% of pre-pandemic levels, which comprises higher than average leisure travel but lower than average commuter travel. New products such as flexible tickets are being introduced to encourage more rail travel among commuters.

The timetable is due to be updated in December, with information being published online at present so passengers are informed.

Train driver numbers have not been impacted by staff losses as heavily as the bus industry has, however the training for new drivers was particularly impacted. Training has resumed but there is a backlog which is currently working towards being cleared.

The Neville Hill depot in East Leeds is being adopted under the control of Northern which will allow for more opportunities to improve services.

TransPennine Express

TransPennine Express reported that services are running at about 84% on time and are among the top performing services for punctuality. Arrival times are recorded for every stop, allowing for more recorded data and improved efforts to address late arrivals.

Passenger numbers are at around 70% of pre-pandemic levels overall, with higher leisure travel than pre-pandemic.

The timetable is due to be updated in December, though there are no major changes for services to or from Leeds.

Contractors have finished installing new customer toilets at Dewsbury train station.

First Bus

First Bus reported that passenger numbers are at around 75% of pre-pandemic levels, with fluctuations based on the area of Leeds. The return of university students has also led to increased demand, but distance learning has created new patterns of use which are being monitored.

The Stourton park and ride and East Leeds Flexibus are now operating. Numbers of users for both are growing and feedback has been positive.

Bus stop information at the Corn Exchange has been improved. The City Square consultation is still ongoing.

There are no immediate plans for any service changes, with a focus on increasing staffing levels and restoring services fully.

Services have been disrupted by roadworks, but plans are in place to address any issues.

Arriva

Arriva reported that there are concerns with the planned alterations to Crown Point Road which could negatively impact passengers between South Leeds and the city centre by reducing the number of lanes and bus stops. This is likely to cause significant complaints and questions if the bus route would need to be diverted. The Chair noted that the issue regarding the Crown Point Road changes is being raised with the leader of Leeds City Council.

Following network changes in July, the number of passengers served at Woodlesford station and in Rothwell has grown.

The total number of passengers is about 70% of pre-pandemic levels.

Transdev

Transdev reported passenger numbers of around 70% compared to pre-pandemic levels. The services running to and from the airport had been most affected but numbers of service users are growing slowly as restrictions are lifted

Weekend and leisure travel remains higher than weekdays in line with other operators. Younger people are using services at a similar rate to pre-pandemic levels, whereas commuters and older people are still below levels from before the pandemic.

Season ticket offers are being offered to encourage travel, including ticket bundles and discounts for regular passengers.

There are currently two routes into Leeds that are not running regularly due to a driver shortage, but the routes can be restored when more drivers can be recruited.

The Chair thanked the officers for their updates and invited any questions.

A point was raised about the Nova 1 trains and the ability of individuals to lift items such as bikes on to the bike racks. Officers replied that there is assistance available for those who are struggling, and that a balance had to be struck between the facilities for passengers and the space required for different types of commuters. The limit of two bicycles per train is also a guideline which can be raised at the discretion of the conductor, provided it does not affect the accessibility for other passengers. This can benefit both commuters and leisure travellers but would need to be monitored for certain routes to ensure service is not negatively affected.

Concerns were raised about the number of people not wearing masks on trains, and that the recorded messages should be amended to suggest they should be worn at all times. Officers responded that there is currently no mask mandate for public travel so this issue cannot be tackled by the operators themselves. Trains do operate with open windows for ventilation, and messages are in place to encourage mask wearing.

It was questioned if the commuting patterns have changed as a result of the pandemic. Officers replied that there are still peak times as could be expected, but fluctuations have been observed on certain weekdays which suggest commuters using trains for only a part of the week.

It was queried why the Flexibus only operates in East Leeds on Monday to Saturday when there are other areas that are less connected that may benefit. Officers responded that it is a trial project which benefitted from some external funding to help support its delivery. The service is based on existing models such as those already running in Liverpool and is running in the Cross Green area of Leeds which is an underserved area and improves access for those residents to St James Hospital. The project also connects with existing infrastructure which allowed for easier passenger access. The lessons learned from this trial can be used to expand the project or improve existing service in more areas.

An issue was raised with the duration of roadworks, and if utility companies are paying highways operators for the disruption as that seems to impact the rate at which works are completed. Officers responded that this issue would need to be raised with Highways officers, as roadworks operate differently depending on the type of work being undertaken. It was suggested that a representative for Highways can be asked to attend future meetings to provide more insight and updates on current and future arrangements.

A question raised regarding any planned works due to take place in the lead up to Christmas. Arriva reported some proprietary works for the TransPennine route upgrade which will result in some closures over Christmas, however there are preparations in place based on previous similar works and there should be no significant disruptions to passengers.

39. Workshop Session - Travel and Transport Post Pandemic

Members were provided with a presentation regarding the connectivity infrastructure plan.

Members made the following comments:

- There are concerns about safety and the lack of mask wearing on public transport, in line with the number of coronavirus cases in local areas (as discussed earlier in the meeting)
- Online purchases are lowering the need to physically visit shops to get their groceries and changes to working patterns are changing how often bus use is necessary. Travelling locally has become preferable and more people prefer the car for this. Bus frequency and parking availability may affect how many people are choosing cars over buses,

and so bus priority in the suburbs should be more strongly considered to reduce journey times and the amount of traffic on the road.

- Members observed there has been a large growth in recreational cycling which is in some cases surpassing commuting. It was queried if more support should be directed towards recreational cycling in line with the encouragement of active travel. Leisure cyclists are likely to cycle anyway but encouraging more commuters to cycle to work instead would reduce the number of cars and therefore reduce emissions. The benefits of increased cycling can be used to promote active travel and encourage a stronger modal shift from motor vehicles to cycles.
- The Chair noted that the use of visual examples in presentations is useful and more engaging to readers to express data.
- It was noted that many schemes for bus priority concern travel to and from the city centre, and there is an opportunity for more schemes that focus on the outer areas of Leeds. Schemes such as the Flexibus have shown that newer models can serve communities in innovative ways.
- Members noted the need for improvement schemes to be spread across all areas of the district, noting that a number of previous schemes had been cancelled or had not had the desired effect.