

Report to: Transport Committee

Date: 1 July 2022

Subject: **Passenger Experience Update Report**

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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 a quarterly update on the performance of the transport network in West Yorkshire, including an update of the Combined Authority's passenger facing activity.

2. Information

Summary picture

- 2.1 The recovery of travel demand following the pandemic has stabilised with the strongest recovery during off-peak hours and weekends.
- 2.2 At the time of publication, industrial action by bus drivers at Arriva Yorkshire was in its third week causing major disruption to passengers in the Wakefield, Kirklees and South Leeds. The Mayor has been in dialogue with both sides of the dispute to encourage a resolution and resumption of services.
- 2.3 A strike by RMT members working for Network Rail and 13 train operating companies, including TransPennine Express, Northern, LNER and Cross Country reduced rail services to less than 5% on 21, 23 and 25 June with a significant reduction in services on the intermediate days. A separate dispute by RMT workers at TransPennine Express is affecting weekend services

- 2.4 The Chair of Transport Committee and the Mayor have continued to press the case through senior-level meetings with rail operators and via Rail North Committee to ensure there is a plan to restore rail service levels and to improve reliability.

Use of the network

Overview

- 2.5 The general picture on bus and rail services through the spring was one of a steady recovery, with local weekday bus patronage recovering more than rail. Latest available data is at **Appendix 1**. Rail use has remained higher at weekends indicating a stronger return of leisure trips.
- 2.6 Since “Plan B” measures were removed, motor vehicle use (at a national level) have once again returned to around pre-pandemic levels with weekend usage exceeding baseline conditions (**Appendix 1**). 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.

Bus network

- 2.7 Over the recent months, bus passenger volumes have continued to show marginal growth outside of holidays, with patronage around 70-80% of baseline, with greatest recovery in the under 19’s cohort. Daily bus use patterns are similar to pre-pandemic, but with reduced magnitude at peak times, with the strongest recovery during off-peak hours and weekends (**Appendix 1**).
- 2.8 Service reliability remains impacted by the reduced availability of bus drivers and engineers. 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. This has given rise to reductions in service frequency and short-term cancellations. The Combined Authority is funding training for new bus drivers through the Adult Education Budget.
- 2.9 Unite members working for Arriva Yorkshire commenced indefinite strike action on 6 June 2022 in a dispute about pay. This has impacted most communities in Wakefield, Kirklees and South Leeds. The Combined Authority has made arrangements to provide a free bus link between Wakefield City Centre and Pinderfields Hospital during the strike. A verbal update on the latest position will be provided.
- 2.10 As part of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations, the Mayor’s Free Bus Sunday operated on Sunday 5 June where all passengers were able to board buses free of charge. Over 150,000 journeys were made showing a 30% increase in patronage compared with the average Sunday in June 2022. The cost of this

initiative was shared with the Combined Authority funding 75% of average Sunday takings in June 2022 with the remaining 25% being the operator contribution.

Rail network

- 2.11 Northern is now reporting patronage in the mid 80% compared to pre pandemic levels. Commuter levels are reported by Northern at approximately 41% based on season ticket sales; this figure does not include commuters using other ticket types, so will be higher. Leisure travel appears to have fully recovered, with some Saturdays proving to be busier than pre-pandemic.
- 2.12 TransPennine Express (TPE) reports demand at around 80% of pre pandemic levels which is a 23% increase on the levels reported to the March meeting of Transport Committee.
- 2.13 LNER is reporting demand at 111% of pre-pandemic levels with a strong recovery in West Yorkshire. As with Northern, recovery is being driven by leisure travellers, but LNER are also seeing a steady growth in business travellers.
- 2.14 By late May 2022, average passenger weekday footfall at Leeds rail station was 69% of baseline pre-pandemic levels (similar to late 2021), however in contrast, average weekend station footfall has been exceeding baseline levels. This supports the stronger recovery for leisure travel as reported by the operators. Notably, both AM and PM station footfall peaks are of reduced magnitude compared to pre-pandemic levels, with a greater share of footfall at daytime inter-peak periods as well as at evenings and weekends.
- 2.15 The Jubilee weekend was busy for the railway, although short of expectations. Weather remains a key driver of leisure demand. Over summer there is an expectation there will be fewer journeys town centres and retail, with more to coast and countryside. Overcrowding continues to be monitored with no specific areas of concern currently, although events and management of those remains critical to address isolated issues.
- 2.16 Operators are encouraged to add carriages and anticipate extra demand where they can. Northern has refocused capacity for the summer period and added additional carriages on routes such as Leeds – Settle – Carlisle and the Wolds Coast (Hull – Bridlington – Filey – Scarborough).

Summary of network changes

Bus network

- 2.17 There are no major structural changes to the bus network since the last report to Transport Committee in March 2022.
- 2.18 Details of the Bus Network Sustainability review are reported at **Item 8**.

Rail Network

- 2.19 As reported in March, COVID-19 related staff sickness led to reductions to timetables in January 2022. Recovery of the staffing position has been difficult; this is due to a deterioration in industrial relations for both TransPennine Express (TPE) and Northern meaning that staff are no longer agreeing to work non-contracted rest days, together with training backlogs following the pandemic. Sickness levels also remain high. Reduced timetables have continued to be in place with the aim of reducing the unacceptable levels of on-the-day cancellations.
- 2.20 This had the desired effect initially, although ad-hoc cancellations started to increase again. To ensure reliability of services on 16 May 2022 Northern introduced a further set of service reductions in addition to those from January. These are summarised at **Appendix 2**. This appears to have had the desired effect, with cancellations now at lower levels. However, this has led to severe gaps in connectivity (notably around Bradford) which have caused clear hardship in several cases, including on some school flows.
- 2.21 Councillor Hinchcliffe and the Mayor have met with Northern to press for mitigations to the worst impacts and to seek assurances there is a clear plan to recover the situation and restore service levels. In consultation with the Combined Authority, Northern has introduced short-term measures to try address the worst impacts. This includes bus services between Bradford and Ilkley and in the Five Towns area to fill recognised and serious gaps.
- 2.22 Northern has confirmed it plans to restore the service levels delivered in December 2021 service by the December 2022 timetable change, with an objective to restore some missing services before if staff availability improves. Northern has been made aware which services are the highest priorities. However, both commitments are at risk by ongoing industrial action. If strikes continue into the summer months this will impact on the driver training programme needed to recover the resource position.
- 2.23 The December 2021 timetable did not represent a full reintroduction of pre-pandemic service levels, most notably the near absence of trains between Huddersfield and Wakefield as reported at the March 2022 meeting. The Mayor and Councillor Hinchcliffe have continued to make the case for proper funding to support the provision of rail services in the North via the TfN Board and Rail North Committee respectively. Rail connectivity provides an important role in supporting the post-pandemic recovery and for delivering against the levelling-up agenda.
- 2.24 TPE plans to introduce the following changes at the December 2022 timetable change with an impact in West Yorkshire:
- Hull –Manchester services extended to Liverpool via Newton le Willows
 - Scarborough services diverted to Manchester Piccadilly and make peak calls between Huddersfield and Stalybridge, including Slaithwaite and Marsden.

- 2.25 LNER have no significant changes planned for the December 2022 timetable.

Passenger network performance

Bus network

- 2.26 The latest performance data from the operators from 1 April 2022 to 31 June 2022 is awaited and will be included in the next update report.
- 2.27 As set out above, at the time of writing Arriva bus services in West Yorkshire continue to be severely impacted by strike action.

Rail network

- 2.28 A strike by RMT trade union members impacted Network Rail and 13 train operating companies, including TransPennine Express, Northern, LNER and Cross Country on 21, 23 and 25 June. This action, which included signallers as well as train guards and other railway staff, resulted in Northern and TPE only operating around 10% of usual services with many routes and stations having no services. Operating hours were restricted to around 7.30 am to 6pm on strike days, and impacts on services the days before and after strikes particularly at the start of service. No replacement bus services were provided but existing buses in place to mitigate Northern's service reductions continued to be provided.
- 2.29 Northern issued 'Do Not Travel' advice from Tuesday 21 June to Sunday 26 June. TPE advised only to travel if 'essential'. Leeds station was closed on Thursday 23 and Saturday 25 June from 7pm with no access. Refunds were made available to those passengers who had booked travel on a strike day and were unable to change it to an alternative date. Train operators looked to ensure that where events were due to take place, steps to mitigate any foreseen issues were taken by providing additional information or staff assistance.
- 2.30 At the time of writing no further national RMT strikes have been called, and negotiations continue.
- 2.31 The performance reports for Northern and TransPennine Express (TPE) are included in **Appendix 3**, which includes a description of the different performance measures mentioned below.
- 2.32 Since the last performance update in March punctuality has been reasonably static. However, cancellations for both operators have been very unpredictable in recent months. For TPE cancellations were reported as very high for period 10, but saw a significant improvement in Period 11, unfortunately they climbed again and remained static for periods 12 and 13. Northern's cancellations rate also improved in period 11, peaked significantly in period 12 before slowly reducing again in period 1 and 2 (April and May).

- 2.33 Time to 3 (Percentage trains calling at station stops within 3 minutes of the planned time) for Northern and TPE remains well below 90% and for the most recent four-week period sits at 85.26% and 78.19% respectively. Cancellations saw Northern at 3.95% (2.32% in the East region) and TPE at 4.56%.
- 2.34 As set out above, the increasing incidence of COVID-19 over Christmas and into the New Year was leading to short-notice cancellations with all operators. Following the introduction of the emergency timetables in January, Northern and TPE initially performed better with cancellations reducing in period 11. However, the cancellations began to increase again. Train crew availability which includes COVID-19-related training backlogs, staff absence (higher than average sickness levels for TPE especially) and withdrawal of rest day working agreements have all contributed to the high levels of cancellations and poor performance figures.
- 2.35 Northern introduced further timetable reductions in May, as set out above. This has led to a reduction in short-notice cancellations. TPE has not reduced services, and cancellations remain high. Many of these are short notice on the day or made the evening before. The latter are currently not counted in the cancellation figures (known as 'P coded' or planned cancellations if notified before 10 pm on the evening before), which means the official cancellation figures do not reflect the passenger experience. Notification of any replacement buses is usually late in the evening before or not until the actual morning, which has caused further passenger frustration.
- 2.36 TPE's Manchester – Leeds – Hull services have been particularly badly affected. This creates problems east of Leeds (overcrowding, difficulty accessing West Yorkshire from Hull in the morning) and leads to erratic service levels at Slaithwaite and Marsden. TPE have indicated that it is monitoring the situation closely and has committed to addressing it as part of plans to reduce sickness levels and support train crew in returning to work.
- 2.37 The Mayor has met with senior management at TPE to seek assurances that there is a clear plan in place to recover the reliability of its services, noting the unacceptable level of disruption this has been causing. We have continued to press TPE to take action to ensure passengers have reliable information on what services are expected to be operating.
- 2.38 TPE has an intense ongoing programme of crew training to address the following:
- to mitigate a backlog of pandemic-induced route knowledge loss
 - address delayed traction training (to be able to drive specific vehicles)
 - to prepare for timetable changes such as the Manchester Recovery Task Force December 2022 change and the impacts of the Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU).

- 2.39 As with Northern's timetable recovery plans, TPE's reliability recovery plans are likely to be impacted if the national strike action continues through the summer.
- 2.40 Since February, TPE services have also been impacted by industrial action by RMT guards, with strikes on Sundays and some Saturdays over the past 17 weeks. On strike days TPE is offering a skeleton service of up to 26% of its normal Sunday services. Discussions on resolving the strike continue.
- 2.41 Performance has also been impacted by increases in trespass and vulnerable people presenting themselves on the railway. Vandalism and cable theft has also seen a major increase. The Network Rail Route Crime Team are continuing to develop action plans in association with the British Transport Police. This includes increasing the number of patrols carried out by Mobile Operation Managers and the British Transport Police. Network Rail infrastructure reliability and asset performance has otherwise been good in recent months.
- 2.42 Northern has set up a local performance group to look at West and North Yorkshire issues specifically and to try and strengthen performance capability locally. This will continue to focus on key lines. The Harrogate Line and Leeds to Manchester Victoria route continue to be a focus.

Passenger satisfaction and attitudes

Transport Focus Surveys

- 2.43 Throughout the pandemic, Transport Focus conducted nationally representative research around travel use. The latest iteration of this research now uses omnibus survey where 2000 members of the public are screened to identify bus and rail users outside of London, with weightings applied to make the results nationally representative of Great Britain. Reports are now published monthly, and a link is provided in **Background Documents**.
- 2.44 The latest insights from surveys published at the beginning of June are:
- 86% of bus passengers and 88% of rail passengers were satisfied with their journey overall (with little change since the start of the year).
 - Leisure was the most common reason for using the bus (30%), followed by commuting (25%). For rail, commuting was the most common reason for use (32%), followed by leisure (29%).
 - 9 out of 10 bus and rail passengers who used the bus in the last 7 days felt safe in relation to COVID-19. For bus, this figure drops to 76% for respondents who did not use the bus in the last 7 days, up from 51% in January 2022, with a similar picture for rail.
 - compared to rail users, bus passengers reported higher levels of satisfaction with the level of crowding and value for money, but lower levels of satisfaction for punctuality.

Updates on Combined Authority activity

Current usage indicators

- 2.45 **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 trends, including to the pre-pandemic position where available.
- 2.46 Use of services continues to be impacted by reduction in travel arising from the pandemic, although demand for travel information is increasing alongside increasing patronage. Weekday calls to MetroLine in May 2022 were 85% of levels in May 2019, 30% higher than the same period last year (up 9.3 points compared to May in 2021). Although the number of journeys planned (using the journey planner, Moovit) increased between February and April 2022, use was 12% lower in April 2022 compared to the same month the previous year.

Fares and ticketing

- 2.47 Use of the MCard app continues to grow, and latest data suggests it now accounts for 72% of MCard sale transactions per month which is a significant move away from smartcards over the previous 12 months.

Bus stations

- 2.48 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.
- 2.49 Halifax Bus Station is progressing well, and work has almost finished on the main site excavations and the erection of the large steel building frame has now commenced. The new temporary facility remains open and fully operational and will remain in place for about 18 months while the new bus station is being built.
- 2.50 Leeds Bus Station refurbishment will complete in August and will include a safe place to progress to a Station of Sanctuary at Leeds. Works continue on the new look travel centre, the new entrance canopy at Dyer Street and the installation of the internal cladding has recently commenced. The project will also provide PV (solar) panels to make the bus station more energy efficient, a new shop and a new waiting room for bus drivers.
- 2.51 Bradford Interchange is now a Station of Sanctuary and works to resurface the bus movement areas and to relocate the Travel Centre are due to start in the Summer.

Bus Alliance update

- 2.52 The Bus Alliance was the mechanism by which the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) was co-developed with bus operators. On 4 April 2022, DfT

notified the Combined Authority that it had been successful in receiving an indicative BSIP revenue funding allocation of £69,974,070 over the next three financial years. The recent focus of the Alliance has been continuing to develop 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 stations

- 2.53 Construction work on the new White Rose railway station is now underway. The new rail station between Morley and Cottingham is being delivered in partnership by the Combined Authority, Leeds City Council, Munroe K and Network Rail, and will be fully accessible.
- 2.54 It is being delivered through the Leeds City Region Transforming Cities Fund, the Leeds Public Transport Investment Programme and the Department for Transport's New Stations Fund, as well as contributions from Munroe K. Construction work is expected to continue to early 2023.

Rail Operators' Forum

- 2.55 The Rail Operators' Forum met on 18 May 2022. This was attended by rail operators, Network Rail and Transport for the North.
- 2.56 Discussions focused on industrial relations issues; how ongoing strikes (just TPE at the time of the meeting) are impacting on West Yorkshire and the steps being taken to ensure that customer disruption is minimised, and related communications are effective. Concerns were raised about TPE performance, including last minute cancellations and the notification of bus replacement services. Contingency planning was considered alongside ongoing challenges with staff resources.
- 2.57 Operators and the Combined Authority also discussed ticketing initiatives to help adapt to new and emerging travel patterns as well as simplification of ticket purchasing. It was reported that a significant number of rail tickets are now being sold via digital technology (prominently tickets on mobile phones). Transport Focus provided updates on customer surveys, exploring customer perceptions and expectations, and travel patterns.
- 2.58 TfN outlined initial work relating to Great British Railways and the works it doing to prepare for the transition to this new body.

3. Tackling the Climate Emergency Implications

- 3.1 Air quality improved during the periods of lower traffic levels during the lockdowns in the pandemic. Local real-time road-side monitoring showed harmful NO₂ emissions on a downward trajectory and it can be inferred from this that CO₂ emissions were similarly reduced.

3.2 An important element of the Transport Recovery Plan agreed in 2020 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 Sustaining an effective, stable and affordable public transport network is crucial in ensuring the post pandemic economic recovery is inclusive particularly to communities with limited access to private transport

5. Equality and Diversity Implications

5.1 Ensuring an effective, stable, and affordable public transport network is important for equality and diversity.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 Inflationary pressures arising from fuel and wage cost growth is impacting on the CA's expenditure on bus services. The cost of a shuttle bus in Wakefield to mitigate the effect of the strike has been funded by the CA. Subject to validation of final returns the cost of Free Bus Sunday is £90,000 funded through savings in the concessionary fare budget.

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 notes the updates provided on the Passenger Experience in West Yorkshire 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>

The Combined Authority continues to produce a regular *West Yorkshire Economic and Transport Insights Report*. This includes information and

analysis on public transport patronage, and is available via this link: <https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/documents/economic-monitor/>.

A regularly updated transport and economic recovery dashboard is available via this link:

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiaNTA5ZjIzZWQtdiOS00ZGNiLTlINmQtNWZmZmQ0ZDBkMjRiliwidCI6IjM0ZTkzYmZjLWVjYtNDM0NS1hNGZILTgwNWl2N2U0ODBiMCI6ImMiOjh9>

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 published here: <https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/documents/covid-19-transport-survey/>

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Insights on transport network use

Appendix 2 – Summary of May 2022 rail timetable changes

Appendix 3 – Rail network performance data

Appendix 4 – Metro branded activity measures