

Notes of Informal Consultative Meeting of the Transport Scrutiny Committee (Mayor's Question Time) Meeting held on 20 January 2022 via Zoom

Item 1 – Welcome and apologies

Attendees (15): Councillors Mohsin Hussain, Ruth Wood, Peter Clarke, Peter Caffrey, Amanda Parsons-Hulse, Dot Foster, Donald Firth, Yusra Hussain, Anthony Smith, Robert Finnigan, Paul Wray, Sharon Hamilton, Harry Ellis, David Jones (substitute), Stephen Fenton.

Apologies (1): Councillor Jackie Ferguson.

In attendance: Tracy Brabin (Mayor), Dave Pearson, Helen Ellerton, Khaled Berroum, Hannah Scales

Item 2 – Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None.

Item 3 – Possible exclusion of the press and public

None.

Item 4 – Minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2021

Minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

Item 5 – Chairs comments and update

The Chair updated Members on the recent meetings of Scrutiny Chairs Steering Group where a system for project scrutiny was discussed, including criteria to prioritise projects for scrutiny in future. The Chairs welcomed any ideas or comments.

The Chair also informed Members of the 'Motorbike Live' event she attended in December and discussed how motorbikes could better be considered in future transport strategising and planning as a possible topic of further enquiry for the committee.

Item 6 – Transport network and projects update

The Chair briefly introduced the information report and invited Members to ask any questions. Clarification was sought about emergency timetables and reduced bus services and it was explained that the situation was fast-moving there was a possibility of bus companies reducing services due to the decreased patronage if funding was not secured. Updates would be provided when known.

Item 7 – Transport Scrutiny Work Programme

Members were reminded of the next meeting due to be held on 10 March 2022 and one of the key items being behaviour change, based on the committee's deliberations this year so far.

Item 8 – Mayor's Question Time, Tracy Brabin

The Chair welcomed and thanked the Mayor Tracy Brabin for attending and outlined the format of the Mayor's Question Time. The session would be split into pre-agreed topic areas and members could ask any questions under those topic areas in turn.

The topic areas were:

- Mayoral and Combined Authority transport powers
- Buses
- Mass Transit and connectivity
- Rail
- Active Travel

Following questions and discussion took place:

- **Mayoral and Combined Authority's powers:** Members noted that although the Mayor had some direct powers, relatively she had more soft power than direct. Mayors across the regions work together through the M8 and M10 groups to pool 'soft power' influence and leverage relationships in parliament and government to influence policy and decisions and secure funding. The Mayor also works alongside the 5 local council leaders and considers herself "one of a group of six" part of a collective approach, as expressed in the CA's governance structure. Members discussed which additional transport powers the Mayor might need going forward such as powers around climate change and electric bus fleet management, as well as possible rail and road powers.
- **Buses:** The FlexiBus ("demand led" bus service) pilot in East Leeds was discussed along with the importance of ensuring access to buses for people in all areas of West Yorkshire. The Mayor outlined how the Bus Service Improvement Plan planned to support West Yorkshire's rural communities, although an announcement on funding for the BSIP was still awaited. It was hoped in the meantime that the Enhanced Partnership would give the Combined Authority more insight and opportunity to influence bus companies to provide a reliable and desirable service.

The government and the Combined Authority supported bus companies during the pandemic to keep services running. The government had yet to announce how funding would continue after March and as a result bus companies are planning ahead, with possible reductions in timetabled services due to uncertainty. The Mayor confirmed she had written to bus operators about this.

It was noted that travel behaviours have changed since the pandemic and long-term impact is still being analysed. The pandemic reduced journeys, but patronage had returned back to approximately 80% of pre-pandemic patronage before the Omicron variant. This means that demand is still there initiatives such as free bus Sunday, the £1 boxing day offer and cheaper summer tickets for young people had helped in that.

Inclusivity in the network was noted as being crucial and Members noted the Network Navigation Project, including real time navigation screens on bus stops across West Yorkshire. Printed timetables (removed as a result of Covid-19) were due to be re-installed. Audio-visual information on all buses and of the telephone contact centre available for people who prefer speaking to a real person regarding buses were other changes. Improvements such as investment in 'tap in, tap out' payment systems, the disparity of pricing across the region and extra bus priority lanes mitigating delays caused by traffic were discussed.

The Mayor acknowledged the challenges in having a network focusing on a core city such as Leeds and Members were informed that Leeds specific transport funding awarded by government 5 years ago was the reason for the seemingly large number of Leeds-focused schemes being delivered compared to the other areas. The mass transit and connectivity plans hoped to bridge current gaps in connecting more areas to the network.

- **Mass Transit:** It was noted that Leeds – and by extension WY as an urban area – was the only city in Europe that doesn't have a mass transit system. Funding for a Mass Transit system was contained within the current government's manifesto and the Combined authority was given £200 million to begin work on this, following consultation and public engagement. It is key that the plan is future proof and that each individual locality had the best mode of transport for the area to enable seamless routes. The proposed mass transit system is going to the CA in March for approval. Members noted that the Mayor had written to ministers to emphasise long term nature of the project and the need for funding commitments so that future mayors and local governments could see it through to completion.
- **Rail:** The cancellation of HS2 and HS3, and its impact on the whole region and Bradford in particular, was discussed and the Mayor explained that she had written to ministers expressing disappointment at the decision and work was underway to assess the full impact and identify mitigations. Region-wide rail station accessibility and inclusivity concerns were discussed as proof of the necessity of investment in rail station infrastructure after years of seeming neglect. The Mayor expressed her support for electrification of the Calder Valley line had written to ministers but had not yet received a response.
- **Active Travel:** The importance of active travel was discussed as being vital to meet climate targets, though it was acknowledged that areas with varying topography can be more challenging to adapt for inclusive active travel. Some members detailed their experience with consultations on transport schemes and discussed the need to incentivise earlier and wider public and member participation in consultations in future. Behaviour change was identified as key to any success in this area and some ideas included investment in pavement markers and safer segregated cycle lanes.

Next meeting date – 10 March 2022, venue to be confirmed