

**Report to:** Transport Committee

**Date:** 26 May 2023

**Subject:** **Passenger Experience Update Report**

**Director:** Dave Pearson, Director Transport & Property Services

**Author:** Mick Bunting, Head of Passenger Experience

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 type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

## 1. Purpose of this Report

- 1.1 To provide an update on the performance of the transport network in West Yorkshire, including an update on the Combined Authority's passenger facing activity.

## 2. Information

### Summary Picture

- 2.1 The recovery of travel demand following the pandemic has stabilised with evidence that the recovery on bus and rail continues to build, albeit slowly.
- 2.2 Punctuality and reliability performance remains a concern, and we continue to work with industry to try address these issues where possible.
- 2.3 First Group's contract to operate TransPennine Express (TPE) will end on 28 May. Discussions had been ongoing regarding either a contract extension or new contract. In the event, DfT determined that operation of TPE should instead transfer to the government-owned Operator of Last Resort, alongside Northern and LNER.

## Bus Network

- 2.4 In January 2023 overall weekday bus patronage (which includes all passenger cohorts) steadily increased to 85% of the pre pandemic baseline (March 2020). Since then, patronage has remained stable outside of school holidays and the snow event in early March. At the end of March (before Easter), adult bus patronage was 81% of baseline levels, which compares to 72% for the equivalent week in 2022 (see **Appendix 1**).
- 2.5 Service reliability continues to be impacted by traffic congestion and reduced availability of bus drivers and engineers. This was a cause for concern in 2021/22, however bus operators are advising that staff shortages are easing.

## Rail Network

- 2.6 Northern reports rail patronage at approximately 83% compared to pre-pandemic levels, with higher levels when services are stable. Leisure travel continues to lead the recovery, with some weekends regularly proving busier than pre-pandemic. Mondays have seen the weakest recovery. Commuter levels are remaining reasonably stable now at 55% overall recovery, based on ticket types (though many commuters are using advance purchase tickets). In response, Northern are targeting several marketing initiatives for commuters.
- 2.7 TransPennine Express (TPE) reports demand at around 75% of pre-pandemic levels which is at the same level as reported to the previous meeting of Transport Committee.
- 2.8 LNER indicates demand is at 95% of pre-pandemic levels for the period October to December. The decline from the previous report to this meeting likely represents the impact of engineering works along with several strike days. The Leeds to London services represents the most popular flow. Friday and Sunday are the busiest days of the week with 150% passengers travelling compared to pre-pandemic levels. LNER have submitted proposals to the Department for Transport to run additional services on Sundays.
- 2.9 CrossCountry demand is about 70% of pre-pandemic levels with the leisure market also prevalent; Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays being the busiest days.
- 2.10 Average weekday footfall at Leeds rail station stands at 70% of pre-pandemic levels, reflecting the March rail strike days. Weekend levels remained near baseline levels (95%) around the same time.
- 2.11 Strikes continue to impact demand significantly during the week of the strike but recovering in the week following.

## 2.12 Summary of Network Changes

### Bus Network

- 2.13 Bus services have been sustained throughout the pandemic by a combination of Government and local government funding. In February, Government announced that funding will extend until the end of June 2023. Bus operators had notified their intention to reduce or withdraw some services to make savings commensurate with an anticipated reduction in funding.
- 2.14 As highlighted in Item 8, a recent announcement was made by Department for Transport (DfT) relating to future bus funding. Insufficient information was available at the time of publication to be able to provide an overview of ramifications. A verbal update will be provided to committee members.
- 2.15 Timetable amendments were made in April to Park & Ride services in Leeds which have had a negative impact on service performance in the weekday peaks. An adjusted timetable was introduced on 22 May to address these issues.

### Rail Network

- 2.16 Details of the timetable change on Sunday, 21 May 2023 were reported to Transport Committee on 10 March 2023. An analysis of known changes is included at **Appendix 2**.
- 2.17 An important change reported was the replacement of the Huddersfield – Wakefield – Castleford rail service with an infrequent rail replacement bus service with greatly extended journey times.
- 2.18 On 23 March, the Combined Authority wrote to Rail North Partnership emphasising dismay at this decision, urging them to:
- a. to provide a firm and unequivocal commitment to reintroduce rail services by the proposed operation of a Manchester – Huddersfield – Wakefield – Castleford – York service from the December 2023 timetable change; and
  - b. to take active steps to provide a rail-based solution as soon as possible, in particular before September, in time for the new college and university academic years.

At the time of writing no substantive response has been received.

## Passenger Network Performance

### Bus Network

- 2.19 Bus service performance is measured by reliability, which is the number of service journeys which actually operate, and punctuality, the percentage of

buses operating on time (i.e. no more than 1 minute early or 5 minutes late) at the start of the route and at timing points along the route. The Bus Alliance collates figures on this from the three major bus companies in the region (First, Arriva and Transdev), the latest quarterly figures West Yorkshire wide are:

<b>Month</b>	<b>Reliability</b>	<b>Punctuality (from the first stop)</b>	<b>Punctuality (stops along the way)</b>
January 2023	96.5%	88.6%	79.6%
February 2023	95.7%	89%	79.6%
March 2023	94.9%	88.4%	79.3%

- 2.20 The bus industry target is for 99.5% of registered bus service mileage to be operated (reliability) and 95% of buses to run no more than 1 minute early or 5 minutes late (punctuality). The above results show performance significantly less than the target over the full period. The results are currently aggregated over all operators at all times of the week and the passenger experience at busier times may be worse than this in some places.
- 2.21 Transport Committee members have asked for a more detailed analysis of these results by area. There are a number of data issues to resolve to enable this and it is hoped to offer greater detail in this regard later in 2023.

### Rail Network

- 2.22 Rail strikes continue to affect the rail network with industrial action by the RMT impacting operators on the 16 and 18 March. Planned industrial action with rail operators on 30 March and 1 April was suspended as discussions reopened over pay, job security and working conditions between the RMT and the Rail Delivery Group. However, RMT members voted to renew the mandate for strike action in early May, and a further strike with operators took place on Saturday 13 May, when a substantially reduced timetable operated with no services on several routes.
- 2.23 Network Rail employees voted to accept a pay offer and are no longer part of the industrial action with the RMT over pay. However, modernising maintenance consultations are ongoing. The suspension of Network Rail action has allowed more of the network to be available on strike days and Northern was able to add additional services calling at Hebden Bridge into the timetable operated on strike days, these reportedly performed well.
- 2.24 At the time of writing more strikes have been announced by the ASLEF union on the 12 and 31 May, and 3 June which will impact on all operators. Almost no train services will be operating on these days, although LNER operated a basic service on 12 May. ASLEF withdrew non-contractual overtime from 15 May to 20 May, and current indications are that it will do so again on 31 May and 1 June. In combination with the action by RMT members on 13 May, the impacts are significant, impacting on several key events across the country.

- 2.25 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.
- 2.26 Since the last update to Transport Committee, punctuality has improved for Northern and TPE and both operators have seen a decrease in cancellations against a peak in Period 10 (December). Time to 3 (Percentage trains calling at station stops within 3 minutes of the planned time) for the most recent four-week period 13 (March) sits at 82.87% for Northern and 70.67% for TPE. This is a notable increase for Northern over the last 6 periods with an increase of 12% from period 8.
- 2.27 Cancellations saw Northern at 4.17% (3.5% in the East region) and TPE at 5.81%. These figures exclude cancellations announced by the evening before ('P-coded'), which TPE continues to make extensive use of, as set out below.
- 2.28 Train crew availability remains a challenge. Although significantly improved, some COVID-19-related training backlogs are still being cleared, staff absence (higher than average sickness levels for TPE especially) and action short of a strike impacting rest day working agreements are all contributing to the high levels of cancellations and poor performance. Strike action has also impacted the rate at which training can be delivered.
- 2.29 TPE's performance has continued to suffer acutely from these issues, compounded by higher than anticipated levels of drivers leaving the business and increased training demands related to network enhancement programmes - principally related to TransPennine Route Upgrade diversions and new routes related to Manchester Task Force.
- 2.30 TPE cancellations continue to have a severe impact in West Yorkshire. Many of these are at short notice, made on the day or the evening before. The latter (known as 'P-coded' or planned cancellations if notified before 22:00 on the evening before) are currently not counted in official cancellation statistics. The ORR is now reporting p-coding for all operators, monthly on their website to help introduce more transparency.
- 2.31 On TPE, for the most recent period 13 (March), 17% (1,023) of services were cancelled (approximately 11% were P-coded and 6% were same day cancellations). On Saturdays in the same period 19% of services were cancelled (approximately 13% were P-coded and 6% were same day cancellations). Since the previous report to Transport Committee there has been a reduction in total cancellations (including p-coding) from 31.6% to 18%. This is a percentage change of -43.4%. The improving trajectory is welcome, but cancellations are still a long way from where they need to be.
- 2.32 As detailed at Transport Committee in March, a Recovery Plan was submitted to Rail North Partnership by TPE in early February 2023. The plan continues to be monitored closely by the Rail North Partnership. The target set within the recovery plan is aligned at driver recruitment, the driver trainee progress and

monitoring the sickness position. The latest update from TPE reports that the recovery plan is on target.

- 2.33 Over the recent period, northern Mayors have continued to engage with the Secretary of State for Transport to secure improved performance at TransPennine Express.
- 2.34 On 11 May 2023, the Secretary of State for Transport confirmed that First Group's contract to operate TPE would not be extended or renewed. The government-owned Operator of Last Resort (OLR) will take over when the current contract ends on 28 May. The Mayor strongly welcomed the news as a fresh start for the operator, and the right outcome after over a year when commuters have experienced exceptionally poor performance.
- 2.35 It is hoped that transfer of ownership will mark a reset in relationships with staff and set the scene for a more constructive set of discussions with trade unions. This would assist in enabling a faster recovery of performance. Nonetheless change will take time, and it will be important to maintain pressure and secure accountability for the delivery of the Recovery Plan.
- 2.36 TPE will join Northern and LNER as operators that are owned by OLR. In making the announcement regarding TPE, the Secretary of State confirmed that he has requested the Department of Transport to review services in the north to improve efficiency and find better ways to deliver for passengers with engagement from northern Mayors. This is a welcome initiative in principle, although concern remains over the potential impact of service reductions in the context of cost savings.
- 2.37 Horbury Junction suffered a broken rail on 28 December, affecting services from Leeds, Castleford, and Wakefield to Barnsley, Sheffield, Nottingham and Lincoln. A temporary fix was implemented in January with a permanent fix planned for the end of May. A broken rail impacting performance at Whitehall Junction on the west side of Leeds station has also now been fixed.
- 2.38 There has unfortunately been an increase in cable theft and vulnerable people on the railway which has impacted performance. Network Rail has ordered additional remote covert and overt cameras for use in hotspots. Trials of new equipment are being carried out which will detect when a cable has been pulled with location reports. Extra patrols are also being introduced by British Transport Police address antisocial behaviour. Hotspot action plans have also been developed for high-risk areas for trespass/vandalism, including Leeds Station.
- 2.39 During the recent Stalybridge Blockade which formed part of the Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU) works, Northern took steps to protect services on the Calder Valley line (which acted a key diversionary route), which resulted in a small number of other services being cancelled. Passenger loadings were high on the route due to poor delivery of TPE services with a knock-on effect onto Northern services. A feedback exercise is being undertaken by Network Rail with signalling and control teams to identify learnings from the Stalybridge

blockade, contingency arrangements and inform the planning of future blockades.

- 2.40 At the time of writing no issues have been raised with the delivery of the plan, including service recovery post-incident but there are 'settling' speeds imposed on train operators following work for TRU which are essential but introduce some delays for a for a week or so afterwards. Some issues with replacement buses and passenger information were fed back and picked up at the time of the blockade. Train operators were pleased with how industry partners worked together.
- 2.41 Upcoming TRU line closures in May and June are listed online here: <https://thetrupgrade.co.uk/upcomingclosures/> . With one exception, these are weekend-only closures. Further work from 19-24 June will take place at Morley, with alternative travel arrangements outlined on the above web page.
- 2.42 Work is planned by Network Rail in June to reduce the risk of flooding from third party land (outside of railway ownership) onto the railway. The objective is a reduction in delay minutes caused by flooding specifically between Leeds and Harrogate, and Halifax and Bradford. Preparation has also started on summer heat related issues.

## **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 surveys 2,000 people nationally representative of the population of Great Britain every other weekend, who are screened to create separate survey reports for bus and rail use. These explore the journey purpose and satisfaction of those who used buses outside London or made a rail journey excluding London Underground in the last seven days, with weightings applied to the varying base numbers to make the results nationally representative. Reports are now published monthly, and links are provided in **Background Documents**.
- 2.44 The latest insights from surveys published on the 21 April 2023 were:
- 88% of bus passengers were satisfied with their journey overall, compared to 86% in the previous report.
  - 86% of rail passengers were satisfied with their journey overall, the same level as the previous report. For both bus and rail, satisfaction broadly increases with age, with a dip in the 35-54 cohort.
  - For bus, satisfaction with both value for money and punctuality was 73%, a slight decline on 74% in the prior report. Journey time satisfaction fell slightly to 84% from 85%, satisfaction with crowding remained at 87% and bus frequency fell slightly to 66% from 67%.
  - For rail, satisfaction with value for money rose to 57% from 55% compared to the last report, while punctuality satisfaction stayed at

80%. Journey time satisfaction fell slightly to 83% from 84%, while satisfaction with the level of crowding and train frequency rose slightly from 70% to 71%.

- Compared to rail passengers, bus passengers reported higher levels of satisfaction with value for money (73% for bus vs 57% for rail), and levels of crowding (87% for bus vs 71% for rail). Rail reported higher levels of satisfaction with punctuality (80% for rail vs 73% for bus) and frequency of service (71% for rail vs 66% for bus).

## **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 Although use of services continues to be impacted the reduction in travel associated with the pandemic, the data indicates demand for travel information is increasing. Calls made into Metroline on weekdays in March 2023 were 91% of the equivalent week in 2019 (pre-pandemic), up from 74% in March 2022. Page views for the Metro website in early May 2023 were 69% of pre-pandemic levels (i.e., the equivalent week in 2019), and Metro page view numbers in every week in 2023 were higher than in 2022 so far.
- 2.47 The new Halifax Bus Station is progressing well and is expected to open later this year. Resurfacing and waterproofing works continue at Bradford Interchange.

## **3. Tackling the Climate Emergency Implications**

- 3.1 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 As reported on an accompanying report, inflationary pressures arising from fuel and wage cost growth are impacting on the Combined Authority and bus operators.

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

Bus service changes in December, January and February 2023 are summarised and published on the Metro website. The summary documents can be accessed via this link: <https://www.wymetro.com/plan-a-journey/travel-news/service-changes/>

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=eyJrljoiNTA5ZjlzZWQtNDdiOS00ZGNiLTlINmQtNWZmZmQ0ZDBkMjRiliwidCI6IjM0ZTkzYmZjLWVlbnJYtNDM0NS1hNGZILTgwNWl2N2U0ODBjMCIslmMiOjh9>

Transport Focus continues to publish regular satisfaction surveys of public transport users. These can be accessed via these links:

[Bus User Survey - Transport Focus](#)

[Rail User Survey - Transport Focus](#)

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