

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TRANSPORT &
INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON FRIDAY 29
SEPTEMBER 2023 IN CONFERENCE ROOMS 1/2, WELLINGTON
HOUSE, 40-50 WELLINGTON STREET, LEEDS, LS1 2DE**

Present:

Cllr Joanne Dodds	Bradford Council
Cllr Anna Watson	Bradford Council
Cllr Joe Atkinson	Calderdale Council
Cllr Amanda Parsons-Hulse (Chair)	Calderdale Council
Cllr Dot Foster	Calderdale Council
Cllr Harry McCarthy	Kirklees Council
Cllr Andrew Pinnock	Kirklees Council
Cllr Oliver Newton	Leeds City Council
Cllr Kayleigh Brooks	Leeds City Council
Cllr Izaak Wilson	Leeds City Council
Cllr Dave Merrett	York City Council

In attendance:

Hannah Scales	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Khaled Berroum	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Mick Bunting	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Simon Warburton	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sabiya Khan, Charlie Keith, Mark Thompson, and Tony Hames.

The meeting was quorate, with 11 members present out of 11 needed for quorum.

2. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

Cllr Dave Merrett declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of the Northern Transport Activists Roundtable, York Bus Forum & as a concessionary bus pass user.

3. Possible exclusion of the press and public

There were no items requiring the exclusion of the press and public.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2023

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2023 be approved subject to the addition of Cllr Harry McCarthy to the attendance list, as he was present.

5. Chair's comments and update

The Chair welcomed new and returning members to the Committee and:

- Provided a reminder about the challenges with quoracy and the need to keep scrutiny officers informed of attendance so substitutes could be arranged in good time.
- Emphasised the importance of keeping discussions at a strategic and regionally focused level, rather than too focused at ward/local council level, which is more typical in local scrutiny.
- Update the committee that she met with the Mayor, Chief Executive, Directors, and the Chair of Transport Committee to inform them of the committee's work programme and discuss the live issues in the transport sector.

The Chair also thanked the Scrutiny Support Officer Hannah Scales for her support throughout the years and wished well in her new role, as this would be her last meeting.

Resolved: That the Chair's verbal update be noted.

6. Scrutiny and Governance Arrangements

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer presented a report providing an overview of the governance and scrutiny arrangements established by the Combined Authority at its annual meeting.

It was noted that the Mayor's Question Time was now scheduled to take place on 1 December 2023 instead of the usual January time due to diary constraints.

Resolved: That the scrutiny and governance arrangements are noted.

7. Transport & Infrastructure Scrutiny Work Programme

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer presented a report providing an overview of the work programme agreed by members over the summer period, following the work planning session held in July.

The Committee agreed:

- To establish a working group to investigate the Flexi Bus scheme, focusing on an overview of the scheme itself and its goals, its performance and why it was cancelled, and determine who made the decision to cancel the scheme – before reporting back to a future

meeting as appropriate. The following members volunteered to participate:

- Cllr Amanda Parsons-Hulse
- Cllr Andrew Pinnock
- Cllr Dot Foster
- Cllr Anna Watson
- Cllr Dave Merrett

- That once the Bus Franchising and Mass Transit schemes had progressed to delivery stage, the Committee should set up two permanent working groups to shadow and scrutinise the projects – possibly in 2024.
- The Mayor’s Housing Pledge is best covered during the Mayors Question Time session with her on 1 December, and that the sustainability and carbon footprint of housebuilding be added to the discussion.

Resolved:

- i) That the work programme be adopted as amended.
- ii) That a Flexi Bus working group be established to:
 1. be provided with an overview of the scheme and its goals.
 2. assess its performance and the reason for its cancellation.
 3. determine who made the decision to cancel the scheme and why it was not a Member or key decision.

8. Bus Reform & Improvement

The Executive Director for Transport provided a report summarising the latest passenger experience and transport network data and the latest performance update of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) – in addition to a verbal update on the Combined Authority’s decision to begin the process of formally pursuing Bus Franchising (taken the previous day) and the next steps.

In terms of **Bus Franchising:**

- The Combined Authority agreed on 28 September to begin the statutory process for bus franchising, following an independent evaluation by Grant Thornton.
- The consultation will begin on 10 October 2023 and all the documentation, including the independent evaluation, will be published for the public and members to see.
- The consultation will run until 7 January 2024 and assessed by an external agency independently and a report will be submitted to the March meeting of the Combined Authority for final approval.
- If approved in March 2024, the timeline for the implementation of franchising long term is planned to take place in three rounds over several years, focusing on different locations and maximising resource use.
- The first round of contracts will be let in Q2 of 2026 to start delivery in 2027. The second round of contracts will be in Q1 2027 to begin by

the end of 2027. The third round of contracts will be at the end of 2027 to be operation by Summer 2028.

- Some issues are still outstanding, such as management and ownership of bus depots – currently in private hands.
- It is a lengthy process involving significant public contracts and funds, and complicated legalities and planning, with numerous stages of preparation and engagement.
- It is vital that members, and the public, are briefed regularly and kept in the loop as the process develops and additional deeper briefings are planned.

The Committee discussed the long-term plans to transition to a bus franchising model and the short-term plans to improve bus services in the interim while that is pursued.

The main points of discussion were:

- **Passenger feedback and complaints:** Discussions around the Passenger Charter revealed that most passengers don't know they can complain or how to complain, therefore data around confidence in the system is incomplete without better advertising for the ways passengers can feedback. Roadside displays (RSDs), and tickets, are considered a key place that complaint information can be advertised widely to ensure that people's views are taken on board – including complaint information to passenger charities in addition to Metroline, a WYCA-managed customer service line which logs all complaints, even those forwarded to other operators.
- **Roadside displays (RSDs):** Due to how RSDs work and are affected by weather, only one document can be displayed at once so all information including bus times and complaints etc must fit on one sheet. Despite a directive issued by the Transport Committee to maintain RSDs after they were deprioritised during COVID, work to update RSDs has been delayed due to a number of factors, including: the volume of requests (over 74,000 across the region) and issues at the printing facilities and distribution. Limit of 6 times a year that bus operators can change timetables, so that they can be reflected in RSDs and limit the number of changes needed.
- **Paper tickets and printed content:** Paper tickets – and other printed content – are still a commitment for the foreseeable future, as many people still rely on them, but long-term next generation digital solutions are also being developed alongside them for the future.
- **Transport funding complications:** Transport funding at WYCA is relatively complicated as it comes from multiple sources and pots, which each have their own stipulations and review arrangements, and which cannot be transferred or redeployed across transport projects and services when certain areas struggle more than other areas. Moving to a deeper devolution model, as planned by the central government, which includes more flexible and devolved single-pot

funding arrangements would support a more flexible and autonomous approach to budget management.

- **Mayors Fares:** One example is the Mayors Fares programme, a flagship mayoral ambition, which was allocated £33m and is reported to be spending that money ahead of schedule due to various factors such as cost inflation for the scheme itself and pressures on bus companies who are seeking to renegotiate going forward – as permitted in the original contract. A report will be submitted to the Combined Authority soon to update them on the latest financial position of Mayors Fares, which the Committee also requested to see when complete.
- **BSIP and protected bus services:** The most common feedback during consultation is that BSIP money should be used to protect at-risk services and cover lost routes. BSIP money has been used to protect 56 services; 30 were full services that would otherwise have been withdrawn and 26 were contract uplifts which covered the parts the less profitable elements of otherwise profitable services, e.g. mid-day or late/early services. Members reported that they were unaware of these protected services and suggested it be communicated and marketed to residents more clearly and widely, as a success, and officers offered to provide a breakdown of the protected services for any interested Member. In addition, it was reported that the committee could see a further breakdown of some of the BSIP funding.
- **Bus services/route issues and feedback:** Members reported that their constituents have reported a “gradual chipping away” of services, particularly the earlier and later services and mid-day frequency. The services and timetables seem to fit less and less with people’s habits and needs and people feel ignored by the bus operators during consultations – especially on Park and Ride schemes which are reducing services, operating times, and increasing ticket prices, which in one case led to the existence of an incentive ticket for a service that doesn’t exist (past 8pm). This has a higher impact on shift workers, such as NHS staff, who work irregular hours. WYCA does engage in regular discussion and consultation with the operators to fix timetable issues as described, but officers can only raise issues they are aware of and encourage Members and constituents to let officers know of issues so they can be factored into their thinking and solutions. A review is currently ongoing regarding school bus services.
- **Bus punctuality and other KPIs/targets:** Punctuality is less than 80%, less than in April when last reported, and doesn’t seem to be improving at any rate according to most recent data. Reliability is integral to improving bus patronage, which is a major ambition in the transport strategy and BSIP – with one goal being 11m journeys, from the current 4.5m. It was made clear that the ambition bus patronage number was a target and not a prediction, and that it was the

Authority shouldn't shy away from higher targets which are based on what the region needs in terms of modal shift. Although it was admitted that some of the targets marked as 90% (information and personal safety satisfaction) should be 100% under the same principle. These ambitious targets are now being worked on through new powers around franchising and major projects such as Mass Transit, designed to give West Yorkshire residents 'London-style' options – in addition to leveraging other devolved powers in policing and refurbishment funds to ensure that bus stations are more welcoming and safer. Modelling and data analysis is a major component of the bus franchising and mass transit work going forward as service and route design is dependent on information. The Committee also requested to see the 2023 KPI figures in future.

- **Travel Plan Network:** There are plans to revive the Travel Plan Network approach to engaging with employers to encourage public transport use, recognising that employers have a major impact on transport use in what they demand of their employees, such as hours worked, locations worked, home working, with as much as 1 in 5 journeys being to/from work. It was reported by Members that the Head of Net Zero at Yorkshire and Humber NHS is pursuing integrating bus information in their internal network to encourage staff to use them, which was welcomed by officers as a lead to follow up on, as the NHS is one of the region's biggest employers with Leeds General Infirmary alone employing over 28,000 people.
- **Real Time Information system (RTI):** An update was requested on the RTI system updates scrutinised by the Committee last year. It was confirmed that funding has been made available to pursue a 'deep dive' review of the system, with the help of focus groups of technical and bus operator partners, to iron out some of the issues previously seen. The system is only as good as the data and information going into it – the greater the data, the more accurate the information to eliminate 'ghost buses' and other issues, and the more easier it is for planners to plan timetable changes.
- **Connectivity and modes:** Buses are often only one mode in a longer journey made up of different modes, such as walking, rail or driving to park, and sometimes a journey involves two different bus companies' services which are not coordinated. Currently two private companies cannot be compelled to cooperate, but under franchising plans the Combined Authority will be able to set routes and design them with other modes in mind. For Bus Franchising and Mass Transit infrastructure, the goal is to have an interconnected transport network that takes all modes into account, including relatively new/future ones such as e-bikes (known as 'micro-mobility'). One related suggestion in the meantime was that WYCA should liaise with York Council, which has a metro centre and information catered to visitors with no knowledge of the local transport network and options, such as rental bikes, buses, and other options.

- **Decarbonisation goals:** Transport is a major carbon emitter and decarbonisation is a major lever in achieving zero carbon goals, with the latest data suggesting authorities are not on track to achieve any of the carbon pathways previously presented, with some past data presented to the committee last year even suggesting that for many transport schemes carbon emissions went up instead of down. Members want to be assured that the data and targets are correct, and authorities do not spend precious time and resources possibly going in the wrong direction by pursuing policies and projects that are not making an impact. It was confirmed that officers are still awaiting the publication of a toolkit for carbon measurement/analysis by the government which will be used across the whole country and all schemes to monitor and map out carbon reduction – it is still expected ahead of the planned Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) refresh.

Resolved: That the report be noted, and the Committee's comments and feedback be taken on board.