West Yorkshire Combined Authority | Tracy Brabin Mayor of West Yorkshire

Report to:	Transport Committee
Date:	29 January 2024
Subject:	**Passenger Experience Update – Bus and Rail**
Director:	Dave Haskins – Interim Director, Passenger Experience & Assets
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Is this a key decision?	☐ Yes ☒ No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	☐ Yes ☒ No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information or appendices?	☐ Yes ☒ No
If relevant, state paragraph number of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, Part 1:	
Are there implications for equality and diversity?	☐ Yes ☒ No

1. Purpose of this Report

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

1.2 The report contains an overview of the following:

- Bus passenger trends
- Bus network service changes – recent and proposed
- Bus network performance/reliability
- Bus Real Time Information
- Bus: fares and pricing changes
- Bradford Interchange closure
- Passenger Satisfaction and attitudes
- Rail network passenger trends
- Rail network service changes – recent and proposed
- Rail network performance/reliability
- Passenger network enhancements

2. Information

Bus Network

Passenger Trends

2.1 Weekday bus use in December was higher than last year, at 87% of baseline (March 2020). This compares to 82% at the same point in the previous year. While use of under 26 / student tickets reduced from 74% to 71% of baseline compared to last year, all other passenger cohorts saw increased usage.

2.2 Including weekend data reveals overall bus use at 89% of baseline compared to 82% last year, with some recent weeks reaching 92% of baseline.

2.3 Passenger journeys at all three park and ride sites in November 2023 was 81% of the equivalent month in 2019. This includes the impact of Stourton Park and Ride opening.

2.4 In November 2023, weekday MetroLine call centre volumes were 87% of the equivalent month in 2019. Metro travel centre sales volumes in November 2023 were 4.6% lower than November 2022, however the number of enquiries was 13.8% higher.

2.5 Wider information relating to insights on transport network use and Metro-branded activity is presented in **Appendix 1**.

Service Changes

2.6 Bus operators have introduced a number of service changes across all districts in October and December which aimed to improve service punctuality and reliability.

2.7 Service 9, which links White Rose with Pudsey and Horsforth, was deregistered by Yorkshire Buses in December, and the Combined Authority have stepped in to retain a service. This is now operated by Squarepeg Buses under contract to the Combined Authority.

2.8 In Bradford, First has introduced additional resource to try to maintain service reliability which has been severely impacted by road works in the city centre. Alongside this, an emergency operating plan was introduced following the closure of Bradford Interchange on 5th January. A further update on this is provided below.

2.9 For full details of all bus service changes, please visit [Service changes | Metro (wymetro.com).]

Network Performance / Reliability

2.10 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.

2.11 The Bus Alliance collates figures on this from the three major bus companies in the region (First, Arriva and Transdev), the latest available quarterly figures West Yorkshire wide are:

Month	**Reliability (%)**	**Punctuality (%)** *(from the first stop)*	**Punctuality (%)** *(stops along the way)*
July 2023	97.72	90.86	82.52
August 2023	97.64	91.41	84.34
September 2023	96.50	88.60	79.43

2.12 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.

Real Time Information

2.13 Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) is provided on digital displays at approximately 2,500 bus stops and bus station stands across West Yorkshire. Generally, this provides a good reflection of service timetables combined with predicted arrival times based on live vehicle tracking.

2.14 However, where a bus journey that is not running is nevertheless reported as running by an RTPI system, it can be considered a ‘ghost bus’. The customer sees an impending bus arrival on the bus stop display or online, but the bus does not arrive, and the predicted bus arrival disappears from the screen. The customer then either continues to wait for a bus or makes alternative travel arrangements. As this is a bad outcome for all involved, work with bus operators is ongoing to improve the systems and practices to reduce the number of ghost buses occurring.

2.15 With the currently available data sources and IT systems in the UK, and despite the Combined Authority having a leading RTPI system, it is not possible to identify the bus journeys that have been cancelled before or after the journey has started. This makes it difficult to understand the full scale of the problem or attribute particular causes. However, we are aware that the primary cause of ghost buses is where bus operators have not recorded in a timely manner which buses have been cancelled, using a back-office system linked to the Combined Authority’s RTPI system. Although the recorded cancellation rate has gone up, it is not as high as it needs to be.

2.16 To address these challenges, commencing in January 2023, the Combined Authority convened a Ghost Bus Working Group with operator representation from Arriva, First and Transdev. The Working Group’s fourth meeting took place in November 2023 and the group will continue to meet as required. One recent positive outcome is that a systems issue was identified, investigated and resolved by the group, enabling bus cancellation data to be fed through to the Combined Authority more consistently. Another improvement is that the three large operators' electronic ticket machines on buses are being upgraded to 4G, which should improve vehicle tracking particularly in rural areas.

2.17 From 1 January 2024, bus occupancy data will no longer be reported on real time displays. Introduced in November 2020, occupancy data was a very useful feature for customers to have during the height of the Covid pandemic. The customer could see 'low', 'medium' or 'high' occupancy on the display and use that information to decide which bus to take. This was very successfully implemented and achieved, facilitating social distancing and inhibiting the spread of the virus. It was implemented across approximately 2,500 bus stops with real time displays, out of approximately 13,000 total bus stops in West Yorkshire. Three years later, the West Yorkshire Bus Alliance decided that the purpose had been achieved and was no longer relevant within the current bus environment. However, the feature can easily be turned back on if and when a public health situation warrants doing so.

Bus: Fares and Pricing Updates

2.18 The Mayor's Fares £2 fare cap remains in place. A number of wider MCard Price Changes have been approved by the West Yorkshire Ticketing Company Board meeting (17 January 2024) which will commence 3 March 2024 in line with the date for rail price increases.

2.19 U19 Fares have been frozen since the implementation of the Young Person's fare deal in 2021, the increase has been brought in across all U19 Products.

2.20 19-25 tickets have been increased and are now 80% of the cost of Adult Tickets.

2.21 The Adult WY DaySaver has been increased to £5 as part of the changes and helps with the longevity of funding for Mayor's Fares. Discounts have been reintroduced on Carnet DaySavers, along with modest increases on the Week and Month Tickets and a reduction in the Annual Countywide Bus.

2.22 Bus and rail products have been increased in line with the guidance from the Department for Transport (4.9%). There is a longer-term view to review these products and their suitability for the target market.

2.23 For the past ten years, Payzone, a network of nearly 400 outlets across West Yorkshire based in corner shops and similar retail establishments, has served as a retail channel for MCard products. Due to rising administrative costs (tripling of the previous fee levels) and declining sales (approx. 95% decline since 2017-18), the West Yorkshire Ticketing Company Limited (WYTCL) decided to end its contract with Payzone for the retailing of MCard products on 31 December 2023. This was subject to an Equality Impact Assessment. Just 3.1% of MCard off-bus sales in 2022-23 were via Payzone (equating to 58,190 transactions), and this halved again by November 2023. As 88% of Payzone sales in the last two financial years have been for Under 19 products, WYTCL initiated a mitigation of offering MyWeek sales on bus. This was implemented across operators on 3 September 2023.

2.24 The WYTCL Board also decided (15 November 2023) to end sales of the Weekender ticket after 31 December 2023, due to very low sales and low customer value. The Weekender was priced at £8.50 and is valid from Friday evenings at 6 pm through Sunday. With the DaySaver priced at £4.50, the Weekender only really held much value for those travelling on all three days and crucially who knew for certain in advance that they would be doing so. (Two DaySavers at a total of £9.00 was just 50p more expensive than a Weekender.)

Bradford Interchange – Temporary Closure of Bus Station

2.25 On Friday 5 January 2024 the Combined Authority took the precautionary measure to close Bradford Interchange Bus Station to safeguard public safety, following a degree of concrete fall into the basement of the facility. At the time of report publication, this remains the case. The Chair of the Committee has requested the Executive Director of Transport to bring an urgent item to the meeting, which will provide the most up-to-date information on the position at the time of the meeting.

2.26 As the organisation responsible for the management and maintenance of the bus station, WYCA chief officers took the decision to close Bradford Interchange bus station last week after some damage was discovered. We have taken this precautionary measure because public safety is our top priority. Contractors have begun work onsite to establish the extent of the damage and what remedial works are required before it can be safely reopened. It is anticipated that these surveys could take several weeks to complete and the bus station will remain closed throughout this period. A temporary bus station solution has been established to limit disruption for passengers, operators and the city centre during this time. These arrangements will develop to ensure that current highways work in the city centre can progress, traffic congestion minimised and all preparations can continue for the 2025 City of Culture programme. Bradford Council is supporting us with this to help minimise disruption to transformation work that is happening in the city centre.

2.27 Train services remain unaffected by the closure of the bus station.

Passenger Satisfaction and Attitudes

Transport Focus Rail User Survey

2.28 The Rail User Survey asks around 250 representative passengers in Great Britain, every other weekend, about experiences of rail travel and how satisfied they were with their most recent train journey. The most recent survey results[1] cover up to 17th December 2023 and show that nationally:

- 17% had used rail in the last seven days, with demographics showing younger people and males being the most common users. London had much higher recent rail usage than the rest of England.

- The top three purposes for rail journeys were commuting (33%), leisure (28%) and friends/family (22%). The proportion of commuting journeys has increased over recent months though remains below a peak of 41% in October 2023.

- 82% were satisfied with their rail journey, down from a peak of 90% in October 2023. Analysis of key satisfaction drivers consider that punctuality/reliability, crowding, frequency and station satisfaction performance may be driving this trend.

- Demographics show leisure users, women and older travellers had greater levels of satisfaction. The gap between leisure and commuter satisfaction widened throughout 2023.

Department for Transport: Transport Statistics Great Britain (TSGB)

2.29 In December 2023 TSGB published their national 2022 update[2] as follows for domestic travel:

- people travelled a total of 740 billion passenger kilometres, 15% higher than 2021

- 86% of all passenger kilometres travelled used cars, vans and taxis

- the average person, in England, completed 862 trips across both private and public modes of transport, 14% higher than 2021 levels, of which the majority of trips in England were completed using private modes of transport. Buses were the most commonly used public transport mode in both England and Great Britain

- the most common reason for travel was leisure

- the average commuting time in England was 28 minutes, similar to 2021 levels; which ranged from 15 minutes for walking to 63 minutes by rail.

2.30 In summary, public transport is used for a minority of all distance travelled. Most journeys are for reasons unrelated to employment.

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[1] Rail User Survey – edition 22 - Transport Focus

[2] Transport Statistics Great Britain: 2022 Summary - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Department for Transport: Cycling Traffic Index, England

2.31 In the year ending September 2023 (published December 2023[3]), the latest provisional data shows that:

- cycling traffic levels have decreased by 5.0% since the previous year. In contrast, provisional road traffic estimates have shown that motor traffic levels have increased by 2.3% over the same period

- cycling traffic levels have increased by 15.1% since December 2013

- cycling traffic peaked in March 2021 during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, up 62.7% against December 2013

- cycling traffic levels have been decreasing since the March 2021 peak, falling by 29.3% by September 2023 but remaining 2.2% above pre-pandemic levels (September 2019). In comparison, motor traffic levels have decreased by 2.7% between September 2019 and September 2023.

Department for Transport: National Bus Strategy: Capacity and Capability

2.32 The DfT recently published a research paper[4] exploring the Capacity and Capability factors affecting local authority delivery of bus services. The report found dwindling internal qualified resource and complex stakeholder relationships could impact the successful delivery of bus services.

Rail Network

Passenger Trends

2.33 In previous reports we have reported rail patronage against pre-pandemic levels. Northern and TransPennine Express (but not LNER) have altered the way they are monitoring demand as travel patterns begin to settle to a new 'normal'. The changes in demand are now compared to the same period the year before and for the purpose of this report have been averaged to provide an estimated figure to remove peaks and troughs due to potential incidents in the week/month of reporting.

2.34 Northern reports rail patronage at approximately 108% compared to November last year. Leisure remains an important market but has evened out more in the winter months. Commuting levels remain reasonably stable, and this is a market Northern are targeting with several marketing initiatives.

2.35 TransPennine Express (TPE) reports demand at around 133% compared to November last year, although it is worth noting that cancellations in the same

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[3] Cycling traffic index, England - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
[4] Bus services: local transport authority capacity and capability - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

period last year were exceptionally high, and it is believed that, accordingly, demand at this time last year was very low.

2.36 LNER indicates demand is currently at 110% of pre-pandemic levels. This is an increase from the previous report to this meeting. The Leeds to London services continues to represent the most popular flow. In addition, they have confirmed that in the quarter July – September the increase in demand has been almost 5% year on year.

2.37 Average weekday footfall at Leeds railway station reached 79% of pre-pandemic levels in the week before Christmas (w/c 18 December). The following week saw railway station footfall fall back to 62% due to the festive period. Average weekend footfall at Leeds railway station was at 70% during the weekend immediately before Christmas (23 - 24 December).

2.38 Strikes continue to impact demand significantly during the week of the strike but recovering in the week following.

2.39 The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) has recently published figures for rail usage for the July – September 2023 quarter. These show, nationally, a 14% year-on-year increase – though this has been somewhat skewed by the success of the Crossrail (Elizabeth Line) full opening in London. Revenue has also gone up (in real terms) by 10% nationally.

2.40 Within this, TPE saw strong ridership growth (15% year-on-year) over this quarter – again likely reflecting better service delivery, with Northern's growth much slower (but from a higher base as compared to pre-Covid travel). As TPE services recovered, the number of train-km actually run increased by over a third during the relevant quarter. CrossCountry and Grand Central have also made good progress. While there has been some growth in use of season tickets, unsurprisingly this remains far below pre-Covid levels as people are less likely to commute every day. Average journey lengths on Northern (and to an extent TransPennine) have become longer as travellers switch to leisure travel from short commutes – this is generally good for revenue.

Rail Network Service Changes

2.41 The new winter rail timetable commenced on 10 December 2023. At the time of writing, it is too early to comment on any issues that have arisen, including in terms of concerns raised previously regarding Northern (NT) and TransPennine Express (TPE). However, since the previous report we have had clarification from Northern Trains that the shorter trains (3 cars rather than 4) on the Leeds – Bradford north-west electric network will be concentrated on the Bradford services, where this capacity is likely to be sufficient, rather than Leeds trains which require 4 cars. Against that, however, concerns remain regarding potential crowding on the Leeds – Doncaster trains, which have also become 3 cars rather than 4, and we will continue to press NT to monitor train loadings and crowding. Notably, on the Bradford – Skipton / Ilkley services, we are continuing to work to obtain Rail North Partnership approval for daytime services to return to twice-hourly, hopefully from December 2024, rather than the current hourly level outside the peaks.

2.42 It is also too early to judge the extent of any issues caused by TPE's reduced timetable, introduced on 10 December 2023, and their decision to withdraw the Nova 3 trains. Again, we shall seek as much data as possible on train loadings, crowding, and as to whether cancellation rates and punctuality improve under the new timetable, whose express purpose is to stabilise service delivery, increasing passenger confidence, and so enable passenger usage to recover.

Rail Network Performance / Reliability

2.43 The performance reports for Northern and TransPennine Express (TPE) are included in **Appendix 2,** which includes a description of the different performance measures mentioned below.

2.44 Since the last update to Transport Committee, punctuality has seen a significant decline for Northern and TPE. In terms of cancellations, Northern's have continued to increase, TPEs have increased but not to the really high levels which they were experiencing early in the year. Time to 3 (Percentage trains calling at station stops within 3 minutes of the planned time) for the most recent four-week period 8 (Oct/Nov) sits at 72.27% for Northern and 60.73% for TPE.

2.45 Cancellations saw Northern at 7.63% (9.47% in the East region) and TPE at 6.72%. These figures exclude cancellations announced by the evening before ('P-coded'), which TPE continues to make use of. More detail of those is detailed below.

2.46 On TPE, for the most recent period 8 (Oct/Nov), 6.7% (510) of services were cancelled (approximately 5.0% were P-coded and 1.7% were same day cancellations). On Saturdays in the same period 10% of services were cancelled (approximately 2% were P-coded and 8% were same day cancellations). Since the previous report to Transport Committee there has been an increase in total cancellations (including P-coding) from 4.1% to 6.7%. This is a percentage change of +2.6%. Whilst there was full availability of rest-day working in the period, weather and Network Rail attributable incidents impacted significantly on TransPennine's performance. Cancellations are also still being significantly impacted by ASLEF Action Short of a Strike days, where overtime is banned. Period 7 saw total cancellations including P-codes at 11.5%, which coincided with strike days.

2.47 The rest day working agreement has enabled TPE to reduce its backlog of driver training and route and traction knowledge has increased. This is positive but there are a high number of drivers expected to leave in the next year hence the need for reduced services in the December timetable. The current rest day working agreement expires in March, it may be necessary to extend the agreement, but the aim is for TransPennine to be able to deliver services without being dependent on this agreement.

2.48 Northern has also made use of a rest day working agreement. When this was introduced on 20 November 2023, p-coding reduced significantly, but due to increased resource challenges Northern have flagged that they may need to start introducing more p-coding in the East Region to try and provide passengers more advance warning when they need to cancel services (as opposed to cancelling on the day). We will continue to monitor this impact.

2.49 Network Rail attributable incidents contributed to a significant number of delays to operator performance during the period. These included a number of weather-related incidents, such as, flooding and a landslip near Dewsbury Station on the 8 November 2023 which continued to impact services over a period of two days. Trespass and vandalism continue to impact services including several incidents of cable left. Network Rail has outlined that there is a continued focus on the prevention and management of all types of trespass, with a combination of community work (schools, mental health support facilities and charities), physical deterrents (fencing, signage, application of forensic markers on cabling) and use of technology (covert and / or smart cameras, BTP drones, etc).

2.50 At the last meeting of Transport Committee 'leaf fall' was beginning to impact on the railway and Network Rail's strategy for targeting this was discussed. During period 8 (i.e. October – November) it had a significant impact on punctuality of services. Windy conditions can cause heavy leaf-fall in a short space of time and rain means the leaves are more likely to stick to the rails. When trains pass over leaves, the heat and weight of the trains bake them into a thin, slippery layer on the rail. This is equivalent to black ice on the roads. Network Rail, with operators, will carry out a post-Autumn review and feedback areas which can be targeted next year.

Rail Strikes

2.51 The national dispute for members of the RMT union (workers such as train conductors and signalling staff) has ended as a pay offer and job security guarantee was accepted by 14 train companies including those that operate in West Yorkshire. A pay rise for the current financial year is still to be agreed and is dependent on changes to working practices; negotiations on this are due to commence.

2.52 Train drivers represented by the union ASLEF continue to strike. Several days between 1 - 8 December were disrupted, with different operators impacted on different days. There was also an overtime ban from the 1-9 December which impacts particularly on TPE services. Disappointingly this action coincided with Christmas Markets including Leeds, impacting on the leisure market and causing overcrowding on some routes.

Passenger Network Enhancements

2.53 As reported to the previous Transport Committees three major blockades (closures of the railway which allow major upgrades to happen to infrastructure) have been completed so far during 2023, two at Morley (Feb 2023 and June 2023) and one at Stalybridge (March/April 2023). The next major blockade is planned to start on Good Friday 2024 at Huddersfield station to replace a bridge to the east of the station. There will also be several weekend closures during 2024. Forthcoming TRU line closures are listed online here: https://thetrupgrade.co.uk/upcomingclosures/. The Huddersfield station revamp has started on the station with temporary toilets in place (which are accessibility friendly) ready for the waiting roof/toilet refurbishment. Existing parking is being relocated which is started to be communicated to passengers by Kirklees Council and TransPennine. This arrangement will be monitored to ensure it is meeting demand.

2.54 In the second half of the 2023 disruption was confined to weekends, and this allowed TransPennine and Northern to prepare for the increase in disruption planned for 2024. The two operators, through working closely together, are re-assessing the customer handling structure, bolstering the team through additional recruitment and implementing actions to enhance the ‘one team’ approach already adopted to ensure a single customer facing solution.

2.55 At the previous Transport Committee meeting we shared the rationale regarding the withdrawal of the proposals to close ticket offices. Transport Focus has published detailed responses to each train company setting out the reasons behind the decision. The document sets out Transport Focus’s decision and provides a post-consultation summary of the process. The information is included online here (Ticket office consultation: summary of responses - Transport Focus) It covers:

- the main reasons for Transport Focus objecting to the proposals
- an outline of the consultation process
- a summary of responses from the public and organisations
- a demographic survey of consultation respondents
- the criteria used to assess train company proposals.

2.56 Following the announcement, Transport for the North (TfN) proposes to work with Northern and TransPennine Express on a ticketing and a stations reform programme, including Northerns Stations as a Place proposition. A key focus of the proposition would be seeking to integrate stations more fully with their local communities and making rail travel more attractive and accessible whilst retaining staff coverage to assist passengers. Transport for North is also monitoring adhoc ticket office closures. The purpose of the monitoring is to track the partial and/or full day closures as recruitment was put on hold during the consultation period. TransPennine have now commenced recruitment to fill vacancies and to fully train someone takes approximately 6-8 weeks. Northern have not yet started recruiting as they are carrying out a review prior to planning their strategy to recruit. We are continuing to monitor this situation and will seek confirmation from both operators later in January that all relevant vacancies have now either been filled or are the subject of a current recruitment.

2.57 Northern has informed us that they intend to introduce charges for car parking at a number of their stations. They have indicated that this is not a trial as such, but they have undertaken to review the impacts, especially on highways around stations. While all of 9 stations concerned are outside West Yorkshire – and we would expect a formal consultation with WYCA and with district councils on any proposals to introduce charging at any West Yorkshire stations – two of the sites are directly over the border into North Yorkshire: Weeton and Cononley. We have, therefore, requested that Northern (and our North Yorkshire partners) provide feedback on any changes in usage and rail travel after the introduction of the charges, particularly as regards changes in highway use, including the possibility of increased “railheading” to stations within West Yorkshire such as Horsforth and Steeton and Silsden.

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, and in meeting the Combined Authority’s inclusive growth objectives.

5. Equality and Diversity Implications

5.1 Ensuring an effective, stable, and affordable public transport network is important for equality and diversity to ensure that it meets the needs of different communities across West Yorkshire. The potential rail service changes run counter to the Combined Authority’s equality and diversity objectives.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

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 in this report.

11. Background Documents

11.1 None

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Insights on Transport Network Use & Metro Branded Activity

Appendix 2 – Rail Network Performance Data