MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE GREATER MANCHESTER BUS SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE HELD ON FRIDAY 6 AUGUST 2021 AT 10:30AM AT MANCHESTER TOWN HALL

PRESENT:

Councillor Jackie Harris	Bury Council
Councillor Kevin Peel	Bury Council
Councillor John Leech	Manchester City Council
Councillor Phil Burke	Rochdale Council
Councillor Barry Warner	Salford City Council
Councillor David Meller	Stockport MBC
Councillor Warren Bray	Tameside MBC (Chair)
Councillor Nathan Evans	Trafford Council
Councillor Mark Aldred	Wigan Council

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lindsay Dunn	Senior Governance & Scrutiny Officer, GMCA
Stephen Rhodes	Customer Director, TfGM
Nick Roberts	Head of Services & Commercial Development, TfGM
Gwynne Williams	Deputy Monitoring Officer, GMCA

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Tom Calderbrook	Diamond
Bob Dunn	Diamond
Ian Humphreys	First
Gary Knowlan	First
Connor Lomas	Go North West
Paul Turner	Transdev

GMTBSC 43/20 APOLOGIES

Resolved /-

That apologies be received and noted from Councillor Roger Jones (Salford CC) and Alastair Nuttall (Arriva).

GMTBSC 44/20 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR FOR 2021/22

Resolved /-

To note that the GM Transport Committee at its meeting on the 18 June appointed Councillor Roger Jones as Chair and Councillor Warren Bray as Vice Chair of the Bus Services Sub Committee for 2021/22.

GMTBSC 45/20 MEMBERSHIP FOR 2021/22

BOLTON	MANCHESTER	ROCHDALE	STOCKPORT	TRAFFORD
BURY	OLDHAM	SALFORD	TAMESIDE	WIGAN

Resolved /-

To note the membership of the GMTC Bus Services Sub Committee for 2021/22 as follows:

Members	Representing	Political Party
Councillor Roger Jones	Salford Council	Labour
Councillor Warren Bray	Tameside MBC	Labour
Councillor Kevin Peel	Bury Council	Labour
Councillor Naeem Hassan	Manchester City Council	Labour
Councillor Mark Aldred	Wigan Council	Labour
Councillor Phil Burke	Rochdale Council	Labour
Councillor Barry Warner	Salford Council	Labour
Councillor David Meller	Stockport MBC	Labour
Councillor Nathan Evans	Trafford Council	Conservative
Councillor Jackie Harris	Bury Council	Conservative
Councillor John Leech	Manchester City Council	Liberal Democrat

GMTBSC 46/20 CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND URGENT BUSINESS

Resolved /-

There were no chairs announcements or items of urgent business.

GMTBSC 47/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Resolved /-

There were no declarations of interest.

GMTBC 48/20 MINUTES OF THE GM TRANSPORT BUS SERVICES SUB COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 12 MARCH 2021

Resolved /-

That the minutes of the GM Transport Bus Services Sub Committee meeting held 12 March 2021 be approved as a correct record.

GMTBSC 49/20 UPDATE FROM OPERATORS

The Chair invited Councillor Phil Burke (Rochdale Council) to raise an issue of concern regarding the wearing of face coverings on bus services. He expressed his disappointment on the decision to take no further enforcement action after the relaxation of restrictions on ‘Freedom Day’ given the increase in infection rates in the region from the delta variant. He highlighted the evidence in regard to the wearing of face coverings and the close proximity of commuters on bus services which he believed would put staff and commuters at increased risk and leave vulnerable passengers less confident to travel without the mandatory continuation on the wearing of face coverings. He suggested that operators were considering profits before the health of passengers by not supporting the extension of the wearing of face coverings until further notice.

Bus operators were requested to provide a verbal update on the key issues and developments since the last Committee meeting along with a response to the position on face coverings raised by Councillor Phil Burke.

Comments raised by bus operators included the following:

- First – Members were advised that the requirement to wear face coverings was not included in the risk assessment for staff as they would continue to work within semi sealed cabs. Regarding the wider customer base, it was advised that guidance was being followed on the network similar to that across the rail industry and retail where there was a strong recommendation for people to wear face coverings. However, this would not be mandated and it was considered it may lead to the public transport network being stigmatised and viewed differently from other environments which could discourage people from using public transport. It was further advised that both profit and cost were not the reasons behind the decision not to mandate face coverings as government funding had been received to subsidise the industry.
  More generally it was reported that staff were continuing to work hard throughout changing circumstances, for which the company were appreciative. It was advised there had been a slight increase in staff shielding and isolating over recent months and more recently the track and trace 'pingdemic' had been increasingly difficult to manage due to unpredictability and the impact on service delivery. Staffing was at the levels expected, however there had been a noticeable change in behaviours with staff reassessing their work life balance as a result of the pandemic and requesting to work shorter hours. This appeared to be impacting the industry as a whole throughout the UK.
  Patronage was reported to be 67% pre-Covid levels which varied by area and commuter routes were less busy than leisure routes. Building back from the pandemic was being considered by the organisation and current ridership trends were being reviewed. Recovery and support funding from the Dft was welcomed and work was under way with colleagues in TfGM on what the recovery process would entail over the forthcoming months along with preparation of the Bus Service Improvement Plan.
- Diamond – The position with regards to face coverings highlighted by First was reiterated. Risk assessments were in place that addressed driver safety and it was reported that some had still opted to wear face coverings. However, with regards to passengers the Government's position on a balanced approach to choose had been adopted and the Committee were advised that staff were strongly recommended not to enforce the wearing of them to minimise conflict.
  Ridership was reported to be circa. 70% of pre Covid levels and the concessionary travel element was slightly lower. 96% of pre Covid mileage was operational across 100% of the network and the majority of services would return to normal from the beginning of September.
  Vehicles had been replaced across the fleet over the previous 18-24 months with a reported 150 new buses in GM. 70% of vehicles across the fleet were Euro 6 emission standard of which all services that operated in the city centre were of the Euro 6 standard. Zero emission buses were the planned for the city centre in the future.
  Staffing issues were reported to be a challenge with a shortage of drivers due to increased numbers of those retiring. Pay rates had been revised and new drivers were being trained to address staffing issues and deliver services.
- Go North West – Scientific studies had provided evidence that travelling by bus did not increase the risk of transmission of catching Covid and hence the same position on face coverings had been adopted the company. Profit had not been a factor as

there was a reliance on Government support across the industry.
It was advised that industrial action taken by drivers had ended in May with a negotiated settlement with the Unite union which had resulted in the return to work of all drivers by the end of May. All services were now being run in house on the usual timetable and there was a noticeable positive environment at the depot.
A marketing campaign had been launched in partnership with businesses to help the public rediscover the environmental and social benefits of bus travel as restrictions had been lifted.
There would be no significant timetable alterations in September, however recovery time would be a consideration for higher frequency services as traffic congestion during peak periods was reviewed.
There would be further fleet investment and buses would be retrofitted to ensure compliance with the Clean Air Zone emissions in 2022. Since the last meeting, an app and new website had been launched providing live customer information on service tracking and service occupancy.
Patronage was reported to be 35% pre Covid levels and there had been a high number of staff absences due to what was referred as the 'pingdemic' and a recruitment campaign was underway.
There was a current fare promotion of £1 for any journey any distance across the operated network after 7pm to help towards the revival of the night time economy. Also being offered were ticket bundle reductions.
Punctuality was currently being affected at peak times due to the impact of traffic congestion as a result of disruptive engineering schemes across the City Centre.

- Transdev – The wearing of face coverings was still being promoted to passengers and driver screens were still in place. There had been no reported increase in feedback from customers with regard to the wearing of face coverings and no complaints from staff on the levels of people choosing whether or not to wear them. Furthermore, drivers and colleagues were being regularly tested.
  It was anticipated that driver availability would improve as a result of the changes in isolation requirements.
  Cleaning the fleet to the advance specification remained in place and would continue as a legacy from the pandemic.
  It was advised that recovery across the network was better in both Bury and Rochdale compared to Manchester City Centre and a similar pattern was reported across Yorkshire and Lancashire where towns had busier routes than those going into the City Centre's.
  There were fare promotions across the network to encourage recovery within the industry along with the hospitality sector.

The Chair thanked Operators for their individual updates along with the responses to the statement raised in relation to the wearing of face coverings.

Members highlighted the recent study carried out at Piccadilly Train Station and on train carriages which had reported no traces of Covid or the new variants. It was suggested that a similar test at bus stations and across the fleet could be a consideration for TfGM to assist to undertake to improve public confidence.

The Committee reflected on the feedback provided by Operators with regard to patronage behaviour change. It was suggested and agreed that data on trends in relation to commuter and leisure ridership would be provided by Operators at the next meeting.

It was proposed that operators should provide consideration to the possibility that none mandatory wearing of face coverings could prevent older people, who were probably more

cautious in their approach, from returning to the network. Operators reiterated that there had been no change with regards to face coverings as in reality, prior to 'Freedom Day' there had been no enforcement due to a lack of police resource availability. There was however a reported high level of compliance. Data indicated that there had been an increase in the return of older people across the network operated by Transdev. As the vaccine programme had been rolled out and lockdown restrictions eased this had reduced the gap to between 7-8% pre Covid levels.

Consideration was provided to the decrease in commuting bus travel. It was advised that although there may be a number of office workers who would continue to work from home or more flexibly, there had been commuters who continued to travel to work throughout the pandemic from different sectors of industry.

Members discussed driver shortage across the industry and requested clarity on the reasons why this was a current challenge. It was suggested that there had been a number of coincidences that were contributing to the issue which included Brexit, a back log in driver training due to the pandemic and the number of individuals who had retired. It was advised the driving industry on the whole was being affected.

The Chair raised a concern on behalf of Councillor Norman Briggs (Oldham Council) with regard to the 181 and 182 bus service operated by First. It was agreed that further contact would be made to understand the issues and address the concerns.

Members welcomed the cleaning regime that had been introduced and asked for assurance that this would remain in place to ensure buses continued to be as clean as they were currently reported to be.

The Chair noted the update with regard to vehicles being retrofitted or replaced to become compliant before the introduction of the GM Clean Air Zone and it was suggested that a breakdown in numbers be provided by Operators at future meetings.

Resolved /-

1. That the response from Operators to the statement made and questions raised by Councillor Phil Burke (Rochdale Council) in relation to face coverings on bus services be noted.
2. That the update from Operators be noted.
3. That data on trends in relation to commuter and leisure patronage be provided by operators at the next meeting.
4. That Councillor Norman Briggs (TfGMC Member, Oldham Council) be contacted directly by First Bus regarding a query in relation to 182 bus service changes, as raised by Councillor Warren Bray.
5. That a breakdown in numbers of vehicles being retrofitted or replaced to become compliant before the introduction of the GM Clean Air Zone be provided by Operators at future meetings.

GMTBSC 50/20 BUS BACK BETTER: NATIONAL BUS STRATEGY BUS SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN - GREATER MANCHESTER'S APPROACH

Stephen Rhodes, Customer Director, TfGM introduced a presentation which provided details of Greater Manchester's approach to the National Bus Strategy Bus Services Improvement Plan, Bus Back Better.

The strategic context of the new national strategy for buses in England (outside London) published by the DfT in March was outlined. It was advised that the key element of the strategy was to get more people travelling by bus and a key output from the National Bus Strategy was a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).

The BSIP in the context of the National Bus Strategy was outlined and it was advised that the BSIP was an integral part and an early deliverable of Bus Reform and Franchising.

The timeline for the initial BSIP, key milestones along with the key opportunities and risks and next steps were outlined to the Committee. It was suggested and agreed that a further update on progress would be provided to the Sub Committee at the next meeting and a draft submission of the Bus Services Improvement Plan be provided by TfGM officers for consideration by the GMTC Committee on 1 October 2021 ahead of presentation to the GMCA for approval on 29 October 2021.

In support of the BSIP, members suggested that engagement should be undertaken with the regions MP's to maximise opportunities for GM along with others who had been identified in the next steps. It was agreed that this was a further opportunity for engagement and would be discussed with the Corporate Affairs team at TfGM to initiate within the time frame available.

Members commented that the presentation had not succinctly highlighted the objectives and priorities of the BSIP in contextual terms for passengers. It was advised that the content of the document would ensure that the ambition and aspiration for GM was detailed and linked to wider vision for bus services.

The constructive and useful discussions that had taken place with Operators on the development of the BSIP was welcomed, however members asked for further clarification on the opportunities for the Greater Manchester Transport Committee members to provide their input into the process. The relatively short time scale to obtain input was recognised, however it was reiterated that a further update would be provided to the next meeting of the Sub-Committee and a draft submission of the document would be provided to members at the earliest opportunity.

It was suggested that the impact of the outcome of the Judicial Review on Bus Franchising had been overlooked as a key risk to the BSIP. It was advised that all Transport Authorities were required to submit a Bus Services Improvement Plan regardless of the mechanism for the delivery of bus services.

Operators confirmed and welcomed the opportunity to be involved and provide support in the development of the BSIP.

Resolved /-

1. That the report be noted.
2. That a further update on the progress of the Bus Services Improvement Plan be provided by TfGM officers to GMTC Bus Services Sub Committee on 1 October 2021.
3. That a draft submission of the Bus Services Improvement Plan be provided by TfGM officers for consideration by the GMTC Committee on 15 October 2021 ahead of presentation to the GMCA for approval on 29 October 2021.

GMTBSC 51/20 FORTHCOMING CHANGES TO THE BUS NETWORK

Nick Roberts, Head of Services & Commercial Development, TfGM took Members through the latest forthcoming changes to the bus network report.

Annex A

In relation to service X41, Members expressed concern that additional stops introduced on Bury New Road between Manchester and Prestwich could have an impact on reliability and frequency.it was clarified that there would be an additional three stops which were all relatively close together on the hourly service and data suggested there would be no impact on relatively low volume stops.

Thanks was placed on record to officers at TfGM and Transdev for the dialogue which had taken place with elected members at Rochdale Council enabling the extension of service 475.

Annex B and Annex C

In relation to Annex C, there were proposed changes to services based on punctuality and health and safety requirements. It was also advised that to improve efficiency, there had been integration of school services into the main network.

Members welcomed service changes to the B1, B2 and B4 and 480 routes. It was requested however that further information was provided to ward councillors for Prestwich at Bury Council, regarding data relating to the proposal to terminate service 66 operated by Diamond at the Longfield Centre, Prestwich. It was suggested that the reason for the decision was due to low usage of a section of the route and it was agreed that further statistical information would be provided to Councillor Kevin Peel (Bury Council), in respect of the proposal.

Officers at TfGM and Transdev were thanked on behalf of the residents for additional morning and evening services on route 458 operating in Rochdale along with those in the evening and on Sunday to Stansfield.

Support was provided on behalf of Councillor Howard Sykes (Oldham Council) and other ward councillors with regard to service 435 operating in Shaw.

Resolved /-

1. That the changes to the commercial network set out in Annex A be noted.
2. That it be agreed that no action be taken in respect of changes or de-registered commercial services set out in Annex A.
3. That the action taken in respect of the service change set out in Annex B be noted.
4. That the proposed changes to general subsidised services set out in Annex C be agreed.
5. That further statistical information be provided to Councillor Kevin Peel (Bury Council), in respect of the proposal to terminate service route 66 at Prestwich, Longfield Centre.

GMTBSC 52/20 GMTC WORK PROGAMME

Resolved /-

That the proposed work programme for the GM Transport Committee and its Sub Committees be noted.

GMTBSC 53/20 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Resolved /-

That the following dates of future meetings be noted by the Committee.

1 October 2021
19 November 2021
21 January 2022
18 March 2022

All meetings will commence at 10:30am

GMTBSC 54/20 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved /-

That, under section 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public should be excluded from the meeting for the following items on business on the grounds that this involved the likely disclosure of exempt information, as set out in the relevant paragraphs of Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

GMTBSC 53/20 FORTHCOMING CHANGES TO THE BUS NETWORK

Resolved /-

That the financial implications of forthcoming changes to the bus network be noted by the Committee.