

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GREATER MANCHESTER
BUS SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE HELD ON FRIDAY 18 MARCH 2022 AT 10:30AM AT
FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE**

PRESENT:

Councillor Jackie Harris	Bury Council
Councillor Kevin Peel	Bury Council
Councillor John Leech	Manchester City Council
Councillor Phil Burke	Rochdale Council
Councillor Roger Jones (Chair)	Salford Council
Councillor David Meller	Stockport Council
Councillor Warren Bray	Tameside Council
Councillor Mark Aldred	Wigan Council

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Nicola Ward	Governance & Scrutiny, GMCA
Gwynne Williams	Deputy Monitoring Officer, GMCA
Jenny Coates	Service Planning (Funding and Development)
Stephen Rhodes	Customer Director and Interim Head of Bus Services, TfGM
Nick Roberts	Head of Services & Commercial Development, TfGM
Martin Shier	Bus Network Performance Manager

OPERATORS IN ATTENDANCE:

Adam Clark	Stagecoach
Nigel Featham	Go North West
Mark Mageean	Stagecoach
Tony Clegg	Rotala/Diamond
Paul Townley	First Bus

Resolved /-

That apologies be received and noted from Councillors Nathan Evans and Barry Warner.

Apologies were also received from Ian Humphreys (First Bus) who was substituted at the meeting by Paul Townley.

GMTBSC 11/22 CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND URGENT BUSINESS

Resolved /-

There were no Chairs announcements or urgent business.

GMTBSC 12/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Resolved /-

There were no declarations of interest.

GMTBC 13/22 MINUTES OF THE GM TRANSPORT BUS SERVICES SUB COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 21 JANUARY 2022

Resolved /-

That the minutes of the GM Transport Bus Services Sub Committee meeting held 21 January 2022 be approved as a correct record.

GMTBSC 14/22 BUS PERFORMANCE REPORT

Martin Shier, Bus Network Performance Manager TfGM took Members through a report which detailed performance across the bus network over the past six months, highlighting the impact of the pandemic and the national driver shortage through a noticeable dip reliability and lost mileage throughout this period.

The bus fleet remained stable, but there had been an overall decline from the levels of fleet

operating in 2019. However, in relation to Euro6 standards, 405 vehicles had already been retrofitted, a further 912 vehicles had been authorised and 25 new vehicles had been acquired, resulting in 54% of the fleet meeting the requirements of the Clean Air standard (as of November 2021). Members really welcomed these figures and urged for it to be shared widely as a good news story.

The current position of the Bus Recovery Grant (BRG) was outlined in section 4 of the report, which evidenced that through the CBSSG (Covid Bus Service Support Grant) £100m had been provided to bus operators to support them through the pandemic, and a further £17m through the BRG. Recently there had been an announcement that this funding would be extended until October 2022, however, the details of this allocation were still to be confirmed. Members expressed their concerns that the lateness of these details was unfair as it provided no opportunity for longer term planning for bus operators or TfGM.

Members urged that the supplier rating graph be included in future reports, officers explained that there had been a gap in monitoring, resulting in its omission.

Members reported that there had been a number of complaints regarding the 457 service operated by Rosso, in relation to its punctuality. It was felt that covid was no longer a valid excuse, however officers did concur that the recent driver shortage had resulted in poor performance of this service, but that they were in regular liaison with the operator and would continue to address.

In relation to the subsidised network, the report highlighted that 17% of current journeys were currently subsidised. Members asked whether this proportion was expected to go up or down as a result of bus franchising, and whether any general forecasting had been done. Officers confirmed that there had been no calculations completed as yet, but it was anticipated that there would be different terms and conditions in relation to any subsidised service, however once completed this would be shared with the Committee.

Members questioned as to whether the median number of passengers per trip was different to the average number of passengers per trip and what was considered the tipping point where a service no longer became viable for subsidy. Officers reiterated that the cost per passenger was the indicator as to whether a service remained viable, and once it became low, further analysis was undertaken as to the contributing factors. The median figures would be

investigated, as officers agreed this comparison could be interesting.

In relation to customer complaints, the report showed that 88 of complaints in this period were in relation to subsidised services, and Members asked whether the nature of these complaints had changed. It was confirmed that the number of complaints was marginally higher than normal, and it was felt that this was mainly as a result of an increase in covid-safety related complaints.

Members expected the dip in relation to reliability as detailed on page 21 of the report to be as a result of increased traffic congestion, officers confirmed that there were a number of contributing factors including driver shortages and highways improvement impacts.

With regards to recovery funding, Members asked how 'final' the latest funding announcement from DfT was. Officers reported that the previous BRG grant was intended to be the last round, however messaging regarding this latest announcement had been clear that this was the last six months of any such available funding. In light of this, Members questioned as to whether there would be service cuts across the network. Officers reported that the new franchised network would look quite different to keep up with the newly forming trends and patterns of travel. Although some marginal route cuts were anticipated, any disruption to passengers would be minimised through strong partnership working with DfT and Local Authorities to ensure the whole network was viable.

Members were pleased to be informed that in relation to the delays on new licences with DVLA that this issue had subsided and that all operators were looking at ways to speed up their internal training programmes to assist with available staffing levels.

The service changes in Rochdale which took place in November had gone smoothly and were well received. However, Members were concerned whether there would be an impact to the planned Wigan scheme as a result of the BRG grant ending. Officers confirmed that there were no planned changes to this scheme at present, as patronage levels could be impacted. The status of the market would not be known until the end of the funding was reached, and Members agreed that it was important to wait and see whether there was any change in the patronage levels at this point before there were any changes to scheme specifications.

Resolved /-

1. That the update be noted.
2. That TfGM would investigate the issues relating to punctuality of the 457 service and report back individually to Councillor Burke.
3. That future performance reports would include the supplier rating graph.
4. That TfGM would review the likely forecasted percentage of the bus network that would be potentially subsidised post franchising in order to provide context as to the current tendered budget.
5. That TfGM would review the presentation of passenger loadings data including the potential for additionally highlighting median loadings.
6. That TfGM be urged to promote the good news story of the significant number of buses across GM which are currently (and scheduled to be) meeting Euro6 standards.

GMTBSC 15/22 BUS OPERATOR UPDATE

The Chair invited those bus operators present to provide a verbal update for the Committee, in advance, written updates from One Bus and Arriva were referenced.

Diamond Bus reported that 85% of their fleet were now Euro6 compliant and it was anticipated the full fleet would be by the end of May 2022. Staffing levels had improved, but there had been a slight decline over the last 2-3 weeks due to staff sickness and the impact of covid was still being felt across the business. Work was ongoing with the Job Centre Plus to address the issue and there had been a significant growth in recruitment recently as a result. However, it was noted that many drivers were moving between operators, which further exasperated the issue. Mileage levels were c. 90% pre covid levels, with some punctuality issues as a result of roadworks, often multiple works along one specific corridor. Regarding this, Members queried as to how successful GMRAPS (Road Activity Permit Scheme) currently was and were reminded that there was a further update scheduled for the next GM Transport full Committee meeting. City Centre events were also proving an issue for the network as these would virtually bring the local road network to a standstill. Incidents of

vandalism were significantly high, with £60k spent in 2021 on broken windows and 12 in the last week at Farnworth depot alone. As a result 3-5 buses have to be taken off the road every day, impacting resource availability and often there is a delay to their repair due to the availability of parts. It was felt that the majority of incidents were as a result of a few key groups of individuals who need addressing urgently. In relation to this, Members urged for more pro-active operations in targeted area, including improved education with schools. Operators reported significant joint working with TravelSafe, however evidence of vandalism was challenging, and CCTV could only be used if the images were perfectly clear. It was disconcerting that after a significant amount of work there were often no prosecutions, but the impact was felt by communities who had become unserved as a result of the re-location of services to reduce the threat of vandalism.

Stagecoach reported that they were currently running c. 93% mileage and due to driver availability, the decision was taken to reduce some of the more frequent services to mitigate the impact to tendered services, however this was hoped to increase shortly. Licensing delays as a result of DVLA backlogs were still impacting new driver recruitment, further exasperated by delays in occupational health appointments due to their backlogs. It was encouraging to note however, that driver turn around had reduced by half and the jobs market remained buoyant. Patronage levels were reported at c. 80% of pre-covid levels, with weekdays becoming noticeably busier, particularly between Tuesday and Thursday, however this was bringing about further congestion concerns. The latest announcement regarding the end of the BRG brought several issues, especially in relation to the rising costs of fuel, staffing costs and general operational costs.

First informed the Committee that their current staffing levels were manageable and that 75% of the recent new starters were completely new to the bus industry which was positive for the longevity of the talent pool. Staff turnover had reduced, and recruitment was going well. However there had been a number of same-day cancellations as a result of current staff shortages, particularly attributed to illness and delayed NHS operations. Current patronage levels were c. 85% and mileage was c. 90% pre-covid levels. First's entire commercial fleet were now Euro6 compliant, with only the yellow school buses still awaiting retrofitting. In the last 6 months it was disheartening to report that there had been 85 incidents of vandalism to the fleet, and further concerning to report that there had only been one prosecution as a result.

Go Northwest had been fully staffed since the start of 2022 and the training school continued to be successful, with a recent specific drive to recruit more women to the industry. They were currently covering c. 93% of pre-covid mileage and patronage recovery was positive with c. 91% pre-covid levels being reached. Government funding had significantly helped keep the network functioning, but clarity regarding ongoing funding, including concessionary funding, was welcomed.

Members were concerned about the high level of vandalism reported by bus operators and urged the reporting of every incident. It was suggested that One Bus be asked to collate a list of the hotspot areas to report to TfGM, GMP and TravelSafe so that they could locate their operations accordingly. The increase in vandalism was not directly correlated to an increase in prosecutions and this caused Members further concern, it was noted that incidents were wide ranging, from broken windows to assaults and all needed to be taken seriously and proactively addressed.

In relation to positive covid cases, Members asked whether bus operators were expecting their staff into the workplace. It was confirmed that all were working in line with Government guidance and anyone who reported to be covid-positive was asked not to attend work. Although it seemed that there was a recent increase in cases, this had not translated to the workforce in GM as yet, although an uptick was being experienced elsewhere in the UK.

Resolved /-

1. That the verbal updates presented by bus operators be noted.
2. That all operators be invited to report their hotspots for vandalism to TfGM in order for a complete list to be provided to TravelSafe officers to address.
3. That TravelSafe be urged to undertake proactive approaches to tackling youth anti-social behaviour, including vandalism, to ensure perpetrators can be prosecuted appropriately.

GMTBSC 16/22

RING AND RIDE PERFORMANCE AND RECOVERY UPDATE

Jenny Coates, Service Planning (Funding and Development) TfGM, introduced a report which detailed progress in relation to the delivery of Ring and Ride services by Greater Manchester

Accessible Transport Ltd (GMATL) and its plans for recovery after Covid. The service ceased through the first lockdown in March 2020 and gradually re-opened between May and October 2020 on a reduced scale in line with a significantly lower demand. This reduced resource has enabled TfGM to reduce the overall cost of Ring and Ride by £1m and it was intended to keep resources at the same level through 2022-23, within which capacity could be managed up to 65% of pre-covid level patronage.

Work was underway to actively re-encourage users back to the service, with contact being made with previously registered users and community groups. Members were content with this proactive approach and that a wide variety of media was being used.

The report detailed that the fleet was rapidly aging and by 2028 all vehicles would not meet the required standards. This was concerning for the Committee, but officers offered assurance that they were actively seeking funding opportunities to purchase new vehicles but had paused purchasing whilst the market matured. It was an aspiration to have the full fleet zero emission and fully accessible, but in the meantime in order to prioritise the recovery of the service in the short term, there would be some leasing of non-electric ramp accessed vehicles to mitigate the issues with electric wheelchairs on tailgates. Members were surprised to learn of this issue and urged that representation was made to the manufacturers that new wheelchairs should have a standstill breaking facility. Officers concurred with this frustration but were pleased that there were now five ramp access vehicles within the fleet.

Members expressed the importance of the service and were impressed by its tenacity throughout the pandemic period, noting that many of its previous users would be classed as vulnerable and therefore potentially less keen to return to public transport. This service would remain on the Committee's agenda as it was acknowledged as a vital service for so many.

Resolved /-

That the update be noted.

Nick Roberts, Head of Services & Commercial Development, TfGM took Members through the Changes to the Bus Network report and highlighted each annex.

Members asked that for every change in frequency, it be made clear what the previous frequency was to enable readers to fully understand the change. Furthermore, that some consideration be given as to how to simplify the report in order to track between services that may offer alternative routes to a planned change etc.

The Chair reported that the local changes as outlined in the report were also communicated to all Salford councillors via the Mayoral offices and that this process should be happening in each Local Authority.

Further clarity was sought in relation to the planned changes for services 583 and 595, as Members reported that they served areas of deprivation within the Wigan borough and were a much-needed service. Officers agreed to provide further information directly to Cllr Aldred.

Resolved /-

1. That the changes to the commercial network set out in Annex A be noted by Members.
2. That the proposals that no action is taken in respect of changes or de-registered commercial services set out in Annex A be agreed by Members.
3. That the action taken in respect of the service change set out in Annex B be noted by Members.
4. That the proposed changes to general subsidised services set out in Annex C be agreed by Members.
5. That clarification be provided from TfGM to Cllr Mark Aldred in relation to the planned approach to services 583 and 593.
6. That TfGM be asked to ensure service frequency changes are included in future reports.
7. That TfGM be asked to look at whether the service change reports can be simplified to

enable the result of the changes to be identified clearly i.e. does this result in a service increase, reduction or no change.

GMTBSC 18/22 GMTC WORK PROGRAMME

Resolved /-

1. That the proposed work programme for the GM Transport Committee and its Sub Committees be noted.
2. That future reports on vandalism, promoting bus patronage growth and anti-social behaviour be included within the Work Programme for the next municipal year.

GMTBSC 19/22 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 20/22 CHANGES TO THE BUS NETWORK AND REVIEW OF SUBSIDISED BUS SERVICES BUDGET

Resolved /-

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