

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
GREATER MANCHESTER TRANSPORT BUS SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE
HELD ON FRIDAY 20 JANUARY 2023
AT THE GMCA OFFICE, CHURCHGATE HOUSE, MANCHESTER**

PRESENT:

Councillor Roger Jones (Chair)	Salford Council
Councillor Jo Lancaster	Bury MBC
Councillor Tracey Rawlins	Manchester City Council
Councillor George Hulme	Oldham Council
Councillor Phil Burke	Rochdale Council
Councillor David Meller	Stockport MBC
Councillor Warren Bray	Tameside MBC
Councillor Linda Blackburn	Trafford Council
Councillor John Vickers	Wigan Council
Councillor Mark Aldred	Wigan Council

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Stephen Rhodes	Director of Bus, Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM)
Nick Roberts	Head of Services & Commercial Development, TfGM
Jenny Coates	Bus Planning Manager (Funding & Development), TfGM
Nicola Ward	Governance & Scrutiny Team
Elaine Mottershead	Governance & Scrutiny Team

OPERATORS IN ATTENDANCE:

Tom Calderbank	Diamond
Paul Townley	First Bus
John Roxburgh	Go North West
Alan French	Stagecoach
Richard Greaves	Stagecoach
Adam Clarke	Stagecoach
Paul Turner	Trans Dev

GMTBSC 01/23 APOLOGIES

RESOLVED /-

That apologies be received and noted from Councillor Howard Sykes (Oldham), Bob Morris from Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) and Alistair Nuttall (Arriva).

GMTBSC 02/23 CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND URGENT BUSINESS

There were no Chair's announcements or items of urgent business.

GMTBSC 03/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest in relation to any item on the agenda.

GMTBSC 04/23 MINUTES OF THE GM TRANSPORT BUS SERVICES SUB COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 18 NOVEMBER 2022

RESOLVED /-

That the minutes of the GM Transport Bus Services Sub Committee meeting held 18 November 2022 be approved as a correct record.

GMTBSC 05/23 CHANGES TO THE BUS NETWORK AND REVIEW OF SUBSIDISED BUS SERVICES BUDGET

Diamond commented on the main changes in Annex A which detailed the proposed changes to some of their services from April 2023. They confirmed that there was a requirement for an operator to give 112 days' notice of such changes. However, that notice period had coincided with a confidentiality period connected with the bus franchise procurement timetable. This resulted in the announcement of the changes being made within 48 hours of the award of franchising contracts. Diamond's decision included the reduction of their Bolton operation by 50 vehicles and they were keen to highlight that this was not financially motivated but rather to provide stability and mitigate the impact of future network changes.

Members expressed their concerns over this decision. This Committee recognised that considering the proposed franchising arrangements was outside of their remit but they had expected they would be involved in any impact on services as a result of any franchise arrangements and had also assumed this would not be necessary until later in the year. They acknowledged Diamond's insistence that it was not a commercial decision, however, it was noted that the commercial services were those identified for change whilst subsidised routes remained unaffected. Members requested that Diamond defer their decision until the next meeting of this Committee in February.

Diamond responded to say that, until recently, only 70 days' notice was required and they had, therefore, given more notice than usual of the changes. They confirmed that, as a commercial company, they considered all their routes as commercially viable. They did not give Members any reassurances that the service changes, or their decision, could be deferred until February but they confirmed that they would be willing to continue discussions.

Councillor Burke read out a statement regarding the 163 bus, the only service linking Heywood and Manchester. A request was made for a full review of bus services across Heywood and Middleton, along with protection for the 163 service and the provision of a long-term sustainable bus service across the community which would put passengers before profit.

Members raised concerns about the 524, 520 and 575 services in Bolton in that any curtailment of services in these areas could lead to further isolation for residents as there were no alternative public transport modes available.

Diamond stated that their decision had been made in response to shortage of drivers, congestion challenges and the uncertainty of contracting arrangements over the next few months. They confirmed that they had tried to minimise impact and, in many cases, had withdrawn services that overlapped with others so that there would still be alternative options available for passengers.

Officers assured Councillors that they were working on plans in response to Diamond's decision.. They confirmed that they would cover the services in the short-term where possible and this could include arrangements with other operators. Officers assured Members that they would be kept informed.

Members repeated their concerns that this situation had occurred and stated that this situation needed to be avoided for future franchising milestones to protect existing services. It was suggested that the procurement process should have restrictions or weighting levels that prevented companies from being able to bid and win contracts and then withdraw from services in this way. Officers were unable to give this assurance to Members, given the legal framework of the procurement and franchising procedures, however would look to mitigate any future risk to further services where possible.

Officers also reported that work had started with the successful operators to ensure successful implementation in September including handover arrangements and staff transfers under the regulations of TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006).

A member asked for more detail about the revisions to Atherton services 586 and 132 and officers agreed that they would provide this.

A member asked about the 755 service in Altrincham that did not provide access to the Girls Grammar School. Officers offered to have a discussion about this directly with the member.

RESOLVED /-

1. That the changes on the commercial network set out in Annex A be noted.
2. That the impact of the changes set out in Annex A be the subject of a further report to the next meeting of this Committee.
3. That TfGM be asked to consider how they may be able to mitigate any risk to the de-registration of current services through future bus franchise procurement tranches.
4. That the proposed changes to general subsidised services set out in Annex C be agreed.
5. That TfGM would provide details of the revisions to services 586 and 132 directly to Councillor Vickers.
6. That TfGM would pick up the concerns of Cllr Blackburn in relation to service 755 not including Altrincham Girls Grammar School outside of the meeting.

GMTBSC 06/23 BUS OPERATORS UPDATE

Stagecoach reported on driver shortages and their work on recruitment and retention which included a 15 minute reduction to the length of shifts to give longer recovery times. It was anticipated that this would improve staffing levels.

Stagecoach had reduced frequencies on some routes and re-invested the vehicles back into other areas. This had been introduced for services 230 and 231, following concerns raised by Councillor Bray about punctuality. Stagecoach had also liaised directly with Councillor Meller regarding service 328 that operated across two weight restricted bridges. The service needed to operate with a small vehicle but, at the same time, ensure that high demand from students was met. Stagecoach confirmed that an additional vehicle would be introduced from April 2023, at no extra cost, to meet this need.

Stagecoach had been running duplicates and planned to run more where possible. No other major changes were reported other than the usual seasonal changes across Summer and September.

Trans Dev reported that they had stabilised their staffing position with help from neighbouring depots. Other challenges included delays on basic maintenance and repair

components along with traffic congestion. Resilience remained low without spare drivers but work had been done with TfGM to address this issue. They expressed concern about the lack of consultation on cross-boundary permit schemes within the upcoming franchise arrangements which had caused a degree of uncertainty. They needed a better route for their services out of Manchester, up the A56 to Prestwich, and had been restricted by a delayed Traffic Order which would open a right turn from Princess Street into Cross Street. The delays had caused a diversion for two years.

An additional update from Diamond reported on a service change in Atherton from the end of January. A revised timetable was developed for the 516 and 583 services with five buses instead of four planned from the end of January. Diamond reported 90% of patronage compared to pre-Covid levels. They had driver shortages, most notably in Bolton, but were continuing to recruit.

First Bus remained above their required staffing levels and had recently recruited 55 people who were new to the industry. Current operation levels were 98% of their scheduled mileage. They had been dealing with sickness absences due to seasonal colds and flu but still managed to operate effectively.

First Bus reported 40 incidences of antisocial behaviour, which had been logged, but they had not received any specific interventions from the TravelSafe Scheme as a result. Incidences of broken glass had resulted in costs of £6,500 to First Bus and one incident with a school resulted in costs of £4,000. The school and GMP had provided support on this issue. TfGM offered to contact TravelSafe on their behalf and keep Councillor Aldred informed. It was also acknowledged that TravelSafe would be providing their six-monthly report to the Transport Committee in March. Members were reminded that all incidences needed to be reported as they occur in order for officers to take appropriate action.

Go North West reported driver shortages but also that there were signs of improvement with continued recruitment and reduced staff turnover. Their patronage numbers were fairly stable. Traffic congestion was particularly challenging in November and December but had since settled as expected. They anticipated operating more mileage towards the end of January and punctuality reviews were completed on the 93, 95, 97 and 98 services. Additional work had also been done with TfGM on services 6 and 129 to improve punctuality. The 162 service was now being operated by Go North West on behalf of TfGM to help bridge a gap in the network.

One Bus provided a general update with an overview of the current challenges faced by operators across the region. The operators had been faced with driver shortages, but congestion and lack of layover facilities had also affected resilience. The City Plan for Manchester City Centre had not recognised this need despite the request for 13 layover spaces. This was not related to commercial profits but to punctuality and reliability for the services. Operators were concerned that plans for new buses and capped fares would not succeed if the layover issues were not addressed.

One Bus were asked to write to Councillor Rawlins separately outlining their concerns on the City Plan.

A member raised a related issue concerning the condition of gulleys which had, in some instances, caused vehicles to swerve around large areas of collected water. It was acknowledged that this was part of the responsibilities of Highways Departments in Local Authorities.

In light of the comments and concerns raised about congestion, a report on the Greater Manchester Road Activity Permit Scheme would be requested.

Members gave positive feedback on some services which included the Vantage Service and improvements that had been made to the Ring and Ride Service after discussions were held with TfGM officers.

RESOLVED /-

1. That bus operators be thanked for their verbal updates, and their contents noted.
2. That bus operators and Members continue to contact TravelSafe to report any anti-social behaviour or safety concerns.
3. That TfGM would report recent damage to First Bus vehicles directly to TravelSafe and ensure that Councillor Aldred is included in any correspondence.
4. That a report on the Greater Manchester Road Activity Permit Scheme (GMRAPS) be brought to the next meeting the Greater Manchester Transport Committee.
5. That it be noted that Gary Nolan from One Bus would write separately to Councillor Tracey Rawlins (Executive Member for the Environment at Manchester City Council) regarding the City Plan for central Manchester and its impact on bus operations.

6. That operators be invited to contact Councillor Lancaster directly should they wish to be involved in the forthcoming Jobs Fair in Bury.
7. That it be noted that Stagecoach would write to Councillor Tracey Rawlins regarding the potential requirements for a permanent diversion away from Rusholme on Friday and Saturday evenings due to congestion levels.

GMTBSC 07/23 LOCAL LINK AND ASSESSIBLE TRANSPORT REVIEW

Officers gave an update on the Local Link service, a pre-bookable minibus service. The Local Link Service was used in situations where few other transport options was available, for example, by shift workers or people in isolated areas, and would be cheaper than a conventional service. The passenger journey matrix had been considered costly but work had been done in the background to ensure its position as a social service. Officers had looked at where they could improve patronage and produced some extensive communications and stakeholder tools. Officers were keen to stress that, unlike the Ring and Ride service, the Local Link was a service for all users without any criteria applied.

Officers reported that the scheduling of the Ring and Ride had been brought in-house to co-ordinate it with the Local Link. It was noted that they already provide a key component of the Bee Network.

Officers had held meetings with Health and SEND colleagues to look at where expertise, efficiencies and support could be utilised in improving the Local Link service.

In response to a question from members, officers confirmed that these services were not part of the franchise procurement procedures, and would remain stand alone.

A member queried an area in Saddleworth with limited public transport options. Officers confirmed that they would be willing to discuss service boundaries if members wished to make representations.

A member disputed the level of publicity around these services, despite the report that extensive communications and stakeholder tools had been used. Officers stated that they would speak to Councillor Rawlins separately.

RESOLVED /-

1. That thanks be expressed to officers at Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) for a comprehensive report.
2. That members be encouraged to contact TfGM with specific issues relating to their communities and the Local Link service.
3. That TfGM would speak directly to Councillor Rawlins regarding further promotional materials for Local Link within the Wythenshawe area.

GMTBSC 08/23 WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED /-

That the proposed Work Programme for the GM Transport Committee and its Sub Committees be noted.

GMBSBSC 09/23 DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

That the next meeting of the Bus Services Sub Committee be noted as Friday 10 March 2023.

GMBSBSC 10/23 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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 11/23 CHANGES TO THE BUS NETWORK AND REVIEW OF SUBSIDISED
BUS SERVICES BUDGET**

RESOLVED /-

That the Committee expressed significant concerns regarding the wider implications of the proposed de-registration of commercial services as highlighted in Annex A of the Changes to the Bus Network and Review of Subsidised Bus Services Budget (item 5) and would prepare a statement outlining these matters for consideration by the GM Transport Committee on 17 February.