

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GREATER MANCHESTER  
BUS SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE HELD ON FRIDAY 21 JANUARY 2022 AT 10:30AM  
AT FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE**

**PRESENT:**

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

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Gwynne Williams	Deputy Monitoring Officer, GMCA
Lee Teasdale	Governance & Scrutiny, GMCA
Stephen Rhodes	Customer Director and Interim Head of Bus Services
Nick Roberts	Head of Services & Commercial Development, TfGM

**OPERATORS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Gary Nolan	One Bus
Adam Clark	Stagecoach
Nigel Featham	Go North West
Mark Mageean	Stagecoach
Alex Jones	Arriva
Matt Rawlinson	Rotala/Diamond
Paul Townley	First Bus
Paul Turner	Transdev

## **GMTBSC 01/22 APOLOGIES**

### **Resolved /-**

That apologies be received and noted from Councillor Naeem Hassan (Manchester) and Councillor Kevin Peel (Bury).

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

## **GMTBSC 02/22 CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND URGENT BUSINESS**

The Chair advised the Committee that Ian Humphreys of First Bus had contacted him directly to provide an update on the industrial action taking place at the First Bus Oldham Depot. This update had been circulated to Committee Members by email.

### **Resolved /-**

That Members note the update on industrial action at the First Bus Oldham depot.

## **GMTBSC 03/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

### **Resolved /-**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **GMTBC 04/22 MINUTES OF THE GM TRANSPORT BUS SERVICES SUB COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 19 NOVEMBER 2021**

### **Resolved /-**

That the minutes of the GM Transport Bus Services Sub Committee meeting held 19 November 2021 be approved as a correct record.

## **GMTBSC 05/22 BUS OPERATOR UPDATE**

Bus operators were invited to update the Committee on the current situation within the sector. Issues raised included-

- Current service patronage levels were highlighted. Services were now offering in the range of 95-100% of pre-covid mileage. However, the reintroduction of Plan B measures had seen patronage levels start to drop off again to around 70-75% patronage. It was now slowly improving day on day from its lowest point post-Christmas, but still fell somewhat short of where patronage levels had returned to in the autumn.
- There was increasing concern around the lack of clarity on the bus recovery grant funding that was due to expire on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2022. The lack of advice from government on this had left operators feeling 'in limbo'. It was unlikely that pre-covid patronage levels would be reached by April, and no support funding could have serious implications upon the ability to run a full complement of services.
- The ending of the concessionary reimbursements would also have an impact upon funding, and discussions on this with TfGM were being sought.
- Staff sickness absence rates were now falling from their peak of up to 10% and most operators were running at an approximate 7% deficit in drivers.
- All operators were undertaking recruitment schemes with campaigns, with a positive increase in applications being seen. However, the ability to employ was still at the mercy of licensing delays with the DVLA.
- It had been noted that quite a large number of bus drivers who had departed to take on HGV work were returning to bus services due to a preference for the sort of hours being worked.
- Retrofit work continued on Euro6 compliance ahead of the Clean Air Zone introduction in May 2022.
- It was acknowledged that bus driver shortages in the wider national picture had been more difficult than within GM that had a relatively high rate of driver retention.

The Chair thanked operators for their updates and invited Committee Members to comment and ask questions.

Members noted that the largest areas of concern around driver cover were in the late night and early morning shifts. Was this due to unsocial hours, or was it related to worries around vandalism and antisocial behaviour? It was advised that drivers had not expressed specific concerns around working shifts related to anti-social behaviour and that it was more a case of unsocial hours, with weekends being particularly acute on this front.

Members further enquired about concerns around funding post-April. Asking if the government had been written to with a request for clarity. It was confirmed that TfGM were in active discussion with the Department for Transport (DfT), and as recent public statements had shown, Metrolink was in a similarly concerning position. It was clear that the DfT needed to make a strong case to the Treasury, but this appeared to be, as previously referenced 'in limbo' at the present time.

Officers highlighted that a formal announcement was still being awaited on GM's submission to the Bus Services Improvement Plan (BSIP). The Plan included a multi-million-pound request to stabilise the network. So it may be that the funding comes through this route, though it was acknowledged that the receipt of the monies was more important than the route by which it came.

The Chair suggested that a statement on these concerns at the next meeting of the overarching Transport Committee (covering concerns around both bus service and Metrolink funding) would be welcome. Arrangements would be made for Cllr Aldred as Chair of the Transport Committee to prepare a statement, that would be forwarded to all Transport Committee Members in advance to ensure a cross-party consensus.

Members asked about new driver applications and how many of these as a percentage had been received from people who had driven buses previously. It was advised that some operators chose to re-focus on those who had not driven previously, as these could be trained from scratch in the 'mould' of the operator and provide a high-quality service.

Members asked if modelling had been done around different patronage levels following the

removal of support funding. It was confirmed that TfGM were working up potential scenarios and related implications, however there was a significant lack of certainty around patronage levels currently with the potential for further COVID surges. Discussions had taken place around BSIP modelling of worst-case scenarios and what could be done with smaller pots of funding.

Members sought additional information on the fleet conversion to Euro6 emission standards. The Chair asked that all operators write to him to confirm their current position in relation to the Clean Air Zone requirements, so that he could then feed this information back to the Committee. TfGM advised that they would also provide an update in advance of the next Transport Committee meeting on the status of the Bus retrofit programme across Greater Manchester.

Bus operators sought for it to be put on the record that they welcomed the level of co-operation seen between TfGM and themselves on the necessary amendments to bus schedules during the COVID pandemic. This co-operation had resulted in a relatively smooth operation in what could have been, and in many parts of the country was, a controversial and difficult environment.

Operators stated that they still had significant concerns in terms of vandalism issues. Some operators were having to spend in the region of £2000 per week on replacing windows. This impacted upon the ability to fund other areas and needed to be addressed ahead of the summer which historically proves to be the worst period for vandalism of this kind. The Chair requested that Rotala/Diamond bus representatives be asked to lead on providing an update on the levels of bus vandalism currently taking place across their fleet.

Members agreed with the concerns around vandalism, and that the lack of reporting around prosecutions on this matter was troubling. If this was not addressed, there were concerns it could impact further upon driver availability for evening services.

Bus operators were asked about their stance on face coverings ahead of a relaxing of the 'Plan B' requirements. It was advised that operators were still working through the messaging on this following the sudden announcement. The Chair asked that any updates bus operators were able to provide on their approach to the use of face coverings on buses following the ceasing of Plan B requirements be forwarded to himself for wider

dissemination.

### **Resolved /-**

1. That the verbal updates presented by bus operators be noted, particularly in relation to the ongoing uncertainties around the Bus Recovery Grant post 4th April 2022, the reduction of concessionary reimbursements, and continuing issues with anti-social damage to buses.
2. That it be noted that services were now offering 95-100% of pre-covid mileage, but post-Christmas following the introduction of Plan B had only been recording 70% patronage levels compared to pre-covid.
3. That it be noted that COVID-19 related sickness absences were now beginning to drop across bus operators, but still continued to cause higher levels of sickness absence than pre-COVID overall.
4. That it be noted that whilst bus driver applications were at healthy levels, the ability to train and put them on the roads remained hampered by DVLA delays.
5. That it be noted that TfGM were in ongoing discussions with the Department of Transport with a view to establishing to position on grant funding post 4<sup>th</sup> April 2022 for bus services.
6. That arrangements be made for Cllr Mark Aldred (Chair of the Transport Committee) to make a statement at the next full Committee meeting expressing the concerns raised around the need for further support funding for both the bus and Metrolink networks.
7. That the statement referred to in decision 6 (above), be shared as a draft with all Transport Committee members ahead of the meeting to ensure a cross party consensus.
8. That all bus operators be asked to provide the Chair with an update on their current position in working towards meeting Clean Air Zone requirements ahead of the next meeting of the Transport Committee, which the Chair will then circulate to all Committee

Members.

9. That TfGM be asked to provide an update in advance of the next Transport Committee meeting on the current status of the Bus retrofit programme across Greater Manchester.
10. That it be noted that bus operators welcomed the level of co-operation seen between themselves and TfGM on the necessary amendments to bus schedules during the COVID pandemic.
11. That Rotala/Diamond bus representatives be asked to provide an update on the levels of bus vandalism currently taking place across their fleet.
12. That any updates bus operators were able to provide on their approach to the use of face coverings on buses following the ceasing of Plan B requirements be forwarded to the Chair.

## **GMTBSC 06/22 CHANGES TO THE BUS NETWORK AND REVIEW OF SUBSIDISED BUS SERVICES BUDGET**

Nick Roberts, Head of Services & Commercial Development, TfGM reported to the Committee on the changes that had taken place to the bus network since the last Bus Services Committee meeting, and any forthcoming changes due.

There had been significant engagement with elected members regarding the proposed changes outlined within this report, including –

- Keeping Cllr Sykes updated on the 482 and 408 services.
- Cllr Cosgrove had been updated on actions related to the provision of the Derker service.
- At the request of Cllr Aldred, TfGM officers had met with Cllrs Bull, Sykes & Fletcher in relation to the 607/608 service in Wigan. With it being agreed that more work would be done on publicity around Ring and Ride.
- The rationale around changes to the 467/468 service were shared with Cllr Peel.
- Cllr Leech received information in relation to Services 571/572.

- Cllr Meller was updated on changes to the 307/308 routes.
- Cllr Briggs was being contacted about the Hail and Ride Scheme.
- It was also highlighted that following member requests, contextual maps had now been added to changes to bus services reports.

It was advised that Annex A highlighted commercial changes in the market. It was currently relatively quiet due to the previously discussed issues around the funding situation.

It was advised that Annex C was largely a case of 'sweeping up unresolved changes' and Officers were engaging as much as possible to relevant councillors. As always there was a focus on offering value for money wherever possible. However, there had been cases where there had been a review of the cost per passenger and allowance had been made for a slightly higher rates in some cases to ensure that no areas were left without services. The 18 and 94 services were highlighted as examples of this.

The return of the 280 service at Dunham Massey following issues with a low bridge was welcomed, as were the improvements to the 467/8 service in Bury. Following a lot of discussion around significant changes to the Rochdale and Oldham services. The bigger picture around these changes had been fully explained to local elected members and there was more acceptance of these as positive changes now.

The Chair thanked officers for the update and welcomed comments and questions from Committee Members.

Members noted that the Dunham Massey 280 service changes were welcome, though some residents still expressed concerns.

Members highlighted some concerns around the 84A service. There was no opposition to what had been proposed, but there were some concerns around the future punctuality of the service. There were specific concerns that the integration of cycle lanes into Barlow Moor Road had overcomplicated this part of the road network and was leading to significant traffic issues. It was asked whether TfGM were involved in discussions around the implementation of these cycle networks. It was confirmed that joint meetings with relevant colleagues were taking place on the integration of the cycle lanes and bus networks.



Members asked if a piece of work had ever been inaugurated to look at split services and the cost impact of imposing this upon residents. It was confirmed that avoiding a cost impact on split services necessitates an integrated ticket offered by the same service provider. If the split required a move to a different operator, then this was not possible, and the implementation of any split service would always look to avoid this scenario.

Members asked that TfGM officers undertake a piece of work analysing where split services had resulted in an impact cost due to the lack of integrated through ticketing between services.

### **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 the update on all work undertaken to address the actions arising from the previous meeting be noted by Members.
6. That Members welcomed the addition of maps to the report.
7. That changes to the 280 service at Dunham Massey be welcomed, despite the ongoing concerns of a few residents.
8. That concerns around the 84A service punctuality due to ongoing works on Barlow Moor Road be noted.
9. That it be noted that ongoing conversations were taking place at TfGM with regards to

the integration of new cycle lanes into the road network, particularly the works currently taking place on Barlow Moor Road.

10. That TfGM officers be asked to undertake a piece of work analysing where split services have resulted in an impact cost due to the lack of integrated ticketing between services.

#### **GMTBSC 07/22 GMTC WORK PROGRAMME**

Gwynne Williams, Deputy Monitoring Officer to the GMCA presented the latest iteration of the Greater Manchester Transport Committee work programme for members consideration.

#### **Resolved /-**

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

#### **GMTBSC 08/22 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 09/22 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.