

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GREATER MANCHESTER
BUS SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE HELD ON FRIDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2021 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	Salford Council (Chair)
Councillor Warren Bray	Tameside Council
Councillor Mark Aldred	Wigan Council

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Gwynne Williams	Deputy Monitoring Officer, GMCA
Nicola Ward	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
Tom Calderbank	Diamond
Paul Towey	First
Connor Lomax	Go North West
Mark Mageean	Stagecoach
Alex Jones	Arriva
Martin Turner	Arriva
Paul Turner	Transdev

GMTBSC 13/21 APOLOGIES

Resolved /-

That apologies be noted and received from Councillor David Meller, Councillor Nathan Evans and Councillor Barry Warner.

GMTBSC 14/21 CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND URGENT BUSINESS

Resolved /-

That it be noted that there had been a request from Cllr Meller regarding the 307/308 service, officers agreed to go back directly to him with further details.

GMTBSC 15/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Resolved /-

There were no declarations of interest.

GMTBC 16/21 MINUTES OF THE GM TRANSPORT BUS SERVICES SUB COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 1 OCTOBER 2021

Resolved /-

That the minutes of the GM Transport Bus Services Sub Committee meeting held 1 October 2021 be approved as a correct record.

GMTBSC 17/21 BUS OPERATOR UPDATE

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

- Bus driver shortages continued nationally, with many contributing factors. The DfT had written to all HGV license holders to encourage re-entry into the industry, however this offer had resulted in further bus driver shortages. The industry had asked Government for a letter to be sent to all PCV license holders encouraging them back to the industry, but this had not been seen as yet.
- There were continued uncertainties around the future of the Bus Recovery Grant, which was due to end in April 2022.
- Greater Manchester was also still awaiting the details of the Bus Service Improvement Programme Grant following receipt of 79 bids from Local Transport Authorities to Government.
- There remained a lack of clarity as to longer term funding models for Greater Manchester once bus franchising was introduced, as patronage levels were much less than the current levels of delivered mileage. Furthermore, under such an agreement, it was anticipated that bus operators would be required to give 112 days' notice of service changes, instead of the current 56 days' notice period. This would result in proposals for April service changes having to be submitted by the first week in December, which was further complicated by the uncertain patronage forecasts.
- The issue of traffic congestion was increasing, resulting in significant discrepancies between journey times. Some city centre routes were experiencing delays of up to 50 minutes and this was significantly affecting scheduling. Operators reported some service reductions as a result; however, those less frequent services were protected where possible.
- Incidents of anti-social behaviour had also increased, with reports of smashed windows, staff assaults and slashed seats. Operators urged for a dedicated police task force, with more officers overseeing the bus network, especially at interchanges.
- Overall staff shortages continued to be quite high amongst many operators, with general sickness levels and covid relating absences contributing. As a result, staffing levels had been challenging but were now thought to be stabilising. There had been a significant recruitment programme undertaken across several operators and additional driving instructors recruited.
- Patronage levels were recorded as 82% on average compared to pre-covid levels.
- In relation to preparations for Greater Manchester's Clean Air Zone, operators reported that fleet retrofitting was well underway, and a number of new Euro-6

compliant vehicles had been brought onto the network. One challenge to this had been the availability of vehicle parts as a result of the changes to importing and exporting from the UK and as a result buses were having to remain out of operation until their parts were delivered, often for 2-3 days.

- The previously reported delay with DVLA in relation to licence renewals had seemed to have improved which was positive.
- The support of colleagues and the public through these recent challenging times was recognised and noted by operators and members of the committee.

The Chair thanked operators for their updates and urged that in relation to the significant strategic issues that letters be sent to the relevant decision makers to ensure they are made aware. Furthermore, a council motion would clearly demonstrate that the issue was acknowledged by the whole local authority and give additional support.

In relation to further increasing patronage levels, members offered to distribute promotional material from bus operators within their networks and asked to be included in future communications. Operators reported that at the latest promotions around leisure travel had been well received and as a result there had been an increase in patronage levels.

Members asked whether the latest recruitment activities had targeted current PCV license holders or had attempted to encourage new people to the industry. It was confirmed that previous recruitment had looked to entice new people to the industry, however with current bus driver numbers being so low, the latest recruitment was open to all. Operators reminded the committee that following successful recruitment, each driver required 35 hours of training before they were able to go out onto the network.

The Committee were informed that the GM Wraps (Road Activity Permit Scheme) was a system designed to identify conflicting roadworks and prepare a schedule that had minimal impact to passengers and other road users but were aware that there had been reports of where this had not happened, therefore it was requested that a future report on the scheme be brought to the Committee. Members also suggested that it would be useful to see where the scheme was most successful in Greater Manchester so that lessons could be shared.

Officers agreed to meet with operators to find a pragmatic approach to the extended service notification period and ensured that the issues in relation to future funding, the potential infrastructure developments through BSIP and CRSTS and the desired expansion of the TravelSafe team were currently being worked through and would be reported to the GM Transport Committee in due course. Operators were urged to keep reporting issues of anti-social behaviour to enable Greater Manchester Police to build up a clear picture of the crime and disorder happening on the transport network and it was further suggested that operators be invited to share their current processes for dealing with ASB with the Chair of the Committee to ensure that a joined-up system was in place.

Resolved /-

1. That the verbal updates presented by bus operators be noted, especially in relation to the uncertainties regarding the Bus Recovery Grant post April 2022, increase of anti-social behaviour incidents, supply chain delays for parts such as glass windows, the challenge of 112 days' notice for proposed service changes, the impact to service levels as a result of driver shortages and the increasing levels of congestion resulting in significant variations on journey times.

2. That it be noted that on average bus operators were now undertaking 97% of pre-covid mileage and recording patronage levels of 82% compared to pre-covid levels.
3. That it be noted that operators reported retrofitting and fleet upgrading activity was on target, to ensure all vehicles were Euro 6 compliant as per the requirements for the Clean Air Zone by May 2022.
4. That Members of the Committee be urged to write to the relevant decision maker whether that be the Chair of the Transport Committee and Mayor or Greater Manchester regarding significant issues and where appropriate, propose a formal motion to their own Local Authority for further support.
5. That bus operators be invited to share details of travel incentives or promotions with the Chair of the Committee so these can be shared with Members and promoted further via their networks.
6. That it be noted that TravelSafe events would be taking place in Media City (2 December) and Wigan (8 December) should any Member or transport operator wish to be engaged.
7. That all operators be invited to submit their process for reporting/dealing with anti-social behaviour incidents (via One Bus) to the Chair of the GM Transport Committee to review with colleagues at GMP and TfGM.

GMTBSC 18/21 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 latest tender round which had included £10m worth of contracts, 20% of which had resulted in service changes including contract terminations, consolidated routes, simplified timetables and extensions to meet new demands. Some of the tenders that were initially included in this round had been sent back out to market as their cost per passenger did not represent good value.

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

- With Councillor Sykes regarding services 482 and 408 in Shaw.
- With Councillor Roberts and Briggs on behalf of Councillor Cosgrove regarding service 402 in Oldham.
- With Councillors Aldred, Sykes and Bullen regarding services 607/608 in Ashton in Makerfield.
- With Councillor Bray in relation to service 356 on Carhill Road.

As a result of this engagement there had been a recognition that further reports needed to be more transparent to ensure that the complexities of proposed changes were explained to all readers. The positive engagement with local councillors and stakeholders was also recognised as a useful element of the process that would continue to be pursued.

Members welcomed the improvements to the B2 and B4 services in Bury, however expressed concern that the proposals in relation to services 467/468 would have a

detrimental effect on people accessing Fairfield Hospital. This route was popular, and it was felt that an hourly service would not meet demand levels. In relation to service 511, members further expressed their concerns in reducing evening services to 2-hourly as it would have a significant impact to an already isolated area. Officers agreed to present data behind these planned service changes to elected members and arrange a meeting to discuss if required.

Members asked for clarification as to the 'value for money' threshold for cost per passenger. This was currently at £4 per passenger, however the calculations behind this figure were complex. Further to this, members also asked for clarification as to the accepted walking distance to alternative services as there were a number of figures mentioned in the report. Officers confirmed this as 400m, however there were other variables to consider when accepting this alternative, including local demographics and gradients.

In relation to services 571 and 572, members asked for the rationale behind the decision to extend the start and finish times. Officers confirmed that this would be due to opportunities found to increase demand but would report back on the details.

Although the proposed changes to service 129 were accepted, members were concerned that this had been already cut from a 40-minute service and asked that officers keep this under review.

Resolved /-

1. That the changes to the commercial network set out in Annex A of the report be noted.
2. That it be agreed that no action is taken in respect of changes or de-registered commercial services set out in Annex A of the report.
3. That the action taken in respect of the service change set out in Annex B of the report be noted.
4. That the proposed changes to general subsidised services set out in Annex C of the report be agreed.
5. That officers would ensure that future reports were more transparent through the explanation of interdependent complexities and increased levels of acute engagement with local stakeholders.
6. That it be noted that officers had met and consulted Cllr Howard Sykes on the proposed changes to services 482 and 408 and that a request had been made to keep these services under review.
7. That it be noted that officers had met with Cllrs Roberts and Briggs and on behalf of Cllr Cosgrove in relation to service 402 in Oldham and a request had been made to reconsider options and reported at the next committee meeting which included the provision of a service to Derker.
8. That it be noted that officers will discuss the proposed changes to services 607 and 608 in Wigan with Cllrs Aldred, Sykes and Bullen on 23rd Nov and explained that this was in relation to driver shortages.

9. That it be noted that following a query from Cllr Bray, there had been improvements made to the proposed changes to service 356.
10. That the rationale for proposed changes to services 467/468 and 511 be shared with Cllr Peel and other Bury councillors as appropriate.
11. That Cllr Harris also be copied into any correspondence relating to proposed changes to service 511.
12. In relation to services 571/572, that TfGM would report back to Cllr Leech as to the reasons for additional morning services.
13. That officers agreed to report back on the outcomes of the re-tender for service 84a to the Transport Committee.

GMTBSC 19/21 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 /-

1. That the proposed work programme for the GM Transport Committee and its Sub Committees be noted.
2. That the GM Transport Committee receive a future report on GM WRAPS (Road Activity Permit Scheme) to ensure its effectiveness in managing roadworks across the sub region and identify any area for improvements.

GMTBSC 20/21 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Resolved /-

That it be noted that the next meeting of the Bus Services Sub Committee would be held on the 21 January 2022.

GMTBSC 21/21 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 22/21 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.