

MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE GREATER MANCHESTER BUS SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE
HELD ON FRIDAY 11 SEPTEMBER AT 10:30AM VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

PRESENT:

Councillor Roger Jones (in the Chair)	Salford City Council
Councillor Roy Walker	Bury Council
Councillor John Leech	Manchester City Council
Councillor Angeliki Stogia	Manchester City Council
Councillor Sean Fielding	Oldham Council
Councillor Phil Burke	Rochdale Council
Councillor Barry Warner	Salford City Council
Councillor David Meller	Stockport MBC
Councillor Warren Bray	Tameside MBC
Councillor Nathan Evans	Trafford Council
Councillor Mark Aldred	Wigan Council

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Alison Chew	Interim Head of Bus Services, TfGM
Jenny Coates	Services Planning Officer, TfGM
Lindsay Dunn	Senior Governance & Scrutiny Officer, GMCA
James Lewis	Section Manager, Services Planning, TfGM
Michael Moore	Bus Planning Officer, TfGM
Stephen Rhodes	Customer Director, TfGM
Nick Roberts	Head of Services & Commercial Development, TfGM
Martin Shier	Bus Partnerships Delivery Manager, TfGM
Lee Teasdale	Senior Governance & Scrutiny Officer, GMCA
Gwynne Williams	Deputy Monitoring Officer, GMCA
Nicola Ward	Senior Governance & Scrutiny Officer, GMCA

GMTBSC 01/20 APOLOGIES

Resolved /-

That apologies be noted and received from Bob Morris (TfGM)

GMTBSC 02/20 CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. As a matter of urgent business, the Chair noted that the ongoing industrial dispute between Go North West and Unite was a matter of concern and therefore an update on the current situation would be provided as part of Item 5 on the agenda.

Resolved /-

That the ongoing industrial dispute between Go North West and Unite be considered as urgent business for discussion as part of Item GMTBSC 05/20.

GMTBSC 03/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Resolved /-

That there were no declarations of interest.

GMTBSC 04/20 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

It was advised that a nomination had been received for Cllr Warren Bray to be Vice-Chair of the Greater Manchester Bus Services Sub-Committee for the year 2020/21. All present supported the nomination.

Resolved /-

That Councillor Warren Bray (Tameside MBC) be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Greater Manchester Bus Services Sub-Committee for the year 2020/21.

GMTBSC 05/20 BUS OPERATOR COMMENTS ABOUT BUS SERVICES IN GM BETWEEN MARCH AND SEPTEMBER 2020

Bus operators were invited by the Committee to provide feedback on bus services in GM over the previous six months, with a particular emphasis on the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on services.

Comments raised by bus operators included the following:

- All operators stated their number one concern had been the safety of their staff and customers – with all responding quickly to the requirements of government guidance in terms of PPE and appropriate risk assessments. Additionally, increased cleaning regimes were put in place, contactless transactions were encouraged, and vehicle capacity was reduced to support social distancing.
- All operators wished to put their thanks on record to all frontline staff who had supported the running of services over the past few months, and additionally, the operational support offered by TfGM. This had been particularly pressing during the first months of lockdown, when vital transportation was kept operating for front line key workers and the NHS.
- The number of services in operation were now being ramped up to close to previous levels, with a considerable amount of focus at present being on ensuring the safe return of children to schools and colleges.
- Many of the operators introduced apps which allowed customers to see how busy each service was, allowing them to make an informed decision on whether to attempt to board.
- Operators were concerned that they were now at the point of maximum capacity under social distancing restrictions and patronage guidelines and did not have the scope to meet any further increases in demand.
- Work was taking place with TfGM around providing additional school services with funding provided by the Department of Education.

- It was advised that the X43 'Witchway' Service continued to be severely impacted by the re-rerouting caused by the closures on Deansgate/Blackfriars Bridge bus stops, and whilst most services were at 60% of previous patronage now, this service had stalled at 25%. This was concerning for passenger journey time, but equally was concerning from an environmental standpoint due to the extra mileage that the re-routing forced.

The Chair thanked the operators for their contributions and invited comments and questions from the Committee Members.

A Member noted concerns raised by residents in relation to delays caused by the pop-up cycle lane development on the A56. Were the congestion/re-routing problems here, and on Deansgate/Blackfriars Bridge the only hotspots at present, or were there other conurbation issues? It was advised that the initial issues with the pop up cycle lane on the A56 had been largely mitigated following frank and open discussions with Trafford Council. However, as highways levels increased, these measures would be further observed and dialogue with Trafford Council would continue.

Concern was expressed by an operator about Deansgate and Blackfriars Bridge being closed for works in such quick succession and the perceived lack of coordination between the neighbouring Manchester and Salford authorities on this. The Chair advised that he knew from personal experience that Manchester and Salford Councils were in frequent contact regarding bus routes and highways.

A Member advised that he had received complaints from residents in the Hopwood area of Heywood that schoolchildren were being refused from buses and told to get specific schools buses, even when they did not live on the school bus route. Issues had also occurred when attempting to use the 'Our Pass'. Did all operators have procedures in place specifically for school times and the increased patronage? It was advised that Diamond Bus Services had been working with TfGM to review services around schools to ensure there is enough capacity on the commercial network to provide further support to dedicated schools' services.

Members queried whether some existing routes were in danger of being withdrawn due to the losses associated with reduced patronage throughout the pandemic. Operators agreed it was concerning and there would be a need to balance the books. However, it was also hoped that once the need for such stringent social distancing requirements passed, that there would be opportunities for bus operators to work together to promote services and a get the residents of GM making the most of the services offered to them. It was considered that the services within the most 'rural' parts of GM would those most at risk.

Members stated that the apps created on levels of bus capacity were very useful, and it was hoped that this offer would remain permanently.

Concerns were raised about the latest revised timetable information not being updated at bus stops, leading to confusion and inconvenience for patrons. TfGM Officers advised that timetable changes had to take place at such frequency initially that it was not possible to keep pace with this at all bus stops, efforts had been made during the main period of lockdown to direct passengers to digital timetable information, and temporary signs at stops provided information on how to access these. A scheme to update the timetable at all bus stops was now about to commence, this would be a significant undertaking across GM, but all stops

would soon reflect the current updates times.

Members sought assurances that first and last services were being retained even where other services were being reduced. Operators confirmed that they had sought to retain first and last services throughout the entirety of the period, including the lockdown, as these were often particularly important for key workers such as hospital staff.

Go North West – Unite Industrial Dispute

The Chair invited Go North West to provide an update on the latest position regarding the ongoing industrial dispute.

Go North West had purchased the Queens Road depot in 2019 and had sought to modernise working practices to bring them in line with the latest ways of working. Some old rules had long remained in place at the depot that was causing the Queens Road location to lose close to £2m per annum. It was stated that as a result of implementing these new practices staff would each be offered a £5k share in the benefits, a no redundancies guarantee and inflation backed payraises in 20/21 and 21/22. There would be no cuts to pay, to hours, or any reduction in the rules. Over 20 meetings had taken place with Unite, who were opposed to the changes, but had not tabled any counter proposals. Therefore, Go North West had issued a S188 notice as an attempt to instigate fresh talks. The S188 would allow the company to re-contract the drivers, and provided a 45-day window in which to undertake negotiations.

Members, being mindful that they could not intervene in employment issues, discussed the issue. It was clear both sides had a very different view of the existing dispute and therefore it was vital that both sides returned to the discussion table to ensure no loss of service for the residents of GM.

Resolved /-

1. That the updates from bus operators be noted by the Committee.
2. That it be noted that bus operators wished to put their thanks on record to all frontline staff who had supported the running of services over the past few months, and also the operational support offered by TfGM.
3. That it be noted that many bus services are now reaching capacity under social distancing restrictions and maximum patronage guidelines.
4. That the impact of the closure of Deansgate and Blackfriars bus stops on congestion and additional journey time be noted.
5. That it be noted that Diamond and TfGM would review services around schools to ensure there is enough capacity on the commercial network to further support dedicated schools services.
6. That it be noted that the initial concerns with the pop up cycle lane on the A56 have been mostly mitigated, however as highways levels increase these measures would be further observed, and dialogue with Trafford Council would continue.
7. That the update on the ongoing industrial dispute between Go North West and Unite be noted by the Committee.
8. That the Committee expresses its wish to see the above noted dispute resolved to the satisfaction of all parties at the earliest opportunity.

GMTBSC 06/20 FORTHCOMING CHANGES TO BUS SERVICES

Nick Roberts (Head of Services & Commercial Development, TfGM) advised the Committee that an addendum to item 6 had been necessary due to the receipt of a notification from GB Coaches Ltd (operating under the North Western trading name) that they would be ceasing services with immediate effect. This was an unusual situation, and did not abide by usual practice, and despite TfGM's best efforts to work with them, they did not reply to TfGM's attempts to contact them. Due to the nature of the incident, TfGM had reported the matter to the Traffic Commissioner for North West England.

Members stated that they were appalled by the unacceptable actions of GB Coaches Ltd. Local Councillors had been in contact with TfGM about the alternative routes available to Denton at the present time due to the unavailability of the 205/305 and 236 routes. It was accepted that the 205 & 305 routes were underutilised and may be hard to justify going forward. However, the 236 route was heavily used by residents and required reinstatement at the earliest opportunity.

It was advised that most of the 236 route remained served with just a couple of stops affected. It was understood that another service coming into the area had been registered to alight at those stops.

Members raised issues with Service 180. A petition had been submitted in regards to this service several months ago, members sought further clarity on how best to submit a petition to be acknowledged by the GM Transport Committee at the earliest opportunity in future. The Chair agreed that a written procedure was needed for the receipt of petitions. It was suggested that petitions should be submitted to TfGM and then a report be brought to the next relevant committee or sub-committee for oversight.

A number of concerns were raised about the impact that the reduction of services on the 180 route had upon residents of Greenfield, particularly school services. The alternative provision involved 2 buses and a long wait was considered by residents to be unacceptable. There were also concerns about the lack of service on a Sunday, removing a public transport route into the Peak District.

It was advised that the number of trips on Service 180 had been increased on 30th August 2020 in line with other service uplifts. However, it was advised that it was a very lightly used service, with an average of 5 customers per journey on weekdays, and 3 on weekends. There was no plan to withdraw the service but it was important to highlight that it was lightly used. The service was now increased in its 'strongest' markets, namely off-peak shopping times. It would be considered again in October, but any decisions would be demand led.

Councillor Mellor stated that comments had been received in relation to Service 130 in Heald Green. It was agreed that these would be passed on to TfGM officers.

Councillor Burke expressed thanks to First for taking over the 587 Service from Yorkshire Tiger.

Resolved /-

1. That the Committee requests a procedure as to how the Greater Manchester Transport Committee is able to informally receive petitions for submission to TfGM.
2. That the cessation of services operated by GB Coaches Ltd under the North Western trading name with immediate effect and TfGM's reporting of the matter to the Traffic Commissioner for the North West of England, be noted.
3. That it be noted that First confirmed that service 180 would retain its current timetable, focussed on demand, which was predominantly off peak.
4. That it be noted that Councillor Mellor would submit suggestions regarding service 130 direct to TfGM.
5. That the changes to the commercial network and the proposals not to replace the de-registered commercial services as set out in Annex A, be noted by the Committee.
6. That the Committee agrees that no action is to be taken in respect of changes or de-registered commercial services as set out in Annex A.
7. That it be noted by the Committee that no services fall under Annex B.
8. That the Committee be minded to approve the proposed changes to general subsidised services set out in Annex C.

GMTBSC 07/20 FUNDING FOR ADDITIONAL DEDICATED HOME TO SCHOOL/COLLEGE TRANSPORT

A report was provided updating the Committee on the proposed approach for the allocation of the £2,249,016 grant received from the Department of Education for additional dedicated home to school/college transport.

90% of GM's children travelled on these services, but with social distancing restrictions in place, funding for the provision of more trips was required. The report set out the approach and the criteria that had been used for which services received the additional support. Around 300 extra trips were taking place each day on the network now and these were closely monitored, to ensure the high levels of demand remained, and changes could be made if required.

Resolved /-

That the approach to allocate the £2,249,016 grant received by Greater Manchester from the Department for Education for 'Additional Dedicated Home to School and College Transport', be noted by the Committee.

GMTBSC 08/20 RING AND RIDE SERVICES

It was advised that the Ring and Ride Service had been hit hard by service impacts due to the nature of the clientele. The services were initially removed, and during April/May started to be reintroduced for essential journeys only. All drivers were issued with PPE and enhanced cleaning regimes were put in place. Initial usage was low upon reintroduction, at only 2% of pre-covid levels. This was up to 11% by July.

The service was now on normal operating hours, but was still only at 16% of pre-covid usage. Steady monitoring would continue going forward.

Resolved /-

That the impact of Covid-19 on the Ring and Ride service be noted by the Committee, specifically the re-introduction of fully social distancing-compliant vehicles for essential travel only.

GMTBSC 09/20 GMTC TRANSPORT WORK PROGRAMME

Gwynne Williams (Deputy Monitoring Officer, GMCA) updated the Committee on the current work programme.

Members suggested that an item considering how best to encourage the public to safely return to public transport be brought to a future meeting of the Transport Committee.

Members expressed concern about bus lane cameras, with several requests having been made and not addressed. It was agreed that a report be brought to a future meeting on the installation and current use of cameras in bus lanes across GM.

Resolved /-

1. That the updated GMTC Transport Work Programme be received by the Committee.
2. That an item considering how best to encourage the public to safely return to public transport be brought to a future meeting of the Transport Committee.
3. That a report be brought to a future meeting on the installation and current use of cameras in bus lanes across GM.

GMTBSC 10/20 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Resolved /-

That the future meeting dates be noted by the Committee.

GMTBSC 11/20 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 12/20 FORTHCOMING CHANGES TO BUS SERVICES – PART B

Resolved /-

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