

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Date: Friday 22 March 2024

Subject: Delivering the Bee Network Update

Report of: Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, Portfolio Lead for Transport and Eammon Boylan, Chief Executive Officer, GMCA & TfGM.

Purpose of Report

To update GMCA on progress implementing the Bee Network, Greater Manchester' vision for an integrated, 'London-style' transport system. The report updates on the operation of franchised services in the Tranche 1 area, and work to prepare for the start of Tranche 2 of bus franchising.

Recommendations:

GMCA is asked to note the update on delivery of the Bee Network.

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Equalities Impact, Carbon and Sustainability Assessment

N/A

Risk Management

N/A

Legal Considerations

There are no specific legal implications with regards to this report.

Financial Consequences – Revenue

There are no specific legal financial implications with regards to this report.

Financial Consequences – Capital

There are no specific legal financial implications with regards to this report.

Number of attachments to the report: 0

Background Papers

Bee Network Performance, Bee Network Committee, Thursday 21 March 2024

24-hour Transport Pilot, Bee Network Committee, Thursday 21 March 2024

Tracking/ Process

Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution?

No.

Exemption from call in

Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency? No

Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee

N/A

Comments/recommendations from Bee Network Committee

N/A

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Bee Network is Greater Manchester's vision for an integrated, 'London-style' transport system, which will change the way people travel across the city region. The Bee Network launched on 24 September 2023 following the successful implementation of bus franchising across Wigan, Bolton parts of Bury and Salford (Tranche 1), which represents approximately 20% of the Greater Manchester bus network.
- 1.2. Tranche 2 is scheduled to commence operations in Rochdale, Oldham and parts of Bury on 24th March 2024 taking the overall proportion of the Greater Manchester bus network which is franchised to circa 50%. The procurement of Tranche 3 operators is currently ongoing, with operations scheduled to commence on 5th January 2025, at which point the whole of the Greater Manchester bus network will be franchised and under public control.

2. Tranche 1 Services

- 2.1. Punctuality for franchised services in the Tranche 1 area is consistently tracking above both the non-franchised network and the equivalent to the Bee Network this time last year.
- 2.2. Work continues to improve the performance of franchised bus services and a 'Bee Network Operational Excellence Plan' is in place, to build towards the high standards set for the Bee Network and take steps to consistently and reliably meet our targets.
- 2.3. Working with our franchised operators, Go North West and Diamond, timetable changes were introduced in January on 44 services in the Tranche 1 area, to improve reliability on the worst performing and most complained about routes. The changes mean that for some services there has been a change to departure times, for others arrival or departure times have changed along the route, making the timetable more reliable for customers. Early morning and evening trips to/from Standish were also extended allowing more passengers to access early morning bus and train services from Wigan.
- 2.4. Further timetable changes are planned for April which will also help to improve bus punctuality and reliability on services, as well as providing extra capacity. In collaboration with Go North West, these changes include the introduction of 20

additional buses across the Tranche 1 area, including on the popular V1 and V2 Busway services. These additional buses will be introduced in two phases during April, with some being introduced into operation from Sunday 7th April and the remainder entering service later in the month (from Sunday 28th April). They will initially be introduced on a 12-month trial basis, during which punctuality improvements and associated patronage/revenue growth will be monitored, measured and evaluated.

- 2.5. Development of a 24hr bus pilot is also underway, with outline proposals due to be considered by the Bee Network Committee on Thursday 21st March 2024.
- 2.6. Patronage on franchised services has grown steadily since the start of Tranche 1 operations with more than 130,000 passengers being carried by Tranche 1 services each weekday, and nearly 140,000 on some days. To date there have been 17 million passenger journeys on Bee Network services.
- 2.7. Revenue for franchised services continues to exceed forecast. Revenue increased further throughout February and year to date is 24% above budget. However, increased revenue is being offset by higher than anticipated costs.

3. Tranche 2 Mobilisation Status

- 3.1. For the last 9 months TfGM have been working with the Tranche 2 Franchise Operators Stagecoach, First and Diamond to mobilise the franchise services and working with the outgoing operators in Tranche 2 (First and GNW) to demobilise and transition their depots, services and employees to prepare for handover to the new Franchise Operators. The Programme is on track to commence operations of a franchised network in Tranche 2 on 24th March 24.
- 3.2. The purchase of the Oldham and Queens Road depots has been completed. The acquisition of the Middleton depot via a lease has been delayed due a small number of issues with the lease however this will not impact operations. Improvement plans for Queens Road and Oldham depots have been developed with some short term changes to be made at Queens Road which include temporary improved toilet facilities and short term repairs to the roof which will eventually need replacing completely.
- 3.3. Electrification of the Oldham depot to enable the operation of new zero emission electric buses is on schedule. All charging infrastructure is now in place and power

connected to the site. Final testing of chargers is on track to complete commissioning on 15th March. The first 5 zero emission buses (ZEBs) have been charged via the infrastructure with no reported issues.

- 3.4. The delivery of the 50 new ZEBs which will operate out of the Oldham depot were due to be received by 26th January but have been impacted by Industrial Action at the Alexander Dennis (ADL) Falkirk Factory. The dispute has now been resolved, and 26 ZEBs will be received ahead of 24th March 24, with 19 already in Oldham and a further 7 due by 17th March 24. However, 24 Bee Network specification Euro VI diesel vehicles have been secured which will cover any shortfall in the ZEBs to ensure there are sufficient vehicles which meet the Bee Network standard from Day 1. The Small Franchises have also been impacted by new vehicle production delays, but an interim fleet has been secured to deliver services until all new vehicles arrive between March and June 2024. At the point of operational commencement date 60% of vehicles will have, as a minimum, external Bee Network livery.
- 3.5. Small Franchise operators have confirmed they have enough drivers and engineers to operate a successful service without agency or seconded drivers, mitigating several operational and financial risks.
- 3.6. For the Large Franchises, Stagecoach has confirmed it does not expect any agency drivers to be needed. Latest TUPE data is indicating a shortage of drivers across the three large depots by c.47 drivers. Recruitment and training continues, with a strong pipeline of new drivers. However, to mitigate this risk, Stagecoach has seconded 120 drivers who are already working on the network, backfilling incumbent drivers to enable training to take place.
- 3.7. The installation of new ticket machines, radio and CCTV continues to progress according to plan.
- 3.8. A significant amount of work has been undertaken to improve and develop the Bee Network App. New Journey Planning launched on 4th March and was rolled out to 100% of users by 11th March. TfGM is collecting feedback and will continue to make improvements iteratively as more people use the functionality. Within 3 days of launch the number of journeys planned on the App had surpassed those planned on the Bee Network website. As of the 11th March, over 5000 journeys were being planned everyday using the App.

- 3.9. Live Bus Tracking is on track to be launched to all users by 22nd March 2024. Tracking should be available for all Bee Network buses and most commercial services including Stagecoach services in the Tranche 3 area. There are occasions where tracking will not be shown, these include the service having not yet started the route or when a service has been cancelled / is not running but still appears on the Stop Departure list, and tracking is not enabled for some commercial services where operators have not provided that data. Tracking is reliant on GPS and therefore there may be momentary loss of tracking. In all cases where tracking is not available the App will inform the customer.
- 3.10. An 'in app feedback' function has been added to allow customers to feedback on the app, especially real time information, bus tracking and journey planning, to inform future improvements.
- 3.11. Detailed planning and preparation between operators, suppliers and TfGM for the overnight cut over from the commercial operations to franchised operations on 23/24th March is underway.
- 3.12. The scale of change required to introduce bus franchising inevitably poses operational challenges, with services changing from one operator to another overnight. Whilst the measures set out above seek to mitigate the impact on passengers it is likely there will be some disruption.
- 3.13. Similarly, whilst franchising provides the opportunity to transform bus services it will take time to tackle poor performance. Interventions are already being identified and developed to improve the worst performing services in the Tranche 2 area but a campaign will be launched asking passengers to 'Please bear with us' as changes are made.
- 3.14. The official launch of Tranche 2 will take place on 25th March 2024 at Oldham Interchange. Information has been shared with members.