

## SOUTH YORKSHIRE TRANSPORT USERS GROUP

Wednesday 19 January 2022

### PRESENT:

J. Hoare	(Chair)
N. Spetch	(Vice Chair/Rotherham TUG)
D. Wrottesley	(Hope Valley Rail User Group)
I. Jenkinson	(Sheffield TUG/Member of the public)
F. Postlethwaite	(BTUG member)
G. Arthur	(BTUG member)
J. Brightmore	(STUG member)

### GUESTS:

R. Cowling	(SYMCA)
C. Sadler	(SYMCA)
N. Wragg	(Supertram)
J. Young	(Stagecoach)
P. Hopkinson	(First)
L. Maloney	(Northern)
A. Bray	(CrossCountry)

### 1. OPEN AND WELCOME

The meeting was opened, and all welcomed to another on-line meeting.

### 2. ELECTION OF A CHAIR

RC invited the group to elect a Chair for the meetings. DW maintained his support for JH as Chair. This was echoed by NS. JH re-elected Chair.

### 3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

NS noted a minor change to the minutes as the incorrect name had been added next to a note. The minutes were approved with this in mind.

### 4. UPDATE FROM OPERATORS

#### **Bus**

JY provided an update from Stagecoach Yorkshire, advising that strikes have ended. Patronage is around 60% of pre-COVID levels, with concessionary tickets lagging behind. Stagecoach expect there to be some issues arising as a result of strike action, but the situation is being closely monitored over the coming weeks. JY discussed the impacts of

Omicron on the bus network and how Stagecoach is managing it. A number of recruits are currently in the training school, with some having passed their tests and route learning. JY advised the funding situation post-March remains unclear and concerning.

Q: NS raised an issue where a local resident thought they couldn't get to a hospital appointment from Dinnington Interchange due to the Stagecoach strike and the information provided on the electronic display screens. However, the depot operating this local service was not on strike.

A: RC said this would be taken back to relevant teams who manage the information on the screens at interchanges to see what improvements can be made.

Q: GA said he welcomed the substantial pay rise for Stagecoach bus drivers but said that this should have come sooner. GA also said Nottinghamshire bus drivers are paid more, so this should be consistent across the country. GA asked about the ENCTS pass funding.

A: JY said operators throughout the pandemic have been paid average amounts for concessionary passes to fundamentally secure the short-term future of the network. In the new financial year, it is planned for this to be reverted to the actual levels of usage as opposed to averages.

Q: DW said he doesn't understand how much money is being asked for by the mayor for an Enhanced Partnership as opposed to the current partnership, and the amount for franchising given the fallout between the Mayor and Rother Valley MP.

A: JY said operators have been in receipt of the Bus Recovery Grant (BRG) which finishes at the end of March. At the moment this is insufficient to maintain current levels of service, let alone increasing frequencies. The future remains uncertain, but it is hoped there will be a BRG2 although it is unclear what form this will take so it is difficult to plan for the future. JY said as part of the Enhanced Partnership in South Yorkshire a Bus Services Improvement Plan (BSIP) has been created which includes a large number of improvements for bus services in the region. However, all elements of the BSIP cost money and are significantly oversubscribed so deliverables have been diluted. With a reduction in allocated funding for the national Bus Back Better scheme it is a tricky situation. Patronage is low and is not expected to return to 100% pre-COVID levels. Work needs to be done to encourage people back onto public transport and reduce the number of other vehicles on the road.

JB noted that planning city centre journeys was a strenuous exercise and that it made car owners less likely to leave their cars and choose public transport.

PH said First is continuing to see a large number of cancellations as a result of staff isolating with COVID, and the situation is difficult to predict. First introduced further short-term journey cancellations from 17 January. To enable customers to plan their travel, they are publicising the impacted journeys for the following week each Wednesday. This will be reviewed and as the situation improves additional journeys will be restored. PH shares JY's comments about sustainability in the future, particularly after March with the removal of funding.

Q: FP said it is clear from bus operators that buses are in crisis. We need radical change in how buses operate as well as greater funding in buses, urgently. FP cannot see a solution without major changes being made. On behalf of BBSY, it is disappointing that the Enhanced Partnership is being proposed as a solution when it will not address wider issues. Perhaps it's time for operators to consider being a private bus operator isn't the best place in the industry and it should be back in public control.

Q: NS said that he understands the operators' concerns surrounding dwindling passenger numbers, but we need to look at the factors that make it unappealing. E.g. it takes longer by bus than car. These barriers need addressing to encourage more people to choose buses over cars.

Q: IJ asked if the drop off in patronage is uniform across the week or if there are particular times and days of travel which are worse off?

A: PH said that this is mostly uniform across the week. JY said that buses are now only receiving customers who have no other choice, such as school children and those without a car, which puts them in a bad place. JY believes this is in part due to Government guidance on travelling, despite evidence that it is very safe. Those with cars tend to use them.

Q: FP said that we need to look into recovery of services, and under Bus Back Better it is advised there are local forums on bus services. It should be noted that such meetings would be welcomed as soon as possible.

Q: JB said the timetables that are agreed on need to stop having so many changes as it is putting people off taking buses. People need to know when their bus is due. Printed information and route maps should return as it is alienating elderly people. Also, services are diverted, information is poor, and people don't know where buses will stop. Evening frequencies need to be increased, number of changes should be reduced, and confusion will reduce.

### **Tram**

NW noted that reduced services are currently being operated due to reduced staffing levels as a result of COVID. This is primarily off-peak. Patronage is around 65% of pre-COVID levels. NW also advised the group of SCC tree works in the Herdings area affecting Purple route services. Plan B restrictions have impacted COVID recovery. Tram

funding is in place until April, and after this NW will provide an update on how the tram will operate post-funding.

## **Rail**

LM advised that Northern is also affected by Omicron, particularly after Christmas in the Sheffield depot, however this is starting to improve. Because of this, an additional timetable change was implemented on 4 January to reduce services and will be in effect until at least 19 February. This affected a number of South Yorkshire services, both reducing some timetables and withdrawing some services. The situation will be reviewed in a month to decide if services should remain reduced or restrictions should be removed.

LM provided an update on patronage, being around 60% of pre-COVID levels, made up mostly of leisure. On reliability, 90% of services in Yorkshire arrive within three minutes of their scheduled time.

At Woodhouse Station, community engagement has taken place with a SYMCA supported project to install artwork at the station. When restrictions ease, it is hoped community engagement projects will increase.

AB advised patronage on CrossCountry services is roughly around 50% of pre-COVID levels. Most patronage is leisure, and it is hoped this will start to increase as school holidays approach. CrossCountry has not yet had to introduce a reduced COVID timetable as most self-isolation is around catering staff. Agreements are in place with drivers to reduce cancellations by allowing rest day working. CrossCountry is also in engagement with unions to resolve disputes following strike action in December.

CrossCountry is due to reset Community Rail funding in the coming months. An investment fund was launched last year with a number of applications received. This is due to launch again this year, accepting applications for proposals to improve the railway.

Q: JB asked when Northern will reintroduce timetable posters at Sheffield station.

A: LM advised timetable posters are in place at Northern managed stations, but Sheffield is EMR.

### **Action: LM to investigate why posters not in place at Sheffield**

Post-meeting note: Lisa Maloney advised that timetables should be on display from May, but handouts would not be available given the frequent changes.

Q: JB asked when three-coach trains will be introduced on Sheffield to Huddersfield services. With a proposed Park & Ride at Penistone and

trains already overcrowded, it will be worrying to see how busy trains may get.

A: RC advised the P&R is in feasibility stages so can't comment further. An update will be provided in due course. LM advised that as footfall increases, extended trains on this line will be considered.

Q: JB asked if and when Northern will produce a timetable book in South Yorkshire such as available in Cumbria? Will it be free and available at railway stations?

A: "Line Guides" for services in Cumbria are produced by Community Rail Partnerships in their local area. At this point, Northern have no plans to produce paper timetables.

Q: DW asked if a chartered train could be run from Sheffield to Deepcar to examine the possibilities of re-opening a line here? DW also asked about if a half-hourly service will be introduced from Sheffield to Edinburgh? Is it the intention to reintroduce the Southampton to Newcastle services in May?

A: AB said that there are no major plans for the May timetable changes. The only planned change is to the hourly Edinburgh service, with the rest of the timetable being reviewed.

## **5. ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP (EP) CONSULTATION**

RC advised that Andy Wright has not joined the meeting, so has reiterated points raised at local meetings on the launch of the consultation. Paper copies are available at interchanges and the consultation can also be taken online.

Q: FP said the consultation format doesn't give much space for people to provide comment. Also, when people do write comments in the boxes, how will they be recorded? How will these be taken into account?

A: RC advised that SYMCA's Data Services team will be reviewing all of the responses and taking into account and categorising the open answers. These will be summarised and provided to Government when the results are passed on as part of the Enhanced Partnership.

Q: FP asked when the next stage of the EP will be and when the consultation results will be published?

A: RC said that the timescales are determined by Govt so are more constrained, but updates will be provided when there are any.

Q: NS said the EP can be a vehicle to encourage more people onto buses, however none of the tick boxes in the survey allow for one to share their ideas on the plans, rather the additional comments. Also, why is the

consultation only about buses? Public transport as a whole should be considered. Will people think about including this in the response, will they have room to do this?

Q: GA said the consultation has an implication that the EP is the only way forward and will definitely deliver on its promises. The survey only has one place to provide comments on alternatives and is a drawback of the consultation. The EP alone will not provide all of what people want to see with buses.

A: RC said the BSIP includes more than the survey suggests but, as mentioned earlier, all costs money. The consultation focuses on the elements for which we have funding. In terms of recovery, SYMCA is playing its part to help customers back onto services.

JB noted that all of the problems seem to be rooted from the original deregulation of buses in the 1980s.

JY said to refer to something that happened 35 years ago is irrelevant, especially given the pandemic.

## **6. MEMBERS ITEMS/RAISED BY OTHER USER GROUPS**

Nothing was raised at local meetings for SYTUG.

## **7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

FP raised the concern that, in November, Dan Jarvis and LA leaders made a statement that they remain committed to improving bus services, including bringing forward the discussions on franchising, following First service reductions. On the agenda of the January MCA meeting, it doesn't appear that this is being properly considered and is being delayed. FP registered her annoyance at this.

JB registered his concerns with the ongoing issue of Pinstone Street in Sheffield. JB asked AB when Voyager trains would be removed from CrossCountry as they are no longer fit for purpose.

AB said that the Voyagers form part of a contract, and until this time they will remain with CrossCountry. There are future plans being worked up, but no changes are due before the end of the franchise.

## **8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

Wednesday 20 April 2022, 10.30am

Wednesday 20 July 2022, 10.30am

Wednesday 19 October 2022, 10.30am