

South Yorkshire Transport User Group

Minutes

2 November 2022



Present:

J. Hoare	Chair/Doncaster TUG
N. Spetch	Vice Chair/Rotherham TUG
G. Arthur	Barnsley TUG
I. Jenkinson	Sheffield TUG
J. Brightmore	Sheffield TUG

Guests:

K. Belfield	First South Yorkshire
D. Ellis	Stagecoach Yorkshire
N. Wragg	Supertram
A. Bray	CrossCountry
L. Maloney	Northern
T. Taylor	SYMCA
R. Cowling	SYMCA

1. **Open and welcome**

The meeting was opened, and all were welcomed.

2. **Apologies for absence**

Fran Postlethwaite (BTUG), John Young (Stagecoach).

3. **Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

Actions from previous meeting: Tim to provide a copy of the summary of actions/results from the Network consultation – attached with minutes.

4. **Update from operators**

Tram:

NW advised new timetables were introduced on 9 November to improve service delivery.

Tram train has been affected by rail industrial action. Evening tram services on Blue and

Yellow routes impacted by engineering works on Sunday 6 November. Supertram is currently running at around 80% of pre-covid patronage levels.

Train:

Timetable changes on 11 December returning services to pre-Covid levels based on December 2021 timetables. TPE affected by staffing issues. SYMCA pushing for improvements to service provision.

Northern – leisure patronage at 90%, commuter 55-60% of pre-Covid levels. Services have been affected by industrial action and high levels of staff sickness. Northern experiencing crowded services due to TPE cancellations. Crowding on platforms has been raised with the TOCs to provide additional staff to manage the situation. The length of trains is dictated by the platform lengths.

Bus:

First: KB advised that nationally, patronage has fallen attributed to Government message not to travel. Car use has increased and fall in patronage is not all to do with service reductions.

Stagecoach: JY updated the group – 2 October service changes helped reduce on-the-day cancellations. Patronage remains around 80% overall with, 72% paying adults and 60% ENCTS. 96% of mileage operated. Driver recruitment and training is ongoing and working on staff retention by way of rewards and recognition and shift work etc.

GA commented on unreliability of services, particularly on the last journeys of the day and asked whether consideration would be given to extending the hours of ENCTS pass use.

TT advised the Enhanced Partnership includes plans to introduce a last bus promise within the Customer Charter and that ENCTS extension is on a long list of demands of where SYMCA spend money.

IJ advised he understands fare paying passenger reductions are due in part to flexible/hybrid working and changing travel patterns but has any research been carried out as to why ENCTS patronage has not returned.

ACTION: TT to provide Transport Focus work on why ENCTS patronage still low.

Post meeting note: Link to Transport Focus report:

<https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/publication/getting-free-bus-pass-holders-back-on-board/>

JB stated reduced services has resulted in packed buses.

KB advised double deckers are used where possible to increase capacity, but some routes are not suitable for double deckers.

Comment also made about services operated by different operators running at similar times on some routes with large gaps in between increasing waiting times at stops.

KB advised there is a legal qualifying agreement on some routes such as the 120 to coordinate services. There will naturally be doubling of services on sections of routes.

5. Covid recovery funding for bus and tram

TT advised that last minute announcement of Government Bus Recovery Grant funding extension had an impact on services we see now as part of October changes. This funding ends in March and SYMCA resources are exhausted for protection of services from that point.

First did not accept BRG funding, which stipulates a mileage threshold, and instead introduced a network based on resource availability to ensure reliability of remaining services.

6. Enhanced Partnership forum

JH attended the EP forum meeting on 28 September, chaired by a Bus Users Group representative from the north-east. Its role is to influence the decisions of the various partnership boards in the interests of the bus passenger.

In all the discussions there were some key words which came up time and again – **reliability** was constantly stressed, followed by regularity, punctuality and frequency. The exercise was based on the production of a customer charter in which passenger expectations would be defined in as short and concise a way as possible. Reassurance of passenger safety post-Covid could be achieved by publicising, for example, how often vehicles are cleaned and where CCTV operates.

How to make the charter meaningful?- data should be published by route, it was also suggested that one access point for complaints and concerns made sense.

What form should the charter take and how to communicate it to the public? -a short, accessible version (no more than two sides) should be published and widely distributed.

Attracting passengers back to public transport is the aim of all involved. Not everyone is digitally equipped or expert but may be the audience that needs legible information more than most.

A second meeting was held virtually on 1 November attended by JH who advised:

The **Customer Charter** is to be developed, following the initial meeting. Pat Beijer outlined the potential content, which will be filled out, as follows:

- 1 Who is the charter for?
- 2 Strategic direction.
- 3 Behaviour of providers.
- 4 Behaviour of users.
- 5 Service quality aims.
- 6 User experience.
- 7 Access to support
- 8 Handling of complaints

Demand recovery – Sept.2022, 55m passengers, the target for March 2025 is 77m. Covid recovery is so far at 78% of pre-covid levels. We have some way to go.

Areas to consider for recovery – are there any quick wins?

- 1 Customer information
- 2 Ticketing
- 3 Marketing and communication
- 4 Specific groups of people

Discussion included these ideas:

Everyone emphasized reliability

A_South_Yorkshire map showing visitor attractions and how to reach them by bus would be good publicity.

Videos to show how to use the bus (amazing ignorance was reported), videos to show the right ticket for a journey.

Imaginative ideas on flexible and multi-operator tickets were suggested (the latter need not cover the whole county)

The whole exercise was instructive but it is clear that we cannot look at buses on their own, however much we seek reliability and punctuality, when so much is outside the control of the operators. Many parties are involved in delivery and such issues as road works can cause a hold up and damage the best of intentions.

It did, however, strike me that the interval between services in any timetable is critical. When the bus should run every 10 minutes, one missing is not a disaster, when the service is hourly, a failure to arrive is enough to lose potential passengers for good!

The Customer Charter needs to be related to the green agenda and also to recognise such issues as the notice period for planned changes.

7. Members items escalated from district user groups

None

8. Any other business

Integration – bus services have reduced. Could people think outside the box by linking bus services to tram and train services i.e. shuttle buses to train stations.

9. Dates of future meetings

The next meeting date was confirmed as Wednesday 18 January 2023 at 2pm.