

# South Yorkshire Transport User Group

## Minutes

20 April 2022



### Present:

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

### Guests:

R. Haywood	First South Yorkshire
L. Maloney	Northern
P. Myers	Northern
D. Ellis	Stagecoach Yorkshire
R. Cowling	SYMCA
E. O'Hara	SYMCA
C. Sadler	SYMCA
A. Wright	SYMCA

### 1. **Open and welcome**

The meeting was opened, and all were welcomed.

### 2. **Apologies for absence**

Nigel Wragg (Supertram), David Wrottesley (Sheffield TUG), Alex Bray (Cross Country), Tim Taylor (SYMCA).

### 3. **Minutes of previous meeting**

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

Actions from previous meeting:

LM provided an update on printed timetables at Sheffield station. LM advised that timetables should be on display from May, but handouts would not be available given the frequent changes.

#### **4. Update from operators**

##### **Train:**

PM advised on the current situation at Northern, including replacement buses on services that have been cancelled due to a shortage of trained drivers. Drivers can not be worked on rest days following a moratorium from the driver union. Covid is continuing to affect Northern, with staff shortages around the January levels when the Omicron variant was taking hold. However, numbers are going in the right direction. Leisure patronage was around 105% of pre-covid levels at Easter, but around 80-85% general patronage as commute is not returning. Busiest service usually Leeds-Nottingham, with weekend services upgraded to four-car where possible.

Q: JB complained again about the lack of timetable posters at Sheffield Rail Station

A: PM advised that no station has posters because of the high frequency of changes – they would quickly become out of date.

Q: JB asked why only two-car trains were being used on the Penistone line after platform extensions

A: PM advised that dedicated three-car trains are expected to arrive at the depot in December as there are delays with EMR releasing rolling stock.

Q: JB asked why only two-car trains on the Leeds-Nottingham services

A: PM advised that this is because of issues with other operators and logistics at Leeds station, with bay platforms not being long enough. Without the issues with other operators, two-car trains would be able to cope. Part of the ECML timetable rewrite in May 2023, an extra Leeds-Sheffield fast service should be available.

Q: NS said it's unsurprising that Northern's commuter traffic is not returning due to unreliability. NS added a comment about less resource on the Sheffield to Lincoln service and asked how many drivers would be needed to operate the pre-Covid service on this line vs the current number of drivers.

A: PM advised that there are enough drivers available, just not enough trained on the routes. Gainsborough Central services are operating sporadically to keep drivers current on the route.

LM added that in June and July, there will be weekend blockades on the Hope Valley line with rail replacement bus services operating between Sheffield and Hope. In June, there will also be a blockade between Chesterfield and Sheffield which will cause disruption to services.

##### **Tram:**

NW sent his apologies, so EO provided an update. Supertram is currently running at around 70% of pre-covid patronage levels. There have been service interruptions caused

by overhead line work, along with reroiling works over the Easter Bank Holiday weekend. Normal service now operating bar Tram Train, with a two-hourly frequency.

Q: JB said that he was unable to find any information to suggest that Supertram was not serving Halfway.

A: EO advised that this would be picked up with Supertram, who would normally communicate this with customers.

**Post meeting note: Supertram is now informing customer of the disruption which is expected to remain until 6 May via Twitter and their web page at <https://www.stagecoachbus.com/news/yorkshire/2022/april-2022/service-changes-due-to-issues-with-overhead-power-lines>. Posters should also now be at tram stops advising of alternative services.**

Q: IJ asked if there was a recent announcement regarding Government funding on Supertram.

A: EO advised that this would be picked up in Item 5, however advised of the £500m for the region which will include a significant amount of money geared towards refurbishment and continuation of the tram network.

#### **Bus:**

AW provided a broad update on buses, with patronage around 65% of pre-Covid levels. He advised that some operators are experiencing staff shortages, which is leading to on-the-day cancellations. Further funding has been received up to 5 October as part of the Bus Recovery Grant (BRG), which is the last commitment from central government as part of the recovery fund.

First: RH advised that patronage is around 70% of pre-Covid levels. In the last week, ENCTS travel has seen an increase but a drop in commercial passengers owing to school closures due to the holidays. RH advised that driver turnover has somewhat stabilised. Recruitment is continuing, but there is also a steady flow of colleagues leaving. The biggest issue at the moment is staff shortage due to Covid. No upcoming timetable changes are planned until around October when funding is expected to come to an end.

Stagecoach: DE advised that patronage is around 67%. There is a good level of drivers available, however staff sickness from Covid led to an increase in short notice cancellations, which will hopefully be short-term. There is a planned timetable change on 22 May, which consists of minor timetable changes to improve punctuality.

Q: GA asked to what extent operators are monitoring the recovery of drivers, as Covid can have lasting effects.

A: RH advised that drivers have a return-to-work interview with a manager to ensure they are fit to drive full time or whether they require a phased return. PM added that the situation was the same at Northern, but the illness period seems to be longer.

## **5. Covid recovery funding for bus and tram**

EO reminded the group of the 12-18 months of recovery funding provided by the Government to operators. This new stage runs from 6 April to 5 October. The nationwide figure of £150m has increased to £189m to support operators, both directly to operators and through Local Transport Authorities (LTAs). £38m of this will go to LTAs to support tendered services and services at risk of withdrawal.

In the next 12 months, around £4m will go to tram to support services, which is lower than previous amounts. However, tram has been worse affected in terms of returning passengers.

From October, when funding ends, there are expected to be a reduction in the network unless passenger/customer numbers increase, which are still well below pre-Covid levels. A lot of the passengers not returning are ENCTS pass holders..

Q: JH said he is unsure how decisions can be made on service reductions when the services are already reduced for customers to return to

A: EO advised that a number of services are available, however as the network is mostly commercial, it is the operators' choice as to which services they do or don't run. It's the LTA's responsibility to try and fill the gaps where possible, within budget constraints. Where revenue is not coming in, it's difficult.

Q: GA asked about the Great British Rail Sale, and if the money being brought into the area for transport could be used for a similar bus scheme.

A: EO advised that this may be a consideration for the individual operators, but pricing isn't regulated by the government in terms of bus. LTAs try and encourage competitive fares and, going forward, the Enhanced Partnership (EP) with operators will lead to a greater reflection on bus prices. He advised that SY is one of the lower-cost regions in the country for buses so trying to reduce further is a challenge.

## **6. Enhanced Partnership and Franchising Assessment**

AW advised that the EP scheme has been formalised, but the Governance structure is being finalised. AW advised of the variety of schemes under consideration as part of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The National Bus Strategy and the pandemic have both brought about problems for the bus network and looking into these will be the immediate priorities for the bus network.

AW told the group of the MCA's intention to start a franchising assessment. Work is beginning on this however it will be a long process. The key element of this will look at the affordability of franchising in the region, as this will come at great cost. AW advised the group not to expect a quick response on the findings of the assessment as there is a lengthy legal consideration, however the work is beginning.

Q: JB asked if the EP will go ahead now a Franchising Assessment is taking place.

A: AW advised that the EP Plan and Scheme – which set out our ambitions to improve bus services in South Yorkshire – were formally agreed from 1 April 2022. The Plan and Scheme will then come into operation on 10 June 2022 and will run in parallel with the franchising assessment.

Q: JB asked if the EP will increase service frequencies.

A: AW said increasing frequencies on key service corridors is an ambition of the EP.

Q: FP raised an item from the BTUG meeting, asking if any action has started yet on franchising in regard to commercial operation. She also raised the point on the BSIP not receiving any Government funding whatsoever.

A: AW advised that, for the first part, work has not started yet. We are in the early stages of working out a project plan and determining the work required. AW said on BSIP funding that we are awaiting formal feedback from the Department for Transport (DfT) for the plans put forward. He advised that there are alternative funding opportunities to look into some of the ambitions of the BSIP and re-assess some of the plans.

Q: FP drew attention to the point that the DfT said only ambitious BSIPs would receive funding and suggested that South Yorkshire would need to be more ambitious to receive funding.

A: AW said that we needed to ensure the commitments in the BSIP were deliverable and it is disappointing that we didn't receive any funding. South Yorkshire is a much smaller MCA area than neighbours such as Liverpool and Manchester who received funding. However, SYMCA will continue to submit bids to other Government funding sources to enable us to improve our transport network.

## 7. Members items

***The Better Buses Group have been liaising with MCA to be included in the EP forum. The EP indicates that both the Passenger Forum and the new Customer Charter will be complete by the end of June. The group feels that the forum should have input into the Charter so can consideration be given to create the forum first?***  
JH asked what the purpose of the SYTUG would be if not to provide feedback?

AW said the piece of work to align established groups like SYTUG and district forums into an EP forum hasn't been done yet. The EP forum will need to be a cross-section of views including users, stakeholders and businesses. Absolutely the SYTUG will be considered for the forum whether under a representation scheme or as a group. Work is ongoing to investigate this.

FP said it would be useful for SYMCA to hold discussions with West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) to seek ideas on how to have input into forums.

JH added that he feels SYTUG is a representative cross-section so would be ideal to feed into the forum.

***As part of the EP can consideration be given to providing better***

***priority to buses coming out of BTI?***

AW advised that, as a principle, through the existing bus partnerships and outside of these, there are regular discussions with operators and highway authorities including Barnsley. AW is sure that if there is scope for better bus priority leaving Barnsley Interchange then BMBC will provide this. AW will review this with BMBC.

**8. Any Other Business**

CS passed along points raised by DW in his absence:

***What has occurred, if anything re Northern Rail action on my idea of a Sheffield to Deepcar/Stocksbridge passenger charter train similar to those operated in the last few years on freight lines to:***

- ***Ashington from Newcastle***
- ***Southampton to Fawley***
- ***Exeter to Oakhampton***

**CS advised he would pass this on to Northern.** NS suggested DW may have been asking if there may be a review of such a service down this route.

***What is the detailed route, number of vehicles, frequency, capacity of the suggested "Sheffield city Centre Freebie Electric Bus?" How is it financed, bearing in mind its previous withdrawal and who is the operator?***

**Post meeting note: SYMCA's Transport Executive has sought tenders for the provision of a city centre shuttle service on behalf of SCC who are funding the service. The proposed route is set out below:**

**Sheffield Interchange > Moorfoot > Sheffield Interchange:**

**Sheffield Interchange, Harmer Lane, Pond Street, Flat Street, Fitzalan Square, High Street, Castle Square, Arundel Gate, Norfolk Street, Surrey Street, Leopold Street, Pinfold Street, Holly Street, West Street, Carver Street, Division Street, Rockingham Street, Charter Row, Fitzwilliam Gate, Cumberland Street, Eyre Street, Furnival Square, Furnival Street, Brown Street, Paternoster Row, Sheaf Square, Pond Street, Harmer Lane, Sheffield Interchange.**

**The proposed timetable is subject to internal approvals at SCC but is anticipated to operate with 2 environmentally friendly (Euro 6) buses to support the Sheffield Clean Air Zone and will operate for up to 18 months. After this time the service is expected to be converted to an Electric Bus Operation.**

JB advised that he finds it easier to interpret timetables with a physical version than searching online for the details. NS added that the SYMCA does not provide any printed timetable leaflets. Why is it not a possibility to have these printed on demand at interchanges or advertise that this can be done in libraries?

**Post meeting note: We encourage customers to self-serve and visit our TSY website where they can print timetable information or register for timetables to be sent to the customer electronically. They can also to ask a friend or family member whether they can print a time or register for timetables to be sent to the customer**

**timetable for them. Also, they are encouraged to visit a library or community venue that provides the internet and printing services.**

**We currently do not print timetables at our Interchanges as if we agree to this it would mean that the Customer Service Ambassadors at the Customer Services (CS) desk would spend the majority of their time printing timetables for customers as demand would increase through word of mouth. There would also be an increase in costs for paper, print cartridges and the printers themselves as we currently do not have these at all of the CS desks. Printed timetables were removed as a result of budget cuts, and we don't have the resource available to provide this service. Operators are considering what they will provide in terms of printed materials.**

DE informed the group of South Yorkshire's successful ZEBRA bid for funding for electric buses. These will operate out of Stagecoach's Rawmarsh depot on services between Barnsley and Doncaster & Barnsley and Rotherham.

Q: GA asked if there were any plans for manufacture of electric buses to be done in South Yorkshire to help create jobs in Yorkshire?

A: DE said that it is unknown who buses will be ordered from. AW added that a piece of work has been undertaken to investigate the decarbonisation of the bus fleet in the region, which has involved route testing. The Government's ZEBRA funding will be helpful to develop manufacturing capacity in the region and options will be explored.

DE also advised the group of the return of the Hope Valley Explorer service from 14 May on weekends and bank holidays until 3 September. The service runs from the Derwent Dams through Bamford, Hope and to Castleton.

## **9. Dates of future meetings**

The next meeting date was confirmed as Wednesday 20 July, 10.30am.