

South Yorkshire Transport User Group

Minutes

18 April 2023



Present:

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

Guests:

J. Young	Stagecoach Yorkshire
N. Wragg	Supertram
A. Bray	CrossCountry
R. Isaac	Northern
A. Wright	SYMCA
R. Cowling	SYMCA

1. **Open and welcome**

The meeting was opened, and all were welcomed.

2. **Apologies for absence**

D. Allsop, Northern

3. **Minutes of previous meeting**

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

4. **Update from operators**

Bus:

Stagecoach – JY advised that services were slowly improving as drivers complete their training. The shortage of skilled labour and availability of parts for vehicle repairs is challenging and is affecting some service delivery.

Patronage is around 70-75% of pre-Covid levels. The £2 fare has seen a rise in single journeys, particularly in deprived areas but not really encouraged new passengers.

Concerns were raised over services in Barnsley whereby two consecutive journeys have been cancelled leaving passengers waiting a long time.

JY advised it is not an option to fail two services in a row - and this is rare – a shortage of driver on one service followed by a road traffic incident or vehicle breakdown could be the cause.

NS advised there was confusion with services 26 and 26a. Bus stops at Kiveton Park are shown on the route map but are not actually present (Packman Lane/Manor Road, Stop ID: 37035929 and Packman Lane/Manor Road).

ACTION: JY to investigate and report back.

Post meeting note: These stops are known as 'Customer Practice' stops. There is no physical infrastructure there, but if a customer was to stand where either stop is indicated on maps, a bus will stop and let passengers board. In effect, they work in a similar way to a virtual stop or hail & ride stop, except the stops are in set locations rather than along a stretch of road.

The absence of a representative from First South Yorkshire was noted and a request made to invite TM Travel. RC advised the group that they are both invited to every meeting.

Tram:

The October timetable changes have stabilised and reliability has improved as a result of the changes. There have been some recent issues with rail breaks due to severe temperature changes. Works are scheduled to repair the rails and details of any impact on services will be posted on the Supertram website and shared on their social media channels.

Leisure travel has returned strong. Commuter journeys have changed due to hybrid working.

DW advised he was disappointed there was no customer information available at stops during disruption in February. A separate, individual response has been provided to DW on 7/3/23.

NW advised that if staff are available, they will be located at stops to help customers alongside the conductors on duty. There are no PID screens at Fitzalan Square due to a lack of funding when the scheme was introduced, and other sites have constraints making installation very difficult and costly.

PID provision is being reviewed.

Train:

Cross Country – AB advised that services were running well, and some services still ran throughout the strikes.

Old units are/have been removed from services.

May 2023 timetables will see an increase in service levels. Cross Country are currently working with DfT on a new contract from October.

RI from Northern Joined the meeting.

Post meeting update from Northern: Northern passenger numbers are currently around 80% of pre-covid levels with commuter figures mid-week (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday) around 90%; Monday commuter figures are around 80% and Friday is poorest day with around 75% recovery. Weekend leisure recovery is still high at 90-100%. Cancellations are currently at 3.43% (slightly higher than 3% target but impacted by Industrial action and sickness levels over winter months). 88.53% services are arriving within 3 minutes and 99% of services are arriving within 15 minutes.

Further industrial action (RMT) took place on 16 and 18 March. During this industrial action Northern were only able to operate a limited contingency service. RMT have reached an agreement with the Network Rail Signal Operators they represent; however, they have not yet reached an agreement with Train Crews but strikes planned for 29 and 31 March were suspended to allow further talks to commence. Additionally, the Rail Manager union (TSSA) has also now reached an agreement. The driver's union (ASLEF) has not yet reached an agreement but has also not announced any further industrial action at this point.

May timetable soon to be launched. Consultation was held in early March and this was attended by two SYMCA representatives. The new timetable will see some changes to services in the South Yorkshire area so check before you travel.

A discussion was held around the May timetable changes and the impact this has on journeys, particularly those between Sheffield and Cleethorpes. The new timetable removes the Saturday services and all peak hour journeys serving Gainsborough Central. Additionally, there is a 5 days (Mon-Fri) single round trip between Sheffield and Cleethorpes which allows for a ~90 minute visit to Cleethorpes. This is now the ONLY rail service offered at Gainsborough Central (and Kirton Lindsey and Brigg). These services do NOT call at any of the intermediate SY stations.

Overcrowding, particularly on match days or when events are held. Sheffield-bound services are often full before the train enters South Yorkshire and it can mean that, at best, the trip is uncomfortable (standing in a crowded vestibule) and at worst, people cannot board at Kiveton Park and/or beyond.

ACTION: RI to take this back to Northern to investigate and provide a response. RC to liaise with SYMCA Rail team for comment.

Post meeting note: A separate email (provided by NS) containing details of the above was sent by RC to SYMCA Rail team and Richard Isaac for comment. SYMCA Rail team responded with: *The comments in the feedback document are echoed in a letter we sent to Nick Donovan, Managing Director of Northern in February in a response to the May 23 timetable. We wrote - It is disappointing the Sheffield to Gainsborough Central peak service has been withdrawn from the May timetable and there was no proposal to fully reinstate the Sheffield–Gainsborough Central stopping train in May. The absence of the*

Gainsborough stopper means the Leeds-Sheffield-Lincoln semi-fast service has to serve all the stations between Sheffield and Lincoln which slows this key inter-regional service down significantly. This has a detrimental impact on end-to-end journey times and subsequent competitiveness with the car for journeys between Leeds/Sheffield and Lincoln. Also mentioned, we want to see the full reinstatement of the Doncaster to Scunthorpe service to hourly. This service is vital to residents of Thorne as well as other stations on the route, which are quite isolated and poorly served by other public transport.

We understand the Leeds to Lincoln service cannot run as a service with more carriages (to increase seating capacity) due to restrictions for platforming at Leeds Station.

These issues and the running of a second fast service Leeds to Sheffield are included in the Timetable consultation meetings with Northern and have been documented via a service aspirations document we have sent to Northern Trains.

It would be good to be include in further feedback on Northern Trains and future timetable feedback for all services in South Yorkshire.

5. Covid recovery funding for bus and tram

Government funding has been extended to the end of June and the £2 fare has also been extended. There's still a need for Government funding beyond this point and discussions are ongoing with DfT post June. There is talk of a transition phase and Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) – based on annual fuel consumption - may be moved to payment per mile. Operators are hopeful that discussions will provide a solution to avoid the cliff edge come June. There is still no long-term plan for funding.

A discussion was held around traffic restrictions and bus priority and the approach in Oxford where they are pro-car.

6. Members items escalated from district user groups

None raised

7. Any other business

JB asked when the group will be updated on tenders, as he has heard they have been issued. RC advised that tenders have not been awarded yet and the group will be advised along with all customers when the July service changes are confirmed. Information is usually posted on the TSY website and social media two to three weeks ahead of the changes and new timetables are posted at stops.

JY also confirmed that tenders have not been awarded yet and that Stagecoach have bid for the ones they currently run and more.

NS raised concerns over the complexity of ticketing. Drivers have issued incorrect TravelMaster tickets as they are unsure exactly which ticket the customer requires (particularly if they want the combined bus/tram/train ticket). A simplification of ticket names was suggested.

ACTION: JY to take this comment back to TravelMaster. RC to raise with EP group.

Post meeting note: Ticket simplification is a significant priority for the EP, and there are active discussions at the moment. However, making progress has been hard, as we have very little jurisdiction under competition law. We can influence through subsidising specific tickets, but budget is a major constraint. The intention is to have a deep dive session on this at the next EP Forum.

JH announced he is standing down as Chair of the group and ask if anyone would like the opportunity going forwards. IJ suggested an interest and JH will propose IJ at the next meeting so the group can decide.

8. Dates of future meetings

Wednesday 19 July 2023, 2.00pm

Thursday 19 October 2023, 10.30am.