

promoting quality public transport.....

Bus and Light Rail Conference, Blackpool, 16th June 22

Ruskin Hotel, Blackpool

**Conference kindly supported by Blackpool Transport Services and
Blackpool Council**

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman, David Butterworth, welcomed delegates to the conference. He commented on a number of issues since the March Conference.

- Poor TPE performance
- Perception re Ticket Office closures (they give personal contact)
- Withdrawal of paper rail timetables and other information
- Taxis – fares and regulation disparities
- HS2 Golborne Link cancellation will give rise to additional problems
- Rail strikes

2. Blackpool Council

David Simper, Transport Projects Leader, gave an informed presentation

- *Buses* - David reported that leisure and tourism driving recovering footfall - April 22 at 2.9m passengers; eventually 115 buses 'Zebra' (zero emissions); working on an 'enhanced partnership' bid;
- *Rail* – changes afoot with the MRTF Dec 22 timetable change, 2 tph to MIA, rather than one to each of MIA and Hazel Grove (latter preferred); also unhappy about possibility of 90s rolling stock (cl 323s) inherited from W. Midlands, seeing that tourism travel at both ends of the service will result in excessive luggage on what is basically commuter stock, the market for which is not – and is unlikely to – recover to the same level;
- *Active Travel* – cycling and walking – features in plans, but a 'levelling up' bid for segregated cycle route was not wholeheartedly supported locally and recently failed;
- *Trams*: Blackpool North Station. Link not yet completed – work outside the station still in progress.
- *Coaches* - Coach station inadequate so keen to provide parking for vehicles. Rigby Rd depot a possibility with electric charging points available. Also secure overnight parking

3. Blackpool Transport Services

Jane Cole, Managing Director started by commenting that in 2020 during the first lockdown, there were only 20% of fare paying passengers, Nov 20 50%, but in subsequent lockdown back to 25%. However, by March 21 - 75%, and July 21 86% on buses with 125% on trams. March 22 the figure was 90%, today - 110%.

Bus Users UK had been employed to undertake a survey. Customer access to information was important and printed timetables would be available this summer.

The council had funded £600,000 to purchase onboard ticket machines (contactless, etc)

The Company was 35 drivers short on the basic establishment, plus need for seasonal staff. 15 buses were not in use

Jane gave an update on Rigby Road depot developments including electric bus (56 by 2025) and coach parking facilities.

Heritage trams were an important market.

4. Lancashire County Council

Cllr Charlie Edwards, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport went through the timeline of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (Bus Back Better). Lancs CC was opting for an Enhanced Partnership rather than franchise model, working collaboratively with Blackburn with Darwen. The original bid was for £170m, but just £34.5m has been allocated to spend on improving bus provision.

Priorities laid down by DfT were -

- 1: Bus Priority Measures. Where they will make most impact not where easiest to deliver.
- 2: Ambitious and eye-catching initiatives that reduce and/or simplify fares, at pace.
- 3: Increased service frequencies and new/expanded routes.

Lancs had submitted a number of priorities inc more bus lanes and bus stop improvement, discounted fares in the evening and a multi operator ticketing scheme. Also some enhancements to bus service support. Bus driver shortages was a challenge. Cllr Edwards stressed the potential of Demand Responsive Transport.

(Presentation on website)

5. Panel Session

Margaret Mitchell, Wigan, mention of HS2 Link and new Golborne Station

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Malcolm Conway referred to the cross-county boundary links (Lancs/Cumbria), e.g. the 555 bus in response to the point about other Lancashire CC interfaces.

David Culshaw - will electricity be available at the right price at the right times when required to charge vehicles?

Adrian Swift, rtd Town Planner, need for planning to be more related to public transport provision, the Morecambe Eden Project and current poor rail services

Stephen Waring, Halifax, referred to Hydrogen. Q. how do different models relate to each other?

Malcolm Richardson – Fylde – support for printed timetables

Ian Watson, Carlisle, Bus Stop markings and car drivers ignoring them

6. Integration, Integration, Integration!

David Butterworth, TWNW Chairman, drew the distinction between integration in Switzerland and lack of it in the UK. He described the hurdles to be overcome in planning and making a journey between Clitheroe and Keswick.

(Presentation on website)

7. Date of Next Conference

October provisionally in Liverpool to be confirmed.