

promoting quality public transport.....

CONFERENCE REPORT

Thursday 2nd March TfGM, Manchester

Conference kindly supported by TfGM, NorthernTrains, Avanti West Coast and Cumbria LEP

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman, David Butterworth, welcomed delegates to the Conference and thanked Transport for Greater Manchester, for kindly offering us the use of the room and providing refreshments. He also welcomed the speakers who represented a wide variety of public transport providers in the North West region.

David then summarised key features that users of public transport demanded

-

- It needs to be available for our use when we need it;
- The service frequency should be appropriate for where we live;
- We expect the service to perform punctually;
- We should not feel to be ripped-off when we pay our fare;
- We expect a comfortable ride;
- We expect a smooth interchange between different modes of transport;
- We expect to have a safe journey.

In particular he contrasted the lack of transport integration in this country to many European countries, in particular Switzerland.

2. Transport in Greater Manchester

Vernon Everitt, Transport Commissioner, GM Combined Authority

The role of the Commissioner is to advise the Mayor for Greater Manchester on Transport issues and priorities. He is independent from TfGM but is in regular close contact. His 4 immediate concerns are a Customer Review, Operational Services and the Network, Funding and Organisational Capability.

The density of Manchester has increased by 8% in the last decade and has led to a focus on funding its transport needs and seeking investment support from Central Government. He would like to see greater integration of transport

services and the introduction of the branded Bee Network would be a major step in this aspiration.

Bus Franchising is progressing and the network in Bolton and Wigan will be fully franchised from 24th September this year followed by the rest of Central Manchester from 25th January 2025. A series of simplified products will be phased in including a whole journey tap and go system and capped fares. It is hoped to integrate the suburban heavy rail network into this system in due course.

The results of the new Bee Network will bring predictable journey times, greater interchange opportunities, increased safety leading to travel confidence. A Bee App will be launched soon.

Finally he referred to the current issues of failing service levels from Avanti and TransPennine Express and amongst others, he is involved in the campaign seeking major improvements.

3. Our Train Operators based in the North

Jonathan Orris, TransPennine Express and Chris Jackson, Northern Rail

Jonathan began for TPE by referring to the trans Pennine route upgrade in which all train operators are involved. A 26 day blockade will be in place from 11th March and a further 9 day blockade will be in place in June. An alternative travel plan has been worked up and this has led to the production of a Passenger Manifesto which had been agreed to adopt a customer handling plan and will be led by an Evaluation Group formed from stakeholders. This will commit operators to clear communication, optimum travel by train, high quality rail replacement services, good information streams at all levels, safety and human intervention need and will be under constant review.

Chris began by describing the extent of the Northern network which features 2600 services per day, 500 stations of which 149 are staffed, 90 million passenger journeys per year (two thirds of all rail travel in the North) and 7000 employees. 77% of tickets are now sold digitally and the company receives a subsidy of £634 million from Government (38p per passenger mile).

Every £1 spent on train fares is estimated to bring £2.50 in economic benefit. £1 million is committed to the 20 Community Rail Partnerships in the North.

He then referred to the current industrial action which had dented customer confidence after 6 months of disruption. This affects all operators and the Liverpool to Manchester route had seen severe congestion as well as a severe level of sickness absence affecting Cumbria services. However recovery is underway with 90% of services now back. It was unfortunate, however, that it has not proved sustainable to continue with the Dales Rail Sunday services this year. However it is expected that there will be no further cuts in the December timetable.

Fleet replacement is now becoming a challenge with 60% - 70% of the diesel rolling stock due to be replaced in the next decade. Bi-mode units will be required to meet Government requirements. New trains will be designed with a customer focus with particular attention to accessibility.

In discussion reference was made to the need for greater customer engagement, improvement of interchange and connectivity, electrification, ticket office closures, and the future needs of the Eden Project North.

4. Bus Franchising in Greater Manchester ***Alison Chew, Deputy Director of Bus, TfGM***

Deregulation of Bus services took place in all parts of the Country, apart from London, in 1986. This resulted in fragmentation, confusion and fares discrepancy as there was little control over operators. The Bus Services Act of 2017 paved the way for the introduction of franchising and Greater Manchester agreed this in 2021. This will lead to improved integration, customer focus commitment, central management and a response to investment in the region as well as addressing de-carbonisation principles.

September 2023 will see franchising go live in Bolton, Wigan, and parts of Bury and Salford, followed by Oldham, Rochdale and the remainder of Bury in March 2024. The rest of Greater Manchester will be fully franchised by January 2025.

100 zero emission buses are on order for phase 1 followed by a further 170 for subsequent phases. TfGM will procure the fleet and lease it to operators who will work under a minimum specification. All vehicles will feature enhanced customer information and amenities and provide an improved experience for users. It is expected that the results will be increased patronage and a major contribution to economic benefit.

Subsequent discussion included restoration of previously lost routes, branding and information provision, bus priority corridors and scaling up of services to cater for events.

5. West Coast Rail ***Nick Smith, Regional Growth Manager, Avanti***

Nick began by acknowledging the inconvenience of services during 2022. Challenges were industrial action, sickness, infra structure work and weather but recovery is now well underway. The 3 train per hour service from Manchester to London is now restored and a 2nd hourly service from Liverpool is to be introduced in May as well as a 10 train per day service for North Wales, both using the new Hitachi fleet.

Station enhancements are taking place at Wigan NW, Stockport, Oxenholme, and Runcorn and a new cycle storage facility is being installed at Manchester Piccadilly.

A major Driver Recruitment programme is almost complete and a target has been adopted for the team to be 50% female by 2030.

A dedicated Travel Companion programme has been introduced to provide a help channel for disabled customers and also provide a “safety net” if the unexpected happens.

In discussion the inconsistency of capacity amongst the 9/11 coach trains, cycle storage on trains, expensive car park pricing at stations, weekend advance ticket availability, and Easter engineering work closures were all raised.

6. The significance of Manchester Metrolink ***Danny Vaughan, Metrolink Manager, TfGM***

Since the first phase of Metrolink was opened in 1992 the network has tripled in size. It now features 99 stops and carried 45 million passenger journeys in 2019. Results have been a reduction in car journeys by 40 million per annum. It is now operated by a partnership between TfGM and Keolis with the former taking the revenue risk.

During the Covid pandemic revenue dropped significantly and a £120 million subsidy was provided by Government but this has now ceased. Passenger numbers have now recovered to 85% but operational costs have increased by 25%. It has been noted that a change in the ratio of patronage between commuter and leisure travellers has occurred with the latter now heavily increased. It is further noted that a Tuesday – Thursday pattern of commuting has emerged. Future need will be to grow patronage and a fare freeze since 2020 is helping and it is expected that the greater integration offered by the Bee Network will bring major additional usage.

Service levels have been restored with Media City enjoying a 6 minute interval and Friday/Saturday services now being available until 1.00 am.

Future development is planned to extend the Trafford Centre service to Crumpsall.

Subsequent discussion covered the desire for expansion to Wigan, Bolton, and Stockport, the £10 add-on Concession Pass and integrated ticketing for travel outside Greater Manchester

7. Date of Next Conference

June 2023 – date to be advised.

Copies of the presentations are available on the TravelWatch NorthWest Website

www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk