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promoting quality public transport.....

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 Bus Reform Project Support Officer
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4th August 2023

Dear Francesca,

LIVERPOOL CITY REGION BUS FRANCHISING CONSULTATION

1. Introduction

1.1 TravelWatch NorthWest is an independent Community Interest Company representing all public transport users in North West England. We give below our comments on this consultation. We have kept to the short questionnaire as this covers the main points adequately from our point of view.

2. Questions

2.1 The Assessment concludes that the current bus system is not performing as well as it should. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

2.2 Agree. The decline in bus services throughout the country over the years has been well documented. The reasons are no doubt complex but we would cite the following factors -

- Reliability - traffic congestion and the need for bus priority measures,
- The convenience of the car and growth in car ownership together with lack of car restraint in cities like Liverpool
- Unfamiliarity with ticket purchasing procedures (pricing, how to pay, etc), journey planning and information. Difficulty of accessing information about fares.
- Customer care perception and in reality - very much down to driver attitude and conduct
- Lack of fares integration and poor modal interchange arrangements.
- Lack of on bus information systems.

2.3 The Assessment concludes that Franchising is the best option for the Combined Authority to meet its strategic objectives for bus transport in the region. For each of the following objectives, to what extent do you think Franchising will help deliver it? [Not at all/ Somewhat/ Mostly/ Fully/ don't know]

i) Objective 1 – Maximise the contribution of bus services to achieving the economic success and social capacity of the Liverpool City Region. (Make the most of how bus services contribute to improving the economy and enable people to access opportunities and services).

2.4 Mostly.

ii) Objective 2 – Maximise the contribution of bus services to reducing the impact of travel on the natural environment. (Make the most of how buses can reduce the impact on the environment).

2.5 Somewhat. Making bus journeys more attractive and help to lower car use will be a significant contribution to reducing the impact on the environment. The introduction of electric buses will also be a key factor in this context.

iii) Objective 3 – Harness competition's role in improving the offer to passengers and delivering best value for the Combined Authority for the services it procures. (Use competition between operators to help improve bus standards and services for passengers and get the most value for the cost to the public sector).

2.6 Somewhat. We assume that competition will only be evident in the tendering process. The chief competitor with the bus is the private car.

iv) Objective 4 – Maximise the passenger benefits of service coordination, ticket integration and information provision across the Liverpool City Region public transport network. (Give passengers a better experience with buses by making bus services more connected, improving how tickets are used across bus services and other public transport services, and providing better information about services and timetables.)

2.7 Mostly. We agree reform is necessary. It would enable clearer fares, flexible ticketing including multi modal, better integration, etc. But it must be accompanied by improvements to infrastructure – bus stations and stops – also information including real time, bus priority measures, better driver awareness training and greater attention to the needs of the mobility impaired in all manifestations – the elderly, the physically and wider disabled, families with children, etc

2.8 At bus stops and bus stations there must be -

- Accurate, up to date timetable and other information displayed in cases at bus stops. .
- Real time information at ideally all, bus stops and at all bus stations. This must be “real-time”, not timetable times. With GPS now widespread digital real time displays should be mandatory at all locations.

2.9 On the bus there should be visual and audible information covering stopping patterns and next stop, fitted to all new vehicles as standard.

2.10 There is a need to integrate buses with train networks to provide fully integrated ticketing using smart cards and consequent faster boarding times as cash handling is reduced or eliminated. Franchising would improve the incentives for the Combined Authority to reduce operating costs by eliminating wasteful competition between operators on popular corridors, and between bus and train.

2.11 While franchising in itself will not cut congestion, the major cause of unreliability and extended journey times for buses, it will increase the incentive for the Combined Authority to invest in bus priority as it, rather than the operators, would benefit from lower costs and higher revenue.

v) Objective 5 – Support the implementation of measures that improve bus service delivery by addressing factors which may constrain the extent to which bus operators can commit to meet quality or service level standards. (Support plans to improve bus service standards to make buses run on time more often).

2.12 Somewhat. Again we emphasise the importance of bus priority measures.

2.13. Based on the information given, do you agree Franchising will offer value for money to the public sector? Why do you think this?

Yes. We agree with the statements that “... the Proposed Franchising Scheme generates a higher NPV when compared to the Enhanced Partnership option and delivers a greater BCR for the Combined Authority. The Proposed Franchising Scheme also gives the benefit of the Combined Authority being able to specify the bus network to benefit areas of the city region that are most in need.”

2.14 The Financial Case sets out the potential sources of funding available to the Combined Authority to deliver Franchising. Do you have any comments?

2.15 We do not profess to hold great expertise on the financial aspects of the proposed franchising scheme. Government support would be helpful and hopefully help to minimise any additional funding required through the council tax/ precept.

2.16 The Assessment shows how Merseytravel would manage Franchising in the Liverpool City Region. To what extent do you support these plans?

2.17 We are in broad agreement with the approaches outlined. We would just say here that in setting up the new structures for managing the new franchise scheme bus operational experience would be useful and perhaps the practices at Transport for London could be looked to as a possible role model.

2.18 Overall, to what extent do you support with or oppose the introduction of Franchising? Do you think Franchising will improve and support the delivery of future improvements for the bus network in the Liverpool City Region? And why?

2.19 On balance we support the Proposed Franchising Scheme though we do have some concerns about the costs involved and trust that the government will be able to give support.

2.20 We would look for franchising to bring the following benefits for passengers -

- Integrated and multi operator ticketing, including the opportunity to break journeys with single journey legs and with a simpler and in some cases cheaper fares.
- Bus priority measures to improve journey times
- Ability to cross subsidise to maintain less used but socially essential routes
- A sea change in information provision – real time visual and audible information on buses, real time information at bus stations and stops.
- Improved procedures for passenger input including a properly publicised complaints procedure on buses and elsewhere (see also below).
- Better more easily available advance information about bus fares
- Impartial Information offices at bus stations covering all operators.
- Making it much easier for **all** to travel by bus.

2.21 Do you have any concerns about Franchising?

2.22 We cannot find any specific reference to passenger representation in the consultation. We always advocate passengers' rights and input to the services that they use. There is a need for passenger involvement in the creation and operation of franchised bus services. In our view, there is a particular ongoing requirement for passengers' views on routing, frequency and fares levels to be actively sought when changes are made.

2.23 It is important that bus passengers know where they should go for information or to make comments or complaints. For many years we have found the arrangements for dealing with passengers' complaints through the Bus Appeals Body to be unsatisfactory. There has latterly been an

improvement with the designation of BUUK as an approved Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) body for the bus and coach industry.

2.24 Our impression is that currently complaints procedures regarding buses in Merseyside do not appear to be well publicised. There should be accessible information for passengers on buses and elsewhere not only how to complain but also how to appeal if the complaint is not dealt with satisfactorily. TWNW would be very happy to contribute its experience in passenger representation and advise on complaints and redress matters. One simple step would be to provide "how to comment/ complain" information on board buses and at bus stations.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

Yours sincerely,

John

John Moorhouse
Company Secretary