

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

SUSTAINABILITY AND TRANSPORT O&S COMMITTEE

1000 hours on 15th January 2020, Committee Room 2 – Actions

Present:

Councillor Liz Clements (Chair)

Councillors Muhammad Afzal, Olly Armstrong, Eddie Freeman, Timothy Huxtable and Julie Johnson

Also Present:

Councillor Waseem Zaffar, Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment

Pete Bond, Director of Integrated Network Services, TfWM

Jon Hayes, Head of Network Delivery, TfWM

Linda McCord, Senior Stakeholder Manager, Transport Focus

Keith McNally, Operations Director, Confederation of Passenger Transport

Inspector Rachel Crump, West Midlands Police - Safer Travel Policing Team

Bob Baker, Director, Diamond Bus

Simon Dunn, Diamond Bus

Ali Bell, Head of external communications (UK Bus), NXWM

Luke Gottard, Head of Network Management, NXWM

Andy Rideout, Head of Customer Experience, NXWM

Mr O'Neil, Member of the Public

Councillor Julien Prichard

Baseema Begum, Scrutiny Officer

Rose Kiely, Overview & Scrutiny Manager

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chair advised those present that the meeting would be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there are confidential or exempt items.

2. APOLOGIES

Cllr Zaker Choudhry.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Cllr Huxtable stated that he was a substitute for the West Midlands Mayor on the West Midlands Bus Alliance (WMBA).

4. SUSTAINABILITY & TRANSPORT O&S COMMITTEE ACTION NOTES

The action notes of the meetings held on the 18th December were agreed.

5. SESSION ON BUSES

(See document No.1)

The Chair, Cllr Clements welcomed all attendees and outlined the format of the meeting.

As per the session plan and included in the papers for the meeting Cllr Zaffar highlighted the key points from his presentation that was focussed on the results of the bus survey undertaken in 2018 and in doing so made the following points: -

- The bus survey was undertaken over a 5-week period and was undertaken because of the vital role buses play in supporting inclusive growth in the city. Partners helped promote the survey.
- The response to the survey was the second biggest received by the city council. Responses were received from non-bus users as well as current users.
- It was important to understand the issues that affect current bus users and the barriers and reasons why other residents do not currently use a bus.
- It was clear that the length of journey was the most important reason with 80% of respondents citing this as a reason as to why they do not travel by bus. Respondents also highlighted reliability as another key reason why they choose to travel in another way. Bus fares and cleanliness were also key factors stated that prevented more people using the bus.
- This gave a clear mandate to partners on what needs to be done to tackle the key issues affecting bus usage.
- A cross-sector feasibility study is currently being commissioned to look at bus priority measures that would support cross-city buses. This will have an impact on those travelling to different part of the city not having to change buses to get across the city centre and to key locations such as hospitals.
- Resources have been spent on pinch points across the city and a further two investment proposals for pinch point funding to support bus priority and traffic management in the city centre have been made.

- £28m of funding has been secured from government for bus priority in the city centre and key bus corridors including Alcester and Dudley Roads.
- A number of priority bus lanes are being introduced as early measures for the Clean Air Zone (CAZ). Delivery is imminent on bus routes into the city centre and leading into the CAZ.
- There are mitigations in place to help buses travelling around the route where work is happening as part of the metro project extension at Five Ways.
- Working in partnership with NXWM and TfWM and supporting smaller providers to get low/zero emission buses introduced into the city as soon as possible. Also, in partnership with TfWM funding has been secured to retrofit buses so they meet the CAZ standard. So far 975 buses meet Euro VI standard which is nearly half the entire fleet in the region.
- The city's Clean Air Strategy encourages low/zero emissions transport and there is a commitment to achieve cleaner air across the city.
- BCC working with a number of partners and other UK cities to purchase hydrogen buses with CAZ revenue funding. Further resources have been deployed for 20 of these buses.
- Happy to attend any meetings in members wards to provide further information to residents and stakeholders on the vision and detail contained within Birmingham Transport Plan.

Members then raised the following points: -

- Positive news about the re-introduction of cross city bus services further to government funding.
- Concern that the No. 11 outer circle route takes an hour longer to travel the whole route compared to 1979. BCC came up with improvements at major junctions with some key interventions proposed and it would be good to see if these could be bought back as many are the choke points that with improvement could help alleviate journey times.
- Damage done by buses mounting grass verges – need to work with bus operators to protect the verges.
- Building trust in our bus users is key e.g. the reliability of the bus service and information at bus stops and that it matches up to expectation. Focus on areas highlighted in the survey to encourage bus use by non-bus users.
- Location of bus shelters and inadequate lighting is a safety issue. Need to improve these to ensure passengers feel safe. Bus shelters also need to be cleaner to encourage more people to use the bus.
- Timetabling of services is another key issue that affects use. In some parts of the city commuters can't get a bus into the city centre before 7am.
- Other issues raised by members included security, cleanliness and better ticketing options (for example there should be an easier way for those with concessionary passes who are having to use 2 passes and this can confuse

some bus drivers with some transactions and frustrate other passengers as it delays journeys).

In response to the points raised, Members were told: -

- Work is happening through the WMBA on cross city bus services/No.11 bus route. Cllr Kath Hartley is the lead member and should be able to provide further detail on this if required.
- In respect of ward issues in Hall Green further information can be provided to Cllr Huxtable.
- Issues relating to the bus depot in Perry Barr is being looked at by the Resources O&S Committee.
- Building trust with bus users is vital. Work needs to be done to improve information on phone apps and at bus stops in reference to bus reliability.
- A34 highways improvements at Perry Barr – NXWM, TfWM and BCC are working closely on a mitigations programme for the period of 12-18 months when disruptions are expected so that buses can provide a service to commuters in the north of the city through the period of works.

The Chair then requested Linda McCord, Transport Focus (TF) to share with members the views of passengers.

The Committee heard that the survey carried out by TF aligns with the survey carried out by BCC. TF does a lot of work with bus passengers and agreed that punctuality, reliability and a consistent bus service drives customer satisfaction.

TF carries out a lot of insight work with passengers and a report on priorities for improvement on buses will be released next week with more information.

One of the issues raised by bus passengers was the need for a better network for example as there are not always direct links, so commuters are having longer journeys where the bus goes via other areas. This should be a key priority.

Another point raised was the need to break down barriers to increase bus usage. The West Midlands region ran the 'Give Bus a Go' initiative in September whereby people who do not or rarely use buses were challenged to use the bus. Feedback was largely positive or very positive with a range of people involved. The perception of using a bus is sometimes not the reality and this is where work needs to be done to convince people that sometimes the bus is the better option.

TF has carried out passenger surveys each year and the response has been that bus passenger satisfaction has increased over the course of 10 years in the West Midlands region from 71% satisfaction to 85%.

Further research with non-users showed that 41% thought buses were a good way of getting around. 25% wouldn't mind making more journeys by bus. A fifth of car journeys in the West Midlands could be made by bus it known that people won't make that change. It is therefore vital that partners work together to break down barriers to bus use. TF will be doing further research in February on value for money on buses in the region both with users and non-users.

Members then heard from Keith McNally from the Confederation of Passenger Transport who made the following points: -

- CPT Research carried out in 2018 highlighted the drivers of change in bus patronage in England from 2011-2017 and the impact on bus passenger numbers that saw a decline nationally. In comparison the number of bus users in the West Midlands is now growing.
- Punctuality and reliability are key issues that underpin bus patronage and the of length journey times has pushed down bus usage.
- An increase in car ownership has had some effect on the use of buses. However, a growth in population and the improved quality of buses has seen an increase in usage.
- 'Moving Forward Together' strategy document was launched by CPT in Autumn 2019 calling on government and the bus industry to support commitments e.g. zero emission buses so that every new bus will be zero or ultra-low emission by 2025.
- Other key areas highlighted in the report include tackling congestion and improving ticketing (capping and use of one ticket across multiple operators).
- Price is another important factor and linked to an increase in journey times. When journeys are variable, and operators need to put extra resource to offer the same standard of service this has an implication on resources and leads to an increase in bus fares.
- There are also developments on open-data for bus services. An example of this is that search engines are able to offer potential passengers information on journey times, services and fares. This is being supported by the WMBA.

A member of the public then joined the discussion and expressed that research done on bus fares showed that there was a correlation on bus usage and bus fares and highlighted that to increase numbers on buses and public transport generally passengers should be offered a ticketing option to allow them to change their mode of travel at no extra cost.

Inspector Rachel Crump from the West Midlands Policing Safer Travel team then addressed the Committee and gave an insight into crime and crime figures on buses. It was explained that criminal damage is the biggest crime that buses suffer and the team aims to reduce instances of criminal damage by asking commuters to report instances of crimes. Refresher training has also been provided to bus drivers so that forensic evidence can be captured wherever possible and bring those responsible to justice.

The Safer Travel team has managed to reduce criminal damage to buses by 10% in the last year by keeping an eye on trends, offender management and reacting to intelligence reports by Police and bus operators. Restorative justice practices are in place, where appropriate, for young offenders so that the perpetrators of crime clean buses for example and the response from communities has been very positive.

There have been 247 civil interventions by Safer Travel used in the West Midlands region since April 2017 with 31 of these being restorative justice. In 2020 the Safer Travel team will be expanded by an additional 2 Constables and 12 Special Constables.

Other criminal behaviour on buses has been passenger on passenger assault. An 'assaults' working group has been set up that works with NXWM. CCTV is really helpful in providing evidence. There is also a text service available (See Something, Say Something) and 1000's of texts are received with each one being responded to. The team looks at trends and where the complaint originates from and open a case file if appropriate.

The Chair then invited Bus Operators to the discussion. Collectively the following points were made: -

- The WMBA has been running for 5 years and the partnership is working well has been instrumental in improving bus patronage and in comparison, to other areas of the country the region has seen a growth in bus passenger figures.
- There has been an increase of 1% in bus speeds in 2019 compared with 2018. This is very good.
- NXWM are committed to keeping bus fares low where possible (for example the cost of the day saver is the same as it was in 2014) and there are low fare zones in place such as local shopping centres. This has been very successful with 62% of passengers travelling for this purpose.
- Congestion is a key issue and getting buses moving is key to increasing bus patronage and improving journey times and will help with deploying resources at different times.
- Through the WMBA buses travelling to and from Harborne have benefited from £10m investment that has seen 38 new top spec buses purchased. TfWM and BCC with DfT funding have implemented a bus lane and this has improved journey times on this service by 8 minutes. Anticipated growth of about 16% on routes where there are newer buses and bus lanes/priority bus lanes.
- Focussing also on young people to make bus travel attractive and easy by offering contactless travel as Birmingham is a young city. Transport Focus research has indicated that a lot of younger people find it a barrier if they don't know fare prices and mobile ticketing and contactless are very important to them. It also helps those young people who are students and new to the city. Since the introduction of contactless travel there has been an increase of 12% in young people using buses.
- The scale of regeneration in the city is challenging with roadworks especially in the city centre and has had an impact on bus journeys. Work continues with TfWM on this.
- Waiting times affecting bus patronage. Passengers don't know how long a journey can take on any given day however bus priority helps passengers.
- In terms of safety – perception is everything for people new to bus travel to give it a go. Value for money is important as well as how the service is

delivered – what happens on the road has a huge impact and is a key barrier. Road space a key issue and buses are in a battle for it.

Pete Bond, TfWM then addressed the Committee with a presentation circulated and outlined: -

- The strategic vision for bus services supported and approved by the WMCA.
- Noting that public transport is key for inclusive growth and the key issues referenced as reliability, congestion, journey times and the negative perceptions held about bus usage. Investment levels in buses is lower than other modes.
- New powers available in the Bus Services Act 2017 however regardless of the mechanism of operating buses, buses cannot work without partnership co-ordination and collaborative working as set out in the WMBA.
- Part of an integrated system – one network customer identity. Important to note where people travel to and changing habits and ensuring bus usage is part of wider options of travel and not a stand-alone option.
- 5000 bus shelters managed by TfWM across the region and bus shelters should receive an annual roof clean.
- Enhanced Partnership (EP) is a new power outlined in the Bus Services Act 2017 and sets out improved bus service standards that all partners are accountable for. TfWM has developed an EP plan for the region (currently going through approvals).
- TfWM are working with the government on the implementation of one card that will work across multi operators. It requires more investment. Work is ongoing with Swift. Working with partners to make it a 'one solution' with real-time and fare information and the ability to make payment and a pilot is being trailed in Wolverhampton
- A Bus Performance Board has been established to be accountable on performance.
- Working with government on bus bye-laws and getting the powers to empower constables on bus services in a similar way to how it works on rail services.

In response to comments made Pete Bond confirmed that: -

- TfWM provide subsidised bus services that reach areas of wards that commercial services don't. These are vital and valued by local communities.
- The Bus Performance Board includes all stakeholders that can affect change and are now able to share performance data and work with operators to deal with issues.
- In regards to the use of a franchising model and regardless of who runs bus services the issues remain the same. There are challenges in how the network is managed and delivered.

RESOLVED: -

1. Cllr Zaffar requested that the Committee look at the issue of grass verges that was raised at the last city council meeting and to which he stated that a cross party Task & Finish Group should be set up to look at the issues in detail.

6. SUSTAINABILITY & TRANSPORT O&S COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

(See document No. 2)

The Committee noted the work programme and items for future discussion.

7. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted.

8. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS (IF ANY)

The Chair received a petition on behalf of Birmingham Friends of the Earth in relation to the Bus Priority scheme on Moseley Road and Alcester Road that has been open to consultation.

9. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

10. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

Agreed.

RESOLVED: -

That in an urgent situation between meetings the Chair, jointly with the relevant Chief Officer, has authority to act on behalf of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 12:22 hours.