

## **MARPLE AREA COMMITTEE**

Meeting: 2 September 2020

At: 6.00 pm

### **PRESENT**

Councillor Colin MacAlister (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Malcolm Allan (Vice-Chair); Councillors Tom Dowse, Steve Gribbon, Becky Senior and Aron Thornley.

### **Also in attendance**

Councillor Christine Corris (Chair of the Werneth Area Committee); Councillor Angie Clark (Vice-Chair of the Werneth Area Committee); Councillors Stuart Corris, Chris Gordon, Mark Roberts and Lisa Smart.

### **1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors and officers were invited to declare any interests they had in any of the items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations of interest were made.

### **2. COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION (CCFA) - TEMPORARY WITHDRAWAL OF THE RAIL SERVICE ON THE ON THE ROSE HILL LINE**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the format for the meeting. It was explained that although the proceedings constituted a formal meeting of the Marple Area Committee, members of the Werneth Area Committee had also been invited to attend and participate freely in the discussion on this item as the subject to be discussed equally impacted the area and those residents represented by that committee.

Councillor Lisa Smart (Chair of the Werneth Area Committee) introduced the "Councillor Call for Action" that she had initiated in relation to the announcement that Northern Trains were proposing to suspend the rail service on the 'Rose Hill line' for three months from 14 September 2020, which would result in no rail services at all from Rose Hill or Woodley railway stations and a substantial reduction in the service at Romiley railway station.

A representative from Northern Trains (Christopher Jackson, Regional Director) also attended the meeting and provided the Area Committee with information relating to the temporary suspension of services between Manchester Piccadilly and Rose Hill station along the 'Hyde Loop Line'. He stated that due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the company was operating in unprecedented times and it was explained that Northern Trains were under significant staffing pressures which contributed to the decision to suspend services on this line. Specifically, it was stated that drivers could not operate interchangeably across all routes as drivers needed specific route knowledge; there had been a number of drivers that had retired, and it had not been possible to recruit new drivers in the current climate; and a number of drivers were shielding, all of which had resulted in a reduction of 42 drivers available to the company.

Mr Jackson stated that the Hyde Loop line had been selected for the suspension of services due to the availability of rail services from other stations within a reasonable proximity of affected stations which would not necessarily be the case elsewhere on the network.

The following comments were then made/ issues raised: -

- Clarification was sought regarding the future of the Rose Hill line and whether the suspension of services was a precursor to closure. In response, assurances were given that there were no plans to close the Rose Hill line permanently.
- Clarification was sought regarding how the decision was made to suspend the Rose Hill line and the Hyde Loop line. In response, it was noted that the decision was taken operationally by Northern Trains. It was also stated that Rail North Partnership are responsible for the franchise but rely on the operational expertise of Northern Trains to make recommendations about the service that could be supported to meet demand where it was needed most.
- Clarification was sought regarding the staffing pressures raised by Northern Trains. In response it was noted that there was general capacity to cover routine absences, but there was no cover available for 11% of additional absences as a result of Covid isolation either by vulnerable people self-isolating or shielding.
- Members expressed their frustration with regard to a failure to implement a cross-ticketing agreement with Stagecoach for the use of local bus services during the period of rail service suspensions. In response, it was stated that under normal circumstances Stagecoach would have agreed a commercial partnership, however, they had concerns regarding their ability to accommodate their own passengers and additional numbers displaced from the railway while also being able to implement social distancing measures.
- Members also commented that although Northern Trains had proposed the suspension of the Rose Hill line and the Hyde Loop line that the Committee didn't want that to be a fixed position and that opportunities should continue to be explored to provide some level of service on the line for the community.
- Clarification was sought regarding the results of the school survey for Marple Hall School and whether Werneth and Harrytown Schools were included in the survey. In response it was noted all three schools were included in the survey which suggested that 60-70 school children used services along the line. However, it was also noted that ticketing data showed that actual patronage on the line by children and young people was lower than that identified by the survey and this would continue to be monitored.
- It was noted that Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) was informed of the decision to suspend the Rose Hill line and the Hyde Loop Line in July 2020 and were opposed to any degradation of services. However, TfGM were working with Northern Trains to propose alternative measures to retain some or all of the services and were aware of the limited resources available to Northern Trains. It was also stated that work was already underway with Northern Trains to support their mitigation plans through the provision of shuttle buses, on demand transport and Metrolink ticket acceptance.
- It was noted that a letter has been sent to the Secretary of State for Transport on behalf of the Greater Manchester Transport Committee (GMTC), however, the Minister had decided not to intervene in this matter.
- Clarification was sought regarding the priorities given to Northern Trains by the government. In response, it was noted that there were not specific directives across the industry, but since the collapse in passenger demand from 23 March and the

introduction of emergency timetables, Northern Trains had focused on maintaining service reliability for essential workers. It was also stated that one of the priorities from the Department for Transport was to maintain current levels of reliability and performance and focus on key routes.

- Clarification was sought regarding TfGM's reasons for opposing the proposal from Northern Trains. In response, it was noted that TfGM did not want to see a degradation of services in the Greater Manchester area.

Representatives from the Friends of Marple Station, the Friends of Rose Hill Station and the Friends of Romiley Station were given the opportunity to represent the views of the local community to the Marple Area Committee.

The Chair concluded the discussion by thanking everyone for their attendance and expressing their views and comments in response to the Councillor Call for Action.

It was then

RESOLVED – (1) That the Corporate Director for Place Management & Regeneration, Transport for Greater Manchester and Northern Trains be advised that it is the view of this Area Committee and the individual members of the Werneth Area Committee that the suspension of rail services from Rose Hill (Marple) railway station to Manchester Piccadilly station was an unnecessary, regrettable and avoidable decision.

(2) That the Corporate Director for Place Management & Regeneration be requested to urgently investigate the potential for a third party rail operator to assume the undertaking of rail services along that section of the line from Rose Hill (Marple) railway station to Guide Bridge with a view to such a service commencing on 14 September 2020.

(3) That approval be given to the allocation of £15,000 from the Area Committee's Delegated Budget (£7,500 from each of the Marple North and Marple South & High Lane allocations) towards the cost of funding the provision of an alternative rail service on the Rose Hill (Marple) to Guide Bridge railway line for a temporary one week period.

(4) That it be noted that the Chair and members of the Werneth Area Committee had made a request that the Chief Executive take urgent action under the constitution to allocate a further £15,000 from the Werneth Area Committee's Delegated Budget (£7,500 from each of the Bredbury & Woodley and Bredbury Green & Romiley ward allocations) for the same purpose.

(5) That it be noted that the use of the allocated funding was contingent on the successful outcome of discussions between officers of the council, Transport for Greater Manchester, the rail industry and potential operators of such service with specific regard to the detail of any such proposal; its viability; legality and governance; costings; and the identification of further sources of potential funding and sponsorship.

(6) That the Corporate Director for Place Management & Regeneration be requested to ensure that the Chairs of the Marple and Werneth area committees were fully appraised of and involved in any discussions and developments in relation to the progression of these proposals.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm