

BUS AND RAIL SERVICE SCRUTINY – FINAL REPORT

Report of the Lead Councillor – Councillor Tom Dowse

FOREWORD

I am pleased to present this scrutiny report on the future of Bus and Train Services affecting our area in light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. This report has been completed by the Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee's Vice Chair- Cllr Tom Dowse; attended by committee members- Cllrs MacAlister, Stewart and Gribbon.

It is today a year since the Prime Minister announced the first national lockdown due by COVID-19, on March 23, 2020. Nobody could possibly have at that point could comprehend the year that would follow, and the great impact that this would have on aspects of our day-to-day life. Indeed, that many areas of our lives would irrevocably change.

Public Transport is no different. That is why our committee decided to take this opportunity to take a look at the policy landscape of the future public transport offer in and around our borough.

In line with the Prime Minister's recent announcements on future bus services, and changes to rail provision across the North West, this committee heard from expert panellists who explained the structural issues in the sector and helped us identify the opportunities for Stockport's voice to be heard in forthcoming statutory consultations.

I would like to thank all officers who have helped me build this report. As I am standing down as the local Councillor for Marple South and High Lane in May 2021, I would also like to thank all officers and members who have aided me over the last four years that I have been a member of this committee- inclusive of my time as both Chair and Vice Chair of Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny.

Cllr Tom Dowse
Conservative Councillor for South Marple, Strines, Hawk Green & High Lane
23 March 2021

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1.1. At the beginning of January 2021 an Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Review Panel was established to look at changes to rail and bus services in Stockport. This paper seeks to summarise the information provided through this review process.

2. RAIL SERVICES

2.1. Members were provided with information on pre-Covid travel patterns in Stockport and how travel changed during both the first national lockdown in March 2020, and during the recovery after that initial lockdown.

2.2. In summary it was found that:

- Mobile phone data showed that the level of trips to, from and within Stockport are in line with the GM average on weekdays, but above the GM average on weekends. In Stockport the average daily number of trips being made is only 38% below the pre COVID-19 level. The average for GM is 41%.
- This dataset also showed that around 32% of those who made a regular commute tips in Stockport are still making that trip. This is marginally above the GM average of 31%.

- The higher rate of weekend mobility for Stockport in the Mobile Phone data is also reflected in the traffic count data. Weekend traffic volumes in Stockport are 16% below typical. The average for GM is 24% below typical.

2.3. Changes to rail operator services were highlighted, including the impact of social distancing on passenger capacity levels. The first lockdown saw the rail industry move to a 'Sunday service plus' with services currently operating at a reduced level to similar to that experienced in June 2020. Operators reported that staff shortages were contributing to short notice disruption across the network. A copy of the information provided can be found at **Appendix A**.

2.4. During the scrutiny review period the Manchester Rail Recovery Taskforce held a public consultation on proposed changes to rail timetables in Greater Manchester to improve performance. This consultation was a result of the 2019 Declaration that the Castlefield Corridor was classed as 'congested infrastructure'.

2.5. The objectives of the review were to:

- Improve train performance for everybody
- Maintain service levels and capacity for as many passengers as possible
- Create a timetable that is based on sound principles from which it will be possible to build improvements, as infrastructure investment becomes available
- Create an equal distribution of service timings (clock face)

2.6. The review presented 3 options for consideration, and the public were invited to comment on the aims of the review and the options presented.

2.7. A cross party response to the consultation was submitted on behalf of the Council which highlighted the following issues:

- The options present a potential loss of service to Manchester Airport, via Piccadilly and loss of direct local services to some stations in north Manchester; Oxford Rd, Deansgate and Salford Cres (varies by option). The options also propose that stopping services from Crewe be diverted away from Stockport to go via Manchester Airport. These proposals do not align with the Council's transport strategy.
- The document fails to acknowledge the failings of rail infrastructure in and around Stockport.
- Each option incrementally increases the need for passengers to interchange between trains in order to complete their journeys. Interchanging is a recognised deterrent to rail travel and therefore, contradicts the Council's transport strategy.
- The Crewe line and the Buxton line run parallel to two of our busiest and most problematic roads (A6, & A34). Any service changes that make rail travel less attractive will inevitably create modal shift onto the road network, contradicting both GM and the Council's transport strategy.

2.8. A copy of the submitted response can be found at Appendix B.

3. BUS SERVICES

3.1. During the review period the results of the recent public consultation on bus reform in Greater Manchester was being analysed.

3.2. The GMCA met on the 23rd March to consider whether to recommend to the GM Mayor to make the Proposed Bus Franchising Scheme. It has since been announced that the GM Mayor, Andy Burnham, has decided to progress with implementing bus franchising in Greater Manchester.

- 3.3. The proposed scheme was subject to public consultation between October 2019 and January 2020. The covid-19 pandemic began to have a significant impact on bus services and travel shortly after the closure of the consultation and, therefore, the GMCA agreed that further work was required to understand the potential impacts of covid-19 on the proposed scheme before a decision to proceed could be made.
- 3.4. A review of the impacts was undertaken and this considered whether the conclusions of the original assessment of the proposed scheme remained valid in the light of covid-19 and the uncertainties associated with it. These findings were subject to a further public consultation between December 2020 and January 2021.
- 3.5. A response to the consultation was submitted on behalf of the Council highlighting the following points:
1. Phasing - Stockport is currently proposed as being in the last phase of the franchising process (from 2024) and the Council stated that they would like to actively work with TfGM to understand the phasing profile and how this correlates with the realisation of benefits from this approach. The Council requested that consideration is given to a greater speed of roll out or the potential to ensure that some benefits are realised in the borough sooner.
 2. Funding – The Council stated that they would expect that approval of any scheme by government will be supported by additional funding support and investment and that the Council would like to work with TfGM to put in place monitoring of those areas without the franchise in the early phases to ensure that benefits are realised early and any risks minimised.
 3. Council and local community involvement – Franchising provides a positive opportunity for communities to be more closely involved in decision making around bus services, and for local accountability to increased. The Council stated that they are fully supportive of this and would like to work closely with TfGM to identify mechanisms through which this can be achieved.
 4. Cross boundary services – Travel to and from Stockport to neighbouring authority areas beyond the GM boundary is a key feature of the transport system in Stockport. The Council stated they would like to work with TfGM to look at the impact of the proposed franchising scheme and any transitional period on cross boundary services coming in and out of Greater Manchester. This is an especially pertinent issue for residents who rely on buses for both commuting and leisure trips.
 5. Air quality and electric buses - There is a clear opportunity for any franchising activity to coincide and support wider efforts to electrify the bus fleet and contribute to air quality improvements. The Council stated they would like to work with TfGM to understand how the proposed timescales for bus franchising fit in with the desire to electrify the bus fleet and replace or retrofit non-compliant buses

A copy of the consultation can be found at Appendix C.

- 3.6. Since the last session of the Scrutiny Review, the Prime Minister has launched the new National Bus Strategy (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-back-better>). The new strategy aims to make buses across England more frequent, more reliable, easier to use and understand, better coordinated, and cheaper.
- 3.7. Key elements include:

- simpler bus fares with daily price caps, so people can use the bus as many times a day as they need without facing mounting costs
- more services in the evenings and at the weekends
- integrated services and ticketing across all transport modes, so people can easily move from bus to train
- all buses to accept contactless payments
- Hundreds of miles of new bus lanes will make journeys quicker and more reliable, getting people out of their cars, reducing pollution and operating costs.
- local authorities and operators working together to deliver bus services that are so frequent that passengers can just 'turn up and go' – no longer needing to rely on a traditional timetable and having the confidence they won't wait more than a few minutes.
- Many councils will choose enhanced partnerships, where local authorities work closely with bus companies, drawing on their operating knowledge and marketing skills. Others may decide that franchising works better for them

4. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1. Revenue and Capital consequences of report recommendations – the report makes not recommendations with immediate financial impacts.
- 4.2. The effect of the decision – No financial effect at this time
- 4.3. Risks by continuing to work with the other relevant stakeholders the Council will be able to mitigate risks to the quality of the service it receives and any related financial impacts.
- 4.4. Future savings/ efficiencies - Not applicable.

5. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1. Not applicable to this report.

6. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

- 6.1. The proposed continued work will be undertaken within the current resources of the Council.

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 7.1. Any equality related considerations of changes to the services provide will need to be considered as part of those specific proposals.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 7.1. Any environmental impact related considerations of changes to the services provide will need to be considered as part of those specific proposals.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1. In light of the information presented in this report it is proposed that:
- The Council continues to work with TfGM, Transport for the North, Rail North and rail operators to continue to secure and maintain the best possible rail services for Stockport.
 - The Council continues to support the Greater Manchester approach to bus organisation and continues to work with TfGM to understand the implications for Stockport.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are none

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Mark Glynn on telephone number Tel: 0161-474-3700 or alternatively email mark.glynn@stockport.gov.uk