

TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

7TH NOVEMBER 2019

Present: Councillors L Robinson, Chair, G Friel, Deputy Chair, P Cleary, J Dodd, S Foulkes, P Hayes, H Howard, A Jones, N Killen, A Lavelle, M O'Mara MBE, K McGlashan, P McKinley, L Mooney, N Nicholas, C Rowe, J Stockton, H Thompson, M Uddin, J Williams, J Wiseman and F Wynn.

The Chair, Councillor Robinson informed the Committee that Councillor Paul Pritchard had resigned and on behalf of the Committee wanted to thank him for his attendance and contribution to the Transport Committee.

47. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ged Philbin.

48. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

49. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Transport Committee held on 10th October 2019, be approved as a correct record.

50. PRESENTATION - FIRST GROUP

The Committee received a presentation from Mr Cameron Jones, Mobilisation Stakeholder, West Coast Partnership, First Group in relation to the replacement West Coast franchise partnership between Trenitalia and First Group.

Mr Jones highlighted the following: -

- Partnership between First Group and Trenitalia is a 70/30 split representing the operator status and high speed credentials respectively;
- West Coast Partnership will commence on 8th December 2019 to 2031 with a discretionary 3 year extension;
- The franchise will have three phases –
 - operate and improve West Coast services from December 2019;
 - shape future HS2 and West Coast services in partnership with our stakeholders; and
 - run the first HS2 services from 2026, alongside West Coast services for 5 years.

- To appoint a Partnership Directorate with 7 Regional Growth Managers reporting directly to the Chief Executive to run the programme of external engagement and to ensure a fully integrated business is in operation;
- The Directorate will also establish independently-chaired forums to deepen strategic collaboration with stakeholders and will include the:
 - Economic Development Forum
 - Integrated Transport Forum
 - Regional Customer Panels – to deal with complaints, pricing and ticketing
- Trains will be refurbished including the entire Pendolino fleet, with 25,000 standard class seats being replaced and the 20 Voyager trains being replaced with 23 electric trains including 13 bi-mode trains to improve capacity and reduce carbon emissions.

Fares

- To restore trust in fares for passengers the franchise will be working with Transport Focus to redesign the fares to understand what passengers are buying and improving flexible fares including off-peak travel;
- Automatic refunds within 15 minutes of delays directly to bank accounts within 48 hours; and
- An Italian customer service system called “Pico” will be introduced which operates as a back office technology platform to support passengers who have purchased a ticket either at a ticket station window, online, or using the mobile app to change tickets and simplify ticket purchasing through combined ticket purchasing etc.

Train Stations

- There will be an investment into the first class lounges at Rugby, Stockport and Preston stations and ticket offices in Preston, Glasgow and Rugby will be modernised;
- An increase and improvement to car parking spaces at 16 stations on the network will be introduced and improvements to bicycle spaces and storage will be looked at together with spaces for electric vehicles to be charged will also be introduced;
- Bus information screens will be installed at stations for passengers to inform about the next leg of journeys; and
- Funding will be made available to community rail partnerships for 19 that exist across the network for local station community projects.

Staff

- An Employee Director will be appointed to the business who will be nominated by the staff and will sit on the franchise Board and represent the employees;
- 50,000 training days will be provided for the 3,500 staff members including modules focusing on customer service, leadership and change management for the length of the franchise; and
- Zero hour contracts will be stopped and real living wages will be introduced for staff and extended to suppliers from year 1.

Accessibility

- An Accessibility and Inclusion Manager will be introduced who will oversee training for frontline staff particularly on how to work with passengers with both visible and invisible disabilities;
- Specific toilet changing facilities will be introduced for disabled staff if required;
- A “passenger assist app” which is currently being developed and trialled will be utilised and there will also be the introduction of the “digital chaperone” in the third year of the franchise; and
- Improvements to the franchise website will be made for the visually and hearing impaired passengers.

Sustainability

- The aim is to become the most sustainable option for intercity travel;
- Water fountains will be installed at stations;
- Discounts will be given to passengers who bring their own coffee cups;
- There is a target to reduce CO2 emissions by 62%;
- There is another target for Non-traction energy to be reduced by 23%;
- These committed targets will be enforced by the Secretary of State; and
- The aim is to produce zero waste to landfills by the end of the franchise.

Liverpool

- Build a brand new relationship with the City Region;
- Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is already in place following the bid process in 2018;
- Focussed improvements to the provision of services between Liverpool and London;
- By 2022 about 263 new services will be introduced each week once the new trains are introduced;
- Extra services from Liverpool to London will be introduced with 2 services per hour with a stop at South Parkway Station for one of the services;
- Improvements to the connectivity between Liverpool and the rest of the country once the consultation on the timetable is complete in 2021;
- Looking at restrictions with peak/off peak tickets to improve passenger journeys;
- MoU with LJLA to improve passenger journeys, baggage and travel information; and
- Letter of support with University of Liverpool setting out a “knowledge transfer partnership” to work with innovative teams using their skills and news ways of approaching traditional challenges.

Members raised the following: -

Councillor McGlashan enquired about the franchise commitments for smart ticketing solutions and if they would be prepared to work with the City Region.

Mr Jones stated that the smart ticketing programme already exists and would not be prepared to do anything to disrupt the existing programmes.

Councillor Friel enquired about the new rolling stock that the franchise would be getting and the accessibility specifications. He also enquired about the plans by the franchise to restore trust in the fares for passengers.

Mr Jones stated that an announcement would be made in the next week or so about the contract for the delivery and building of the new trains, but it is planned to be compliant with standards, but also to go beyond in every aspect. He also spoke about the fares and making it more affordable by no more than 70% on an advance single journey as well as making upgrades more affordable.

Councillor Uddin asked about the plans for young persons' ticketing.

Mr Jones said that the franchise would honour all the existing schemes, but will look at the plans for future enhancements and provide information back to the Committee.

Councillor Cleary spoke about the combining of tickets referred to in the presentation relating to rail, bus and air travel and enquired about those people who didn't want to fly and if there were any initiatives being planned for long distance journeys e.g. Liverpool to Paris. He also enquired about the investment of the bicycle storage at stations and on trains.

Mr Jones informed the Committee that the franchise were working with the Tourist Authority UK to improve services across the UK and improve additional services e.g. to Llandudno. He also said that he would have to speak to the Marketing team to enquire about making journeys easier to the continent and report back, but it is focussed on UK travel at the moment. He also stated that he would be happy to look at the example of the Merseytravel secure cycling, but would need to see what the plans are for the franchise and provide feedback to the Committee.

Councillor Allan Jones enquired about the on board catering improvements. He also asked for clarity regarding the refund for late trains.

Mr Jones informed the Committee that discussions were underway with a high street retailer to enhance on board catering and that local products will be showcased on the networks together with the suppliers and SMEs and the on board cafes and at seat services will be kept. He further stated that it would not be a full refund but a % of the fare would be refunded.

Councillor Foulkes enquired about the Chester network and the plans for services for Chester.

Mr Jones informed the Committee that he would need to provide the details for services relating to Chester to the Committee at a later date. He spoke about the existing timetable with small changes being made, but nothing considerable would be done until the national timetable change in 2022 following the consultation in 2021, but there are guarantees that nothing would be done to the detriment of the existing services.

Councillor Stockton enquired about the journey times between Liverpool and London and if any consideration had gone into reducing the journey times to support the economy in the City Region. He also enquired about the Runcorn station and future plans for services and what the carbon reduction strategy plans were.

Mr Jones commented that the new trains would have 125mph capability which will be the beginning of reducing those times and carbon emissions, with faster acceleration and improved braking, but further details can be provided to the Committee. He also said that he would provide additional information relating to the Runcorn Station. He also informed the Committee that there were plans to rain water harvest and install solar plans, but once the Sustainability Plan was produced that contained a delivery schedule it would be shared with the Committee.

Councillor Wiseman enquired about the service disruptions and engineering works the diversionary routes to Liverpool are via Warrington, Earlestown and electrified Chatsmoss, best way to retain train crew competency is to have at least one service up and down the route would consideration be given to calling at St Helens Junction.

Mr Jones said that he would need to look at the detail and provide a response at a later date.

Councillor Thompson enquired about more jobs being made available in the local area with the increase in services.

Mr Jones confirmed that there would not be any loss of jobs, but there would be job creation through apprenticeships and other areas but would need to clarify about specifics and get back to the Committee.

Councillor Rowe enquired about the number of staff involved in providing the West Coast services and if the car parking issues at Runcorn Station could be looked at together with the car parking charges to encourage passengers to use the car park and not the roads.

Mr Jones confirmed that the staff would be TUPE over with all their rights, which would be preserved. He also stated that an additional 900 car parking spaces would be created, but would need to clarify if there would be a review of the car parking charges.

Councillor Nicholas enquired about the two trains each hour from Liverpool to London, what can the City Region do to support these services to operate and would there be any services around the holiday period. She also asked about the impact of Brexit with an Italian train company being involved.

Mr Jones confirmed that there would be new trains with more services and better fares for passengers. He guaranteed the extra services to Liverpool from 2022, but regarding the engineering works, he spoke about the difficulty of taking services away when people needed it most. He confirmed that there would not be any problems or impact with Brexit even with the Italian company on board.

Councillor Howard spoke about the increase to two trains per hour between Liverpool and London, with a stop at Runcorn and Liverpool South Parkway and enquired about the infrastructure constraints regarding platforming and signalling problems with an 11-car Pendolino service and what the City Region could do to support the franchise.

Mr Jones confirmed the additional services calling at the South Parkway Station but was unable to confirm how the platform and signalling arrangements would be done and offered to provide the Committee with details at a later time.

Councillor Wynn enquired about the new trains and wheel chair accessibility for the new trains.

Mr Jones confirmed that the new trains would not have the type of accessibility like the new rolling stock coming to the City Region, but that staff would be on hand to assist and support passengers. He did confirm that the trains would be accessible and would have wheelchair access.

Councillor McKinley spoke about the City Region being committed to regeneration and adopting a community wealth building model and enquired if the franchise would be interested in working with the City Region to contribute to community wealth building.

Mr Jones confirmed that through the MoU the franchise is committed to set up a formal partnership and governance with shared objectives and would hope that a meeting could be held in early 2020 to put things in place.

The Chair, Councillor Robinson commented about the bus/rail integration and hoped that the commitments referred to in the presentation came to fruition. He also spoke about the difficulties with the bus division not signing up to the "Smart in the North" ticketing scheme.

The Chair also enquired about the upgrades to the Pendolino fleet and if it was being done at the Alstom Plant in Widnes which would underpin a number of well-paid engineering jobs in the region and how the franchise would support the city region to achieve its aspirations of a full high speed type service rail for the Northern Powerhouse Rail Network for direct connections going forward.

Mr Jones confirmed that the Pendolino fleet would be upgraded at the Widnes Plant. He also confirmed that the franchise would be happy to work with the city region to create a strategic partnership to deliver the best economic outcome for the region. He informed the Committee that there was a review underway to act collaboratively with heavy expectations from Government to deliver.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee commented that the City Region would be looking forward to working with the franchise and welcomed the increase in services between Liverpool and London. He also stated that the city region would be committed to working very closely to maximise services for Smart Ticketing at Runcorn, Liverpool South Parkway and the wider city region.

RESOLVED that the Transport Committee notes the contents of the presentation and thanked Mr Jones for his attendance and for answering the questions.

51. TRANSFORMING CITIES FUND UPDATE

The Committee considered a report from the Interim Director of Integrated Transport, Shane Fitzpatrick relating to the Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) update who highlighted the following: -

- The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) has secured £172.5 million in capital grant from the TCF for local transport investment over a 5-year period.
- The aim of the fund is to support programmes of interlinking interventions, which will transform sustainable transport connectivity in key commuter routes in major city regions.
- Three priority themes were agreed to set parameters for the funding:-
 - Theme 1: Improving and expanding the public transport network to meet new areas of demand;
 - Theme 2: Improving the appeal of public transport, and particularly bus, against private transport; and
 - Theme 3: Intervening for health and wellbeing.
- Shane Fitzpatrick has been appointed to lead on the delivery of the overall TCF programme and reports to the TCF Board;
- Funding has been brought forward for three schemes identified as follows:
 - Funding for the launch of a smart ticketing portal and new ticketing media as a successor to “Walrus”;
 - Support for a new, low carbon and low emission vessel(s) to replace the ageing Mersey Ferries; and
 - Match funding in respect of the priority European Regional Development Fund Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) programme of green travel routes for cyclists.
- 17 interventions have been identified with 8 related to Theme 1, Theme 2 has 4 interventions and Theme 3 has 5 schemes identified.
- Programme delivery and monitoring is continued to be developed and is challenging with a significant challenge to rail which makes up about two thirds of the programme expenditure.

Councillor Foulkes spoke about accessibility at stations and moving to 100% accessibility at platform levels despite it currently being at 62%. He enquired about how the city region could encourage the other half of the money to match the other fund to come forward from Government. He also spoke about Wirral Waters and being able to join schemes through the themes and transform it into other blocks of funding.

Shane Fitzpatrick informed the Committee that in relation to the “Access for all” schemes it has a £15m budget that will improve 5 stations at £3m each which is a long-term programme. There is also a mid-tier programme which has been introduced for smaller scale improvements are being made year on year. In relation to Wirral Waters there are two corridors, Phase 1 and 2, but that investment is also linked to three other transport improvement schemes split into 3 phases for the wider connectivity. It is already made up from different blocks of work including public realm, walking and cycling etc.

Councillor Stockton commented about the timeframe for the disbursement of the funding up to 31 March 2023 and enquired about the details of the timeframe for development of the scheme.

Shane Fitzpatrick had informed the TCF Board that work was underway to establish the base programme and pull together the planned packages, cash flow and expenditure, but further updates would be provided as that programme work emerges.

Councillor Mooney commented that the Headbolt Lane, Kirkby was really welcomed by the residents and would be a “game-changer” for the area and thanked everyone involved for making it happen.

Shane Fitzpatrick commented that it is a challenging project and work was underway with some interventions including rolling stock and battery technology which may benefit the building of a mile of track within the business case going forward to which potentially could reduce the costs at Headbolt Lane.

Councillor Williams enquired about the accessibility to stations in Wirral South, and could criteria be provided relating to TCF.

Shane Fitzpatrick informed the Committee that more information would be provided relating to the guidance and criteria used for TCF. He also spoke about it was important to note that in relation to Access for All, there were inputs from Network Rail, Merseytravel and the Train Operator companies in a joint contribution to achieve the programme.

The Chair commented that it should be noted that the City Region was investing more than £500m in the new trains and infrastructure and the challenge back to Government would be to find another £100m, then the whole network could be completely step-free in the City Region.

Councillor Cleary sought clarification on Wirral Waters relating to the significant planning approval starting in January 2020 and the Eureka project as well and how it would be transported in the future relating to the street car proposal.

Shane Fitzpatrick stated that the early stages of feasibility work was underway together with the work being done with the Eureka project to replace Spaceport. The Seacombe landing stage and bridges would need to be renewed and all parties were represented in an existing steering group. He also spoke about the connectivity and the discussions with Peel for better transport options to be identified in the medium and long term in regard to transport connectivity to rail infrastructure. This incorporated investment currently ongoing with regard to the new rolling stock alongside a short to medium term bus strategy for Wirral Waters which was previously developed and approved for development.

The Chair commented that the Wirral Water development would be huge for the City Region and how it would be linked to the rest of the city region would be important.

Councillor McKinley enquired about the cycle network that runs through Sefton and the Health and Wellbeing agenda relating to clearing the bridle ways that could be used for the disabled.

Shane Fitzpatrick commented that he would need to look into it and would provide a response to the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Transport Committee notes the contents of the report and requests further information as appropriate.

52. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Committee received no questions from the public.

53. PETITIONS AND STATEMENTS

The Committee received no petitions from the public.

54. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR

National Award

- a) Councillor Gordon Friel informed the Committee that the Bus Team had won a National Award and thanked the Bus Team for their achievements.

Vote of Thanks

- b) The Chair on behalf of the Committee extended best wishes to Charles Yankiah (Democratic Services) as it was his last meeting and thanked him for his work and contributions to the Transport Committee.

Chair of the Transport Committee

(The meeting closed at 3.30 pm)