

## **LCR TRANSPORT COMMITTEE**

At a meeting of the LCR Transport Committee held in the Authority Chamber - No.1 Mann Island, Liverpool, L3 1BP on Thursday, 7th July, 2022 the following Members were

P r e s e n t:

J Burke, C Cooke, J Donnelly, S Foulkes, S Halsall, D Hawley, P Hayes, N Killen, K Laird, A Lowe, L Makinson, A McCormack, K McGlashan, N Nicholas, D O'Connor, G Philbin, L Robinson, T Rowe, H Thompson, A Wall and J Williams.

### **1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR**

Louise Outram, Deputy Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer, opened the meeting and invited nominations for the appointment of Chair of the Transport Committee for the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

Councillor Steve Foulkes nominated Councillor Liam Robinson as the Chair of the Transport Committee for 2022/23 and this was seconded by Councillor Ken McGlashan.

RESOLVED - That Councillor Liam Robinson be appointed Chair of the Transport Committee for 2022/23.

Councillor Liam Robinson  
Chair of the Transport Committee  
(in the Chair)

### **2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR**

Councillor Liam Robinson expressed his gratitude at being re-elected as Chair and addressed the appointment of Vice-Chair of the Transport Committee for the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

Councillor Liam Robinson nominated Councillor Gordon Friel as the Vice-Chair of the Transport Committee for 2022/23 and this was seconded by Councillor Steve Foulkes.

RESOLVED - That Councillor Gordon Friel be appointed Vice-Chair of the Transport Committee for 2022/23.

### **3. CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS**

The Chair, Councillor Liam Robinson, took the opportunity on behalf of the Transport Committee to extend well wishes and a speedy recovery to Vice-Chair Councillor Gordon Friel, who was not well enough to attend the meeting.

The Chair welcomed seven new members to the Transport Committee and looked forward to working with them across the new municipal year. The Chair referenced the anticipated additional appointment of a Halton Opposition member and would provide the Committee with an update once the Halton Opposition groups had made their decision.

The Chair thanked those members who were no longer on the Committee,

namely: Councillors T Brough, A Lavelle and G Stockton; and former Councillors J Banks, A Jones, L Melia, J Pearson and J Stockton.

The Chair undertook to personally write to the retiring members expressing thanks on behalf of the Committee.

#### 4. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors G Friel and J Dodd.

#### 5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

#### 6. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Transport Committee held on 10 March 2022, be approved as a correct record.

#### 7. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP 2022/23

The Committee considered a report of the Monitoring Officer which presented the Committee Membership 2022/23 as appointed by the Constituent Local Authorities, which were approved by the Combined Authority at its Annual Meeting held on 10 June 2022 and the Monitoring Officer after the meeting as provided for by the Constitution.

Louise Outram, Deputy Monitoring Officer, invited Members of the Transport Committee to ask any questions they may have regarding the standard annual attendance and membership report.

The Chair referenced paragraph 3.3 and advised that the nominations for Lead Members appointments for 2022/23 were proposed as follows:-

Area of Focus	Lead Member
Rail and Freight	Councillor Gordon Friel
Bus	Councillor Natalie Nicholas
Ferries	Councillor Ken McGlashan
Transport Finance and Resources	Councillor Steve Foulkes
Active Travel, Tunnels and KRN	Councillor Ged Philbin
Customer and Smart Ticketing	Councillor Nina Killen

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the membership of the Transport Committee for 2022/23, be noted;
- (ii) the Committee welcomed the following Councillors to be appointed to the Committee:-

Local Authority	Members
Halton MBC	Councillor Alan Lowe (Labour) Opposition Member awaiting nomination
Liverpool CC	Councillor Helen Thompson (Labour) Councillor Liz Makinson (Liberal Democrat)
Sefton MBC	Councillor John Dodd (Liberal Democrat)

St Helens MBC	Councillor David Hawley (Green) Councillor Keith Laird (Labour) Councillor Anne McCormack (Labour)
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- (iii) the Committee placed on record its thanks to the following former members, for their work on behalf of the Committee and their contribution to taking forward the transport agenda of the City Region:-

Local Authority	Members
Halton MBC	Former Councillor John Stockton (Labour)
Liverpool CC	Former Councillor Lindsay Melia Anthony Lavelle (Labour)
Sefton MBC	Councillor Tony Brough (Conservative)
St Helens MBC	Former Councillor Jeanette Banks (Labour) Former Councillor Allan Jones (Conservative) Former Councillor Joe Pearson (Labour)

- (iv) the Lead member roles as outlined in paragraph 3.3 be appointed as follows:-

Area of Focus	Lead Member
Rail and Freight	Councillor Gordon Friel
Bus	Councillor Natalie Nicholas
Ferries	Councillor Ken McGlashan
Transport Finance and Resources	Councillor Steve Foulkes
Active Travel, Tunnels and KRN	Councillor Ged Philbin
Customer and Smart Ticketing	Councillor Nina Killen

- (v) the Monitoring Officer be notified of the appointment to the position of Opposition Spokesperson.

## 8. CYCLE OF MEETINGS, SPOKESPERSONS AND APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

The Committee considered the report of the Monitoring Officer which provided details of the cycle of meetings for the 2022/23 municipal year and information relating to the conduct of business of the Committee for 2022/2023.

Louise Outram, Deputy Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer, invited Members of the Committee to ask questions they may have regarding the standard annual meeting cycle and conduct of business report. No questions were received.

The Chair, Councillor Liam Robinson, advised Members of the proposed Labour Group nominations for Appointments to Outside Bodies, which were as follows:-

Outside Body	Appointment
TravelSafe Board	Councillor Sean Halsall (Chair) Councillor Andrea Wall (Vice-Chair) Opposition Appointment to be confirmed
West Coast 250	Councillor Gordon Friel
TfN Scrutiny	Councillor Damien O'Connor Councillor Tommy Rowe (Substitute)

The Chair further advised Members of the proposed Labour Group nominations for Spokespersons for each of the Constituent Local Authorities, as follows:-

Local Authority	Member
Liverpool	Councillor Liam Robinson
Sefton	Councillor Gordon Friel
Knowsley	Councillor Ken McGlashan
St Helens	Councillor Keith Laird
Wirral	Councillor Steve Foulkes
Halton	Councillor Andrea Wall

The Chair asked Members to note that the Opposition Members were to inform the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Democratic Services Team of their nomination for the TravelSafe Board once this had been determined.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the dates and times of the Transport Committee meetings for the forthcoming year as per appendix one to the report, be noted and that attendance at the briefing sessions on transport related matters be agreed as an approved duty;
- (ii) the representation and individuals to serve on Outside Bodies for the forthcoming year, noting that these could be subject to change throughout the Municipal Year, be agreed as follows:-

Outside Body	Appointment
TravelSafe Board	Councillor Sean Halsall (Chair) Councillor Andrea Wall (Vice-Chair) Opposition Appointment to be confirmed
West Coast 250	Councillor Gordon Friel
TfN Scrutiny	Councillor Damien O'Connor Councillor Tommy Rowe (Substitute)

- (iii) the Spokespersons for each of the Constituent Local Authorities to answer questions at Council Meetings for the forthcoming year (Appendix Two) be appointed as follows;

Local Authority	Member
Liverpool	Councillor Liam Robinson
Sefton	Councillor Gordon Friel
Knowsley	Councillor Ken McGlashan
St Helens	Councillor Keith Laird
Wirral	Councillor Steve Foulkes
Halton	Councillor Andrea Wall

- (iv) the changes regarding the appointments by the Combined Authority in respect of the Transport for the North (TfN) bodies, namely, the Partnership Board (Substitute Member), the Rail North Committee (Substitute Member) and the General Purposes Committee (Substitute Member) be noted; and
- (v) the appointment of the Chair of the Transport Committee as a co-opted member of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, holding the Transport and Air Quality portfolio on behalf of the City Region, be noted.

## **9. OPERATOR PRESENTATION - AVANTI WEST COAST**

Members of the Transport Committee considered a presentation from Nick Smith, Regional Growth Manager (Liverpool and Wales) of Avanti West Coast Trains, providing a comprehensive overview of the West Coast Partnership rail operator.

Nick Smith explained that West Coast Partnership was an umbrella organisation which covered two operational businesses: the inter-city rail services of Avanti West Coast; and the 'shadow operator' West Coast Partnership Development, who were responsible for overseeing high-speed services and post-2029 conventional services.

Members' attention was drawn to a slide detailing key projects of Avanti West Coast, including:-

- Voyager trains refresh (2020)
- Full refurbishment of Pendolino fleet – an investment of £117m
- 23 new Hitachi trains (bi-mode and electric units) to reduce carbon emissions
- Stations and depot investment
- The Three Classes proposition of First, Standard Premium and Standard
- Funding for 20 Community Rail Partnerships across the network

Nick Smith then presented a slide which explained West Coast Partnership Development's role of advising the Department for Transport on its programme of research for the future delivery of high-speed services. It's main functions were to:-

- Advise the Secretary of State
- Cooperate with HS2 Ltd
- Act as a 'critical friend'
- Investigate a range of functional requirements

The Committee heard that, in his role of Regional Growth Manager, Nick Smith worked with both operational divisions of West Coast Partnership to maximise stakeholder engagement and unlock resources across the Liverpool City Region and Wales. The Committee heard how the Combined Authority and Avanti West Coast enjoyed a positive relationship with structured engagement and regular meetings.

Members were given an overview of the operational challenges faced as passenger demand continued to grow on all routes, particularly for leisure travel from Friday to Sunday, which had seen a faster recovery than business and commuter travel.

Nick Smith revealed that there had been around 80% recovery of pre-Covid services, with Liverpool as the highest performing weekend leisure route at 82% recovery. To encourage the continued growth of midweek business and commuter travel, Nick Smith had been working with destination management organisations such as Visit Liverpool. Nationally, reduced-price ticket promotions and the 'book with confidence' scheme also worked towards increasing passenger numbers.

The Committee Members were given a summary of challenges which had impacted local performance, including strike action; a disparity between the existing working patterns of rail crew and recent changing travel demands; staff absence due to shielding and sickness from Covid-19; and a shift towards a greater appreciation of work-life balance for staff who were more likely to make plans at the weekend rather than pick up extra shifts. Nick Smith stressed that changes addressing weekend staffing levels, such as revised rosters, hoped to improve the operation of weekend services in the coming months.

Members were given updates on upcoming general timetable changes, such as an increased service and amended route between Liverpool and London Euston from December 2023. There was also an additional service between Liverpool South Parkway and Euston, facilitated by the new Hitachi fleet, which would service passengers using Liverpool John Lennon Airport. In general, significant timetable changes from December 2022 would anticipate the additional services served by the new Hitachi fleet the following year.

The Committee was given details of projects which impacted the City Region. Nick Smith referenced the ongoing full Pendolino refurbishment happening in Widnes and the work undertaken with Halton Council, Network Rail and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority which proposed improvements to Runcorn Station Quarter.

Nick Smith closed the presentation by stating that Avanti North West was open and eager to work with other stakeholders and partnerships.

The Chair, Councillor Liam Robinson, thanked him for his appearance and invited Members of the Committee to ask any questions they may have.

Councillor Sean Halsall referenced the ongoing disruption from strike action across the network and asked what Avanti was doing to work with unions towards a resolution. Nick Smith advised that, whilst he was not personally close to discussions, Avanti was working as much as possible with unions and the government but reminded the Committee that the issue was network wide.

Councillor Nina Killen noted the importance of affordable travel for young people, as the introduction of MyTicket had driven up bus passenger numbers in the City Region. The Committee was advised that customers were always encouraged to practice advance booking and flexible travel times where possible to save money and that young people were more likely to be able to take advantage of such conditions. Whilst there were no immediate plans to introduce an age-specific travel ticket, Nick Smith suggested that it was something he could discuss with and recommend to his colleagues.

Councillor Nina Killen also spoke of one of her constituents who had been unable to book advance rail tickets for travel in May and June 2022 when they had tried to book in April 2022. Nick Smith advised the Committee that, while a long booking horizon was always the aim, the previous 24 months had seen significant timetable changes which had resulted in a lack of confidence for operators being able to offer this. The Committee heard how Avanti West Coast was moving towards a position of greater foresight for timetables and booking horizons should continue to improve.

Councillor Steve Foulkes enquired about service updates and station area enhancements for Chester Station, which was outside of the Liverpool City Region but still visited by many of his Wirral constituents. The Committee were advised that although services had been impacted by Covid, some services to Chester had seen incremental improvements and a return to hourly services between Chester and Euston was planned from September this year. Nick Smith was happy to report that a good level of structured engagement existed between Avanti, Transport for Wales (who operated Chester Station), the Local Authority and MP. The Committee also heard how Avanti had some input regarding structural enhancements by Network Rail and funding possibilities for Transport for Wales; while there was work to be done, all participants were eager to collaborate and bring forth improvements.

Councillor Jerry Williams raised complaints he had received about 9 car, rather than 11 car services, on the strongly recovered Liverpool and London route and asked what Avanti was doing to ensure more seating was available. Nick Smith explained how 11-car trains would always try to be prioritised for the busiest times but that it was not always possible across the network due to competing services and events, as well as issues around train staff and crew. The Committee heard how these complaints would be fed back to Avanti's operations team.

Councillor Ken McGlashan requested information about the accessibility of both existing stations and new rolling stock. Nick Smith assured the Committee that the new Hitachi trains had been designed with accessibility in mind, but that he would need to check regarding the specifics of sliding platforms and confirm those with the Committee in due course. The significant issue of rolling stock inconsistencies with platform levels was addressed and it was explained how work with Network Rail was needed, but that innovation in rolling stock was a possible solution moving forward.

In response to Councillor Ken McGlashan's query regarding the equality implications of wheelchair spaces being placed next to the toilets on trains, Nick Smith explained that disabled travellers being near to facilities was the key factor in deciding the positioning of wheelchair spaces on their trains. Nick Smith acknowledged the potentially disruptive and inflexible location of wheelchair spaces on trains and committed to providing this feedback to Avanti West Coast's Accessibility and Inclusion Manager for consideration. It was also noted that national accessibility panels had advised Avanti throughout the process and that users would be invited to experience the new Hitachi trains and provide feedback.

Councillor Damian O'Connor asked about the Rail Regulators approval process and timeline for the introduction of the second hourly service between Liverpool and London, which was confirmed to come into effect in and after December 2023. The Committee were advised that the collaborative effort of the December 2022 timetable change would prepare the whole industry nationally with the service being introduced the following year. The second service would also be introduced on a phased basis to allow for a build-up of demand. Nick Smith suggested that the Combined Authority continue to collaborate with Avanti West Coast to better demonstrate the recognised value of travelling to the Liverpool City Region across the network.

Councillor Nathalie Nicholas asked what consideration had been given to the signalling infrastructure for the additional Liverpool South Parkway service and if there was anything the Liverpool City Region could do to support that. Nick Smith revealed that the Combined Authority had commissioned a study into what possible enhancements would be needed and Avanti were ready to advise. The Committee heard how other rail operators would be in a similar position of recognising the importance of connectivity to the airport and would be keen to work with the CA in identifying steps to move forward.

A further query was raised as to the message Avanti was projecting with regards to train cleanliness and how that could encourage additional travel. Nick Smith confirmed that

the current cleaning regime would not change as it was now an expected part of the service provided to Pendolino customers. The Committee also heard that the Avanti West Coast website further reassured passengers with information about the service's high standards of cleanliness.

Councillor Liz Makinson wanted to know the date from which the London service would be calling at Liverpool South Parkway, which was confirmed to be some time after December 2023. It was explained that the roll out of the new Hitachi trains needed to be underway and a Pendolino taken off the route before the new train could call at Liverpool South Parkway. The Committee were assured that Avanti's New Fleet Manager would work with the Combined Authority to accommodate the processes needed before a date could be established.

Regarding the staffing issues on weekends and the resulting cancellations, Councillor Liz Makinson asked what incentives were being offered to Avanti West Coast staff to encourage more weekend working and help services meet customer demand. The Committee heard how the changes to ways of working brought about by the pandemic meant that longer term, more sustainable patterns and ways of working was needed. The new rosters mentioned in the presentation should reduce the number of cancelled weekend services but ultimately Avanti needed to adapt their ways of working to meet the needs of their customers.

Referring to the presentation, Councillor Alan Lowe acknowledged the proposal of plans for Runcorn Station but wanted to know if any specific arrangements could be shared to the Committee. Nick Smith noted the disparity between the updated piazza area and the prefabricated station building; he confirmed that considerations had been ongoing as to where the value for money would lie between a light refresh and a complete rebuild of the station. Halton Council officers were to advise on the best value for money schemes to ensure Runcorn would deliver for passengers and the local community, as well as being able to adapt towards the future of high-speed services. The Committee heard how details could be shared once a decision had been made from the range of options and funding could be unlocked.

Councillor Alan Lowe further explained how, owing to station car park charges, parked vehicles along Picow Farm Rd near to the station had upset residents and it was asked if Avanti West Coast would give this some consideration. It was explained that Avanti West Coast, as managers of Runcorn Station, were required to maximise revenue opportunities across their estate. Nick Smith expressed regret that residents had been negatively impacted and would be happy to follow this up with Councillor Lowe. He was unsure if the Local Authority had been made aware of the issue but informed the Committee that Avanti were always happy to work with local authorities to understand these impacts. It was also noted any revenue made through this obligation went to the Department for Transport.

Councillor Ged Philbin asked if there had been any dialogue between Avanti and the Department for Transport regarding the impact of congestion, particularly between Liverpool Lime Street and Ditton. There was concern that the problem would worsen with the addition of extra services and the HS2 route through Runcorn. The Committee heard how there was ongoing dialogue between Avanti and the Department for Transport, Network Rail and other rail operators regarding infrastructure and performance, where input from the Local and Combined Authorities would be welcome to recommend where investment would be best spent in the north west. Nick Smith confirmed that the overlap between conventional and high-speed services had been acknowledged and Avanti were open to collaboration on addressing issues and unlocking funding.

Councillor Tommy Rowe questioned whether the increase in services would create job opportunities and, if so, what was Avanti West Coast's policy regarding equality and



diversity in its recruitment process. Nick Smith noted that there would always be employment opportunities within the rail industry but was unable to speculate as to what the changes over the next couple of years would bring. The Committee were assured that Avanti were eager to employ from as wide a catchment as possible when recruiting for new services and that equality and diversity underpinned the whole organisation; nevertheless, he acknowledged that this was always worth reinforcing back to the organisation. Nick Smith gave a brief overview of a recent programme in collaboration with The Princes Trust which gave young people the opportunity to experience work in customer services on Avanti trains.

Whilst the Committee welcomed the move towards greater opportunity for cheaper tickets using flexible travel and advance bookings, Councillor Helen Thompson asked if Avanti had plans to increase the availability of low-cost ticket options across the board. Nick Smith confirmed that the refurbished Pendolino trains had additional standard seating which would hopefully increase standard price ticket availability, but again reiterated the benefits of advanced booking and flexible travel. The Committee were informed that pricing was set at a national level within the rail industry and Avanti hoped to provide and promote as many opportunities for good value travel as possible within that framework.

Councillor Keith Laird referred to the diversion route in the event of service disruption and engineering works, which went via Warrington and Earlestown. He suggested that a service via the electrified Chap Moss route would be a good way to retain staff competency in these instances. Councillor Laird also enquired as to whether Avanti would consider calling at St Helens Junction or Lea Green, using selective door opening, as both stations had large car parks. The Committee heard that Nick Smith would feed this back to the Network Planning team, as training around route knowledge would be a useful contingency tool for future disruption and diversion. He noted that this was a prime example of how structured engagement and dialogue with the Combined Authority could help align Avanti services with local aspirations.

Councillor David Hawley enquired about the possibility of resuming to the pre-Covid timetables of half-hourly services between Liverpool and Manchester and Liverpool and Wigan. The Chair interjected that the services mentioned were operated by Northern Rail and not Avanti West Coast, but that a similar question was anticipated during Public Question Time and would be addressed in due course.

The Chair expressed the Committee's enthusiasm for the many exciting changes ahead noted that they looked forward to working closely with Avanti West Coast Trains to improve rail services across the region. The Chair further expressed his hopes for a timely resolution to current industrial action and for the new Prime Minister to negotiate a new deal that works for all involved. He thanked Nick Smith of Avanti West Coast Trains on behalf of the Committee for an informative presentation.

## **10. MERSEYRAIL UPDATE**

The Transport Committee received a verbal update from David Jones, Rail Development Manager, following recent disruption on the Merseyrail network. The Transport Committee were briefed on the key points which surrounded recent events which had negatively impacted services.

David Jones distinguished between two separate levels of industrial relations. The Committee heard that the role of a second staff member on the 777 class trains had been accepted by the RMT union and the issue had been resolved to some extent; this allowed for discussions to progress with ASLEF before the introduction of the new trains. It was then explained that Merseyrail was in a similar position to Avanti regarding the pay dispute. David Jones expressed concern but stated he was unable to add further comment whilst negotiations took place.

The Committee heard an overview of the issues with bearings on the 507 and 508 class trains. David Jones was happy to report that Merseyrail were ahead of the curve on repairs and that a full service was currently in operation, but that the problem was ongoing and an investigation was underway. The Committee were assured that services would continue as long as they were ahead of the failures and that Merseyrail hoped to find a solution in due course. It was noted that the above issues had impacted performance levels but that the continuing trend was one of improvement and he was confident of a return to the high standard Merseyrail had delivered in the past.

The Committee heard that the shift from peak to off-peak travel had been recognised and was being monitored to inform how services could change in the future. Lastly David Jones expressed the industry's concern around increasing levels of Covid and the uncertainty which surrounded the impact of emerging variants. He welcomed questions from the Members of the Committee.

Councillor Paul Hayes stated that the ongoing issues with ball bearings underlined the need to get new trains out on the tracks as soon as possible. He asked for clarification on whether the roll out of the new trains had been delayed because of the industrial disputes and requested a timetable for the roll out.

The Committee heard how the entire project had been impacted mainly by the pandemic and its effect across Europe, from the closure of factories making the trains to the delivery of orders being slowed down by border closures. It was also noted that one factory had suffered extensive flooding and that the invasion of Ukraine had seen many workers from another factory return to their home country to fight.

The Chair stated that Merseyrail were in a positive position with trade union negotiations and that the roll out of the 777 class trains was on target for the Autumn of this year.

RESOLVED - That the verbal update be noted.

## **11. QUARTERLY BUS UPDATE**

The Transport Committee considered a report of Merseytravel which provided Members with key bus issues relating to the fourth quarter of 2021/22. The Quarterly Bus Update report:-

- provided an update on the milestones of the Bus Alliance;
- detailed report progress on the assessment into Bus Reform, Hybus Trial Project and Green Bus Routes Programme; and
- provided an overview of how the Bus Team continued to work with bus operators to support the maintenance of a safe and reliable bus network whilst dealing with the challenges of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Laura Needham, Bus Strategy Programme Manager, further informed the Committee of key upcoming events such as the public consultation for the 10A routes planned for Autumn of this year, and confirmation that 20 vehicles from the Hybus trial were expected to be on the road from December of this year. The Committee were asked to note the report contents and to anticipate the Quarterly Bus Update for the second quarter on 22 September 2022.

The Chair, Councillor Liam Robinson, thanked Laura Needham for her report and invited Members to raise any questions or comments.

Councillor Helen Thompson thanked Laura Needham for the detailed nature of the report. In reference to an online consultation for proposed cuts to some Liverpool bus routes, The Committee heard that the consultation was not only difficult to source online, but also lacked clarity on the cuts being the decision of bus companies and not that of Merseytravel. Councillor Thompson questioned whether we as an organisation could do better in future with regards to the accessibility and clarity of the online consultation process.

Matt Goggins, Assistant Director for Bus, agreed that this was an important point and reiterated that the changes proposed were those of the bus operators and that Merseytravel's role was to coordinate and facilitate that process through proper engagement. The Committee heard that feedback was always welcomed as a part of a commitment to doing a better job and that consultations and drop-in sessions across the Local Authorities had been held. Matt Goggins acknowledged the relatively constrained timescale of the consultation but was confident that the high volume of responses - which was currently upwards 1700 - showed that the consultation was reaching residents.

Councillor Steve Foulkes pointed out that bus reform was the main topic that residents wanted to discuss and engage with, but that the quarterly report made no reference to this. It was suggested that the report should have prompted a dialogue within the Committee around the bus reform plans and how they relate to the bus operators' commercial decision making. He highlighted the isolation of the Noctorum and Beechwood estates on the Wirral, which had been specifically included in the Bus Service Improvement Plan, only to experience a subsequent reduction in services. He stressed the importance of taking the opportunity to confront bus operators with those issues during the consultation process, rather than leaving Merseytravel officers to address them, as he had witnessed at a recent open day workshop on the Wirral. Lastly, Councillor Foulkes noted the report's omission of the subsidised fare reductions and hoped that the public would be made aware that they had been listened to and that their money was being used to improve bus services across the city region.

The Chair asserted his accord with the points raised and Councillor Foulkes expressed optimism that the bus reform would improve such problems.

Councillor Nathalie Nicholas reference the section addressing climate change implications on page 41 of the report and noted that more substance would have been appropriate considering the commitment the Combined Authority had made towards going green. Similarly, it was further suggested that the use of the word "considered" in the equality and diversity section on page 41 was passive and did not engage readers with the values held by the Combined Authority. The Committee heard how providing affordable bus services for users who were unable to afford a car should have been included as a positive step towards equality and that this point had been raised to Officers previously by both Councillors Nicholas and Friel.

Laura Needham stated that a single issue report, such as the one from 4<sup>th</sup> March, always included a highly detailed Equality Impact Assessment, but that the inclusion of greater detail into the quarterly reports was something that could be looked at.

Councillor Ken McGlashan spoke of his attendance at a consultation on proposed service cuts in Knowsley. The Committee heard that, when Bus Development Officer Simon Ackers opened the conversation on behalf of Merseytravel, a lack of bus operators present had given the erroneous impression that the cuts were being proposed by Merseytravel. Councillor McGlashan asked if this could be avoided in the future through improved communication and clarification.

The Chair revealed that each of the City Region's bus operators would be returning for an hour-long opportunity to be held accountable by the Transport Committee.

In response to a query from Councillor McGlashan regarding the number of PCSOs currently funded by Merseytravel, Laura Needham confirmed that she would come back to the Committee with the correct figure in due course.

Councillor Sean Halsall questioned how the City Region could steer a bus-led recovery whilst we allowed operators to damage the network further by cutting services. He then requested more information on the environmental impact of those cuts, which had potentially led to more car journeys. Lastly, Councillor Halsall wished to place on record that as politicians, Members of The Committee wanted to see the network expanded, not shrunk due to the profiteering of bus companies.

Laura Needham agreed that the Network Development Team's vision for bus was to expand across the Liverpool City Region. The Committee heard that from September, 71% of services would experience "no change" across the revised network; 7% would experience route change; 21% of services would see timetable changes; and under 1% of those services were being withdrawn. Laura Needham was confident that the network would continue to provide full coverage without detrimental impact on travellers across the city region.

Matt Goggins stressed that Merseytravel were not in control of any changes proposed by operators but were in a position to influence decision making as much as possible. It was acknowledged that a larger network was an ambition supported by Members through the Bus Service Improvement Plan and that essential financial support from Central Government funding was still not forthcoming.

Councillor Halsall explained that he was in no way expressing criticism of Merseytravel Officers and wished to demonstrate that deregulation had been a mistake that the Transport Committee could help rectify.

Councillor Chris Cooke suggested that there had been missed opportunities over the pandemic relating to the active travel infrastructure rollout and that the current petrol prices were another opportunity that could have been used to put pressure on bus companies. The Committee were asked to consider whether they all had a part to play in highlighting the benefits of travelling by bus.

Matt Goggins recognised the challenge presented by the two years where the public were asked to avoid using public transport, along with the ongoing wait for the pledged national Back to Bus campaign. He agreed that the public had formed new travel and work habits which could have been tapped into but that the new fares proposal to lower prices from the Autumn was a step in the right direction. It was noted that, along with lower travel costs, an investment in infrastructure, increased reliability and improved journey times were all part of the bigger picture which were being addressed as part of the Bus Service Improvement Plan.

The Chair informed Members that the Bus Team had lobbied as hard as possible with operators to secure the "least worst" proposal and that the Committee was dedicated to using devolved powers to reverse the damage inflicted through deregulation.

Councillor Liz Makinson enquired about the possibility of increased leverage over bus companies in receipt of public money to reduce fares. She further noted that the repeated reference to a "London style transport system" was not reflected in measures such as subsidising bus companies, which she saw as a step in the wrong direction. Lastly, Councillor Makinson sought clarification over the price of weekly and monthly travel tickets, as only reduced single bus fares had been mentioned in the report and it would be a positive move to help with the rising cost of living.

Matt Goggins informed the Committee that leverage over subsidised operators was limited as their partnership was one of cooperation and soft influence and it was noted that positive outcomes had been reached. The Committee also heard that, whilst the Bus Service

Improvement Plan had proposed a price reduction across all ticket types, limited funding had not allowed all plans to be actioned and that Merseytravel would continue to push for further funding.

The Chair noted that the industry had historically been tilted towards the bus companies and gave the recent example that, throughout the pandemic, it had been taxpayers who had ultimately saved the bus companies, yet service cuts had still been made. It was stressed that bus reform hoped to solve this and the Chair put on record the Committee's thanks to Officers for their hard work. It was stated that, while the consultation had not been perfect, the Liverpool City Region had been the only part of the country to exercise the process. The Chair commented that the high response rate had been encouraging and was indicative of the importance of a re-regulated bus system for the City Region.

RESOLVED - That the contents of the report be noted.

## **12. MERSEYTRAVEL OUTTURN - FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE**

The Transport Committee considered the report of Merseytravel providing Members with details of the revenue and capital outturn in respect of Merseytravel activity for the financial year 2021/22 and the revised capital programme for 2022.

Sarah Johnston, Assistant Director, Finance, explained that the report looked at both capital and revenue outturn and the resulting impact on Merseytravel reserves. The Committee were reminded that the budget set for 2021/22 had been cautiously conservative against the uncertainty of post-Covid recovery with regards to both patronage and funding.

Sarah Johnston reported that although additional costs had been incurred, Merseytravel had received recovery funding in addition to unexpected assistance from the government's Sales, Fees and Charges Compensation Scheme. It was revealed that this funding, combined with a better than anticipated recovery of Mersey Ferries patronage, prudent revenue budget management and previously forecast areas of saving, had led to an overall underspend against the revenue budget of £7m. The Committee's attention was drawn to paragraphs 3.3 – 3.5 of the report, which looked at the revenue outturn in greater detail.

The Transport Committee heard how the pandemic had also impacted Merseytravel's capital budget by way of resource availability, thus delivery had been constrained. Notwithstanding, £129m of Merseytravel's capital programme had been spent in the 2021/22 period, which was testament to the organisation's ability to deliver against a challenging backdrop. Sarah Johnston explained that much of the reported underspend related to slippage on existing schemes, which had been incorporated into the revised capital programme through paragraphs 3.6 - 3.9 of the report.

Overall, the Committee heard that a positive contribution of £713k had been made to Merseytravel reserves across the year but it was stressed that the outlook remained challenging with rising inflation. Consequently, an inflation reserve had been set aside to mitigate circumstances as they were continually monitored. Sarah Johnston concluded that all activity would be reported back to the Committee and invited Members to ask questions.

Councillor Steve Foulkes identified himself as the recently re-elected Lead Member for Finance at the Combined Authority. He noted the advantages of Merseytravel's current position and endorsed their cautious approach. He commended the measure of reserving money to assist with inflationary pressures but reminded the Committee that the outturn detailed in the report was up until March of this year and that the next outturn of the first fiscal quarter would be a better indication of the need for reassessments.

The previously reported 'structural budget deficit' was brought up by Councillor Steve Foulkes, who noted it was not mentioned in the current outturn report and questioned whether Merseytravel was still in such a position. Sarah Johnston confirmed that, over the medium term, Merseytravel still had a structural budget deficit as the removal of £5m had been needed to balance the 2021/22 budget. It was confirmed that the next quarter report would display much tighter variances. The Committee heard that recovery funding would drop off, delivery costs would increase and the outturn would be affected across the 2022/23 period and beyond.

Councillor Foulkes thanked the Officers in finance for their briefings and stated that all Members were welcome to approach either himself or Sarah Johnston regarding the budget.

The Chair, Councillor Liam Robinson, moved the recommendation on page 45 of the report with the agreement of the Committee.

RESOLVED - That the contents of the report be noted.

### **13. DEVELOPING THE NEXT LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 4 - UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director for Policy, Strategy and Government Relations which detailed the following:-

- an update on the process of developing the next statutory Local Transport Plan (LTP) for the Liverpool City Region;
- an update on the development of a Vision and Goals Document and the associated public engagement, together with the next steps in the LTP's development; and
- a brief update on the intention by the Department for Transport to escalate the status of LTPs and place them at the heart of local decision making processes.

Huw Jenkins, Lead Officer - Transport Policy, presented the Transport Committee with a brief slideshow which outlined the new Local Transport Plan ahead of expected updated guidance from Government. It was explained that the process would be a staged one and that updates would be brought back to the Committee on an ongoing basis moving forward.

The Committee's attention was drawn to the various challenges faced ahead of the plan, with a particular emphasis on how transportation was both a contributor to, and majorly impacted by, the climate challenge. The importance of redesigning how we travel to reduce carbon emissions and encourage more walking and cycling was central to the plan and the Committee were briefed on the opportunities presented by the £710m available from the sustainable transport settlement funding pot.

Huw Jenkins explained that the draft Vision and Goals document was currently in the consultation period and had already received valuable feedback. The Committee heard how the draft document set out five clear goals to move the city region's transport towards becoming a resilient, net zero carbon emissions network by 2040 or sooner and that the consultation period would be open until the end of July 2022. Huw Jenkins added that, further to suggestions from the last Transport Committee meeting, in-depth consultations with local residents and with young people and schools were also underway and findings would be brought back when ready. The Committee were also briefed on various scenarios which had been explored, against which the plan would be tested to determine its impact and resilience.

The Chair, Councillor Liam Robinson, thanked Huw Jenkins for his presentation and stated that he looked forward to hearing about the consultation responses and seeing how

the plan will develop. The Committee were invited to ask questions; none were received. The Chair proposed to move the recommendations as set out in the report and this was agreed.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the progress with the development of the fourth Local Transport Plan, including the stakeholder engagement and statutory assessments that are underway, be noted;
- (ii) the approach to the development of future transport scenarios as a logical way to consider uncertainty and risk in the development of the plan be endorsed; and
- (ii) it be noted that new guidance is anticipated from the Department for Transport in respect of the form and content of Local Transport Plans, and that members will be updated on the implications arising from this.

#### **14. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

**Question received from Mr Andrew Wennell:**

*“Over the past year or so the train Services from St Helens central have been bad only 1 train an hour on the stopping service between Wigan North-Western & Liverpool Lime Street. Plus only running 2 trains on the service between Liverpool Lime Street & Blackpool North. Which means on certain times of the day this service is missed out. So then have to use other service which adds extra pressure on these ones. So my question is are there going to be any improvement on this as other parts of Merseyside get a train every 15 minutes on the stations on the Merseyrail network. So please don't leave us out on the areas on the east side who get less trains than the areas served by Merseyrail as we are all in one county of Merseyside.”*

The Chair, Councillor Liam Robinson, thanked Mr Wennell for his question and acknowledged the importance of the issue raised for the whole eastern conurbation of the Liverpool City Region. The Chair assured Mr Wennell that a full and detailed formal response would be provided within ten days, but felt it was important to highlight some points now.

The Chair referred to the understandably significant impact on staffing and the reduction in services that followed across all railway operators at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Chair explained how, in a devolved setting, Merseyrail had been able to resume services to a pre-pandemic timetable and the City Region was continually imploring Northern Rail to do the same for the City Lines.

The Chair acknowledged that the rail service provision in the east of the region was not satisfactory and added that frequent, quality rail services across all areas of the Liverpool City Region was a priority identified in Metro Mayor Steve Rotheram's Merseyrail for All Policy. The Chair concluded that Mr Wennell's concerns were shared by the Committee and that the issue was a genuine priority for the City Region moving forward.

#### **15. PETITIONS AND STATEMENTS**

There were no petitions or statements received.

**16. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR**

There were no urgent items of business.

Minutes 1 to 16 received as a correct record on the 10 day of November 2022.

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Chair of the LCR Transport Committee

(The meeting closed at 16.01pm)