

## **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, 10th November, 2022 the following Members were

**P r e s e n t:**

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

Councillors Joanne Burke, Chris Cooke, John Donnelly, Steve Foulkes, Sean Halsall, David Hawley, Nina Killen, Keith Laird, Alan Lowe, Liz Makinson, Anne McCormack, Ken McGlashan, Nathalie Nicholas, Damien O'Connor, Ged Philbin, Tommy Rowe, Gareth Stockton, Helen Thompson and Andrea Wall.

### **CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS**

The Chair, Councillor Liam Robinson, opened the meeting and welcomed Members back to the Transport Committee after a hiatus over the period of national mourning following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

It was also announced that this was the first Transport Committee meeting since the passing of Vice Chair Councillor Gordon Friel. The Chair noted the hugely positive impact that Councillor Friel had made across the city region over more than two decades serving as a local councillor, and how deeply missed he would be by the Committee.

Members were asked to stand for two minutes' silence in recognition of both Armistice Day and as a tribute to Councillor Friel.

### **18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors J Dodd, P Hayes and J Williams.

### **19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received.

### **20 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

Clarification was sought regarding the query raised on page 12 of the minutes of the last meeting, held on 7 July 2022, regarding the number of PCSOs currently employed by Merseytravel. Laura Needham, Bus Strategy Programme Officer, confirmed that the information would be checked and relayed to Members of the Committee after the meeting was concluded.

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the Transport Committee held on 7 July 2022, be approved as a correct record.

## **21 COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS**

Lisa Backstrom, Senior Democratic Services Officer, provided an update on appointments to the Transport Committee since the last meeting. It was confirmed that the vacant position of Halton Opposition Leader would be split between Liberal Democrat Councillor Gareth Stockton, who would be in post until Wednesday 30 November 2022; Conservative Councillor John Bradshaw would then take over from Thursday 01 December. The Chair took the opportunity to welcome Councillor Stockton back as a returning Member of the Transport Committee.

In light of the passing of Councillor Friel, Members were asked to consider nominations to the following positions:-

- Vice-Chair of the Committee; and
- Lead Member for Rail and Freight

The Chair nominated Councillor Steve Foulkes as Vice-Chair for the Transport Committee for the remainder of 2022/23; this was seconded by Councillor Sean Halsall. No other nominations were proposed and the appointment was approved.

The Chair then proposed nominee Councillor Sean Halsall as Lead Member for Rail and Freight. This was seconded by Councillor Foulkes and, with no other nominations received, the appointment was agreed by the Transport Committee.

RESOLVED – That:

- (i) Councillor Steve Foulkes be appointed as Vice Chair of the Committee for the remainder of 2022/23; and
- (ii) Councillor Sean Halsall be appointed as Lead Member for Rail and Freight for the remainder of 2022/23.

## **22 OPERATOR PRESENTATION - MERSEYRAIL**

Members of the Transport Committee considered a presentation from Jane English, Deputy Managing Director, Merseyrail, regarding current performance, recent operational problems and a look towards the future. The Committee also heard that the presentation sought to address questions and comments recently received concerning the reduced services at Bromborough Rake Station.

Merseyrail's strong performance as a rail operator was illustrated by the fact that 95.5% of their trains had arrived on time within the last period; it was explained how this was over one percentage point more than the next best performing operator, London Overground. A recent survey had revealed a 91% customer satisfaction rating and the Committee heard how Merseyrail's post-Covid recovery of passenger numbers, particularly on commuter services, was overall strong and considerably above the national average.

Members of the Committee were then given an in-depth look at three major operational challenges which the provider had faced over the preceding Summer which, while unfortunate, had highlighted the positive collaborative relationship between Merseyrail, Merseytravel and the Combined Authority.

Firstly, reference was made to the three weeks of significant disruption brought about by safety critical issues with wheel bearings, of which the scale had been unanticipated. The Committee heard how the 24 hour inspection of trains had limited services but prevented

services stopping mid-journey and so minimised disruption. This was determined to be the most pragmatic approach to manage the situation and all but one of the faults had been detected at the depot before a service had commenced. In acknowledgement of the difficult decisions made, Merseyrail had distributed 7.5 thousand envelopes to passengers with a range of money, prizes and vouchers inside, by way of an apology.

The Committee heard how the extreme high temperatures on 18 and 19 July this year meant that emergency timetable measures had been put into place to safeguard the fleet. Whilst this had undoubtedly caused disruption, the situation had not been unique to Merseyrail and the forward planning, in collaboration with the city region, had at least offered customers some degree of certainty around what to expect from services over those days.

The third challenge faced by Merseyrail had been the timetable performance on the Chester and Ellesmere Port lines post-Covid. Public performance measures had been as low as 93% and services had experienced problems with punctuality and having to miss calling at certain stations after being made “semi-fast”. The Committee were informed that from August 2022, the frequency of services calling at the two stations with the smallest percent of passengers on those lines – Green Lane and Bromborough Rake - had been reduced to improve reliability. Members of the Committee were shown table which indicated that the improved services had benefited 2000 passengers; 380 had been directly affected at the two stations but research had shown 130 of those had been able to travel from neighbouring stations. It was also noted that “semi-fast” service disruption was down by two thirds since the changes were introduced. Members of the Committee were assured that proactive measures had been put in place to assist passengers who relied on the accessible nature of Bromborough Rake Station, the number of which was explained to be the lowest across the whole of Wirral. These changes and challenges were to be monitored and would be subject to an initial review on 9 December 2022.

Members of the Transport Committee were given an overview of Merseyrail’s future improvements and aspirations with an emphasis on working closely with the LCR CA. The new fleet of 777 trains were scheduled for gradual implementation on the Kirby line and work was ongoing with the Combined Authority to modernise ticketing options. It was explained how the two bodies had committed to work together from the first quarter of 2023, looking to secure the funding needed for technological upgrades to gates. It was revealed that three new lifts had recently opened and a further two would open soon, and reference was made to the battery operated trains which were to service Headbolt Lane, a new station set to open in Summer 2023. Looking further ahead, the Committee were informed that, if approved, the new Liverpool Baltic station would open in 2025. Merseyrail’s commitment to the CA’s Merseyrail for All project was reiterated, which looked to extend train services towards Skelmersdale.

Following the presentation, the Committee were invited to ask questions and an in-depth discussion was had regarding the changes to services calling at Bromborough Rake and Green Lane. It was asked whether the “skip stopping” of services was the only solution to reducing how many trains would run late. Members heard that, due to the already tight 15 minute timetable, the only viable option had been to “remove to improve” services. Members also wanted reassurance on the restoration of services with the implementation of the new rolling stock, and that no services and booking office staffing would be reduced. Merseyrail were confident that their plan was to reinstate the 15 minute service and improve services all round as per their concessional obligation, but that the new fleet of rolling stock had to be operational before this could happen. It was also questioned who paid when disabled passengers who could not travel from Bromborough Rake had to get a taxi to the next accessible station, which was confirmed to be Merseyrail.

Members were interested to know more about the plans around smart ticketing and other technological advancements, with an emphasis on inclusion and transport integration. Merseyrail referred back to how they were looking to source more funding and acknowledged that as technology moves quickly, the focus needed to be on making an easy to use and easy to retail network. It was also recognised that not all transport users had smart phones or even bank cards, and that inclusion of the “bankless” or other passengers not familiar with the technology would also be able to access services easily. The issue of technology assisting in transport integration was also identified as a key goal within the upcoming bus franchising.

Questions were raised around the implementation and storage of the new rolling stock and members were assured that work was ongoing to get the fleet fully rolled out as soon as possible. Merseyrail would update the Committee with an update when possible. It was asked if any costs had incurred by storing the fleet while implementation was delayed; the representatives present stated that they did not hold details of that but that the question could be deferred to a colleague after the Committee.

The Committee enquired about the timeframe of the opening of the new Headbolt Lane station and heard how it was still on track for Summer 2023. It was agreed that the plan, which had been 20 years in the making, had only come to fruition with devolution and that it was an example of what can be achieved with planning and vision across the city region. It was further queried if a cost benefit analysis of using batteries vs. extending the electrification of the line had been undertaken. While Merseyrail were unable to confirm this to the Committee, it was stressed that the innovative project was a first for the country and that Members and residents alike should be proud of what had been accomplished.

A discussion was held around train services on the eastern conurbation which were not operated by Merseyrail and created a disparity across the region. The Committee were assured that a Merseyrail standard of service was the aim for the entire city region and that, as part of integration and in line with the franchising of buses, bringing outside services into Merseyrail would be explored. Members heard how, although it was currently in the early stages of planning, this was nevertheless part of Metro Mayor Steve Rotherham’s vision.

Members of the Committee were interested to hear how Merseyrail was planning for Boxing Day services and those for future events in 2023, such as Eurovision and the Open Golf. It was confirmed that the Boxing Day trains would run and that communications would be published the following day. Merseyrail informed the Committee that regular meetings had commenced and reminded members that these events would span weeks and include travel from beyond the wider city region, thus needing a collaborative effort.

Lastly, Members of the Committee discussed the ongoing importance of cleanliness of trains and stations in the wake of COVID. Both Members and Merseyrail agreed that this was a crucial part of offering good customer service and that high standards would be maintained. The Committee also concurred that innovation, collaboration and devolution were the key elements needed to move the city region’s transport networks forward.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted.

## **23 DEVELOPING THE NEXT LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN**

Members of the Transport Committee considered a report of the Executive Director for Policy, Strategy and Government Relations, which updated members on progress in the development of a new Local Transport Plan (LTP) for the Liverpool City Region.

Suzanne Cain, Transport Policy Co-ordinator, asked Members of the Transport Committee to note the key messages that had emerged from the public consultation process, which included the broad endorsement of the plan's overall direction with no primary issues identified. A comprehensive scope of information had been gathered from various engagement and consultation methods, which had been incorporated into the report.

Huw Jenkins, Lead Officer for Transport Policy, set out the headline findings from the transport modelling of the four future travel scenarios which had been developed, along with the challenges presented that will shape the development of the LTP's preferred strategy. It was explained that the report helped quantify the plan in terms of its deliverability via achievable goals, which could result in Merseyside performing better than the Government base case. The Committee also heard how, along with the risk of delays in guidance from Government, the carbon modelling identified a significant challenge ahead.

Before the findings from the "State of Freight" section of the report was discussed, Members were invited to ask questions on the findings of the consultation and modelling processes. Clarification was sought over the engagement with schools and representation of the six local authorities; it was confirmed that schools from each of the authorities had been included in the process. A discussion was held around the plan's focus to be "child friendly" and how the move away from dependency on cars in particular tied in with the identified risk of health across the city region.

Reference was made to the over 55's consultation and it was asked if a distinction between the concepts of health and crime had been identified where "safety" was concerned. The Committee were informed that the over 55s consultation had been an open-ended engagement and that part of the next step was to pick up on the specifics. It was acknowledged that the consultation process had suggested that travel habits had changed over the pandemic for over 55s in particular.

Reference was made to the current uncertainty amid recent changes in Government policy which affected the Northern Powerhouse and related grants. The Committee acknowledged that no Conservative Councillors were in attendance to offer a more informed view of the "mood music" within Government and so there was no speculation as to where those discussions were up to at a national level.

The Committee then heard additional information updating members on the "State of Freight" workstream and its place within the Local Transport Plan, with particular emphasis on the city region's ports. The report had identified a high density of HGV traffic moving up through the country from ports in the south. It was explained how this evidence based approach could be used to comprehensively consider all options, implications and alternatives for the correct intervention. The importance of the emerging work was recognised and it was suggested that a members briefing session should be set up in due course.

The possibility of the use of drones for delivery was raised by a member and it was clarified that, before looking to solutions and improvements, it was vital to identify exactly what was going were. The Committee were assured that the region was open to innovation and that freight could play a major role in the future of this important shift.

RESOLVED – That:-

- (i) the depth of the consultation that has been undertaken on the Vision and Goals document that forms a first stage in the development of the new Local Transport Plan (LTP), including the key messages emerging together with the broad support for the new plans vision, be noted;

- (ii) the headline findings from the modelling of the four future travel scenarios developed and that will shape the development of the LTP's preferred strategy be noted;
- (iii) the work underway to build a more detailed picture of freight movements across the city region as part of the evidence that will inform the LTP and future investment and lobbying activities be noted;
- (iv) the Integrated Assessment of the LTP that is underway to identify, and mitigate against the plan's risks or implications on the environment, on equality and diversity and on social value be noted; and
- (v) there is delay to the publication of new, draft guidance on LTP's by the Department for Transport and that this introduces a degree of risk be noted.

## **24 QUARTERLY BUS UPDATE**

Members of the Transport Committee considered a report of Merseytravel which provided Members with key bus issues relating to the second quarter of 2022/23.

The Quarterly Bus Update provided updates on the milestones of the Bus Alliance, progress on the assessments into Bus Reform, Hybus Trial Project and Green Bus Routes Programme, along with an overview of how the Bus Team continued to work with bus operators to support the post-Covid recovery of the region's bus network. The Committee also heard about the impact of the reduced funding allowance on the implementation of the Bus Service Improvement Plan.

Laura Needham, Bus Strategy Programme Officer, was present to respond to questions and topics raised by Members of the Committee. A discussion took place about ways in which the bus network could better serve the night-time economy, with particular emphasis on the newly opened Shakespeare in the North theatre in Prescot. The destination was on the 10A bus route between Liverpool and St Helens, which was the intended service for the new Hydrogen buses once they were operational. It was suggested that this route was appropriately placed to trial a more frequent night-time schedule or 24-hour service.

The Committee heard that an enhanced night-time provision of services was an important aim and that this issue would be taken back to the bus service providers directly. It was also suggested that the BID could be approached to assist with the night-time economy surrounding the student population of the City Region. Further to this engagement, a more in-depth report on the night-time bus network could also be conducted.

The issues of routes with an infrequent service - and one running to every 40 minutes, i.e. without a "clock-face" frequency - were highlighted as barriers for bus users in some areas. The Committee were assured that this would be taken back to the bus providers directly and it was stressed that the improvement and accessibility of real-time information on the bus network was vital moving forward.

Members discussed how the public consultations on bus services held under the banner of "Merseytravel" had resulted in the individual service providers avoiding accountability. Whilst some subsidised routes had not worsened post-consultation, it was further evidence in favour of the devolution of bus services to improve the network overall.

**RESOLVED** - That the contents of the report be noted.

## **25 MERSEYTRAVEL FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 2**

Members of the Transport Committee considered a report of Merseytravel providing details of Merseytravel's financial performance for the period through to 30 September 2022, together with projected outturn.

Sarah Johnston, Assistant Director, Finance, presented the report and explained that, despite the challenging backdrop of the budget, financial performance was holding up at the halfway point. The overall projected underspend was outlined and the Committee heard how specifically earmarked reserves had been set aside to assist in the eventuality of two key financial risks facing Merseytravel, those of cost inflation and the public sector pay award.

The Committee were invited to ask questions and the impact of the upcoming public sector pay award was queried. It was confirmed that the cost would be over £700k and, in anticipation of a further Government "mini-budget", complacency was not an option. Any pressures would continue to be closely monitored and reported back to the Committee.

RESOLVED - That the contents of the report be noted.

## **26 MERSEYTRAVEL MULTI MODAL TICKET PRICES 2023**

Members of the Transport Committee considered a report of Merseytravel relating to the approval of ticket recommendations for all Merseytravel multi operator and multi modal pre-paid tickets for 2023.

Gary Evans, Assistant Director for Customer Delivery, presented the report and clarified that discussions on the pricing of the Solo and MyTicket products were still ongoing; as such, these ticket types were not included in the recommended price changes. The Committee heard how the RPI from July 2022 was significantly higher than the proposed price increases in the report. It was further explained that, if approved, the price increase of approximately 6% across multi modal travel tickets would come in effect from January 2023.

The Committee were invited to ask questions and it was queried whether Merseytravel anticipated a decline in ticket sales due to their increased costs, particularly within the current national cost of living crisis. The Committee were informed that a balance was needed to keep products affordable and consistently below RPI whilst costs for transport providers had also increased significantly. It was explained how negotiations with Merseyrail had resulted in a practical influence on ticket prices, which could have been significantly higher.

The Committee were reassured that rail travel accounted for 20% of journeys across the city region and that tickets for bus only journeys – which accounted for 80% of journeys and were typically used by the least affluent passengers – were not subject to price increases at this time. The Committee heard how the recommendations proposed should be considered the "least worst" option in the current economic climate.

RESOLVED – That:

- (i) the annual prices for the Merseytravel Multi-Operator Ticketing Scheme products, to be fully implemented by 4 January 2023 (or August 2023 for Term time tickets) for Trio, Railpass and Saveaway tickets as outlined in Appendix 1 of this report be approved; and
- (iii) the annual price increase for the Bus Multi operator bus only products, Solo and My Ticket, are still subject to negotiation and will be subject to a further report and the prices for these products will remain unchanged moving into 2023, be noted.

## 27 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair confirmed that two public questions had been received and circulated to Members of the Committee. Mr Andrew Wennell was invited to put his question to the meeting.

### **Question received from Mr Andrew Wennell:**

*“Hough Green & Heswall stations.*

*Both of the above stations are on the border of Merseyside. With Hough Green I was advised that this is the last station before you had to pay for onward journeys if you had a concessionary travel pass for Merseyside. But yes you can catch the train here to Hough Green but when you get off to then catch a bus you would have to wait until 0930 as this area is classed as Widnes.*

*With Heswall I was advised the other day that your pass only covers you to Upton but on the maps on the Merseyrail trains the area that is covered for the Metrocard & concessionary pass would also include Heswall. So this could be misleading to some people.*

*So my question is if you can travel on the Train to Hough Green they why can't you continue your journey by bus without paying the fare as this should be included. If Heswall is on the map then we should be allowed to travel there on our pass or get these maps updated if you can now only travel to Upton on your pass.”*

The Chair thanked Mr Wennell for his question and advised him that a formal written response would be provided within 10 working days following the meeting.

It was confirmed that travel up to Hough Green and Heswall by train, as part of the concessionary travel terms and conditions, was permitted and included in the various zone maps as inside the appropriate boundary for use. The Committee were reminded that the local travel passes were for use across Liverpool, Wirral, Sefton, Knowsley and St Helens and that any advice to the contrary was incorrect.

The Chair addressed the issue of onward bus travel from Hough Green and noted that the terms and conditions of the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme were determined at a national level and restricted free bus travel between 6.30am and 09.30am, Monday to Friday. It was further clarified that the concessionary travel passes issued by Merseytravel included benefits not applicable to the national scheme, such as the use of local trains and a lower age eligibility.

The Committee heard how the destination of an onward bus route would determine if the Merseytravel pass could be used and as such, services travelling outside the boundary towards Warrington or Halton were not included in the use of the free travel pass and passengers were instead subject to nationally set restrictions.

The Chair then invited Ms Wennell to put her question to the meeting.

### **Question received from Ms Pamela Wennell:**

*“I have queried this before and would like to know why there are two buses that are meant to be at stand 5 in St. Helens station at the same time. The 32 arrives before the 35 St. Helens Junction bus, but the 35 in theory should leave before the 32. As you can see that this is not possible. Today, 7 November due to the 32 being in the number 5 stand, the 35 bus parked*



*behind in stand 4, which confused the issue. Is there no way that you can stop this from happening, e.g., having two buses stop at the same stand?"*

The Chair thanked Ms Wennell for her question and advised that a formal written response would be provided to her within 10 working days following the close of the meeting. It was noted that the timings of services referenced by Ms Wennell were deliberately separated to limit the occurrence of such clashes but, on the occasion specified, a delay on the number 32 service had led to the number 35 service using an incorrect bus stand to keep to its schedule and prevent additional delays.

The Chair assured Ms Wennell that the wider issue of delays would be taken up with the service providers directly. The Committee then had confirmation that an investigation had commenced with colleagues at the Hubs Team, who would monitor the situation moving forward and review the service allocation at the bus station to identify any steps towards improvement.

## **28 PETITIONS AND STATEMENTS**

There were no petitions or statements received.

## **29 ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR**

The Chair announced that colleague Suzanne Cain, an “exceptional” Transport Policy Co-ordinator, was moving on in her employment; he expressed his heartfelt thanks and well wishes on behalf of the Transport Committee.

The meeting closed at 4.04 pm

Minutes 17 to 29 received as a correct record on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of January 2023.

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Chairperson of the Committee