

Members of the Environment and Waste Management Improvement Committee

Members of the Committee

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Local Bus Operators policies - Scrutiny Report

1. The scrutiny of the policies of the local bus operators arises from a resolution of Council on 28 June 2005(**Appendix 1**). The start of the scrutiny was delayed to allow the finalisation of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) following its evaluation by Government office.
2. The final LTP now includes the revisions in the light of Government office comments. The Environment and Waste Management Improvement Committee (EWMIC) received a report on the final LTP at its meeting on 21 February 2006.
3. Members of the EWMIC also received briefings on the LTP, the role of West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (WYPTE), bus policy and background to local bus operations (**Appendix 2**) at the committee meeting held on 21 February 2006.
4. Members received further detailed briefings from WYPTE staff in a Member session on 28 February 2006.
5. A public scrutiny session was held on 08 March 2006 where bus operators responded to the questions detailed in **Appendix 3** which had been sent to them in advance of this meeting. There is a summary of notes taken at this meeting set out in Chapter 2.

Acknowledgements

The Chair of the Environment & Waste Management Improvement Committee, Cllr Ghazanfer Khaliq, would like to thank all the individuals and organisations that submitted evidence to this Scrutiny, the members of the Committee for their hard work in both holding the hearings and producing the report and all of the officers involved for their invaluable assistance in arranging the hearings and the production of the report.

Chapter 2 – Background Information and Evidence

A. MINUTES OF 21 February 2006 ENVIRONMENT & WASTE MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE

At the meeting on 21 February 2006, a short presentation was provided on the scrutiny of the policies of local bus operators and their contribution to securing the strategic goals of the Local Transport Plan.

The presentation included:-

- An outline of the scrutiny process and timetable from the Performance Coordinator.
- An outline of the Council's duties as regards local bus operators, clarifying Bradford Council's responsibilities – Transport Planning Manager, Department of Transportation, Design and Planning.
- The role and responsibilities of the West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive, including background to the key issues in understanding the policies of local bus operators– West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive) (WYPTE).

The Council's role included responsibility for the physical infrastructure. For public transport this involved:-

- The provision of stops, their locations and measures in place at those locations.
- Consideration and implementation of priority measures where these were necessary and acceptable and the space/resource was available for implementation.

Links with Metro had been developed to ascertain how the Council, as highway authority, could contribute to the maintenance and improvement of the network of bus and rail services and links with bus companies looked at their operational concerns. Liaison with the Police addressed enforcement issues and contact with other groups included involvement in school travel network facilities and mobility/access issues being addressed for the community.

West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (WYPTE) provided a detailed presentation on the framework for the provision of bus services in Bradford. The presentation contained:-

- An outline of WYPTE's objectives including the legal framework for the provision of bus services in Bradford; the context for how services were planned, identification of issues regarding Local Transport Plan (LTP) delivery and accountability and responsibility.
- A summary of their role including LTP co-ordination; bus strategy, rail franchise, funding and integration projects.
- Identification of local bus operators.

- Commercial services and tendered services
- Responsibility for LTP targets.

It was agreed that all Members would receive a copy of the presentation and questions forwarded to the Performance Coordinator would be responded to prior to the bus scrutiny sessions planned for 28 February and 8 March 2006.

No resolution was passed on this item.

B. NOTES TAKEN FROM BRIEFING BY WYPTE TO ENVIRONMENT AND WASTE MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE - 08 March 06

Approximately 80% of bus services in the West Yorkshire region are commercially operated; the remaining 20% are tendered by WYPTE. These tendered services include access services such as school buses, rural buses, MetroConnect services, weekend and late evening buses and the AccessBus service.

Fares have risen at a rate on average of 30% over the last five years. The shorter journey fares have risen over 100% over the last 5 years – this has significant implications as most of these journeys are made by people living in inner city many of whom come from deprived households.

Overall, the pattern of bus patronage had been increasing between 2000 and 2003 but then began to decline and is expected to continue to fall in the medium term. The current rate of decrease in bus patronage is around 2% per annum. The introduction of free travel for the disabled and senior citizens is expected to result in a significant increase in passengers. Both First bus and K&DT have introduced extended travel tickets (i.e., weekly, monthly tickets) to increase patronage. Both First bus and K&DT have developed high frequency bus routes resulting in passenger growth. Most recently K&DT introduced high quality buses on its high frequency 662 service from Keighley to Bradford service with a resultant 5% increase in patronage.

Members noted that train patronage was increasing, even though train fares were also increasing. Historically bus driver recruitment and retention has been poor for First which, as a large provider had a significantly adverse impact on reliability. Members were also told that the length of time it takes passengers to board is one of the reasons for delays. This delay can be almost as long per journey as time spent stationary at traffic signals¹. Delays are caused by confusion over tickets and the payment of cash (and the obtaining of change) for fares.

Park and ride schemes are being evaluated through the LTP, but in conurbations it may not be as effective in West Yorkshire as in single city areas such as York. West Yorkshire is a polycentric conurbation so shoppers can move to another city or town to shop if they do not find the transport arrangements acceptable. In single city areas such as York, there is no alternative city easily accessible.

There is an opportunity to exploit new technologies such as transponders fitted on buses which activate traffic lights to request a priority for an approaching bus if conditions

¹ *The Greater Manchester causes of bus unreliability study*, GMPTE, 2005.

allow. Trials on the Manchester Road guided bus way showed reduced and less variable travel times following the use of on board technologies.

C. NOTES TAKEN FROM ENVIRONMENT AND WASTE MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE PUBLIC MEETING - 08 March 2006

Attendees

Cllr Ghazanfer Khaliq – Chair of Improvement Committee

Cllr David Robinson – Improvement Committee Member

Khadim Hussain – Operations Director, First Bradford

Geoff Lomax - Commercial Director, Keighley & District Travel Ltd (K&DT)

Neil Holt – West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (WYPTE)

Neale Wallace – WYPTE

K&DT buses introduced high frequency, high quality buses on its corridor 662 route service from Keighley to Bradford service which has experienced an increase in patronage.

Points for the Council to consider

- How can the Council promote priority for buses on the highways?
- Can the Council extend the use of Bus only lanes?
- How can the Council promote the use of Smart technologies and guided routes?
- How can the Council encourage the creation of new bus routes?

Geoff Lomax – Commercial Director Keighley & District Travel Ltd

K&DT is now part of the Transdev Group and operates approximately 100 buses, some of which some are school services under contract to WYPTE as well as tendered evening and Sunday services. The daytime services are commercially operated.

There has been a 5% increase in patronage on certain corridors, namely the 662 Keighley to Bradford route which is served by buses of a very high specification. Patronage is always increased on high frequency routes.

K&D Travel would work together with WYPTE and other bus operators, so long as it does not inconvenience the majority of their passengers. Geoff Lomax explained that the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) does not allow the operators to work together to agree fares as this is deemed to be price fixing.

K&D Travel obtain public feedback via a user group of six people that meet quarterly and from comment cards that are placed on every bus.

The three main customer comments received concern:

1. Reduced frequencies to evening and Sunday services
2. Specific complaints about an incident
3. Lack of frequency of buses to a particular area.

Key reasons for general costs increasing:

- Increase in fuel costs
- Increase in insurance costs
- Fleet replacement

K&D accept that the higher fares do in part contribute to decreased patronage.

Key problems facing Keighley & District Travel:

- Unpredictable traffic congestion
- Need to provide low floor buses, but not all stops are accessible – they need to be protected by bus clearway orders
- Competition from a heavily subsidised train service
- Lack of enforcement of offences such as unauthorised vehicles driving in bus lanes and parking at bus stops.

Khadim Hussain – Operations Director First (Bradford)

First Bradford introduced the Smartcard system in 1997 and this was relaunched in 2000. The card can be bought at the Interchange and used for extended travel or 'charged' with credit which can be used instead of cash. There are currently 90,000 cards in circulation and between 15-17% of journeys use the Smartcard. First Bradford estimate that the introduction of the Smartcard led to an increase of 15 – 17% patronage with Smartcard. First Bradford would join a Yorkshire wide Smartcard scheme if the terms were acceptable.

Increased traffic congestion results in a loss of punctuality, longer journey times and more buses on the road in an attempt to keep to schedule on high frequency corridor routes.

As a business, if First Bradford Bus did not increase fares they would operate at a loss and in the longer term would go out of business.

Key reasons for general costs increasing:

- Increase in fuels costs
- Increased cost of buses to provide a higher specification – to include climate control, on board CCTV, driver protective screens etc
- Increased wage settlements – staff turnover was 20%; now that driver wages are higher, staff turnover has decreased
- Uncoordinated traffic works – bus operators receive a weekly/fortnightly schedule of roadworks but the contractors do not always keep to the schedule. Therefore, the operators have to face unscheduled lane closures and roadworks going on longer and at different times to those scheduled for.

West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (WYPTE)

Currently, the only way a passenger can travel on more than one operator with one travel card is by using the Metrocard which is more expensive than the operators own travel cards.

WYPTE have set out the following three scenarios for operators wishing to work in partnership:

a. All operators charging same single fares

Drawbacks – would be seen as price fixing by OFT under current competition legislation

Delivery Mechanisms – can only be delivered by a Quality Contract (franchising).

b. All operators agreeing to a single ‘multi-operator travel’ scheme for West Yorkshire

Drawbacks – has to be open to all operators. Depends on all operators ‘volunteering’ to drop their own single operator travel tickets but operators would still control price and products available

Delivery Mechanisms – Statutory Ticketing Scheme

c. All operators charging similar fares for similar journeys, single multi-operator travel scheme for whole county controlled by Metro

Drawbacks – Possible additional cost of administering the scheme could fall on operators, operators would lose autonomy over fare setting

Delivery Mechanisms – can only be delivered by a Quality Contract (franchising).

Chapter 3 – Findings and Recommendations

1. The Council as the Highway Authority is responsible for the physical carriageway that buses operate on (the road, bus stops, lane markings etc) but have no control over the policies or practices of bus operators. The five West Yorkshire Authorities combine together through the West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority (WYPTA) and West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (WYPTE) to produce and operate the sub regional local transport plan (LTP).
2. Bus services operate in a deregulated industry. Bus operators are commercial businesses with a responsibility to their shareholders. 80% of bus journeys are commercially operated and bus operators decide how and when they are provided and what fares are charged. The remaining 20% are tendered by WYPTE.
3. From the evidence presented to Members, it seems widely accepted that reliability and punctuality, journey time, complexity of ticketing (if across more than one operator), quality of ride, safety and security and cost are the major considerations for the bus travelling public.
4. Public consultation by bus operators is weak. Operators are not obliged to accept the conclusions of the much wider consultation undertaken by the WYPTE. Consideration could be given to using the Council's consultation machinery ('Speak Out' panel, Area Conferences and Neighbourhood Forums etc) to strengthen the engagement of the bus operators with the communities they serve.

Recommendation 1

The Council should consider ways of using the Council's consultation machinery ('Speak Out' panel, Area Conferences and Neighbourhood Forums etc) to establish the views of local communities on transport related matters so as to strengthen the engagement of the bus operators with the communities they serve. WYPTE to be consulted / involved.

Head of Neighbourhood Support Service, Department of Policy & Performance

5. Bus operators see the extension of bus only lanes and bus clear way orders as a way of significantly reducing traffic congestion and improving bus journey punctuality and thereby increasing bus patronage. Consideration should be given by the Council, through the WYPTE, to increase the extent of bus only lanes wherever this is possible, including those corridor routes currently the responsibility of the Highways Agency.

Recommendation 2

The Council, with the WYPTE, should seek opportunities to increase the extent of bus only lanes and bus clearway orders throughout the district, including those corridor routes currently the responsibility of the Highways Agency.

Director of Transportation, Design and Planning, Department of Transportation, Design & Planning, Transport Planning

6. Members considered that new technology such as real time travel information and smart traffic signalling should be used to inform passengers of bus arrival times and prioritise buses in existing, extended and new bus only lanes.

Recommendation 3

The Council, through the WYPTE, should encourage wherever possible the use of new technologies, such as real time travel information and smart traffic signalling (which can also be introduced outside of 'bus only' lanes), to inform passengers of bus arrival times and prioritise buses in existing, extended and new bus only lanes in order to encourage an increase in bus patronage.

Director of Transportation, Design and Planning, Department of Transportation, Design & Planning, Transport Planning

7. Bus operators also highlighted the lack of enforcement by the Police against other vehicle use of, and parking in, bus only lanes and parking at bus stops as significant in undermining punctuality and increasing journey times. The decriminalisation of car parking allows the transfer of road traffic duties, including traffic warden duties and responsibilities, to the local authority. A scheme has already been introduced in Leeds and plans to introduce in Kirklees in June and Calderdale in September are well advanced. The transfer of traffic warden duties and other traffic enforcement duties to Bradford MDC is an opportunity to address the misuse of bus lanes and bus stops.

Recommendation 4

The transfer of traffic warden duties and other traffic enforcement duties from the Police to Bradford MDC would enable the Council to design services that can assist in the enforcement and the misuse of bus lanes and bus stops.

Director of Transportation, Design and Planning, Department of Transportation, Design & Planning, Transport Planning

8. Bus operators see a lack of enforcement by the Council and the Highways Agency on contractors to keep to published schedules of roadworks as contributing to delays in bus services

Recommendation 5

The Council should review how it can ensure that contractors observe published schedules of roadworks in order to avoid delays in bus services and reduce road congestion.

Director of Transportation, Design and Planning, Department of Transportation, Design & Planning, Transport Planning

9. There seems to be reluctance on the part of bus operators to work together, and with the WYPTE, to develop a single multi-operator ticketing scheme for West Yorkshire. Such a scheme, particularly if using Smartcard technology, could greatly simplify ticketing, reduce delays in boarding at bus stops and is likely to increase patronage. However, under present legislation, the scheme would need to provide the bus operators with control over the setting of fares otherwise the financial risks to them would be too great to enter into the scheme. Proposals to develop a joint Ticketing Company are currently almost complete. Whilst this will co-ordinate the delivery of the multi-operator MetroCard products, passenger confusion will continue with the range of single operator products available. Operators also expressed concern that they could fall foul of competition legislation.

Recommendation 6

The Council and Bradford Vision, through the WYPTA, should encourage all local bus operators to agree a single multi-operator travel smartcard scheme across West Yorkshire.

Director of Transportation, Design and Planning, Department of Transportation, Design & Planning, Transport Planning

10. The development of the school 'yellow bus' quality service and the introduction of free off peak bus travel for senior citizens from April 2006 should lead to a significant increase in bus patronage. Not all schools have published travel plans, although it is accepted that in some cases (such as inner city schools where population densities are such that most children walk to their primary school) that this does not cause a detriment.
11. As the largest employer in the district, the Council should review its staff policies to promote green travel, including the use of buses. Through the use of the Eco Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS), the Council should aim to become an exemplar employer in tackling road congestion, air quality and healthy living. This review should, in consultation with staff Trade Unions, include an examination of the use of staff essential and casual car user allowances, free or subsidised town centre staff parking, subsidised bus travel for staff, green car leasing scheme and other relevant schemes.

Recommendation 7

The Council should review its staff policies to promote green travel, including the use of buses. Through the use of the Eco Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS), the Council should aim to become an exemplar employer in tackling road congestion, air quality and healthy living. This review should, in consultation with staff Trade Unions, include an examination of current staff essential and casual car user allowances, free or subsidised town centre staff parking, subsidised bus travel for staff, green car leasing scheme, flexible start and finish times and other relevant schemes.

Directors of Human Resources and Policy and Performance

12. Travel plans, road congestion, air quality etc are part of the draft District Environment Strategy. Consideration should be given to the formation of a Transport Partnership, under the Environment Partnership to be part of the family of partnerships as part of Bradford Vision. The active participation of the local bus operators would be an essential feature of the Transport Partnership.

Recommendation 8

Bradford Vision should consider the formation of a Transport Partnership, under the Environment Partnership to be part of the family of partnerships as part of Bradford Vision. The active participation of the local bus operators and the WYPTE would be an essential feature of the Transport Partnership

Chief Executive of Bradford Vision

13. The Environment and Waste Management Improvement Committee, at its meeting in October 2006, will consider a report on:-

(i) progress towards ensuring all schools in the Bradford district have produced school travel plans;

(ii) progress on developing the Council 'Green' Travel Plan to encourage staff to travel to work by public transport, to share cars, walk or cycle to work to help reduce road congestion, improve air quality and benefit their health;

(iii) progress on the decriminalisation of parking offences and the assumption of responsibility for enforcing on-street parking restrictions;

(iv) any plans to promote flexible working times to reduce road congestion. The Council should also consider at this meeting the level of progress made on the recommendations agreed from this scrutiny report.

(Transport Planning, Department of Transport, Design & Planning)

RESOLUTION OF FULL COUNCIL

Minutes of 28/6/05 Council meeting

WEST YORKSHIRE TRANSPORT PLAN 2006 – 2011

On 14 June 2005 the Executive considered a report of the Transportation Design and Planning Director seeking approval of the provisional version of the West Yorkshire Local Transport Plan which was required to be submitted to the Government by the end of July.

The plan had been prepared on behalf of the five Local Authorities and West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority which comprised the Local Transport Plan Partnership. A final version of the plan was required to be submitted to the Government by the end of March 2006.

The Executive resolved

That the Provisional Local Transport Plan be approved for submission to the Secretary of State.

That while the Council notes and accepts the priorities as set out in the Transport Plan, we believe that for the priorities to be addressed successfully they need to be adopted by all organisations involved in the provision of transport services.

We are concerned that recent fare increases and service cuts by First Bus, the virtual monopoly provider of bus services in the District, will make it harder to achieve the stated objectives of the Transport Plan in particular, the ability to change people's travel behaviour through the provision of alternatives to the use of private cars.

Whilst noting that the private sector has a responsibility to its shareholders to make a profit we believe that public transport providers also have important social, environmental and economic responsibilities and should assess fully the potential impact of their decisions on each of these areas.

We recognise the role of the WYPTE in trying to keep socially important routes open and welcome the Government's introduction of free travel for pensioners and disabled people. However, we believe that these developments will have limited impact unless local bus companies demonstrate active engagement with and responsibility towards the communities that they serve and give greater weight to the social and economic responsibilities they assumed when undertaking to provide services.

Council therefore asks the Environment and Waste Management Improvement Committee to undertake a detailed scrutiny of the policies of local bus operators and their contribution to securing the strategic goals of the Local Transport Plan.

Presentation on the scrutiny of the policies of local bus operators and their contribution to securing the strategic goals of the Local Transport Plan

Presentation to be downloaded separately.

QUESTIONS TO LOCAL BUS OPERATORS

A. LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN (LTP)

1. What responsibility does your company have for the LTP?
2. How do your policies contribute towards achieving the strategic goals of the LTP?
3. We understand that in your response to the Bus Strategy you specifically object to the principle of co-ordination of services between bus operators and between buses and rail. Is this the case?
4. If yes, surely such policies will provide better services for the travelling public?
5. What responsibility towards, and engagement with, the local communities you serve can you demonstrate?

B. BUS PATRONAGE

1. Are you trying to increase bus patronage and how are you trying to do this?
2. What are the obstacles to you achieving this?

C. BUS FARES

1. Do you accept that an increase in bus fares leads to a loss of bus patronage?
2. If yes, why have you increased fares so much in recent years? [Currently around 80% on information we have from WYPTE]
3. Do you accept that over time the extra revenue from increased fares is lost due to the drop in patronage?
4. We welcome the SmartCard system that First are trialling in the Bradford area. Such systems potentially offer customer benefits and can afford wider benefits through other applications. We are advised that First Bus in particular has objected most strongly in their response to the Bus Strategy to the introduction of a Countywide multi-operator SmartCard system. Is this the case and if yes, could you explain why?
5. We understand that in real terms, the cost of motoring has decreased. Do you agree?
6. If yes, then why has the cost of bus travel increased so much?

D. RELIABILITY

1. What are you as a bus operator doing to improve reliability and punctuality of bus services?
2. There has been a proliferation of single operator tickets in recent years. These lead to confusion for passengers. As boarding times can account for 40% of bus delays, could you explain your rationale for introducing such tickets?
3. Simplification of fares is essential to help in improving bus service reliability. What are you doing to achieve this?
4. If children are the adult passengers of the future, what are you doing to encourage them to use local buses?
5. Do you welcome and support the 'yellow bus scheme'?

E. WORKING TOGETHER

1. Do you agree it would be to the passengers benefit to have maximum coordination between bus operators on ticketing, timetabling, publicity etc?
2. How can WYPTE help you to increase bus patronage?
3. How can Bradford Council help you increase bus patronage?