

Minutes of **Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Sustainable Public Transport**

Meeting date **Thursday, 7 January 2021**

Members present: Councillor Kim Snape (Chair), and Councillors Julia Berry, Val Counce, Mark Clifford, Gordon France, Tom Gray, Yvonne Hargreaves, Laura Lennox and June Molyneaux

Officers: Alison Marland (Principal Planning Officer) and Ruth Rimmington (Democratic and Member Services Team Leader) and Matthew Pawlyszyn (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

Other Members: Tracy Keating (Manager, Central Lancs Dial-a-Ride) and Owain Roberts (Regional Stakeholder Manager, Northern Trains)

21.OS16 Minutes of meeting Thursday, 3 December 2020 of Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Sustainable Public Transport

The Minutes of the meeting Thursday, 3 December 2020 were approved as a correct record.

21.OS17 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

21.OS18 Verbal Presentation by Dial-a-Ride

The Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Sustainable Public transport welcomed Tracy Keating, Manager at Central Lancs Dial-a-Ride.

She explained that Central Lancashire Dial A Ride provided community, door to door transport service and had been operating since 1982. There were six employees, two were based in the office and four were drivers. The fleet consisted of six minibuses, three were used daily. The service was to provide transport for people that were unable to access public transport. Drivers were Midas Trained, and DBS checked.

The service covers certain areas on specific days and times, with customers required to book 24 to 48 hours in advance.

To use Dial-a-Ride, users had to be members. There was no age limit in place, but there was a misconception that Dial-a-Ride was exclusive to the elderly or disabled,

the only requirement was for the user to be unable to access other means of public transport.

Dial-a-Ride operated Monday to Friday 8:30 – 16:30, on Saturday's out of town trips were organised for community groups, theatres, and cinemas, all prior to Covid-19.

Funding

Part of the funding was received by Lancashire County Council, but this had reduced 30% in the previous 5 years. Chorley and South Ribble Council provided funding over three years, but this didn't cover the whole service and cut backs were made. Other sources of funding have been explored including the Big Lottery, and funding bids for environmentally friendly minibuses.

Capacity

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, 2500 trips were made a month. At present, that figure was 750.

Covid-19 regulations have reduced bus capacity, a minibus with capacity for 12 – 14 passengers, was now reduced to 4 or 5.

The Community Car Service is a volunteer car scheme with six volunteers and volunteers used their own vehicles to take passengers to their destinations, usually appointments or shops.

There was difficulty in finding volunteers, during the last drive for recruitment, 2000 leaflets were distributed with 2 responses.

The Community Car Service drivers did not require an additional license as they were not taking fares, but were refunded 40p per mile and compensated for the dead mileage, which was mileage operated without a passenger. DBS and extra insurance were paid by Dial-a-Ride.

The car service had been funded by Eccleston Parish Council to serve the people of Eccleston.

Members recommended that Tracy made contact with the Parish Council clerks as there was significant interest from Members to have a Dial-a-Ride service in their wards and Parish's, and suggested that Dial-a-Ride featured in Parish Council's Newsletters, and notice boards. It was also recommended for Dial-a-Ride to attend Chorley Liaison to raise awareness.

Costs

The diesel minibuses cost between £48,000 - £60,000 each, the buses required full accessibility functionality, to ensure wheelchair compatibility. The vehicles were serviced and checked every 10 weeks. The youngest bus was from 2012 and oldest 2008.

Members believed that there was a great opportunity to scope what work could be completed to ensure vulnerable groups and those at risk were able to remain mobile during the pandemic.

Decision: The report was noted.

21.OS19 Verbal Presentation by Northern Trains

Owain Roberts, Regional Stakeholder Manager of Northern Trains Limited was welcomed to the Task Group.

The members were updated as to how Covid-19 had impacted the rail network and customers. How the company and its staff had proactively ensured the trains were as safe, and socially distanced as possible while making it clear to both customers and staff of the changes. Despite action taken, Covid-19 was impacting service and use. Workplace bubbles were created to limit the spread of Covid-19. There had been no new train drivers or conductors between the months of March and October as it was not possible to undertake the required training.

During the pandemic, there had been significant operational impact, prior to the pandemic, there were 2850 daily services, the first lockdown in March 2020 caused a 95% drop in passengers from the year prior, with that figure slowly rising to 50% capacity by Christmas, it was assumed that the third Lockdown would again, decrease the number of passengers, and services in operation.

Service

The aim was to provide a service that customers could consistently rely on. Between 70-75% of trains arrived on time, 90% of trains arrived within 3 minutes of expected times and just under 100% arrived within 15 minutes of scheduled times. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of cancellations was low.

Significant investment had been made to the Bolton corridor trainline, which runs through Chorley. Electrification occurred in February 2018. Tracks were been relayed on the West Coast Main Line which increased top speeds from 75mph to 100mph.

Various stations across the region have been refurbished and their capacity increased, and technology installed to provide greater customer information.

Infrastructure Challenge

A significant challenge faced in the North West was the congested rail networks. The network at full capacity limited flexibility potential.

Trains

43 new Class 331's were now in service, they increased customer capacity and comfort. The improved trains were more environmentally friendly with better performance, with greater accessibility. In November 2020, all Pacer trains were retired from passenger services from November 2020

A new depot is due to open at Newton Heath January 2021 which will allow further improvement in the reliability and performance of trains.

Improved flexible and season tickets were introduced and tickets could now be paid for and displayed on smart phones, although a campaign was underway to ensure that

people that used their phones as tickets have them charged. The improved flexible tickets was in response to Covid-19 as work and travel habits changed and accommodations made to suit the ever changing needs of the customer.

There is a new mobility scooter scheme in place, the updated trains have greater allowances for more mobility scooters although the service requires pre-booking to ensure compatibility.

Councillor Molyneux asked about the train station in Adlington without a train service. She explained Adlington prior to Covid-19 was a commuter village and residents commuted to Preston and Manchester. The station had a limited service and matters deteriorated when Buckshaw reopened. Owain explained that any changes to the timetable was a business case decision, if there was profitability available, changes would be made. It was also explained that the lack of flexibility on certain routes have meant that routes were constrained, and extra stops would impact the network. Cllr Molyneux countered that there was a service to Manchester Airport that currently would not be used due to Covid-19. She added that promises were made that Adlington would improve after electrification but it was not the case. Commuters now go to Blackrod to get the train.

When asked about the environmental impact of the trains, it was explained there had there been a reduction of emissions, although the figures were not available, nearly all of the trains that went through Chorley were electric. There are occasions when a replacement train would be required.

Councillor Julia Berry thanked Northern Rail for maintaining their operation throughout the difficult period and praised the safe, secure, and reliable service. She felt that as there was potential change in the work life balance of commuters and residents after Covid-19, she asked if there had been consideration for a new way of thinking regarding routes, ensuring that they were flexibility, with a focus on weekend services. She continued to enquire about cycling and said that at Chorley Station there was a bike shelter with high levels of cycle theft, and asked if there was consideration for greater investment in secure cycle storage, akin to Preston Station's secure cycle storage.

Owain agreed that travel patterns have changed, and the flexible ticket was in response. Regarding secure cycle shelters, there was funding available but there was uncertainty where it was going to be awarded and distributed.

Members asked about reopening of Coppull station, Owain explained that the franchise time for the line was between 5 and 7 years and new stations were the responsibility of the Local Authority, which would be Lancashire County Council.

Councillor Laura Lennox explained that prior to Covid-19, her journey from Chorley to Manchester could take as long as it took to get from Manchester to London, and enquired about the worst junction in the area. Owain couldn't say what was the worst but noted that there were some extremely busy and used lines.

Alison Marland, Principal Planning Officer asked about the potential for the rail provider to update Chorley Council when timetables were changed or expanded. Owain said that Covid-19 had impacted communication as they were no longer consulting as they had to respond to changes on a weekly or monthly basis, but when they do consult, they consult the County Council, and there would be a County Officer

to talk to and provide information to the District Councils, but he was happy to add Chorley Council to the mailing list for updates.

Northern Rail were exploring new ways of consulting but was unable to make any guarantees to Members, as the industry in addition to Covid-19 was fast moving and many changes have and will be made.

Decision: The report was noted.

21.OS20 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) Consultation - Doing Buses Differently: The Impact of Covid 19

Alison Marland, Principal Planning officer updated the Task Group with the progress of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority consultation for proposed franchising scheme in light of the Covid-19's impact as part of the ambition for their integrated transport system.

75% of public transport journeys were by bus and 1 in 3 households in Greater Manchester did not have access to a personal car. Areas targeted were less affluent and communities with a greater number of vulnerable residents.

In Greater Manchester there were over 150 types of ticket, with various bus companies deciding what routes were commercially viable. Customer standards varied and it was difficult for a network to be planned. Franchising would bring everything under control of the Combined Authority.

There are three phases and areas identified for improved infrastructure. Despite the significant impact of Covid-19 plans to franchise were continuing as it would be beneficial to the economy, health and wellbeing of residents, the environment, and had the potential to embrace flexible working post Covid-19 recovery.

It had been acknowledged that prior to Covid-19, there was a decline in bus use and bus services, franchising would place the financial responsibilities on the public sector, and difficult choices would have to be made to improve facilities.

Implications for Chorley

There were bus routes that crossed the boundary from Greater Manchester into Chorley which would be part of the franchising scheme, and buses that strayed out of Greater Manchester would be run with the cooperation of the neighboring authority.

Chorley provided a response supporting Greater Manchester's Franchising action in 2020 and have reiterated a similar response to demonstrate our belief in the importance of and use of sustainable modes of public transport. An improved network for public transport would result in fewer car journey, reducing the impact on climate change.

Cllr Laura Lennox left at 19:24

Attempts were made to invite Greater Manchester Combined Authority to address members, but the invitation was declined.

In response to a question, Alison said she would explore further into the elements of funding for the Franchising considering the decreased use of public transport due to Covid-19 which was expected to remain present in 2021. Although noted that the process of franchising would not be immediate and would take three to four years to come to fruition.

Cllr June Molyneaux left 19:26

Cllr Julia Berry believed that collaboration with a franchised Greater Manchester Combined Authority would be beneficial for Chorley and felt that the planning and transparency had been positive and was optimistic about the opportunities to share good practice with the Greater Lancashire Transport Plan, and believed that engaging with other authorities should continue.

Decision: The report was noted.

21.OS21 Date of Next Meeting

There was no set date for the next meeting, but proposals were made to talk to Chorley MP Sir Lindsay Hoyle to gain a national government perspective, in addition to talking to senior figures within Chorley Council.

There was a proposed meeting to take place in February for members to discuss and review the draft recommendations and report.

Chair

Date