

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

Meeting date **Friday, 29 January 2021**

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

Officers: Alison Marland (Principal Planning Officer) and Matthew Pawlyszyn (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

Apologies: Councillor Kim Snape

Other: Sir Lindsay Hoyle (MP for Chorley)

21.OS1 Minutes of meeting Thursday, 7 January 2021 of Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Sustainable Public Transport

Decision: The minutes were approved as a correct record.

21.OS2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations.

21.OS3 Question and Answer with MP Sir Lindsay Hoyle

The Task Group welcomed Sir Lindsay Hoyle.

“Councillor Kim Snape (Chair) - In your opinion how could things change for the better in Chorley in development of more sustainable public transport?”

Sir Lindsay explained that the biggest issue was who controlled and oversaw public transport in the area. Compared to Greater Manchester, Chorley was poor in relation to travel. Greater Manchester was cheaper with a wider variety of routes. It was desired for Chorley to have a circular route and better provision, but it was not currently possible. The way forward would be for more delegated powers to enable local issues to be addressed in the local area, or for a system of devolved powers to form a North West Travel Areas. The train service needed to be expanded, Chorley was lucky that there were mainlines through and near, but there were not the active stations to provide the advantage to residents.

Councillor Mark Clifford - What specific actions are you taking as the MP for Chorley to ensue Chorley has more sustainable public transport?

Sir Lindsay Hoyle believed that a good starting point would be for Chorley Council to reflect upon this question and think what they are doing to ensure Chorley has more sustainable public transport. He believed that a good starting point would be for Chorley Council to seek a greater voice and push for greater control at the local level.

Bus and taxi operators should be incentivised to convert to electric and cleaner fuels, and stressed that it was important for the council to cooperate and work closely to ensure good delivery, and felt that a 'lead by example' approach could work with the implementation of electric charging taxi ranks.

Councillor Molyneaux added that when hearing from Northern Trains, they explained that they consulted with the County Council. She asked if he could persuade Northern Trains to talk to Chorley and the Parish Councils as well. Sir Lindsay Hoyle agreed and felt that the County Council should be having regular meetings with the District, Town and Parish Councils to ensure all are better informed and that there was a free flow of dialogue and exchange of information.

He recounted the decrease in service in Chorley, and reminisced it was once possible to get the train to Scotland, and to Yorkshire but the County Council allowed the dominance of Wigan and the routes were resultingly lost and never replaced. He felt that it was important for the Council to push back if they believed their area was not being serviced as it should.

It was summarised that with all the improvements made, and money spent Chorley had not gained the benefits that other areas did.

Councillor Kim Snape (Chair) -Do you think Chorley would be better served for public transport by being included in the greater Manchester transport network?

The MP agreed and explained that fares were more expensive in Chorley and the connection was weaker. 50% of Chorley's population worked out of town and more needed to be done to encourage the use of public transport. This would result in a cleaner area with less congestion. He believed that a devolved bus service to the local level would be best for the users in Chorley.

Councillor Laura Lennox - I would like to know if Parliament can push for re-regulation of public transport to enable it to become more accessible and consequently more sustainable.

Sir Lindsay Hoyle explained that it was possible, but it was not on the agenda. It was widely recognised that it was more efficient to have a nationalised train and bus service. There was no evidence that private enterprise was more efficient but acknowledged that the past was often viewed with rose tinted glasses. He explained that when the Local Authority were running the buses, the aim was to meet the needs of the people rather than profit. He highlighted the issue of multiple train operators which can cause users confusion and inconvenience as certain tickets could only be used at certain times on certain routes.

He remarked that failed enterprise would often give the keys back and gave the example of East Coast Train Line. In public hands, it was performing better than it did privately.

Councillor Lennox highlighted the deregulated buses in Cornwall, controlled by the Council but ran by private enterprise. The MP highlighted that in that case, the local authority had no choice but to take control as the private operators returned the franchise, but highlighted that there were many factors that had to be considered, especially into sustainability for the tax payer, but felt that its success had been boosted by the tourism in the area.

Councillor Yvonne Hargreaves asked if it was a good idea to involve bus companies more in the planning process. The MP replied that it was positive to meet with them but warned that their focus would be profitability rather than the needs of the residents.

Relating to the cost of public transport, Sir Lindsay Hoyle believed that raising the prices was not productive as it frequently caused the cycle of fewer people being able to afford the bus, which then resulted in less people using the bus, and then that would result with the route being classed as “commercially unviable”.

He added that Chorley was behind when it came to technology available as there are no bus stops that highlight when the next bus is due. He did praise that travel to the Youth Zone was offered for £1 but felt that it should be free, in addition to further youth subsidies.

Sir Lindsay Hoyle continued to say that a service that ran locally could pick the right routes with the right buses. At present, routes that were not profitable were pulled without regard for passengers and the local area. Devolved powers to the local authority would be able to manage routes and subsidise the routes that were in danger, he noted that there was a rise in routes that had been subsidised by Chorley Council and asked what the County Council were doing for Chorley in return.

Councillor Gordon France agreed and raised that the number 24A bus route was subsidised 70% by Chorley Council but have no say in the route. He then asked for more information about the double decker hydrogen bus fleet in Aberdeen.

Sir Lindsay believed that hydrogen was a great fuel source, and better than electric but Aberdeen’s hydrogen buses were currently a trial, and the progress unknown. The success of the trail had the potential to shape the view of bus companies on hydrogen’s future.

Councillor Hargreaves added that hydrogen was twice the price of electric, and that the infrastructure was not in place.

Alison Marland – Principle Planning Officer -*The National Bus Strategy was due to be launched in 2020 (backed up by a comprehensive settlement in the Spending Review, which would give local authorities and bus operators the ability to plan for years to come and ensure the sustainability of critical services while stemming cuts and working to increase patronage). Can you provide any information on the National Bus Strategy timetable and how can local authorities be involved?*

The pandemic delayed progress, but the budget was due soon.

Alison Marland - *Have you any update on devolution or combined authorities for Lancashire?*

The County Council would be unlikely to give up the power that they have but the best way to explore models was to raise issues to the County, and to cooperate with nearby councils.

Alison Marland - *In light of Covid-19 and the amounts of subsidies being provided including changes to routes and timetables, has the government a recovery plan?*

This was believed to be a matter of wait and see, there would likely be upcoming cuts. A new budget was due but he did not wish to speculate. He added that he hoped that there was more emphasis on using rail for freight.

Alison Marland - *What sustainable public transport initiatives are the government proposing? Lancashire County has bid for public transport initiatives e.g. electric buses but has not been successful and cannot afford to do this alone*

Sir Lindsay believed that a strategy was needed to be created that suited the needs of the population.

Alison Marland - *How can we progress a new station at Coppull?*

It was believed that golden opportunities had been missed when the land was sold and houses were built without a long term plan for the station. Money had been put aside for a feasibility study. He noted that there needed to be a new motorway junction in addition to the station at Coppull to help the new homes.

21.OS4 Date of Next Meeting

4 February 2021, 18:00.

Chair

Date