

Local Enterprise Partnership

10 March 2022

Mayoral Update

Purpose of Report

To provide LEP Board Members with an update on key Mayoral activity relating to the economic agenda.

1. Fighting for South Yorkshire's bus and tram services

South Yorkshire's public transport network connects people, communities and businesses to jobs, training and social opportunities every single day of the week. A reliable, affordable and frequent service is essential. It is key to building back better from the pandemic.

However, emergency funding that has maintained bus and tram services during COVID was scheduled to end on 31 March. A failure to have continued support risked 50% of buses running across South Yorkshire being scaled back or cut completely.

As well as meeting with the senior teams of First Bus and Stagecoach to discuss their plans to reduce services, I have continued to make the case into government with local leaders and MPs to ensure emergency funding is renewed to support the public transport recovery effort across the region. For these reasons I welcome the Government's recent decision to extend the emergency funding until October.

Although we don't yet have details of the local allocation, I am pleased that operators have agreed to delay possible network and service reductions to allow time to undertake an options appraisal process that will run through to the summer seeking to manage, minimise and mitigate service impacts on the travelling public.

Whilst I continue to believe in the huge potential of our buses, it is clear the current system in South Yorkshire is not delivering as it should. On the 4 March the MCA will decide whether or not to commence a formal investigation of bus franchising as an option to deliver the best services for the region.

A formal investigation of the merits of bus franchising in South Yorkshire will not revolutionise bus services overnight but an investigation is an essential, legal requirement if we do want to move on to franchising itself and therefore a critical step in our effort towards transforming the region's public transport offer, and

ensuring buses in South Yorkshire work for passengers across the region in the long term.

We simply have to look at every option to transform our region's transport – and that has to include franchising.

Moving to the formal franchising assessment is the right decision for South Yorkshire. But I want and need operators to act like real partners now, and for government beyond emergency funding to provide the transformative investment they promised when we accepted their invitation to submit our Bus Services Improvement Plan. Without partnership and transformative funding, we cannot hope to reverse the cycle of decline – and build the future that South Yorkshire deserves.

2. Connected by Water

At the end of January, I was delighted to launch the Connected by Water Action Plan, with colleagues from councils and environmental organisations across South Yorkshire. An ambitious plan, it seeks to reduce flood risk and tackle the climate emergency head on.

First conceived after the 2019 floods that devastated communities across South Yorkshire, the Plan brings together key stakeholders to work together to tackle the issue. Local councils, the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Water and other organisations formed a partnership and work began on the action plan, which combines 144 actions and 100 projects with a total investment of £400 million to better protect over 17,000 homes, businesses and infrastructure across South Yorkshire. A key part of the Plan is using natural solutions to cut flood risk, like tree planting and land management, because it doesn't just tackle flooding, it helps with nature recovery and gets us closer to our target of Net Zero carbon emissions by 2040 at the latest.

The 'living plan' will continue to evolve based on what we learn over the coming months and years, but it will ensure that we are doing all we can to protect homes and businesses across South Yorkshire from the devastating impact of flooding.

3. Continuing to strengthen relationships with India

The long-established relationship between South Yorkshire and India was further strengthened at an important Round Table event hosted by the Indian High Commission in London on the 22nd February. Keynote speakers at the event were the High Commissioner of India to the UK, Ms Gaitri Issar Kumar, Richard Stubbs, Chair of the South Yorkshire India Advisory Board and LEP Board member and myself.

The event focused on the opportunities for more South Yorkshire businesses to export to and establish a presence in India, and for more Indian businesses to trade with and invest in South Yorkshire. Given the Free Trade Agreement currently being negotiated between the UK and Indian Governments, the Round Table was a very positive and timely discussion for the region.

I look forward to welcoming the UK's High Commissioner to India to South Yorkshire later this month and the opportunity to showcase a number of key businesses and locations in the region.

4. Levelling Up White Paper and Levelling Up South Yorkshire

Early in February the Government published its long awaited and much anticipated Levelling Up White Paper (LUWP).

I welcome moves to create London-style powers across England, devolve more control over skills, and to spread R&D and culture spending more evenly around the country, as well as the regeneration efforts in Sheffield. If government are ready to put real resources into a partnership driven from South Yorkshire and not SW1, it could be the start of something significant.

The White Paper is a step in the right direction, without the means to achieve the positive ambition it sets out. Its 12 'missions' are great aspirations – but their Lion-like ambition is matched with mouse-like resources. The money is almost all recycled, and often less than the funds it replaces. In practice, cuts to local government funding since 2018 easily outweigh funding in that period from the main levelling up funds – by an average of £50m, across 144 out of 157 local authority areas.

Without the funding needed for real change, the government's promises of levelling up will remain hollow.

5. Thank you

As this is my final LEP Board meeting before the end of mayoral term I want to put on record my huge thanks to all members of the Board – past and present – for their support, hard work and dedication over the last four years.

It has been a great personal pleasure to work with you to create the stronger, greener, and fairer South Yorkshire that we all wish to see – and as is detailed in our Strategic Economic Plan. This will only be possible by partners from across the region and beyond coming together to deliver it. By bringing partners and stakeholders together from the public and private sectors, with our universities, colleges, and trade unions, the LEP has the ability to act as the fulcrum to realise this change.

Whilst this will clearly not happen overnight, by working together and remaining focused on this goal, there is a huge opportunity to unleash the undoubted potential of people, communities, and businesses across South Yorkshire. I look forward to continuing to work with the LEP, in my capacity as an MP, to deliver on this immense ambition.

Thank you, and good luck.