Overview and Scrutiny Committee

20 October 2022

Update on Real Time Bus Data

Is the paper exempt from the press and public?	No
Reason why exempt:	Not applicable
Purpose of this report:	Monitoring/Assurance
Is this a Key Decision?	No
Has it been included on the Forward Plan?	Not a Key Decision

Director Approving Submission of the Report:
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Executive Summary
At Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 28 July, members requested an update on levels of service cancellation on the bus network and how these cancellations are reflected in data presented to customers. This paper provides that update.

What does this mean for businesses, people and places in South Yorkshire?
The report provides details of how real time data is shared with customers and users of the bus network in South Yorkshire and hence their ability to rely upon the information provided.

Recommendations
That members of OSC raise any questions in regard to the information provided in this report.

Consideration by any other Board, Committee, Assurance or Advisory Panel
N/A

1. Background

1.1 The majority of buses in South Yorkshire (and in particular all buses operated by First and Stagecoach operators) have the ability to share their location and hence be tracked in "real time".

1.2 The data provided by these systems is shared with SYMCA for use in our customer information systems. This includes information in our online journey planner, "Your Next Bus" SMS service and also on real time display units affixed to 234 stops and shelters across the region with a further 193 to be installed by the end of January 2023.

1.3 SYMCA receives a number of queries and complaints annually as to the levels of reliability of the data provided in these systems. Members of OSC therefore asked for more information on the levels of service cancellations which result in erroneous data being presented through real time data sources.

1.4 Following further investigation between 5.7% and 6.1% of services in the last two years did not operate but were not cancelled by the operator (i.e. where the operator should have marked the service as not operating but failed to amend their records, or technical equipment failure meant it wasn't tracked) and hence would still appear in our real time data sources. We can only remove services from our real time data feeds if operators tell us when then cancel a service. The same issue also arises for operators own customer facing information. The source of the problem is the need for manual removal of relevant services, so making the systems vulnerable to error and delay. Operators have been doing work to sort, but so far without marked improvement. .

	2021	2022
Scheduled Journeys	1,026,338	838,969
Actual Journeys (operated)	954,297	761,964
Cancelled Journeys	8,304	23,986
Part-cancelled Journeys[1]	1,382	5,176
Total Cancellations	9,686	29,162
Journeys not tracked	72,041	77,005
% of journeys that did not operate and were not cancelled by the operator	6.08%	5.70%

1.5 This is compounded by services which are running late but are not tracked (around 9% of all services were not tracked in 2022 to date). For many services, punctuality varies considerably from day to day and at different times of the day in particular. By way of an example, the evening peak continues to show notably lower punctuality than the rest of the day, averaging 69% for South Yorkshire compared to 81% punctuality across all services (September 2022 data).

Evening peak time punctuality levels are below 70% in three of the four local authority districts (only Barnsley being above at 75%).

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[1] Part-cancelled journeys are where services are cancelled at some point during their scheduled operation, eg, vehicle breakdown or irrecoverable delay on route meaning the rest of the service is cancelled.

	ACTUAL	TARGET	DIFFERENCE
Barnsley	84.1%	95.0%	-10.9%
Doncaster	79.3%	95.0%	-15.7%
Rotherham	81.9%	95.0%	-13.1%
Sheffield	80.3%	95.0%	-14.7%

Our Enhanced Bus Partnership has set a target of 95% punctuality. Based on current levels of performance there is clearly a significant improvement required in this area.

June 2022		South Yorkshire		
Day	Time band[2]	On-time Observed	Total Observed	Punctuality (%)
Mon-Fri	Early Morning	67,334	74,183	91
	Morning Peak	78,222	97,303	80
	Interpeak	242,702	307,604	79
	Evening Peak	82,695	120,575	69
	Evening	123,300	151,027	82
Weekends	All Times	167,795	202,212	83
Total	All Times	762,048	952,904	80

1.6   When a service is not running to timetable, and is not being tracked it is impossible for a customer to know if the service is either running at all, or just running late. Indeed on higher frequency routes where there are other services available it is possible that customers board the next available service, and in their view the service "never turned up" when in fact it was just running late.

2.   Key Issues

2.1   Whilst punctuality remains a concern, as the majority of services are operated commercially, SYMCA has no direct ability to mandate them to run to a given level of performance. Where services are frequently late or cancelled, these can be reported to the Traffic Commissioner who in turn can intervene with the operator in question and impose their own fines or restrictions.

2.2   In any case, a key contributing factor to late running of services is down to local road and traffic conditions (i.e. outside of the operators control).

2.3   Key factors include the relative availability of bus lanes and bus priority measures. Furthermore, the hours of operation of bus lanes, when they are most required at

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[2] Time bands are:

	Start time	End time
Early Morning	00:00	07:29
Morning Peak	07:30	09:29
Interpeak	09:30	15:29
Evening Peak	15:30	17:59
Evening	18:00	23:59

times of congestion, do not always match conditions on the ground. The peak times of congestion have changed over time, with the afternoon peak now starting earlier (in part linked to school end times being brought forward) and congestion therefore occurring earlier before bus lanes become operable.

2.4   Along with hours of operation, enforcement and infringement of bus lanes also has an impact on punctuality. If members of the public continue to park and use bus lanes during their hours of operation, this invariably means the bus will have to merge with other (congested) traffic and hence lose its journey speed advantage. This is compounded by relatively low levels of available enforcement resources by local authorities.

2.5   In terms of real time accuracy, not all bus operators have real-time enabled vehicles. Whilst First South Yorkshire and Stagecoach Yorkshire have their fleet enabled to be tracked (typically through their ticket machines), smaller operators such as Hulley's, Cawthornes and Goodfellows are not able to provide the real time data.

SYMCA have previously put forward as part of the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Levelling Up Fund submissions proposals to provide the capital investment to allow these smaller operators to upgrade their equipment, so the entire South Yorkshire fleet is real-time enabled. This would also have the benefit of all ticket machines being able to take contactless payments and hence could be part of a wider implementation of a fare-capping initiative in the region. It would also mean that all operators are compliant with the DfT Bus Open Data Standards (BODS) which were implemented nationally in 2020.

Previous submissions have been unsuccessful, but we continue to submit proposals for the funding (through more recent LUF bidding rounds). Depending on the outcome of the latest LUF round, we may need to look at identifying local funding options where possible.

3.   Financial and Procurement Implications and Advice

3.1   There are no direct financial implications as a result of this paper, though any plans to more extensively roll out more real time units across South Yorkshire would both require capital investment to purchase the units, as well as ongoing higher revenue support to manage and maintain the devices and their associated licences.

4.   Legal Implications and Advice

4.1   There are no direct legal implications as a result of this paper.

5.   Human Resources Implications and Advice

5.1   There are no direct human resource implications as a result of this paper.

6.   Equality and Diversity Implications and Advice

6.1   There are no direct equality and diversity implications as a result of this paper, though members should recognise that for those passengers who are not digitally

literate, or do not have access to the internet or a smartphone, they rely entirely on the real time information displayed at stops to allow them to plan their journeys. It is likely that these customers are disproportionately of a higher age group, and likely to be beyond state pension retirement age.

7.   Climate Change Implications and Advice

7.1   There are no direct climate change implications as a result of this paper.

8.   Information and Communication Technology Implications and Advice

8.1   There are no direct information and technology implications as a result of this paper, though SYMCA may want to consider in due course what mix of real time information is made available to passengers through at stop displays, online information provided through the Travel South Yorkshire website, though operator-own smartphone apps or any future consolidated app which could be developed.

9.   Communications and Marketing Implications and Advice

9.1   There are no direct communication or marketing implications as a result of this paper, though any changes to the levels of real time service provision in future will need to be effectively communicated to customers so they understand where they can best access accurate information.

List of Appendices Included

None