SOUTH YORKSHIRE
SY MCA
MAYORAL
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AUTHORITY

Enhanced Partnership Board

Tuesday, 21 March 2023

Update on Mayor's priorities

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

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Executive Summary

The Enhanced Partnership (EP) has agreed to a range of deliverables and commitments to improve bus services in South Yorkshire, consistent with the aspirations in the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The Mayor has identified two particular priorities for focus over the next 3 months:

- The improvement of real time information available on a mobile phone.
- Ticket simplification.

A separate paper to the EP Board provides an overall update of progress in delivery of the EP Programme. This paper provides specific focus on these two priorities and seeks the continued commitment of operators.

What does this mean for businesses, people and places in South Yorkshire?

The EP has been created to achieve a step change in the performance of the bus network in the South Yorkshire region. In time, its success will significantly enhance the passenger experience for public transport users. This in turn will support growth in bus patronage and help it to achieve long-term financial sustainability.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. Board members note the update provided in this paper.
2. Operators continue and intensify efforts to achieve a very high rate of tracking of buses.
3. All parties continue the current engagement on ticket simplification and work to ensure multi-operator ticketing becoming the preferred ticket for the majority of consumers based on price and simplicity.

1.   Background

1.1   This paper updates the Board on progress with two Mayoral priorities in the EP Programme:

- The improvement of real time information available on a mobile phone.
- Ticket simplification.

2.   Real time (live departure) information on a mobile phone

2.1   Bus users have clearly stated as part of the work on the Bus Promise that real time/ live departure information is very important, particularly in an environment where punctuality is poor. If a bus is not on time, passengers must have access to accurate live departure information on where the bus is and when it will actually depart from their stop. Some bus stops in South Yorkshire have live departure displays. However, this information is needed before a person reaches the stop, so they can delay leaving home if the bus is late. It is also required for stops where there is no display. For both reasons, this means being able to access live departure information on a mobile phone.

2.2   Some bus operators provide real time information about their services on their own operator apps. Network-wide live departure information is also available on a mobile phone through the TSY website. This is most easily done by scanning the QR code (available at almost every bus stop), which takes the user directly to the relevant pages on the TSY website for that stop. However, there are a number of issues with the system:

- The website is not designed for mobile phone use, and the customer interface is not user-friendly.
- A number of desirable functions are not provided. These include:
  o A map showing the actual location of the bus.
  o The ability to bookmark a stop easily, without needing to rescan the bus stop QR code each time.

- Information on how many minutes late the bus is, and the expected departure time, rather than an indication simply that the bus is running (or not running) on time.
- The accuracy of the system is poor. This is caused by two problems:
  - Only around 85% of buses are correctly tracking at any one time. This is for a number of reasons, including lack of compatible equipment on some buses, equipment failure, driver error, GPS drift and occasional lost GPS signals.
  - Cancelled buses not being logged in the system, leading to "ghost buses".

2.3 The ultimate aim is to provide live departure information for all operators' services on a mobile phone through a TSY app. However, the procurement and development of such an app will take several months and is driven by the need for app-based ticket retail sales for the tram when SYMCA takes over tram operations in March 2024. In the meantime, a programme of work is underway to improve web-based live departure information as follows:

- A strong initiative with operators to improve the accuracy of vehicle tracking. This involves equipping vehicles that do not currently have compatible tracking equipment, improving data feeds, making sure drivers configure trackers correctly, and ensuring that cancelled services are logged in the system as being cancelled.
- Development of the TSY website to make it more mobile-responsive, and to introduce new tools such as map-based vehicle tracking and bookmarking.

2.4 This programme is expected to deliver significantly improved live departure information on a mobile phone by May 2023, and it is intended that this is "launched" for passengers at that time. We expect to have a TSY app through which live departure information for bus can be delivered by March 2024, and on tram by mid-late 2024.

2.5 Operators are requested to continue to strongly support the programme of work to improve real time vehicle tracking as a high priority.

3. Ticket simplification

3.1 There are currently a large number of ticket types available to passengers in South Yorkshire. The complexity of tickets is a constraint on new users using buses, as it is hard to be certain one has the right product offering the best value for money. Where tickets are purchased on-bus, the complexity of tickets also increases the time it takes for passengers and drivers to identify the best product, slowing down boarding times.

3.2 Currently in South Yorkshire, single operator products are invariably cheaper than the multi-operator equivalent. Removal of single-operator products is therefore only desirable for passengers that otherwise would buy a single-operator product if it is accompanied by a reduction in the price of the multi-operator equivalent. There is a commitment in the EP Scheme to review premium levels on multi-operator ticket products.

3.3 | The ticket simplification work to date has started to map product types, identify which single operator products could be removed, and model the price point to which multi-operator products would need to be reduced to ensure that few if any passengers are disadvantaged.

3.4 | At the time of writing, it is too early to report the results of this exercise. However, the early indications are that if no passengers are to be financially disadvantaged, there is likely to be negative impact on bus operator revenues for some or all operators. The scale of these impacts has yet to be determined.

3.5 | It is intended, by the date of the EP meeting, to have some definitive conclusions on the impact of removal of single operator products at various price points. The EP will work to ensure multi-operator ticketing becoming the preferred ticket for the majority of consumers based on price and simplicity.

3.6 | A separate workstream is being undertaken to improve 'TicketFinder'. This tool on the TSY website guides a passenger to the best ticket through a series of questions. While this work will make finding the best ticket easier, it is not seen as a substitute for greatly simplifying the number of products available.

3.7 | By 2024-25 we expect the bus system to move to a multi-operator Tap and Cap environment, whereby passengers will not need to select a particular ticket product. Instead, when the passenger taps on and off the bus with a contactless bank card, smartcard or mobile app, the "system" will cap the passenger's fare at the best ticket type based on actual usage. This will simplify the user experience and speed up boarding times. However, it still requires ticket products and prices to be in place and does not take away the importance of simplifying tickets in the meantime.

4. Recommendations

4.1 | It is recommended that:

1. Board members note the update provided in this paper.
2. Operators continue and intensify efforts to achieve a very high rate of tracking of buses.
3. All parties continue the current engagement on ticket simplification and work to ensure multi-operator ticketing becoming the preferred ticket for the majority of consumers based on price and simplicity.

5. Consultation on Proposal

5.1 | Not applicable as a discussion paper only.

6. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

6.1 | Not applicable as a discussion paper only.

7. Financial and Procurement Implications and Advice

7.1 | Not applicable as a discussion paper only. Any financial implications resulting from schemes and proposals referred to in this paper will be subject to their own

financial and policy approval processes (e.g. through Transport and Environment Board).

8.   Legal Implications and Advice

8.1   Not applicable as a discussion paper only.

9.   Human Resources Implications and Advice

9.1   Not applicable as a discussion paper only.

10.   Equality and Diversity Implications and Advice

10.1   Not applicable as a discussion paper only.

11.   Climate Change Implications and Advice

11.1   Not applicable as a discussion paper only.

12.   Information and Communication Technology Implications and Advice

12.1   Not applicable as a discussion paper only.

13.   Communications and Marketing Implications and Advice

13.1   Not applicable as a discussion paper only.

14.   List of Appendices Included

None