

Enhanced Partnership Board

Tuesday, 29 August 2023

Update on EP programme delivery

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

Director Approving Submission of the Report:
Pat Beijer, Acting Executive Director of Transport

Report Author(s):
Nick Brown, Project Director, Bus Partnerships

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on progress against agreed Enhanced Partnership (EP) project deliverables and targets.

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

The Enhanced Partnership 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 the Board notes the updates on the delivery of specific commitments in the EP programme and performance against agreed network targets provided in this paper.

1. Progress against EP commitments and targets

1.1 This paper updates the Board on progress against:

- The specific deliverables in the published EP Scheme (Appendix 1)
- Additional commitments in the Refreshed EP programme agreed by the EP Board on 29 November 2022 (Appendix 2)
- The network performance targets set out in the BSIP and EP Plan (Appendix 3).

1.2 The following are areas of progress:

- The South Yorkshire Bus Promise was agreed at the last EP Board meeting on 9 May 2023 and will be released in the near future once all parties have confirmed their readiness to deliver the respective standards within this document.
- Regular conversations are being scheduled to ensure that funded bus priority measures are progressing, and that a pipeline of future projects is developed in each local authority area.
- An improved TSY mobile phone-accessible live departure/real time information system has been developed and is soon to be released on the TSY website.
- Work has started on a TSY retail and information app, to be completed by March 2024.
- SYMCA has identified funding for a number of trials of Demand Responsive Transport and other ways to provide accessibility to individuals and communities for whom providing traditional bus services may be not cost effective. Work is underway to identify suitable projects.
- The extension of the government £2 fare cap to October 2023 and the further extension for another year at £2.50 to November 2024, will continue to reduce travel costs and simplify ticket purchase for many people in South Yorkshire for the next 14 months.
- TravelMaster has agreed to introduce new all-SY multi-operator, bus-only day, seven-day, 28-day and annual tickets. This will be known as the SYBus product. These will be significantly cheaper than the current SY-Connect tickets, which include tram travel. They are likely to be a cost-effective option for passengers that want to travel across local authority boundaries on multiple operator services.
- TravelMaster has also informed us they have been assisting with the delivery of the Derbyshire multi-operator bus ticket. This benefits residents and visitors to Sheffield by enabling journeys on any bus to and from Sheffield City Centre into Derbyshire, including the Peak District.
- The reliability of services has dipped slightly, but remains good at 97.7% for the 12 months to May 2023 against a target of 99.5%.

1.3 The following are key areas where progress is behind the aspirations set out in the BSIP and EP documents:

- Low levels of government funding have led to difficult decisions to increase the child notified fare from 80p to £1.00; to cut the Zoom Beyond concession for 18-21 year olds; and to reduce the frequency of a number of tendered evening and Sunday services. These changes will come into effect from late October/early November 2023.

- It is now clear that progress in the delivery of ticket simplification is dependent on a subsidy being made available for selected TravelMaster multi-operator products. This will require additional funding from government. There is no evidence to suggest this funding will be forthcoming in the near future.
- Recent slow growth in patronage appears to have flattened at 62 million journeys per year, 81% of the 2024/25 target.
- The punctuality of services is 77.8% for the 12 months to June 2023, well below the 95% target.
- SYMCA has pulled out of a proposed EP Marketing campaign to promote the extension of the £2 fare cap, (£2.50 from 1 November 2023). This is on the basis that there is no clear evidence base that demonstrates the potential effectiveness of such a campaign, especially in a time the network has challenges around the quality and provision of services. The priority is to develop better behavioural research into the factors that deter bus use and the measures that are likely to encourage it.
- However, SYMCA would still like to discuss with Operators an option to promote more general improvements and investment in the system and network, using TSY and operators as the primary vehicle for the campaign. Arrangements for this proposal are in progress at time of writing.
- High levels of fraud have led TravelMaster to remove the ability for customers to purchase 7-day passes on board buses using contactless payments. The tickets can still be purchased on-vehicle, using cash and are available online and through the TravelMaster app at a slightly lower price than previously available on board.

1.4 The following paragraphs provide a more detailed update on those key EP Board commitments where progress has been slow, including those reported at the last EP Board meeting. Changes to the RAG rating are recorded in the titles.

1.5 ***Ticket simplification (moved from red to amber)***

TravelMaster has agreed to introduce new all-SY multi-operator, bus-only day, seven-day, 28-day and annual tickets in November 2023. These will be significantly cheaper than the SY Connect ticket, which costs £8.00 for a day pass and includes tram travel. The new tickets are likely to be a cost-effective option for passengers that want to travel across local authority boundaries and on multi-operator services.

The launch of these new tickets does not in itself simplify the range of ticket products available. The proposed commercial price point is unlikely to attract many passengers from the single-operator products. However, the new ticket products would attract passengers to switch and could be a widely promoted ticket in the future if the ticket price were to be reduced to the point that it is comparable with single-operator products. TravelMaster has clarified that doing so would require public subsidy.

TravelMaster is currently modelling what levels of subsidy would be required for a number of possible price points, with the lowest price point (£5.00) having the greatest impact in attracting users to switch from single-operator equivalent products. Decisions on whether to then remove the single-operator products

(which is ultimately required to achieve ticket simplification) are commercial decisions that operators must make independently.

Once subsidy requirements for different price points have been established, further progress will be dependent on new funding from government. SYMCA will continue to seek this funding from government, but there is no evidence to suggest this will be forthcoming in the near future.

1.6 ***Bus priority (moved from red to amber)***

SYMCA has initiated regular discussions involving local authority officers, bus operators and SYMCA to oversee the delivery of agreed bus priority measures, and to develop a forward programme of measures for the future. This will provide a framework for ensuring that bus priority is delivered according to the programme.

Of the named bus priority projects in the EP Scheme, most are at or near completion. However, the A61 bus priority/road widening scheme remains behind schedule, with completion now expected October 2025. There have also been delays in delivery of some of the bus priority measures in Sheffield funded through the TCF programme, although these are not specifically referenced on the EP Scheme.

1.7 ***Network development – trials of new services (retain at red)***

There have been no trials of significant new commercial services reported by operators.

We should however note that there has been a focus on using existing resources to protect the current network in lieu of potentially trialling new services; this has been primarily resources used to deliver tendered services paid for by SYMCA.

Operators have also highlighted an interdependency with bus punctuality as maintaining current frequencies but with worsening journey times means committing more resource to maintain an existing timetable. This limits the amount of available resource to trial new services.

There have been some minor positive developments in relation to subsidised services reported by operators for South Yorkshire residents. Specifically, the X17 has been extended to Derbyshire as a consequence of Derbyshire County Council's BSIP funding, which will benefit South Yorkshire residents seeking to travel across the boundary.

1.8 ***Demand responsive transport (DRT) trial (move from red to amber)***

As previously noted, the funding of a DRT trial was included in the Levelling Up Fund bid to government, which we learned was unsuccessful after the EP scheme was agreed.

However, SYMCA has recently identified a one-off fund to be used for trialling new cost effective ways to provide accessibility in areas where traditional bus services are expensive to maintain. Ideas for use of this fund are currently being collated,

but it is likely to involve some form of DRT, community transport provision, and/or taxi services.

1.9 ***Identification of new park and ride sites and transport hubs (remain at red, propose not to include in EP Scheme)***

Given the level of under-utilisation of most park and ride sites in South Yorkshire, and in particular the bus-based park and ride sites, we do not propose any new investment in this area in the short term. This suggestion was in the Refreshed EP document and has not been formally added as an EP Scheme commitment. Park and rides are being reviewed to inform a strategy and plan as part of the preparatory works to deliver a new Local Transport Plan. Pending the outcome of this work, we therefore suggest that this item is not currently included a variation to the EP Scheme.

1.10 ***Introduction of multi-operator tap and cap electronic payment systems (moved from red to amber)***

First have spent over £300,000 installing tap off readers. They have reported they are ready to implement fare capping on the Project Coral model not only on a single operator basis, but also on a multi-operator basis having already delivered this in Leicester and Stoke. There has been no concrete progress in the equipping of other operators' fleets with Stagecoach confirming tap off functionality is deferred to be incorporated in the next generation ticketing equipment.

Although the existence of the £2 fare cap has reduced the immediate pressure for a multi-operator tap and cap system, it remains important to continue to prepare for implementation of multi-operator tap and cap as soon after October 2024 as possible.

1.11 ***South Yorkshire Bus Promise (remains at green)***

The Bus Promise was agreed at the last meeting of the EP Board in May 2023, subject to additional minor changes. Two amendments have been made to the Bus Promise since that meeting:

- The process for escalation of complaints has been revised to reflect the statutory dispute resolution process. Bus Users UK is currently the only registered dispute resolution body for bus services in the UK. The text now reads: "You may escalate complaints to Bus Users UK, which is the registered dispute resolution body for local bus services in the UK."
- The commitment relating to assisting wheelchair users if there is no available space on a bus has been amended to clarify that the operator depot, rather than the driver, would in practice be responsible for arranging alternative transport. The text now reads: "Drivers will advise customers to leave the wheelchair space clear if a wheelchair user requires the space. If a wheelchair user cannot board because allocated spaces are already taken up, the driver will contact their depot to advise of the next bus available for the passenger, or to arrange for an accessible taxi if the wait for the next available bus is too long."

It is intended that the Bus Promise is published following a final check-in to ensure all parties are ready to honour the commitments in the document. This is likely to be in the next 3-4 weeks.

1.12 **Performance Dashboard**

The performance dashboard in Appendix 3 highlights that recent modest growth in patronage has reached a plateau at around 62 million passenger journeys per year, 81% of the 2024/25 target.

Reliability has dipped slightly, but is still relatively high at 97.7% over the 12 months to May 2023, slightly below the 2024/25 target of 99.5%.

Punctuality remains poor at 77.8% over the 12 months to June 2023, against a 2024/25 target of 95%.

2. **Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that Board members note the updates on the delivery of specific commitments in the EP programme and performance against agreed network targets provided in this paper.

3. **Consultation on Proposal**

- 3.1 Not applicable as a discussion paper only.

4. **Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

- 4.1 Not applicable as a discussion paper only.

5. **Financial and Procurement Implications and Advice**

- 5.1 No financial or procurement decisions are recommended in this paper. Any financial implications resulting from schemes and proposals referred to in this paper will be subject to their own financial and policy approval processes.

6. **Legal Implications and Advice**

- 6.1 Not applicable as a discussion paper only.

7. **Human Resources Implications and Advice**

- 7.1 Not applicable as a discussion paper only.

8. **Equality and Diversity Implications and Advice**

- 8.1 Not applicable as a discussion paper only.

9. **Climate Change Implications and Advice**

- 9.1 Not applicable as a discussion paper only.

10. Information and Communication Technology Implications and Advice

10.1 Not applicable as a discussion paper only.

11. Communications and Marketing Implications and Advice

11.1 Not applicable as a discussion paper only.

List of Appendices Included:

1 Progress with EP Scheme deliverables

2 Progress with Refreshed EP deliverables

3 EP performance dashboard (August 2023)