

## Enhanced Partnership Board

Tuesday, 19 December 2023

### Update on EP programme delivery

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

**Director Approving Submission of the Report:**  
 Pat Beijer, Interim Executive Director (Transport)

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

#### Executive Summary

This report provides both an update on progress and a position statement against the agreed Enhanced Partnership (EP) project deliverables and targets. It provides the opportunity for partners to reflect upon the future work programme and ways of working of the Board. In particular, as the Board embarks on the review of the current EP Scheme, this creates the opportunity to consider how the Board could provide greater focus and be more effective in addressing the current issues raised by South Yorkshire's bus passengers and citizens.

#### 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 EP Board:

1. Notes the progress and outstanding issues across the Board's project deliverables and targets, as set out in the report.
2. Agrees that the Project Director (Bus Partnerships) completes the review of the current EP Scheme, in consultation with the EP Forum, Local Authorities, Bus Operators and SYMCA, with the aim of bringing final recommendations to the EP Board in May or June 2024. The aim will be to refresh the current scope and ways of working with a renewed focus on addressing passenger priorities.
3. Approves and publishes the South Yorkshire Bus Promise (Appendix 4) and uses a consideration of how it is to be delivered, alongside addressing ongoing real time customer intelligence, as one of the starting points for the refreshed focus and work programme of the Board. As part of that work the Board agrees that:
  - 3.1 Partners share insights into the issues that are raised through passenger feedback and complaints. This information is used to develop a prioritised list of passenger priorities for improvement, as a direct input into the EP Scheme review, and as a basis for reporting progress to the EP Board in the future.
  - 3.2 SYMCA, operators and councils work to promote CityMapper as a mechanism for better understanding passenger demand; and use this data in the ongoing planning of the network and trialling of new service proposals.
  - 3.3 All future performance reporting to the EP Board includes reporting of vehicle tracking performance.
4. Requests the Project Director (Bus Partnerships) to develop and consult with partners on a revised overarching 'back to bus' marketing plan that draws from the recently commissioned customer insight work (set out in paragraph 3.6), for consideration at a future meeting.

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper provides an assessment of progress in delivering the EP commitments since the launch of the EP and in addressing the live issues facing the bus network. It makes recommendations on how the current EP refresh process can position the EP to better address these issues in the future.

### 2. Progress with EP delivery and review of EP Scheme

- 2.1 The EP has been operating for over 18 months. Successive update reports to the EP Board have demonstrated that delivery has not matched the aspirations in the original EP Plan and EP Scheme. This is for a range of reasons, foremost of which is the fact that South Yorkshire did not receive any government funding from either the BSIP or Levelling Up Funds for bus improvements, even though these were specifically identified as required in order to deliver the aspirations in the EP. There has therefore been a pattern of decline in network coverage and punctuality, an increase in ticket prices, and the loss of some concessions. While patronage has increased, this is from

a low base, and patronage appears to have reached a plateau over recent months. From a more positive perspective, the recent network cuts appear to have created a more stable situation, with no further commercial service cuts on the horizon that we are aware of, and the tendered service network stable until at least March 2025.

2.2 The Mayor's recent "Fair bus deal for South Yorkshire" campaign has both highlighted the under-funding of South Yorkshire by government, and demonstrated the strength of opinion within the public on the impact this has had on bus services in the region. SYMCA continues to emphasise as strongly as possible with government the inequity in the funding environment compared to similar regions such as West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester and the West Midlands.

2.3 However, we need to redefine our aspirations as a partnership, taking into account the reality of our funding base, and to find new ways of working within the EP to focus available resources on the things that will make the biggest difference. One potential shortcoming of the current set of EP aspirations is that it seeks to make progress on a wide range of fronts without a clear sense of priority, which is problematic in an environment where funding is inadequate.

2.3 At the last EP Board it was noted that work to formally review the EP Scheme is underway. This process offers a mechanism to reset ambitions and agree positive but realistic commitments and targets for the bus system, taking into account available resources. This will need to focus on those things that are most important to passengers (and potential passengers), and address the issues that generate the greatest level of complaint and feedback to SYMCA, operators and local authorities. The process for completing this review is likely to take several months, given the current uncertainty over funding and the need to ensure the review is widely consulted. We do not anticipate this process concluding until May or June 2024.

2.4 The review of the EP Scheme must also take into account the views of the EP Forum, which has been set up to provide the voice of bus users and large employers into the EP's work. The feedback from the EP Forum over recent months has consistently been to raise concerns about three areas in particular:

- 1 Erosions to network coverage, and reduced frequency of some bus services.
- 2 Poor punctuality of bus services, combined with limited availability and accuracy of real time information on when a bus will actually arrive.
- 3 The changes to the Zoom Beyond concession, because of both its impact on both the individuals concerned, and the viability of services regularly used by 18-21 year-olds if users are deterred from bus use by the increased cost of travel.

2.5 As part of the refresh of the work of the EP Board it is recommended that partners share insights into the issues that are raised through passenger feedback and complaints. It is also recommended this information is used to develop a prioritised list of passenger priorities for improvement, as a direct input into the EP Scheme review, and as a basis for regular reporting progress to the EP Board in the future.

### 3. Update on current EP commitments and targets

3.1 Against this backdrop, Appendices 1 and 2 provide an update on the full set of deliverables and commitments contained in the current EP Scheme and Refreshed EP

document. Appendix 3 provides the most recent dashboard on progress against EP targets. The following paragraphs provide commentary on the key areas where we know passengers have concerns, and more generally on progress with EP deliverables.

### ***Key focus areas for passengers***

#### **3.2 *Network coverage and service frequencies***

Sunday 29 October 2023 saw the final implementation of the long-planned service changes for evening and Sunday services, with reduced frequencies for a number of services. There is no doubt that these changes have had a significant impact on passengers that use those services. These impacts were mitigated by the fact that some services were 'reinstated' at the original frequency on a commercial basis by the operator.

Although the reduced frequencies for these services was a regrettable consequence of low levels of government funding, the changes themselves have gone as smoothly as we could have hoped from an operational perspective. All the timetables including a few minor last-minute amendments were published on the Travel South Yorkshire website and also printed and distributed to stops ahead of the service change date. This is in stark contrast to the issues experienced in October 2022 where we were unable to complete this process in time due to the late change in funding.

More positively, Stagecoach has introduced a new service 43A from Sheffield to Lowedges, new X17 evening journeys between Chesterfield and Sheffield, and enhanced route 66 frequency between Barnsley and Elsecar, all on commercial basis. The X17 enhancement follows an extension earlier in the year at the Matlock end to Wirksworth and Matlock Bath which provides South Yorkshire residents with a direct bus to leisure attractions plus brings Derbyshire residents into South Yorkshire. This was part funded by Derbyshire BSIP funding.

We understand from operators that the commercial network is now considered 'stable', and that no further commercial service cuts are expected in the foreseeable future. Operators are strongly encouraged to seek opportunities for further commercial enhancements to the network, reinvesting resources associated with increases in patronage and greater profitability, where these eventuate.

SYMCA is severely constrained in expanding the tendered network. We are currently awaiting confirmation of longer term government funding before being able to determine what will happen beyond March 2025, when current reserves funding to maintain services comes to an end.

SYMCA is committed to sharing data and insights on customer demand with operators to help in planning the network and identifying efficiencies and opportunities to trial new services. We have signed a contract with CityMapper, who operate an app that provides data on patterns of travel demand as well as offering real time and other information on bus services and other modes of transport. A South Yorkshire branding of this app is due to be launched in the near future.

It is recommended that SYMCA, operators and councils work to promote CityMapper as a mechanism for better understanding passenger demand; and use this data in the ongoing planning of the network and trialling of new service proposals.

### 3.3

#### *Punctuality and real time information*

Punctuality continues to be a major issue in the region. The latest average punctuality figure at 77.6% is still far short of the 95% target.

This puts a focus on the continuing need for bus priority measures to enable bus services to bypass congestion. Delivery of the current programme of bus priority measures is progressing. The iPort bridge project has been completed and the new bridge will be open in early December. Operators are expected to revise service routes and start to serve iPort using the new bridge in early January. In addition, the Doncaster A630 bus priority project is essentially complete.

Conversely some schemes are significantly behind schedule (eg the South West Corridor bus priority scheme in Sheffield), and some have experienced significant cost escalations (eg Phase II of the A61 scheme in Barnsley has had to be descope due to cost pressures).

As previously reported, DfT feedback on the reason why South Yorkshire was unsuccessful in its bid for BSIP funding included that it could have been strengthened with more developed proposals to deliver significant additional bus priority improvements. There remains £16m of allocated capital funding under the CRSTS programme, some or all of which could be used for new bus priority measures, and the use of this fund this remains under discussion.

From the operator perspective, driver recruitment has been successful, stimulated in part by increases in pay by major operators, but shortages remain. Major operators have also been through a process of rescheduling services to minimise punctuality issues, though this runs the risk of building in more slack into timetables and increasing journey times.

The South Yorkshire Bus Promise (see below) contains a commitment to publishing route/service-level punctuality information on the TSY website. Discussions are ongoing on how best to incorporate operators commentary on to the TSY website on the reasons for delays on specific routes.

The other aspect of punctuality is investment in real time information, so that passengers at least know when a service will arrive even if it is late. SYMCA has upgraded the real time information platform for mobile phones available on the TSY website, and information is now available on a map base. SYMCA has also installed a total of 185 new real time displays at shelters as part of the EP programme with the remaining 8 due for installation in the near future.

The launch of a South Yorkshire branded CityMapper app mentioned above will provide passengers with a further mechanism to receive real time information on their mobile phones on services in the region.

SYMCA has recently focused attention on measuring the number of buses that are tracking, without which none of the real time systems available to passengers will

provide a real time prediction. Data from April to August 2023 suggests a wide variability in tracking performance between operators, with results between 91% and 67%. This will need to improve dramatically if passengers are to have confidence in real time systems.

It is recommended that all future performance reporting to the EP Board includes reporting of vehicle tracking performance.

### 3.4

#### *Concessions, tickets and the cost of travel*

Changes to the child notified fare and the replacement of the Zoom Beyond concession with commercial alternatives by Stagecoach and First were implemented on 1 November 2023. As noted above, the EP Forum has expressed strong concerns over the changes to Zoom Beyond.

Conversely, the continuation of the government-funded £2 fare cap has continued to make travel cheaper for many passengers in South Yorkshire. A recent evaluation of the scheme undertaken by SYMCA has found that:

1. Whilst the majority of eligible bus and tram users are opting for the £2 single journey capped ticket for most of their journeys, there are opportunities to increase awareness of the ticket, which may increase use.
2. There is emerging evidence of the £2 single journey capped ticket having a positive impact on the amount spent on bus and tram journeys, and therefore the cost of living for those that use these services.
3. There is some evidence of minor behaviour change in the form of more journeys, new users and modal shift amongst bus and tram users eligible and using the £2 single journey capped ticket.
4. The £2 single fare capped ticket is having a positive impact on quality of life, access to services and the perceptions of bus services, especially amongst bus and tram users.
5. Underlying this, certain groups are likely to benefit more than others as they are more likely to be bus and tram users – for example, women, disabled residents, residents from lower social grades, unemployed residents, residents without access to a car, and non-White British residents.

The continued availability of the £2 fare cap on single tickets has undoubtedly diverted a proportion of passengers from using period products such as day passes. While the work to simplify the array of period products available has continued, significant simplification will not happen without additional subsidy funding, which is very unlikely to be available in the current public funding environment.

Further work on the simplification of period passes in the short term will be highly dependent on the availability of additional government funding. The main focus of the future Board's efforts will therefore remain on preparing for the potential end of the £2 fare cap in December 2025.

## ***Other updates***

### 3.5

#### *Zero-emission buses*

- Good progress is being made in the delivery of all three electric bus projects in South Yorkshire.
  - 23 electric buses for the Stagecoach service between Barnsley to Rotherham service are currently on order and being constructed
  - 4 electric buses have been ordered for the Sheffield Connect service
  - 11 electric minibuses have been ordered for the four South Yorkshire Community Transport providers
  - charging infrastructure is being installed for all of the above projects
- We understand First has been successfully trialling an electric bus in Sheffield.
- SYMCA and bus operators have been collaborating on a bid for funding for zero-emission buses under the second round of the government Zebra initiative. We anticipate having submitted this bid at the time of the EP Board meeting.

### 3.6

#### *Marketing*

Partners have previously pledged contributions to a £380,000 joint fund to implement a 'back to bus' marketing programme. This has not yet been progressed, pending further work on the development of improved customer insights into the types of people who may be persuaded to use the bus, the factors that are constraining them, and the channels that marketing activity could use to reach them. This work has now started, and partners have been invited to contribute customer surveys and other insights to inform this research.

It is recommended the Project Director is requested to develop and consult on a revised marketing plan that builds on this more targeted response, set within the context of an overarching campaign, for consideration at a future meeting.

### 3.7

#### *SY Bus Promise*

The SY Bus Promise (attached as Appendix 4), developed by the EP Forum, includes a number of commitments and measures that will address passenger concerns. It contains a mix of commitments that passengers should be able to expect immediately (such as the promise of reimbursement for a taxi fare if the last bus is cancelled). It also contains aspirational statements that will not be achieved for some time but which the EP has committed to (such as punctuality and reliability targets).

Publishing the bus promise will provide a tool for:

- guiding improvements in the system
- communicating what users should expect from the bus system, and to help in the process of attracting non-users to use buses
- reporting of progress (it is proposed that the EP Board receives a report on performance with meeting the standards in the bus promise from the EP Forum on a 6-monthly basis).

It is recommended the Board approves and publishes the South Yorkshire Bus Promise (Appendix 4) and uses the considerations on its how it is to be delivered,

alongside addressing ongoing real time customer intelligence, as one of the starting points for the refreshed focus and work programme of the Board.

#### **4. Recommendations**

It is recommended that the EP Board:

1. Notes the progress and outstanding issues across the Board's project deliverables and targets, as set out in the report.
2. Agrees that the Project Director (Bus Partnerships) completes the review of the current EP Scheme, in consultation with the EP Forum, Local Authorities, Bus Operators and SYMCA, with the aim of bringing final recommendations to the EP Board in May or June 2024. The aim will be to refresh the current scope and ways of working with a renewed focus on addressing passenger priorities.
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  - 3.2 SYMCA, operators and councils work to promote CityMapper as a mechanism for better understanding passenger demand; and use this data in the ongoing planning of the network and trialling of new service proposals.
  - 3.3 All future performance reporting to the EP Board includes reporting of vehicle tracking performance.
4. Requests the Project Director (Bus Partnerships) to develop and consult with partners on a revised overarching 'back to bus' marketing plan that draws from the recently commissioned customer insight work (set out in paragraph 3.6), for consideration at a future meeting.

#### **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**

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7.1 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.

## **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**

Appendix 1 Progress with EP Scheme deliverables

Appendix 2 Progress with Refreshed EP deliverables

Appendix 3 EP performance dashboard (September 2023)

Appendix 4 Draft South Yorkshire Bus Promise