

RMBC TRANSPORT LIAISON GROUP
Wednesday, 3rd December, 2014

Present:- Councillor Godfrey (in the Chair); The Mayor (Councillor Foden); Councillors Astbury, Atkin, Burton, Cowles, Cutts, J. Hamilton, N. Hamilton, Swift, Whelbourn and Wootton.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ahmed, Beaumont, Hoddinott, Lakin, Sansome and Whysall.

10. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 24TH SEPTEMBER, 2014

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting of the Transport Liaison Group, held on 24th September, 2014.

Agreed:- That the minutes of the previous meeting be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

11. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

(a) With regard to Minute No. 7(1) – it was noted that there was still no viable option in terms of trying to improve the bus service link between Todwick and Dinnington and onwards as far as the Rotherham hospital and into Sheffield.

(b) With regard to Minute No. 7(3) – Members welcomed the return of the Stagecoach services 108 and 109 (Rawmarsh) to the routes which had operated during 2012.

12. NORTHERN RAIL

Further to Minute No. 7(7) of the meeting of the RMBC Transport Liaison group held on 24th September, 2014, Members welcomed Mr. John O'Grady (Client and Stakeholder Manager of Northern Rail) who gave a presentation about the Northern Rail railway franchise.

The presentation highlighted the following salient matters:-

: the Northern Rail company is ten years old;

: Northern Rail operates rail services in the North of England by means of a 10 years' franchise awarded by the Department for Transport (the current franchise expires in February 2016); previously, there had been a direct award to Northern Rail of an extension of an additional two years to the original franchise period;

: Northern Rail is the largest provider of passenger rail services in England (93 million passengers per year, with the pattern of travel being

mainly short commuter journeys); train service performance is at 96% reliability;

: the franchise arrangement from Department for Transport does not allow rail companies to make capital investment for growth of their business, although some investment is permitted, often using funding provided by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs);

: the bidding process for the new franchise, beyond February 2016, will begin soon, although there may ultimately be some alterations to that process, depending upon the outcome of the General Election in May 2015;

: Northern Rail operates 450 railway stations throughout the North of England and, currently, there is a process of installing the new Customer Information Screens at the vast majority of stations;

: the company is placing much more emphasis upon customer service and, earlier in 2014, appointed its first Director of Customer Services;

: the company has embraced modern methods of ticket sales : increased use of Internet sales; the expensive installation of ticket vending machines at railway stations (a vending machine will be installed at the Rotherham Central station in February 2016);

: the offer of reduced fares for off-peak travel is not universally popular; however, the Department for Transport had insisted upon their availability as part of the conditions of the railway franchise;

: Northern Rail actively co-operates with community rail partnerships (eg: the 'Friends of Penistone Line');

: all assets on the railway lines are owned by and are the responsibility of Network Rail (not by the Northern Rail company);

: revenue protection is important to the Company; previously, it was estimated that some 10% of passengers would attempt to travel and avoid paying for a ticket; however, Northern Rail had engaged a sub-contractor to resolve this issue and a more recent estimate is that only some 5.3% of passengers manage to avoid paying the fares for travelling;

: sustainability – Northern Rail has environment-friendly policies (eg: use of recycled water for washing trains and carriages; installation of LED lighting at railway stations);

: Northern Rail provides enhanced train services for specific events (eg: for journeys to the Christmas Market at Lincoln and for spectators watching the Tour de France bicycle race in Yorkshire in July 2014);

: the professionalism of the service is being improved; eg: staff training

and improved focus on customer requirements; improved communications with passengers; conductors enabled to speed up the ticket checking process by the use of smartphones;

: nationally, surveys of rail passengers take place each year in the Spring and Autumn; however, the sample group of 1,200 passengers is considered to be too small; therefore, Northern Rail undertakes its own customer satisfaction surveys, involving 5,000 passengers every quarter; feedback usually refers to the punctuality of trains and passenger experiences of services and waiting times within railway stations;

: passenger satisfaction levels have risen markedly during the past 18 months;

: Northern Rail will make increasing use of social media for communications with the travelling public; much negative feedback from passengers will be quickly published on social media, for example, whenever a train is delayed or cancelled;

: Northern Rail works with the various Passenger Transport Executives in the region to plan the delivery of priorities for the travelling public (eg: improvements to the whole railway station environment);

: important issues in the next six months are : increasing the availability of electrified trains (and some diesel vehicles); responding to the outcome of the recent survey of passengers.

The questions from Members and the subsequent discussion included the following issues:-

- passengers prefer to purchase tickets either via the Internet, or at ticket offices at railway stations; a significant amount of money is still collected from passengers who pay the conductor on the train; this latter proportion of passengers is reducing, although locally in South Yorkshire, paying fares on the train is still a very popular method amongst rail passengers;

- there is a capacity problem on some trains and often there are more passengers than seats on trains (eg: the East Coast mainline); the manufacture of diesel trains no longer occurs in the United Kingdom, nor in many parts of Europe; the Government does not allow any significant investment in services; it is unfortunate that passengers often have to stand when travelling on trains; the railway industry views the HS2 high speed rail project as a necessity;

: some manufacture of trains happens in County Durham (eg: Hitachi Rail Europe);

: the imminent electrification of the railway lines between Liverpool and Manchester (and the use of electrified trains there) will enable better quality, but not new diesel vehicles to be transferred for use elsewhere in

the North of England;

: it is the intention that the aged and shoddy-in-appearance Pacer trains should eventually be removed and replaced with new and/or newer vehicles;

: Northern Rail is a joint venture between the Serco Group plc, the international services company and Abellio, a subsidiary of NS Dutch Railways;

: although the subsidy which Northern Rail receives from central Government is one of the largest in England, in turn, Northern Rail transports the largest number of passengers;

: concerns were expressed about passenger safety on trains and at railway stations; the Government may specify, as part of the new franchise, that there are 'driver-only' trains; rail franchise companies ought to ensure that there are sufficient staff on railways, available to assist passengers at all hours;

: reference was made to the specific and personal assistance provided for visually impaired people who travel by train; it was imperative that such persons should register with the Company in order to benefit from this specific assistance;

: any restriction of the increase in fares would be the product of a decision by central Government;

: it is anticipated that the proposed expansion and improvement of the railway network, during the next decade, will be matched by increases in the number of people travelling by train;

: the integration of rail and bus services is a desirable objective, for the wider benefit of the travelling public; however, the commercial demands of bus and rail operators are acknowledged;

: desirable objectives for the local area are : direct rail links from Rotherham to London; improvements to the Holmes Chord railway line serving the Rotherham Central station.

Mr. O'Grady was thanked for his informative presentation.

13. UPDATES FROM THE TRANSPORT OPERATORS

(1) First Group – service punctuality continues to be affected by various road works, eg: Pool Green crossroads, Centenary Way, Rotherham and also in Hooton Roberts and in Maltby. There are likely to be further delays because of (i) the traffic congestion around Meadowhall during the pre-Christmas shopping period; and (ii) the increased amount of traffic on Centenary Way, Rotherham near to the new Tesco supermarket, which

affects access to and egress from the Transport Interchange. A further round of consultation will take place during 2015, as part of the Rotherham Voluntary Bus Partnership. A Councillor asked for further information about bus services 7, 8 and 22M and the Kimberworth route.

(2) Stagecoach – these services are also affected by the congestion near to the new supermarket at Centenary Way, Rotherham. In January 2015, minor alterations will be made to services 217 and 218, to improve reliability and punctuality. Similarly, the morning peak hours' journeys for services 220, 221 and 221 will be revised. Before the end of January, 2015, the new X20 service will be operating between Barnsley and Doncaster. Travelling across the Deane Valley, this hourly service will have limited stops and therefore achieve faster journey times overall.

(3) South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (SYPTTE) – reference was made to the changes to services affecting most areas of the Rotherham Borough. Passenger numbers, overall, have increased by 1½% during the past twelve months, a figure which represents a significant increase. The SYPTTE website contains the response to the recently-undertaken public consultation exercise, entitled “have your say,” which examined customer priorities in terms of passenger transport provision, the impact of future budget changes, etc. The consultation response will be used to inform the Transport Authority's budget deliberations in February 2015. Discussion took place on the impact of world-wide oil prices on the costs of bus services and the cost of passenger fares. It was acknowledged that there are many factors which affect bus operating costs and the amounts of passenger fares. There was a consensus for the view that larger passenger numbers, overall, would be a principal factor in helping to reduce the cost of fares. A Councillor asked for information about service 73 (serving Rotherham, Canklow, Brinsworth and Treeton) and whether it will be possible to provide increased passenger-carrying capacity during the pre-Christmas period.

(4) Rotherham Community Transport – Members noted that Stephen Hewitson had retired from the Community Transport Service during the Summer 2014 and his successor is Adrian Parkinson. This year is the 25th Anniversary of Rotherham Community Transport and the organisation has won the ‘project category’ award in the Voluntary Action Rotherham's eleventh annual community achievement award scheme. Community transport passenger numbers are increasing throughout South Yorkshire. The Rotherham organisation is working with Rotherfed (tenants' and residents' association) to provide accessible, safe and affordable transport (eg: for shopping excursions) for people who have difficulty using public transport. Staff training will be completed in January 2015, enabling Rotherham Community Transport to achieve accreditation from the Dementia Action Alliance. This is a county-wide scheme in which community transport vehicles will be eligible to display the dementia friendly logo and employees are trained to provide appropriate assistance to dementia sufferers. It was confirmed that the SYPTTE sometimes uses

the Community Transport services to supplement tendered bus services. Community transport services are now provided for the wider community, are not age-dependent and aim to serve people who may be socially and geographically isolated, as well as people who have mobility difficulties. Reference was made to the Department for Transport capital grants scheme for innovative small schemes. Small, not-for-profit groups which hold Section 19 (Transport Act 1985) permits will be eligible to apply for these grants and the Community Transport organisations in South Yorkshire are currently preparing a bid.

(5) Robin Hood Doncaster Sheffield Airport – consideration was given to the minutes of the most recent meeting of the Robin Hood Airport Consultative Committee, held on 16th October, 2014. The contents of these minutes were noted.

14. UPDATES FROM RMBC TRANSPORTATION UNIT

Members received details reported by the Traffic and Transportation Manager concerning the following highways improvement projects, both within the Rotherham Borough area and in the wider region:-

(A) M1 Junction 33 (and A630 Rotherway) – this highway improvement scheme is promoted by the Highways Agency and supported by this Council and by Sheffield City Council and has been very successful. The problem of traffic congestion and lengthy queues, on the approach to the Rotherway roundabout from Canklow, has recently improved because of the opening of a second lane within the A630 carriageway. Some re-phasing of the traffic signals at the Whiston crossroads (A631 West Bawtry Road), programmed to be implemented early in 2015, will assist in improving the vehicle capacity of that highway junction and should also reduce traffic queuing on the A618 Pleasley Road, Whiston.

(B) Pool Green roundabout (Centenary Way/Main Street/Masbrough Street, Rotherham) – the scheme to replace the roundabout with a signal-controlled, crossroads junction has reached its half-way stage, in terms of length of time and is expected to be completed on time in April/May 2015. Every endeavour is being made to minimise traffic disruption.

(C) A630 Centenary Way, Rotherham – there will be some re-phasing of the traffic signals at the junction of Centenary Way, Drummond Street, the Transport Interchange and the access road into the supermarket car park, because of the additional vehicular traffic generated by the recent opening of the new Tesco supermarket. A further road safety audit will be undertaken after completion of these works, by which time the supermarket will have been open for several weeks.

(D) 'Smart' Motorways project (M1 Junction 32 to Junction 35A) – the Highways Agency will begin work on this project in March 2015 and construction works are expected to last 18 months. There will be four lanes of the M1 motorway running at all times, from Junction 32 (the

M1/M18 intersection) as far as Junction 35A (leading to the Stocksbridge bypass). The original proposal for the 60 mph vehicle speed limit on this section of the M1 has been rejected by the Minister for Transport, although the possible use of variable speed limits is still under consideration. The scheme has to ensure that the air quality in this area must not be made worse, especially that affecting the Air Quality Management Area around Tinsley.

(E) Recent announcement (November 2014) by the coalition Government about proposals to improve the transportation links between the major cities in the North of England, which would be subject to the provision of Government funding – the announcement had highlighted a number of initial suggestions for Trans-Pennine highway improvements between Sheffield and Manchester, particularly affecting the A628 Woodhead Pass:-

: A new road to bypass Mottram Moor – an initial prediction that this scheme might be completed as early as 2022 might be considered to be optimistic, as any public inquiry would necessarily cause delays;

: provision of crawler lanes along the A628; eg: eastbound in the direction of Barnsley and Sheffield;

: the construction of an additional, short section of dual carriageway along the A61 at Tankersley (between the Westwood roundabout and M1 Junction 36);

: a feasibility study of the possible construction of a tunnel across the Pennines; this tunnel, if constructed, may become the longest road tunnel in Europe and will be an extremely expensive project.

(F) Tram-Train Rapid Transit scheme (linking Sheffield, Rotherham and Parkgate) - modifications required to the Rotherham Central railway station will include height alterations at the College Road bridge. This scheme may begin during late 2015 and will occur after completion of the Centenary Way/Main Street/Masbrough Street (Pool Green) junction improvement. However, the bridge alterations may require the temporary closure of College Road to facilitate the works.

15. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Agreed:- (1) That the next meeting of the RMBC Transport Liaison Group be held at the Town Hall, Rotherham on Wednesday, 18th March, 2015, commencing at 2.00 p.m.

(2) That future meetings of the RMBC Transport Liaison Group take place on:- Wednesday 24th June, 2015 and a Wednesday during September, 2015.