

**TRANSPORT FOR GREATER MANCHESTER COMMITTEE
REPORT FOR INFORMATION**

Sub Committee: Bus Networks and TfGM Services
Date: 18 November 2016
Subject: Busway Operational Update
Report of: Head of Bus

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The report provides an update on the performance of the Busway services and the outputs of the recent passenger satisfaction survey.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to note the contents of the report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

N/A

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1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Busway service between Leigh, Atherton, Tyldesley, Salford and Manchester was officially launched on 3 April 2016, following the completion of the construction works along the 4.5 mile guided section and an intensive period of driver training. There are seven pairs of stops along the guided section all of which are fully accessible and are equipped with CCTV, lighting, emergency help points, real time passenger information, shelters and covered cycle parking facilities.
- 1.2 The service continues utilising the extensive bus priority measures on the A580 East Lancs Road meaning that it is able to benefit from whole or partial segregation from general traffic for a large percentage of the route from Leigh to Salford Central
- 1.3 The service operates from 4am Monday-Friday and continues until midnight seven days per week, with a peak frequency of eight journeys per hour east of Tyldesley formed by four departures per hour each from Leigh (operating as service V1) and Atherton (service V2). Whilst services are terminating in Manchester at present, the same service level will be provided once the extension to Oxford Road becomes available following completion of the required infrastructure and when traffic conditions associated with the Metrolink Second City Crossing and Oxford Road projects allow. This service frequency is considerably higher than that previously provided by the Services 32 and X34 on the corridor.
- 1.4 The service is operated by First using 20 new double deck low emission hybrid buses. These vehicles are specified to a high level including plush seating, tables on the top deck, free Wi-Fi, USB charging points and on-board 'next stop' audio and visual announcements, all of which improves the attractiveness of the service offered to the passenger. The service has been named and branded by First, with TfGM's agreement, as Vantage.

2. Current Operational Performance

- 2.1 Patronage on the service has been strong from the outset and has grown to the current peak level of approximately 47,000 passengers per week having started at approximately 28,000 in April. Fares are aligned with those on the standard First network allowing the service to be branded as a 'premium service at everyday prices'.
- 2.2 Leisure travel has been particularly successful with some evening journeys carrying almost full seated loads and Saturdays in particular being popular with patronage on some days being close to those seen on a weekday.
- 2.3 The Service V1 which serves Leigh is clearly the stronger of the two in terms of patronage levels however this has served as a helpful source of

additional capacity east of Tyldesley at times of peak demand when capacity has been a problem on occasions.

- 2.4 Overall journey times of 50 minutes between Leigh and the Regional Centre are consistently being achieved or bettered which compares favourably with those that could be achieved regularly prior to the introduction of the Guideway and the priority infrastructure on the A580. Previous inconsistencies in journey time of between 20-30 mins have been largely removed.
- 2.5 Of the three Park and Ride sites that have been constructed as a part of the scheme at East Bond Street in Leigh, at Astley Street in Tyldesley and on the A580 near Swinton, both Leigh and Tyldesley are being very well used and at levels considerably ahead of those that were anticipated. Whilst take up in the A580 site has been slower, this is in line with predictions and usage continues to increase with further promotion planned.
- 2.6 Given that the Busway service was also intended to stimulate patronage growth locally between Leigh and Tyldesley and Atherton, a 6 month contractually required promotional £1 fare between any stop on the Guideway was also introduced which has proved to be successful. The Guideway also significantly improved the public transport offer in the area, reducing the journey time between Leigh and Tyldesley from the original 25 minutes to approximately 10 minutes.

3. Infrastructure Management

- 3.1 The Guideway infrastructure is being managed by TfGM to carry out regular checks and manage the contractors responsible for cleaning and maintenance of the stops and the adjacent Multi-User path.
- 3.2 Some of the anticipated issues with anti-social behaviour particularly on the more remote stretches of the Guideway have been rare and only occasional instances have been reported mostly related to cyclists or pedestrians using the Guideway and these have mostly occurred at the eastern end.
- 3.3 A small number of vehicle incursions have taken place since the opening of the guideway, and the levels encountered are not high when compared to other similar schemes in Cambridge and Luton. These have mostly been by private cars which have either been caught in the car traps provided or been badly damaged in driving through them. This has been principally at East Bond Street and additional signage has now been added to further stress that the track is for Guided Bus use only with further amendments to the local highway signage also under consideration. Whilst delays or diversions to the service have been minimal at this point, ongoing

monitoring is clearly necessary to ensure that the risk of further inappropriate guideway use is minimised.

- 3.4 Specific activity was also carried out during the summer months and in particular during the school holidays to deter children from walking on or obstructing the Guideway. Coupled with engagement work carried with local schools prior to the opening of the Guideway this proved to be successful with no significant incidents recorded.

4. Customer Satisfaction Survey

- 4.1 Prior to the introduction of the busway service, a bespoke customer satisfaction survey was carried out by TfGM on the services which would most probably be duplicated/replaced by the new Busway Service.

- 4.2 Whilst First are contractually required to carry out customer surveys to monitor satisfaction levels on an ongoing basis, it was decided to repeat the original survey that was carried out to more accurately assess the immediate impacts of the introduction of the Busway service.

- 4.3 The survey received a very positive 89% return rate and the results are exceptional, especially when compared to Transport Focus' satisfaction survey which produced outputs for the whole of the GM network. The headline results for the survey are:-

- 95% are satisfied with the length of time their journey takes – a 20% increase on the levels recorded in the 'pre' survey
- 94% appreciate the reliability of services on the route – a 26% increase
- 93% are satisfied with the availability of seating or space to stand – a 9% increase
- 96% of passengers are satisfied with the frequency of services on the route – a massive 32% increase.

- 4.4 The 2015 Transport Focus Bus Passenger Survey for Greater Manchester witnessed a significant decline in customer perceptions of value for money, with two-thirds (66%) saying they are satisfied. However, 89% of passengers on the guided busway are satisfied with the value for money on that journey.

- 4.5 94% of passengers are satisfied with the travel information provided at the bus stop; which is considerably greater than the GM results from the Bus Passenger Survey (67%). The same proportion is also satisfied with the travel information provided inside the bus e.g. Audio Visual announcements.

- 4.6 Of survey respondents, 20% reported that they had previously made their journey as a car driver. This indicates a significant level of behavioural change due to the high level of attractiveness of the Vantage services.
- 4.7 Overall, 98% were satisfied with their bus journey that day, a 12% increase on the overall satisfaction levels compared to the previous survey.
- 4.8 The highest level of dissatisfaction was with the availability of Wi-Fi (10%) – this has already been discussed with First for their action.

5. Service Development

- 5.1 The next significant service development will be the extension of the route to serve the University and Central Manchester Hospital site on Oxford Road. Five new vehicles have been procured to provide additional capacity and support the extension and discussions are currently ongoing to assess how this can best be achieved from an operational perspective given that some bus priority-enabling infrastructure works and other third party works will be ongoing in January.
- 5.2 The single biggest issue at present is that of under-capacity on inbound journeys in the morning peak with many vehicles being either full or close to it by the end of the Guideway. It is essential that any new potential users are not dissuaded from becoming regular customers by having a poor experience on first use which is felt to be likely given the present capacity limitations. Whilst the need to deal with this issue highlights the success of the Busway service, on an interim basis, three additional duplicate journeys are currently being provided utilising high spec First (non-Vantage branded) vehicles to provide the necessary additional extra capacity until the new vehicles are delivered at the turn of the year.
- 5.3 The Service X39 that was intended to provide additional capacity at the A580 Park and Ride site has failed to generate patronage due to the strong brand identity of the V1 and V2 services. First has therefore amended the service to operate via Swinton instead.
- 5.4 Discussions are ongoing between TfGM and First as to how best to deploy the new vehicles so that any further demand can be accommodated and to ensure that the new vehicles are deployed most effectively to cover the extension of the route and ensure capacity is available at the most critical periods of demand.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 Members are recommended to note the content of the report.

Howard Hartley
Head of Bus