

Leader's Report

January 2024

Bradford Bus Interchange

To be clear the closure of the Bus Interchange is hugely inconvenient for residents and bus operators at a time when the City of Bradford is in the middle of the biggest regeneration programme the city has seen in decades. I have asked WYCA for an update on the current situation so that I could report it to Full Council. All the information I have is derived from WYCA. If there are any questions which I don't have the response to I will of course take them back to WYCA and get them answered.

Additionally I have asked for a report to be prepared for the West Yorkshire Transport Committee to review next Monday. This is a cross party committee and they will all have the opportunity to get answers to any questions they may have.

WYCA advise me that on 22nd December a piece of concrete (20 cm x 50 cm) fell into the underground car park underneath the Bus Interchange. WYCA closed the car park for public safety and alternative parking arrangements were made for users. Further inspections took place as a result and in view of the heavy rainfall which could be putting a strain on the interchange internal drainage system, a decision was made on 4th January that as well as the closure of the car park the whole Bus Interchange should be closed as well.

Work has been ongoing on the bus facility since an £8.5m business case was approved by the Combined Authority in December 2021 to improve the resilience of the bus station and reduce the adverse impacts associated with the age of the asset, which has been in operation since 1974. That work at the interchange included the commissioning of survey work and the findings had informed the work undertaken at the Interchange. These works have now been halted. The bus station is an unusual structure, with buses operating across an elevated area, which is supported by a continuous concrete slab above a cavity, which has served as a basement car park for adjacent businesses.

The CA have been challenged in engaging the right level of surveyor expertise to carry out a full inspection because of the national RAAC issue. This means that every surveyor with expertise in concrete is already fully engaged in other work at this present time. I have asked whether the Bus Interchange has RAAC and have been advised that it does not. However with the passing years water could have got into the structure. Only a full surveyor report will be able to properly ascertain if this theory could be correct. To do this survey significant works will have to be undertaken to get into the core structure of the bus station, which may involve taking up surfacing for example.

Further public information was therefore issued on Friday 19 January to confirm that the bus station will remain closed for at least the next two months, so as to allow time for the structure as a whole to be examined and for a full remediation plan to be developed looking at all options.

Regarding passenger usage, an emergency plan was instigated overnight on 4th January, enabling WYCA to maintain bus operations by directing passengers to alternative stops principally along Hall Ings and Nelson Street. This plan has been improved since the first day of operation by establishing the Jacobs Well car park as a temporary bus layover area, installing portacabin rest areas for staff, further pedestrian signage, a temporary information and travelshop facility within the rail station and regular customer information updates.

WYCA and Bradford Council teams have liaised daily on performance and we have maintained a daily stand-up call with bus operators.

This group has worked on the longer closure period, so as to identify what further passenger and traffic management measures should be established to improve the performance of the temporary arrangements. The explicit aim in carrying out this work is to:

- Protect public safety in the area;
- Manage traffic in the Hall Ings/Nelson Street/Bridge Street/Market Street area, so as to safeguard the completion of the ongoing TCF works and removal of the former NCP car park;
- Support general congestion management in the city centre; and
- Establish a facility that can be managed in the interests of passengers, bus network performance and the city centre as a whole.

WYCA have apologised for the inconvenienced caused to the travelling public and given me their commitment that all senior staff are working to resolve this issue as soon as possible. I will provide more updates as and when I have them.

Budget Consultation launched

On 11th January the Council's budget consultation launched where £40 million of cuts were announced over three years. We have had a good response so far to the consultation and I would encourage everyone in the district to engage with the process. At the same time the Council is negotiating with DLUHC to apply for Exceptional Financial Support so that the Council and the Children's Trust remain financially viable. The Council will have to change how it operates to reduce its expenditure substantially to eliminate the £120 million structural gap that now exists because of the increase in social care costs. 87% of the council's projected spend this year against the budget we set in February 2023 will be spent on Children's and Adults Social Care. I have tasked the Chief Executive with developing a transformation plan to reduce the size and shape of the council over the next 4 to 5 years to fit the reduced funding we will have now.

There is a huge amount of lobbying being done cross party with Government to secure more investment in all councils, not just Bradford Council. Sigoma, the LGA, the Yorkshire Leaders' Board and this week the County Councils Network (predominantly a Conservative Council Leaders' organisation) have all written to Government asking for action in the face of rising costs. Decisions on our own council funding is subject to agreement with DLUHC and has to be taken in time for council budget setting.

New bus services in Bradford district due to the Mayor's Bus Service Improvement Plan

We were delighted that the West Yorkshire Mayor has invested in additional bus services as well as the £2 fare. This means that the district has benefitted from significant investment in superbus schemes. The Aireline number 60 service, which runs between Keighley and Leeds has been increased to every 20 minutes between Leeds and Shipley. The K7 route which runs between Keighley and Oakworth now has a service every 12 minutes and the K2/K3 route which runs between Keighley and Braithwaite now has a service every ten minutes.

As of December 2023, the improvements to these services have had a positive impact on local bus use, with passenger numbers on the 'Aireline' service up by 28 per cent, on the K7 route up by 23 per cent and an increase of 21 per cent on the K2/K3 route compared to Spring 2023. The other local Keighley services which had the £1 flat fare have also seen passenger numbers increase by 5 per cent.