

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING – 6TH DECEMBER 2023

ITEM OF BUSINESS NO. 6.2 – MEMBERS' QUESTIONS ON THE DISCHARGE OF THE FUNCTIONS OF THE SOUTH YORKSHIRE JOINT AUTHORITIES AND MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY
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QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE SOUTH YORKSHIRE MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY TO BE ANSWERED AT THE MEETING BY THE COUNCIL'S REPRESENTATIVE ON THE COMBINED AUTHORITY (COUNCILLOR TOM HUNT)

Questions from Councillor Sophie Thornton

The M17 bus service between Bradway and Jordanthorpe was axed by SYMCA in October 2022 and later reintroduced by SYMCA and TM Travel in July 2023. It has recently had its Saturday services withdrawn due to a lack of drivers and other issues. The 76A bus service between Sheffield City Centre and Chancet Wood has also been plagued by poor reliability since it was awarded to TM Travel.

1. Will you apologise to residents who have faced confusion and delay due to these repeated service changes and poor performance?
2. Was SYMCA aware of a shortage of drivers or vehicles when awarding these contracts?
3. Can you confirm whether any financial penalties have been issued due to the operator's poor performance?
4. What measures are you putting in place to improve performance and reliability of these services?"

Answer from Councillor Tom Hunt

The M17 service was withdrawn between October 2022 and July 2023 as SYMCA received no bids to operate the contract, despite a number of attempts to find a supplier. The same situation affected several services across South Yorkshire. Under current legislation, SYMCA has no power to compel an operator to bid for a contract; nor can SYMCA establish its own municipally-owned operator to compete.

South Yorkshire's bus routes are struggling from the national shortage of bus drivers. Earlier this year we faced around 200 driver vacancies in our region, and high turnover rates.

In response, the Combined Authority has spent £385,000 to deliver bus and coach driver training in South Yorkshire from April. That has helped yield some short-term results, expanding operator capacity and allowing operators to take on more routes – which is why some services were restored in July 2023.

However, SYMCA recognises that TM Travel in particular have been struggling to meet contractual expectations of service quality and reliability. SYMCA began conversations with TM Travel to formally discuss service delivery issues as early as late July.

An action plan with regular monitoring has been put in place, leading to increased driver recruitment and training and the resolution of a vehicle engineering backlog. In addition, SYMCA has taken the step of imposing financial penalties on TM Travel for each missed service (as well as not paying them for the missed service).

The reality is that deregulation of our buses has failed since the Tories introduced this change in the 1980s. It has left communities with little say over the essential services they rely on, and handed operators enormous power to raise fares and slash routes.

Sheffield is not alone in the impact being felt, bus usage has almost halved outside of London. It is a national scandal but it doesn't have to be this way. Labour has announced plans to reform the country's broken bus system and hand power and control to local communities.

Led by Oliver Coppard, the Mayor of South Yorkshire, we are going through an assessment process for a proposed bus franchising scheme in South Yorkshire. This would bring regulation of our bus routes, frequencies, fares, and tickets under local public control. We're not allowed to prejudge the decision, but people across Sheffield tell me all the time that they are keen for us to do what Manchester have already done with their buses. We're getting this work done as quick as we can.

Questions from Councillor Richard Shaw

1. Meadowhead was once the southern-most point of Sheffield's tramways, prior to the network's closure in 1960. As Leader of this Council and a member of the Mayoral Combined Authority Board, would you support a future extension of the current tram network from Gleadless Town End to Meadowhead?
2. Do you agree that such an extension would improve public transport to and from the city centre and could alleviate concerns about additional motor traffic associated with the proposed new stadium at Meadowhead?

Answer from Councillor Tom Hunt

The tram is an essential part of our mass public transport network in Sheffield and with the first tram-train system in the country it's great that the network now extends out to

Rotherham. Some of the strongest growth in patronage are on the tram-train network and I think this highlights that it is essential that we look at innovative ways of growing patronage across the tram network and this must include further expansion.

Connecting people across the city and South Yorkshire to a fast, high quality and zero emission tram and tram-train network means that they will have greater confidence in accessing jobs, training, shops and services by public transport.

That's why as well as securing funding from Government to undertake major maintenance of the existing network, the Council and SYMCA are working closely to develop our future 'Vision for Tram' including plans for expanding the network. It's essential that in considering options that any new tram lines meet community demand and value for money criteria, and also where funding and finance for new connections will be secured.

A range of options for tram connections will be considered as part of the review. This will include opening rail lines to Stocksbridge and also to Waverley, through South East Sheffield to Chesterfield, creating new routes for our tram-train services. I will ensure that officers are aware of the desire for an extension to Meadowhead. If any other members want to make suggestions then please contact me and I will ensure the team that is working on the review gets the details.

Further opportunities for people to access tram will be coming forward soon with a new station planned for Magna, close to people living in Tinsley, which will also include a new park and ride facility.

Questions from Councillor Ian Horner

1. In his recent video Councillor Hunt spoke about expanding the Tram network. Will he explain how the Labour controlled MCA increasing the tram fare from £2.00 to £2.80, a 40% increase, is meant to encourage people to use the network?
2. Labour controlled Liverpool City Region has now joined the Labour Controlled Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire in getting devolved transport funding from the Government. When will the Labour controlled South Yorkshire MCA get from the back of the queue in getting the same funding levels to help hard pressed passengers in Sheffield?

Answers from Councillor Tom Hunt

Question 1

Sadly, due to government's sustained and damaging underfunding of South Yorkshire public transport, difficult decisions around fare increases have had to be made. South Yorkshire was the most populous region in the country to receive no monies whatsoever from the Government's "Bus Back Better" (BSIP) fund. Even with

subsequent per capita top-ups from the Government, South Yorkshire has received around £30 less per head than West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester or the West Midlands.

As a result, SYMCA has seen a decline in its bus network of around 10% over the last year – despite agreeing to invest all available reserves to keep as many public transport routes operational into 2025. The cumulative effect of falling central government grants since 2010 is a 40% reduction in our region’s network. At the same time, a fall in our commercially operated network since the pandemic has seen SYMCA’s procured services budget rise from £7m to £21m.

SYMCA’s Board has therefore faced difficult choices on balancing fares, concessions, and the range of the transport network in South Yorkshire over the past year.

The Government introduced a nationwide £2 bus fare cap in November 2022. At that point, the SYMCA Board agreed to introduce an equivalent £2 tram fare cap – as part of a package of cost-of-living interventions.

This July, when it became clear that SYMCA would not receive the BSIP money we were seeking from Government, the Board decided to maximise the number of routes – including restoring services that had been cut last October. This came at the cost of difficult decisions, including raising fare caps and reducing concessions. In total, that package of interventions cost around £17m – the full discretionary sum available to the MCA.

At that point, we were expecting the nationwide bus fare cap to rise to £2.50. The Bus Fare Cap is funded by the Department for Transport, but the region must find the money for a tram fare cap. In the July decisions, the MCA decided to maintain a tram fare cap, at the higher level of £2.80.

The Government subsequently announced an extension of the £2 bus cap in October 2023, to the end of 2024. This has created an unanticipated wedge between prices. The MCA does not have the funding to address this gap, but the Mayor has directly raised this anomaly with the Transport Secretary and both Rail and Local Transport Ministers.

On the subject of extending the tram, I am strongly in favour of expanding the network by running tram-train services on the Barrow Line line. This would involve the restoration of train stations on the line at Whittington, Barrow Hill and Staveley, Eckington and Renishaw, Killamarsh and Beighton. I look forward to your support in achieving this.

Question 2

South Yorkshire faces the same funding regime as other Combined Authorities, including West Yorkshire, Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester. The only difference between us has been funding allocations by the Department for Transport.

This is an injustice, which is why Mayor Oliver Coppard launched a fair funding for buses campaign earlier this year.

Separately, Greater Manchester has moved towards a different operational model for its bus network – franchising – which in October Liverpool announced it would also pursue.

South Yorkshire is currently undertaking a bus franchising assessment – the first step of that process – and is doing so at the fastest pace yet seen in the country. We cannot pre-empt the conclusions of that assessment about the best options for South Yorkshire, but the MCA Board is active in looking at reform for our bus system, as quickly as feasible.

**QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE SOUTH YORKSHIRE PENSIONS AUTHORITY
TO BE ANSWERED AT THE MEETING BY THE COUNCIL'S REPRESENTATIVE
ON THE PENSIONS AUTHORITY (COUNCILLOR JAYNE DUNN)**

Questions from Councillor Bernard Little

1. To ensure that local government in Sheffield moves into a new climate secure energy system, does South Yorkshire Pensions Authority acknowledge that a swift, orderly transition is in everyone's interests, particularly for scheme beneficiaries, who would otherwise bear the brunt of any shortfall in pension fund assets?
2. Does SYPA recognise that, if the climate risk models used to guide investment decisions trivialise the extent of the financial impacts of climate change, it is unlikely that finance officers and trustees will have the incentives to act now?
3. Does SYPA recognise that the 'Carbon Tracker' report (Loading the DICE against pension funds" Flawed economic thinking on climate has put your pension at risk", July 2023) is a call for action by investment professionals to look at the evidence set down in the climate science literature, and implement strategies, to wind down Sheffield's fossil fuel system, based on a 'no regrets' precautionary approach?
4. How will South Yorkshire Pensions Authority respond to this report?

Answers from Councillor Jayne Dunn

Question 1

The Pensions Authority recognises the effects of climate change as the most significant risk to the value of both its assets and liabilities over the longer term, As such it has in its investment strategy agreed in March 2023 made decisions which will focus more of its investments in supporting the transition to a low / no carbon economy in line with its Net Zero Goal.

Question 2

SYPA would accept that there is no "right" set of climate scenarios and that this is a developing field. A such while noting the results of these analysis the Authority has concentrated its investment strategy on making investments in assets which will support the transition including a significant exposure to renewable energy and associated grid management technologies and other technologies which allow carbon to be removed from particular sectors of the economy as well as engaging through the Border to Coast pool with listed companies to encourage them to deliver reductions in emissions using science based targets.

Question 3

The Authority is aware of this report and as previously stated takes the view that there is no “right” set of climate scenarios and has therefore taken steps to support the decarbonisation of its portfolios in line with its Net Zero goal. However, simply disinvesting from companies even if it were technically feasible does not reduce the amount of carbon emitted by one gram.

Question 4

The Authority regularly reviews both its Climate Change policy and Net Zero Action Plan and will in the next review (to be reported in March) consider whether further actions in relation to decarbonisation of its investment portfolios is necessary to deliver the Net Zero Goal.

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