

LCR TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the LCR Transport Committee held in the Authority Chamber - No.1 Mann Island, Liverpool, L3 1BP on Thursday, 1st February, 2024 the following Members were

P r e s e n t:

Councillor Steve Foulkes
Chairperson of the Committee
(in the Chair)

Councillors Sean Halsall, John Abbott, John Donnelly, Ken McGlashan, Tommy Rowe, Paul Woodruff, Kimberley Berry, Liz Makinson, William Shortall, Lena Simic, John Dodd, James Hansen, Keith Laird, Allen Makin, Anne McCormack, Damien O'Connor, George Davies, James Stewart Laing and Simon Mountney

34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Clare Carragher, Ged Philbin, Andrea Wall, and Christopher Rowe.

35 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed all in attendance and provided the Committee with some housekeeping announcements.

36 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

37 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the last meeting of the Transport Committee, held on 23rd November 2023, were approved as a correct record.

In relation to the Minutes, Councillor Shorthall requested clarification regarding the situation with the 418 bus route.

The Chair advised that following the hearing of the petition by the Committee, and concerns forwarded to the Mayor and the Combined Authority, a subsequent meeting of the Combined Authority heard a further question regarding the bus route. The Committee were informed that the Mayor responded to that question by stating that there had been a reprieve of the service until the end of April, with discussions taking place in the meantime around possible replacements or alternatives. It was therefore confirmed that whilst there was a reprieve, the final outcome in terms of the future of the service, was still awaited and it was hoped that this would be confirmed soon.

In terms of the Minutes, Councillor Laird made reference to the performance of Northern Trains, and asked whether the Chair had noted any improvements in service, and whether the Committee could be provided with regular updates regarding Northern performance.

The Chair confirmed that the request for regular updates would be formally noted and followed up.

38 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair advised that six public questions had been submitted for the meeting, from three members of the public.

The Chair confirmed that Mr Steele who had submitted two questions, was in attendance, and he invited Mr Steele to present his questions to the Committee.

The first question from Mr Steele was around the bus services provided on Boxing Day and New Years Day.

It was stated that these were the worst since the deregulation of the bus services, with whole areas such as Speke, Netherley, Croxteth and most of the Wirral, having no bus services at all, despite having services in past years.

Mr Steele commented that many shops and hospitality venues were open on both dates, but this year, some staff had no access to bus services that they would have relied on previously.

Reference was also made to the lack of public transport services on both dates for Liverpool Airport, despite both being busy travel days. It was also noted that there was a major football match on New Years Day, which resulted in some passengers paying more for a taxi from the Airport than they had for their actual air fare.

Mr Steele therefore questioned whether this is an example of the major bus companies showing their true colours following the decision for franchising.

The Chair responded that in the current deregulated bus system, the decision on which bus services operate on what days over the festive period lies with the bus operators. It was confirmed that each of the two main bus operators operated different levels of service on each day in question, however, overall, the level of service provided over the festive period was well below the Combined Authority's expectations.

The Chair advised that when bus operators shared their plans for bus services over the festive period, they were asked to reconsider, however, ultimately, they took the decision to stand down a number of services, meaning that some areas of the region such as the ones highlighted were left without a bus service on certain days.

The Chair confirmed that this feedback would be passed on to bus operators and that they would be asked to reconsider their approach for 2024.

The Chair then invited Mr Steele to put his second question to the Committee.

Mr Steele stated that since 2021, people working in the business district or the Waterfront area, who live in North Liverpool, have had to endure a mile long walk to their nearest bus stop, as services only start from Queens Square, whereas they previously started from James St, Liverpool One or Lord Street. Mr Steele stated that this means huge numbers of passengers getting on at the only stop in Queens Square and buses taking up to ten minutes to board especially at busy times.

It was commented that it is increasingly apparent that there is a problem with traffic congestion along Tithebarn St, Old Hall St and the Waterfront, with excess numbers of cars on the road, as workers either pay to use car parks or get lifts home due to the lack of bus options.

Mr Steele stated that the bus companies have advised that it is the City Council who made the decision and whilst buses can often be seen parked up along Dale St and then driving back along Victoria St, passengers are having to trudge to Queen Square in all weathers to get their bus home.

Mr Steele stated that it was advised that the changes would be reviewed, and questioned, given these factors, whether there was a reason why it hadn't been reevaluated.

The Chair confirmed that the current arrangements for buses in Liverpool City Centre were introduced in (2021) in response to Liverpool City Council's City Centre Connectivity Scheme.

It was advised that the arrangements reduced the numbers of buses travelling through the city centre, many of which were enforced through roads being closed to through traffic, such as Lime Street, Castle Street and Mann Island, and the removal of bus infrastructure on Victoria Street.

The Chair stated that in January 2024, a bus-only link was established to reopen Lime Street to buses on a limited basis.

It was confirmed that the current arrangements for buses in Liverpool City Centre, including the impact of the changes in 2021, would be reviewed in 2024, alongside Liverpool City Council, as part of work towards a new mobility strategy for the city centre, which is intended to put a greater emphasis on public and active travel.

The Chair advised that two question had been submitted by Mrs Wennell and two from Mr Wennell, who were both unable to attend the meeting in person, therefore the meeting Clerk would read out their questions on their behalf.

The first question from Mrs Wennell was in relation to the 289 bus timetable at the bus stop on Baldwin Street, St. Helens, not being up to date.

The Chair apologised and advised that the display will be checked and updated as necessary.

The second question from Mrs Wennell was around the refurbishment of the toilets at Liverpool Central, resulting in only the accessible one being open.

Mrs Wennell commented that this would result in a very long queue, especially an issue for people that have to use the toilet urgently because of a medical condition.

Mrs Wennell therefore asked whether there was another solution to this problem, such as providing more toilets in the station, or advising passengers of alternative toilets not too far from the station.

The Chair responded that the toilet refurbishment programme on the Merseyrail network is seeing £300,000 being spent on improving facilities for customers, including extensive refurbishment of the toilets at Liverpool Central.

The Chair acknowledged that the works taking place are disruptive to customers and advised that for this reason, they were taking place in a staggered manner, meaning that a toilet should usually be available for use.

The Chair confirmed that during busy times, alternative toilets are available on the network and are only a short train ride away at Liverpool Lime St and James Street stations.

It was also stated that station staff can direct customers to the nearest public toilets outside of the Merseyrail network should this be required.

The first question from Mr Wennell was around the closure of Woodside Ferry Terminal for refurbishment, which he stated had been closed since the 16th October 2022. Mr Wennell therefore asked for an update on when the Woodside Ferry Terminal would reopen.

The Chair responded that following a procurement process, a contractor had been appointed to replace the landing stage and linkspan bridge at Woodside, and it was envisaged that the ECI process (Early Contractor Involvement) would start shortly. It was confirmed that this project would require the contractor to remove the old structures and replace with new, with a target date for completion of early Spring 2025.

The Chair confirmed that the structure would then need testing and commissioning, prior to becoming operational as soon as possible after that.

The Chair advised that it should be noted that there are other works on site that will be undertaken by The Big Heritage Company (U Boat), and some smaller scale works in Woodside Ferry Village, alongside the wider plans to redevelop the public realm around Woodside by Wirral Borough Council.

The Chair confirmed that the desire is to bring all these projects together to re-open at the same time, or as close as is practically possible, which will deliver a fantastic offer at Woodside.

It was also confirmed that there is a robust communications plan in place to ensure stakeholders, partners and residents are well briefed and kept up to date with the key stages of the projects as they are achieved.

The second question from Mr Wennell was around the recent opening of the Lime Street linkway for buses. Mr Wennell questioned why it is just the Number 7 route using this linkway and not others.

The Chair responded that the decision on how the Lime Street Bus Link fits into the current bus routing in the city centre has been taken by the bus operators, following extensive trials of the new link.

It was confirmed that the opening of the bus link provides an opportunity for a new routing for Service 7, although this is presently on an experimental basis.

The Chair stated that as the link has been designed to operate as a bi-directional single lane, the number of buses that can use the link is limited.

The Chair commented that as such, it was initially decided to operate only one service through the link, as the introduction of the facility required some complex revision to the traffic signal systems, at both ends of the link. It was advised that further use of the link, may be considered in future, which will be based upon the findings of the current operation, which has already highlighted a number of minor required alterations.

The Chair confirmed that all relevant, practical avenues, are being actively explored.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Mr Steele and Mr and Mrs Wennell for their questions, and advised that written responses to the questions, would be provided.

39 PETITIONS AND STATEMENTS

There were no petitions submitted or statements made.

40 OPERATOR PRESENTATION - MERSEYRAIL

The Chair welcomed Neil Grabham, Steve Dodd, Suzanne Grant and Greg Suligowski, representing Merseyrail.

The Committee were provided with a presentation, which shared some reflections from 2023, provided an update around the fleet roll-out programme, and provided information regarding new projects around ticketing transformation and network investment.

The presentation provided the Committee with some context in terms of the Merseyrail network and operations, high performance levels, and strong governance arrangements.

The Board were advised that rail is a complex operation, involving effective collaboration with several partners, including Merseytravel, Stadler UK, Merseyrail and Network Rail.

It was highlighted to the Committee that 2023 saw significant transformation, and despite numerous challenges, Merseyrail continued to maintain its position in the top 5 performing rail operators in the UK, with a performance of 93.3%, well above the national average.

It was also confirmed that 28.4 million journeys were enabled, and 3 major events supported, during 2023.

In terms of the roll out of the new trains, it was highlighted that significant progress had been made, with 31 new trains now available, operating on each route, enabling all passengers to experience the benefits.

Reference was made to the new route expansion and new station at Headbolt Lane, and the introduction of the world leading battery powered trains.

It was also advised that there had been no industrial action taken by Merseyrail employees, despite widespread industrial action across other areas and operators.

In terms of the new fleet roll out, the Committee were advised that the new trains marked a positive change, however, it was acknowledged that there have been challenges, and reliability had not been as hoped, which Merseyrail and Stadler have worked tirelessly to address. It was advised that recent software updates had improved performance and frequency of services.

The Committee were advised that there are two different types of train – the traditional type drawing power from the third rail, and the groundbreaking battery powered trains, providing significant opportunities for expansion.

The Committee were provided with an overview of the roll out programme, and it was confirmed that four out of the seven routes were now complete, with work continuing to complete the roll out of the outstanding units at Headbolt Lane, New Brighton and Southport.

It was confirmed that Headbolt Lane has been the most affected by the recent transition, with season ticket holders being the most impacted. The Committee were advised that as a gesture of good will, around 700 passengers have been provided with a refund for 2023, with further initiatives being developed to compensate other passengers.

It was confirmed that the frequency of services at Headbolt Lane was due to increase to four per hour, which is hoped will encourage the return of, and attract new passengers.

In terms of future development, the Committee were advised that a key focus will be around ticketing modernisation. It was commented that there had been some

improvements made, in terms of the availability of online tickets, along with an increase in the number of passengers.

It was also highlighted that work was underway in partnership with the Combined Authority to modernise the retail offer, and around the introduction of “tap and go” technology.

The Committee were informed that a further key area of focus would be around investing in the network for the future.

Reference was made to the introduction of new lifts at some stations to improve accessibility, investment in toilet facilities, work with the Combined Authority around the development of new network links into the Baltic area of Liverpool, and expansion of battery powered trains beyond the city region.

Members expressed thanks for the informative presentation.

Comments were made regarding the current ticketing arrangements, which were considered outdated, and creating issues for people travelling, which on occasion, resulted in fines being issued, which was considered to be a source of embarrassment for the region.

It was confirmed that there are challenges at present around the infrastructure for checking electronic tickets, which have been difficult to address whilst trying to keep fares low. It was advised that if tickets bought online are not printed, refunds are automatically issued, and unfortunately some people do try to exploit this. Therefore, it was confirmed that the introduction of “tap and go” technology, is a priority.

A question was raised around what the key weaknesses and key priorities for Merseyrail are considered to be.

In terms of priorities, it was confirmed that they are around ensuring the safety of operations, completion of the full fleet roll out, and driving up the reliability of trains.

With regard to weaknesses, it was advised that these are around the modernisation of ticketing, investment in maintenance and delivery standards, and improving integration across the network, as there remain areas that are not currently serviced. It was confirmed that the introduction of the new trains, mean that service expansion can now be explored.

A question was raised around the number of stations that are still not fully accessible.

It was advised that exact information would be confirmed following the meeting, however reference was made to the Access for All funding received, and it was confirmed that the Merseyrail website contains detailed information regarding accessibility at each station.

Members requested that information be shared regarding customer satisfaction in terms of the new trains, and asked whether there had been any consideration of 8 car roll out, particularly for busy routes.

In terms of customer satisfaction, it was confirmed that levels are currently around 95% and that there had been several in-house surveys undertaken to temperature check this. It was confirmed that there had been a decline in customer satisfaction for the Headbolt Lane route, however this had been addressed quickly.

With regard to the potential roll out of 8 car trains on some lines, it was advised that there would be a two-stage process, around testing, and then training for staff and drivers. It was confirmed that Merseyrail are keen to roll out 8 car trains as soon as possible.

A question was raised around the training of staff with regard to equalities and disabilities and interacting with customers.

It was confirmed that a range of learning and training had been provided to staff around hidden disabilities, and reference was made to the TravelSafe Policy to protect passengers and staff.

It was advised that further information could be shared with Members if required.

In terms of the introduction of “tap and go” technology, a question was raised around when this was likely to be introduced.

It was confirmed that good progress had been made and that an update would be provided to the Mayor in the next few months, with a view to potential implementation later in the year.

A further question was raised around future expansion, and where and when it was envisaged that this expansion would take place.

It was confirmed that any programme of work would be governed by the Combined Authority, with Merseyrail working with the Combined Authority to support its strategy, there had been no direct discussions regarding this at present.

Reference was made to “Greening Up” initiatives, and it was asked whether there are plans for such initiatives at any stations.

It was advised that there are a range of sustainability initiatives being considered including the introduction of green environments and gardens. It was confirmed that outdoor space at several individual stations have been adopted by local community groups, with reference made to the “incredible edible” initiative.

With regard to future expansion, reference was made to the approval of a planning application for new homes in east Rainford, and it was questioned whether there are any plans for expansion into that area.

It was confirmed that such matters would be discussed with the Combined Authority and that this had not been considered at present.

Reference was made to performance levels, and clarity was requested around responsibility for performance and whether a rough breakdown could be provided of the percentage of responsibility for each organisation or element.

In terms of recent performance, it was advised that Network Rail had experienced significant issues in terms of infrastructure, which had significantly impacted performance on the Wirral lines. It was confirmed that Merseyrail had worked in collaboration with Network Rail to resolve those issues.

In terms of a rough percentage breakdown of responsibility per organisation, it was advised that approximately 30% responsibility lay with Network Rail, with the new fleet roll out accounting for approximately 43%, and the remainder being due to errors within the system and passenger issues.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted.

41 THE A LINES - A VISION FOR LIVERPOOL - PRESENTATION

The Chair welcomed Simon O'Brien – Liverpool City Region Cycling and Walking Commissioner, who was in attendance to provide the Committee with a presentation around "The A Lines – A Vision for Liverpool".

In terms of background, the Committee were informed that the focus of the presentation, was the Cycling and Walking Commissioners own, independent report, which had been developed over a two-year period, and which brings together different strands, in order to help move the agenda forward.

It was advised that the report is focused on Liverpool and had been positively received by the Mayor and the Leader of Liverpool City Council.

The Committee were informed that Active Travel is crucially important.

It was acknowledged that there are significant inequalities in the region and improving networks and connectivity, has a positive social impact. It was stated that other benefits of Active Travel included the environmental impact, health impact in terms of cleaner air, and positive impact on the economy.

The presentation highlighted some examples of great infrastructure currently in place across the city, and the existing active travel network, which amounts to 90km of high-quality cycling structure.

In terms of where the city needs to be, the Committee were informed that the map of existing infrastructure had been overlayed with key points of interest, such as leisure centres.

Reference was made to an interesting piece of work looking at the Census of 2021 and highlighting the areas within Liverpool where over 3% of journey's are by bike. It was advised that those areas also have low car ownership, therefore highlighting the areas that should be targeted for improved active travel networks.

The Committee were informed that this data was also overlayed with data around approved pipeline schemes, to further build the picture, and reference was made to the “Mini Holland” area vision.

The presentation went on to highlight the number of serious and fatal cycle collisions in the city, over a five-year period, and it was acknowledged that when pedestrian data is also added, Liverpool is unfortunately the second highest city in the Country in terms of this data, which needs to be addressed.

Information was provided regarding the commuting corridors across the city, where there are the highest levels of pollution. It was noted that often those most impacted by the pollution are not those who are commuting.

It was highlighted to the Committee that the purpose of the report, was to bring together all of the pieces of work undertaken in this arena, and collate all of the data together, on the same map, to provide a full picture.

The Committee were informed that by doing so, it was identified that there is a total of 138km of high-quality infrastructure, already in existence, or approved and in the pipeline.

It was highlighted that with the addition of an extra 13km of high-quality infrastructure, a coherent, inner-city network, could be created; and with an additional 46km of outer-city networks, there could be a cycling network that is fit for purpose.

In terms of how quickly this vision to become a “Supercharged City” could be achieved, it was advised that immediate action is required as the LCR is falling slightly behind other areas, with specific reference made to Leicester, who have achieved a fantastic active travel network within a couple of years, due to there being the will to change.

The presentation went on to highlight a roadmap to achieving the vision, with reference made to the importance of factoring in the political cycle.

A question was raised regarding plans for other areas of the LCR.

It was advised that discussions are underway within the other areas, however due to several factors, Liverpool was considered to be the natural place to start.

It was confirmed that work would be undertaken with relevant officers and political leaders across each of the LCR districts, to create a similar report for each Local Authority area.

Members made reference to some of the challenges around active travel, particularly people’s resistance to change, and asked what the key message should be in terms of selling active travel to residents.

Reference was made to Lambeth Council who made the decision to implement active travel infrastructure, despite anticipating public backlash, because they were confident that it was the right thing to do. It was advised that there was significant challenge in the first year, but by year 4, every Councillor was re-elected with a larger

majority, as people recognised the positive impact made. It was confirmed that resistance and challenge is inevitable, therefore strong political leadership is key.

A question was raised around new modes of travel such as e-scooters, and how they fit into the vision around active travel.

It was commented that whilst e-scooters can be contentious, any mode of transport that helps to reduce pollution, should be part of the mix, with consistent messaging around being courteous of other road users, being key.

Members commented that such ideas and plans around active travel can often get hijacked by individuals and groups with specific motives, and it was therefore asked what Elected Members can do to challenge such groups, in terms of highlighting the benefits, and preventing the spread of misinformation and division of communities.

It was advised that the same question had been asked of commissioners. It was confirmed that the consensus was that it is best to say nothing, as any response will only serve to give more prominence to the agenda of such groups.

It was advised that the key was to go through due process, including consultation, and show people how it can be done, highlighting the benefits.

A further question was raised around consultation, how to gain buy-in from people, and how to ensure that the right groups are being consulted.

It was confirmed that effective consultation, and consultation at the right time, was vitally important, to ensure that people are provided with an opportunity to influence the planning process. Reference was also made to some of the groups that had been engaged and continue to be engaged on an ongoing basis.

Members made reference to the importance of improving air quality, and issues with current cycling lanes being disjointed, which it was commented needs addressing in order to get people onboard with the active travel agenda.

Agreement was expressed for the comments made and it was confirmed that the purpose of the report is to highlight where the current infrastructure can be joined up to create a coherent plan.

Comments were made regarding the requirement for funding and political will in terms of progressing this agenda. It was noted that in terms of such infrastructure, some common public concerns were around safety and effectiveness, and as such the "show and tell" piece was considered vital in terms of gaining buy-in and support.

Reference was made to the cycle network in Seville which was considered to be far from perfect. It was commented that there had been significant scepticism in terms of demand, however once completed, the number of people cycling per year increased from 2,000 to 30,000.

There were significant improvements made in Leicester, which has seen yearly increases in the number of cyclists of 10 percent.

It was therefore confirmed that if the infrastructure is available, people will use it.

Members made reference to the Cycling and Walking Plan adopted by St. Helens Council, and the cyclops lane that had recently been introduced, which despite complaints, had significantly benefitted pedestrians using Lea Green Station and the nearby high school. Reference was made to future schemes currently under development, one of which will integrate with the cyclops junction, with plans for the infrastructure to continue to Whiston Hospital.

A question was raised in terms of the national picture in light of the forthcoming general election, and what are considered to be the key commitments required from the main political parties around active travel.

It was confirmed that there is money available for this work following the cancellation of HS2 and the Transport settlement for the North, therefore a key ask would be to maintain the availability of that funding.

It was confirmed that the political will is there, but the main challenge for any political party will be around delivery. The importance of improving processes for grant funding, and ensuring that revenue is put into schemes, as well as capital, were also highlighted as being factors which would really start to move the agenda forward.

Reference was made to the terms walking and wheeling, and the increased use of mobility scooters on those networks. It was commented that if those routes are open to pedestrians, cyclists and wheeling modes of travel, there becomes a greater audience.

Some of the wider issues impacting on people cycling, were also highlighted, such as bike storage and changing facilities at people's place of work.

It was advised that there had been some debate when planning and designing routes around space constraints and ability for individuals using the network to pass each other safely. However, it was noted that cycle lanes in other cities, such as Rotterdam, were significantly narrower than the ones here, and any space constraints are easily resolved by good manners and individuals deferring for other users, when required.

It was confirmed that the key point is creating a network so that there is a safe alternative for people other than being mixed in with cars and HGV's.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Simon for the excellent presentation and his evident passion.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted.

42 MERSEYTRAVEL BUDGET 2024/25

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director for Corporate Resources, concerning the draft revenue budget for Merseytravel for 2024/25.

The Committee were advised that the report presents the transport elements of the Combined Authority's budget for 2024/25, which had been unanimously approved by the CA, and together with the revenue for the Tunnels, approved in December 2023, will form the grants payable to Merseytravel for transport activities for the coming financial year.

The Committee were informed that one of the key features of the budget was around the Combined Authority investment in bus, particularly around network support, improving the quality of the offer in terms of bus, and affordability of bus ticketing, which form the strategic approach to the next stage of bus reform.

In terms of savings, it was advised that some had been achieved through national support for some bus measures and BSIP grants, and also joining the national £2 fare scheme, which was previously funded locally.

It was confirmed that there was a proposed increase in spend around bus for 2024/25, with Members attention drawn to Table 2 and proposed spend in terms of bus and hubs, which includes bus network support and concessionary travel.

It was also highlighted that £7m had been set aside for the revenue elements of progressing bus reform, including the provisional of professional advice and technical support, around design and the purchase of assets.

Reference was made to the ongoing volatility in terms of bus, and it was confirmed that there was a significant amount being held in contingency, with one of the biggest risks being operator failure, or deregulation of routes.

In terms of the Capital Programme, it was confirmed that for this year, that would be approved by the Combined Authority in March, at which point there would be greater clarity in terms of central government capital funding.

It was confirmed that the Mayor and the CA are keen to promote the budget as being sustainable, with transport at the heart of the city region.

Members made reference to paragraph 5.8 of the report and concerns regarding the sustainability of service levels. It was therefore questioned what might be at risk, and what options had been considered.

Members were advised that the biggest risk is in relation to significant increases at pace in public transport costs nationally.

It was advised that due to changes in travel patterns and work patterns, there are fewer passengers on some routes, making them less financially sustainable for commercial operators.

The Committee were advised that this has been accepted as a significant risk, and it was considered to be much easier to manage this risk by moving from a deregulated bus market to a franchised bus market, by utilising the Mayoral Powers afforded by devolution, with this being the key strategy over the coming years.

Members commented that when budget planning, it was always prudent to plan for the worst-case scenario, and it was the role of the Transport Committee to ensure that does not happen.

Reference was made to the risks around deregistration and the impact that may have on residents and challenges that presents.

Members highlighted that whilst the figures may suggest that less is being spent on bus, this was due to additional funding being provided around the £2 fares, as previously stated.

The Chair stated that it had been expressed to the Mayor and Leaders, that it would have been favourable for the Transport Committee to have seen the budget before it was approved by the CA, however it was acknowledged that the Committee are still able to make comments.

The Chair therefore moved that the recommendations be as follows:

- The verbal update concerning approval of the budget by the Combined Authority at the meeting on 26th January 2024, for the financial year 2024/25, be noted.
- The significant challenges in respect of the rising costs for supported bus services, and the close monitoring of the impact of such changes, by officer, be noted.
- The Committee continue to receive detailed budget monitoring reports throughout the year.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Halsall and agreed unanimously by the Committee.

RESOLVED - That:

- a) The verbal update concerning approval of the budget by the Combined Authority at the meeting on 26th January 2024, for the financial year 2024/25, be noted.
- b) The significant challenges in respect of the rising costs for supported bus services, and the close monitoring of the impact of such changes, by officer, be noted.
- c) The Committee continue to receive detailed budget monitoring reports throughout the year.

43 MERSEY FERRIES LONG-TERM STRATEGY UPDATE

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director for Place, regarding progress on the Mersey Ferries Long Term Strategy.

The Committee were advised that the report provides an update on the major interventions associated with the Mersey Ferries Long Term Strategy, which looks to reduce public subsidy at Mersey Ferries and ensure that the service remains for future generations.

It was advised that the report summarises the details, and the main headlines in terms of major infrastructure, were highlighted to the Committee.

In terms of Seacombe Terminal, it was advised that the focus has been around bringing into operation, the recent investments that had been made, with a focus on supporting the new Ureka Mersey attraction, who will be a key partner for Mersey Ferries, moving forward.

It was confirmed that there had been an increase in visitor numbers over the summer period, and it was pleasing to see a number of those visitors utilising the ferries and purchasing a joint ticket.

In terms of the next 6 to 12 months, it was advised that the focus at Seacombe was around business as usual and around maintenance of the suspended deck underneath the terminal itself.

With regard to Woodside, the Committee were informed that work was part of wider regeneration plans for the Woodside area, with Wirral Council successfully bidding for Levelling Up funding for the general area.

It was advised that Wirral Council had requested that the LCRCA lead on the renewal of a linkspan bridge and landing stage at Woodside, which will service Mersey Ferries for years to come.

It was confirmed that a contractor had been appointed to progress those works, with a target date for work on site to commence in the early part of the next financial year, with a vision for completion on site of March 2025.

It was stressed that plans are awaited from Wirral Council around the wider regeneration, with a requirement for plans to be aligned.

In terms of vessels, it was advised that there will be a twofold approach, with one being investment in existing vessels, with additional funding received for the enhanced maintenance of "Snowdrop", to extend its lifespan by 5 to 7 years. It was advised that the second phase of that work was scheduled locally at Camel Lairds, within the next few months, however that work is subject to the other vessel being available, which is currently undergoing annual maintenance.

With regard to the second approach, it was advised that a contract is now in place with Camel Lairds for production of the first new ferry in over 60 years, marking a real investment in the service.

It was confirmed that the design and build programme is currently being finalised, with the vision being to have that vessel in service by summer 2026.

Members made reference to all the hard work undertaken by officers to get to the current position, and expressed their thanks.

Members also expressed support for the build of the new vessel, and refurbishment of existing vessels being undertaken locally.

In terms of the new vessel, Members requested reassurance that it would be fully accessible, with no barriers to anyone enjoying the facility.

It was confirmed that the new vessel would be fully accessible, with the vessel being built to class, meaning that the accessibility standards are far greater than for the existing vessels built 60 years ago. It was advised that the enhanced maintenance of “Snowdrop” would unfortunately not bring it up to current standards, as the funding would not facilitate such major works, however it was confirmed that the new vessel would be fully accessible for all passengers and staff, across every deck.

Further comments were made in relation to climate change, with support expressed for the new design, which will allow for the retrofit of alternative power, and which will assist in improving the air quality around the dock areas.

The Chair commented that this was undoubtedly a good news story and made reference to previous discussions around reducing the ferry provision.

It was stated that the tenacity of Members and officers, and the role of the Transport Committee, had played a vital part in progressing matters to where they are currently.

The Chair placed on record particular thanks to Councillor Ken McGlashan, who had invested a significant amount of time and energy into defending and protecting the ferries, and to Gary Evans.

The Chair moved the additional recommendations, as follows:

- The Committee thanks officers and Members for maintaining and improving a 3-terminal strategy for Mersey Ferries.
- The Committee notes that economic impact of building and refurbishing the fleet locally, for the City Region.

The motion was seconded by Councillor McGlashan and approved unanimously by the Committee.

RESOLVED - That:

- (a) the progress made by officers in terms of the interventions associated with the Mersey Ferries Long Term Strategy, be noted;
- (b) regular reports to update on further progress, at future Transport Committee meetings, be requested;
- (c) the Committee place on record thanks to officers and Members for maintaining and improving a 3-terminal strategy for Mersey Ferries; and

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- (d) the economic impact of building and refurbishing the fleet locally, for the City Region, be noted.

The meeting closed at 13:50

Minutes 34 to 43 received as a correct record on the 21 day of March 2024.

Chairperson of the Committee