



**Fairness & Wellbeing  
Commission**

**Tim Taylor**  
**Transport**

South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined authority

# Bus Services Update

Doncaster Fairness and Wellbeing Commission

30 June 2023

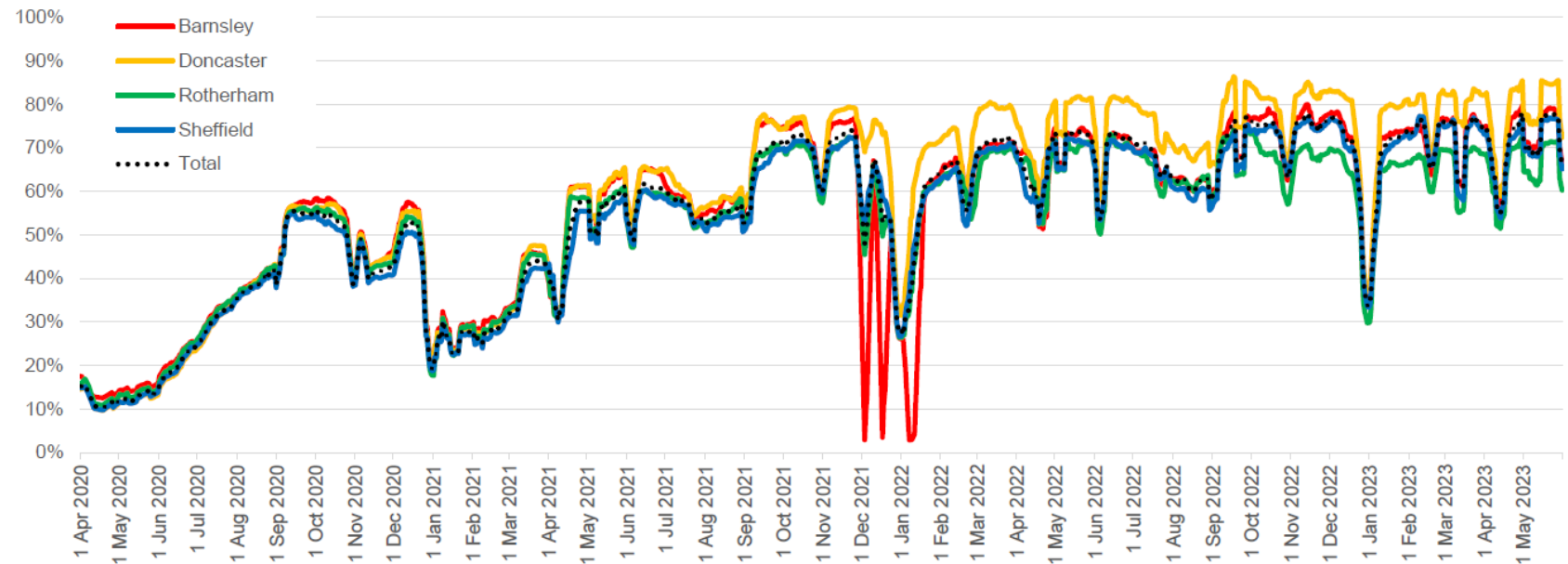
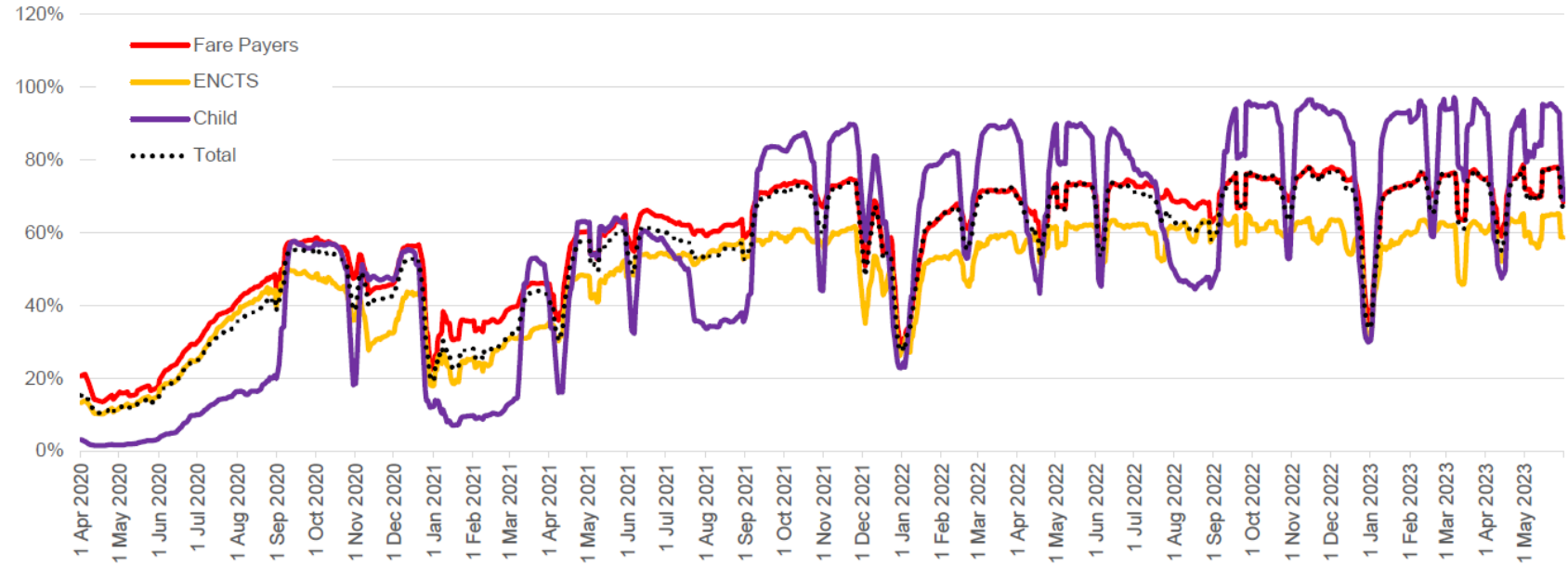
Presented by

Tim Taylor, Director of Public Transport Operations



# Patronage

- Patronage has experienced significant variations during Covid and national restrictions, but we are now back in a relatively stable position, albeit only at around 70% of pre-Covid volumes.
- Demand by customer group varies significantly, with children now back to near 100% but ENCTS (elderly and disabled pass holders) at 60 to 65%.
- Doncaster recovery has remained ahead of the other three LA's with recovery at around 85%.
- Leisure-related trips appear to still have some opportunity for growth with Saturday demand back to above 80% of pre-Covid.
- There is however only small signs of continuing growth and demand has levelled off (notwithstanding fares initiatives having some effect).



## Background

- Since April 2020, DfT have been providing bus operators and Local Authorities with Covid-related support funding (Bus Recovery Grant, BRG). This has been extended numerous times, with the autumn 2022 extension running from 05 October 2022 to 31 March 2023.
- This funding has allowed us to maintain a level of bus service which would otherwise not exist due to operators looking to reduce services to those which are commercially sustainable.
- In Autumn 2022, the MCA Board agreed to make use of financial reserves of up to £7.2m to further protect bus services in the period October 2022 to end of July 2023. Whilst we anticipate the draw down on these reserves to be modest whilst BRG is available, this will accelerate significantly as and when BRG ends.

## July Service Changes

- Our original plan for bus network in July was to implement the financially sustainable network on the basis of Government funding ending at the end of March 2023. Since then the funding was extended first to end of June 2023 and then to end of March 2023 (albeit at reduced levels).
- The BRG funding arrangement and £2 fare cap on bus was originally due to end in June 2023 as now been extended to 31 October 2024
- DfT have also confirmed that bus support funding (now to be called BSIP+) has been extended to 31 March 2025.
- As such, our draw down on reserves which we had planned to support the network to from April to July 2023 has not been incurred.
- We are therefore have the opportunity in using some additional time to consider the best possible use of both remaining reserves but also our BSIP+ allocation over the coming (almost) two years.
- Given that operators are also now in a greater position of certainty of funding, and also have improved their driver recruitment and retention, we are being able to reinstate some services which were lost in October 2022 as no operators were prepared to bid on those services at the time.
- However, the substantial issue is our ability to protect everything from the start September depending on policy options, in particular choices on discretionary concessions.

## September Service Changes

- Even with BSIP+ now confirmed, there is insufficient funding available in total to protect the entire bus network at risk. Our total available BSIP+ funding is £6.3m to end of March 2025.
- With use of reserves, we therefore have combined additional funding of £17.2m over the next two years but additional tender costs (including non-statutory school services) of £24.4m.
- Where possible, there is a desire to continue to support young people aged 18-21 with the Zoom Beyond concession and also match the national bus fare cap with an equivalent on tram.
- We therefore have some very difficult decisions to make about prioritising which services need to be protected across the region and which cannot be afforded.
- Currently, non-statutory school services are only funded through to July 2024 but can be extended at a cost of around £1.6m per year from September 2024.
- There remain a significant number of services for which we have provided temporary contract extensions through to 3 September and we now need to undertake a focussed exercise to prioritise what services can be afforded and what options are available to best mitigate where possible the impact of service reductions, particularly in the evening and on Sunday.

# Process

## Completed to date

- Sought and received bids for all tenders for services in scope from bus operators in March 2023 (prices for one, two and three year contracts)
- Already awarded a proportion of tenders for daytime services for those routes deemed essential.
- We also have statutory school bus services awarded to July 2027.
- Non-statutory school bus services have been extended to July 2024 through use of reserves.
- Interim contracts have been agreed on the remaining daytime tendered services and all evening and weekend tendered services through to 3 September to provide network stability relative to now (as well as reinstate some services lost in October 2022).
- Agreed to continue to operate the Zoom Beyond concession and fare cap on tram through to 3 September.
- On tenders received for all interim contracts, we have applied at a South Yorkshire level the prioritisation derived from the public engagement activity in August 2022.
- We have overlaid the existing tendered services criteria on frequency and cost per passenger.
- Modelling undertaken modelling over two principle time horizons of two and three years.

# Process

## Next Steps

- Provide considered advice on time horizon of two or three years for contract awards from September in light of fiscal environment in coming years (thus far we are planning on the basis of 2 years of funding certainty).
- Complete a service-level implication assessment of bus services retained and lost, by Local Authority, for socialising with LA Leaders, elected members and officers.
- Undertake further modelling of cost and service implications based on any changes to the existing tendered service criteria (e.g. frequency of services, application of cost per passenger thresholds) or prioritisation using the public consultation and engagement undertaken in August 2022.
- For example, we can protect a much greater proportion of evening and Sunday bus services but would need to move to 90 or 120 minute frequency; is this acceptable?
- Progress work on Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) options to provide further possible mitigations for service reductions. We will use the cost per passenger assessments on services to help inform value for money through possible DRT options.
- Schedule engagement activities at a Local Authority level including elected member sessions in July (currently planned for week commencing 17 July) for feedback and to inform final decisions taken on 31 July by the MCA Board.
- Service changes will take place on 3 September with our usual communications and service information processes leading up to this date.



Thank you

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