

Scrutiny Conclusions: Bradford Interchange Closure

The scrutiny session focused on scrutiny of interim operations, including those to-date and the future post-reopening in January 2025 and scrutiny of lessons learned including all changes planned or made to asset management, emergency plans, communications, mass transit and bus franchising.

POINTS OF ENQUIRY:

Decision-making and democratic oversight:

1. The extent to which the process to date has been guided by elected Members and, therefore, which Members are accountable; involvement they've had, guidance/advice they've imparted, decisions they've made and what options they were presented with.
2. The steps taken to ensure, uphold and fulfil the "Decision-Making Principles" in the constitution, which Scrutiny Members must take account of when scrutinising and deciding what decisions to call-in, has been undertaken.

Communications and engagement:

3. The quality, speed, regularity and depth of how impacted, and other relevant, councillors are briefed - including Bradford Members, Leeds Members from nearby areas, Transport Committee Members, Scrutiny Members and CA Members.
4. The quality of communication and information sharing with the public, residents, passengers, bus operators, taxi drivers and other impacted people.

Information, data and analysis:

5. If all Members and decision makers are receiving the full detail and analysis of the strategic, legal, financial/budgetary, health & safety risks and implications to support their decision making.
6. If a value-for-money (VfM) assessment on the recommended option (to re-open) and other options so that Members and the public can assess the impact on the taxpayers.

Timelines and monitoring:

7. The clarity on timelines, timescales and reporting mechanisms for the proceeding steps so that any oversight board, scrutineer and others can suitably assess that work is moving at pace and the promised outcomes will be achieved.
8. If various reviews promised in the latest CA paper will be completed on time, in enough depth and who will assess them – officers, external experts and elected members.

Lessons learned and future plans:

9. If this experience has informed the approach to other bus station assets which have, or could have, similar issues.
10. If a full 'lessons learned' evaluation will be done.
11. If the interim measures employed until the reopening and during any partial reopening are much improved on previous arrangements and that lessons were learned from the interim operational experience to date.

12. If well thought-out contingencies are in place, due to appropriate risk assessment, in case other related works (e.g. the lower concourse) are delayed or another structural failure takes place – and how these will be different and improved from previous actions.
 13. If information on plans for the new station (linked to the mass transit programme) which was a key part of the recommended decision to re-open, will be presented; as the decision was taken in the context that proposals for a new station would consequently progress.
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CONCLUSIONS AND ASSURANCES:

“Interim operations”: Assessment of quality of interim measures to-date and the quality of communication to passengers, councillors, and operators:

14. Communication challenges: Communication to the public in the past could have been better. A commitment was made to convene a communications group to communicate next steps, and engage in expectations management, to the public about the speed of re-opening. Work will be undertaken to explain the full story as the information is now public and regulatory issues regarding tenants prohibiting certain communication is expected to be resolved.
15. Passenger-POV approach: Decision makers (Members and officers) did not always have firsthand experience of a situation, which is crucial to ensure that decisions and actions are passenger focused and less obvious matters are covered, such as information at other stations warning about the issues at Interchange. This type of information is best collated directly from passenger feedback, with a good mechanism for monitoring follow up action.
16. Feedback follow-up: Information and advice given by the public and Members was not always being acted upon and monitored long term, with some cases of ‘slippage’ especially where partners were concerned, or where people were removing posters/information, requiring problems to be re-reported and re-fixed. Members and the public want to see that their concerns are being actively heard and resolved.
17. Member engagement: Greater Member engagement is needed, not just to maintain democratic oversight, but because Members are good sources of constituent views and information – and must be able to feed back to constituents and support public information efforts. Consulting members at a regional level, not just Bradford, helps identify lateral issues as outlined (in para 15) and other knock-on effects in neighbouring council areas.
18. Stakeholders (operators): Good communication and co-working with stakeholders and partners responsible for other elements of the transport network is vital, e.g. train companies at train stations and the bus companies to coordinate new stops and routes, bus driver behaviour, and operators’ on-street customer services. This was central to many passenger complaints and to success of interim operations. Lessons must be learned for bus franchising and mass transit, which will give WYCA greater direct control of more of the transport network.
19. Accessibility: An overreliance on digital means might have been behind some of the gaps in information not being physically signposted at other stations. The necessity of putting accessibility first, both in terms of ensuring that people with needs can access interim transport measures easily and that information is disseminated in a wide variety of ways – not just digital. The most effective means of customer support reported has been through the travel centres and on-site staff available to help people on the ground.

20. Modal shift: There's been a loss of faith by some of the public in using public transport due to the interruptions of the 'perfect storm' of a major city bus station being closed amidst major roadworks and infrastructure projects affecting traffic and service quality. Data on the extent of this has been collated and a plan on how to bring lost passengers back to public transport once the station is re-opened and rebuild confidence is needed.

“Lessons learned”: Assessment of lessons learned from the situation and what has been changed, in terms of assets and other connecting areas of work such as bus franchising, mass transit, risk management and capital programme appraisals:

21. New assets review and strategy: A new assets team is developing an asset management strategy and undertaking a review of the corporate asset register to assess their condition and any interventions needed. There will also be greater consideration and focus on long-term asset health in current and future capital programme projects and risk management.
22. Future modern stations: The new award-winning Halifax Bus Station is considered a possible future-approach case study for bus station assets. The evaluation report of this would be very useful for both officers and Scrutiny Members to study when complete, to influence any future approach to asset management and construction.
23. Contingency plans in place: Emergency plans and interim operational measures have been established and agreed with local authority and bus operator partners for each of the bus stations and other assets, learning from the Interchange experience of what worked and didn't. Bradford Interchange was a 'perfect storm' in terms of its timing (Christmas, City of Culture) and location, but any station issues will be treated equally in any area.
24. New communications strategy: A new communications group will oversee the rollout of information to the public, media, and Members, on the January 2025 re-opening to minimise confusion and manage expectations as capacity is eventually returned to normal – identified as the most common issue by Members, the public and partners. The quality of communications has already improved since these issues were first raised by Members.
25. Customer service refresh: Lessons learned from the Interchange situation have been incorporated into the ongoing separate work on refreshing the “Customer Offer” (customer services) currently in development. The Transport Committee has been updated on this work earlier this year and will reach the Member workshop stage soon.
26. Impact on other strategic programmes: Lessons have been learned for Mass Transit and Bus Franchising programmes, with mass transit likely requiring a new transport hub combining rail, light rail and buses in Bradford in a more optimal location (not at the current Interchange) and bus franchising providing greater control over more of the bus network, if similar interim measures were required in future. There are also links with risk management and capital programme appraisal under review.
27. Possible Peer Review: The possibility of inviting an LGA-style Peer Review could be explored, in addition to existing officer-peer review through the Urban Transport Group (of officers), to learn lessons and best practice from other areas and benefit not just from WY Scrutiny Members, but other Members nationally.