

# WAKEFIELD CIVIC SOCIETY

*Building Interest in Wakefield*

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PO Box 380,  
Wakefield,  
WF1 3WT.

West Yorkshire Combined Authority,  
Consultation Team.

11<sup>th</sup> April 2021

Dear Sir or Madam,

## **West Yorkshire Connectivity Infrastructure Plan**

I am writing to provide the Society's comments on the West Yorkshire Connectivity Infrastructure Plan. The comments are written from the perspective of the Society's Executive Committee and focus primarily on the potential impact on Wakefield city centre and surrounding areas but will have wider application in some cases.

In summary, we very much welcome the new emphasis being given to transport issues in and around West Yorkshire and there is much to be admired within the proposals – it is, after all, difficult to disagree with the sentiment expressed in the foreword that “No dream should be quashed, nor any life compromised, by poor transport connections”. We just hope that the funding can be acquired – and soon – to turn these dreams into reality.

We agree that the Connectivity Infrastructure Plan must address climate change and take urgent steps to reduce pollution. This can in significant part be achieved by reducing private car use, particularly for commuting and at peak journey times. We accept that car use will be with us for the foreseeable future, and in some cases may remain the only truly viable option, but there is an emerging window of opportunity to convince people to swap to public transport before they commit to the cost of swapping their petrol and diesel vehicles for more expensive electric replacements. Once the purchase has been made, people will be more likely to use the new vehicles than not. While this will certainly help to improve air quality, if everyone merely swaps petrol and diesel for electric, there will be no reduction in peak-time congestion, and the attendant frustration it causes.

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For public transport to be attractive, it will need to be:

- Inexpensive to use (when compared with the cost of other modes);
- Safe;
- Comfortable;
- Predictable;
- Reliable; and
- Frequent

Irregular working hours are becoming more common and so a good service is required out of current peak times. On high demand routes there needs to be as close to a turn up and ride service as possible.

I and fellow members of the Society's committee will, of course, be happy to discuss our comments further with you should you wish to do so.

Yours sincerely,

[By Email]

**Kevin Trickett MBE,**

President

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## **West Yorkshire Connectivity Infrastructure Plan – Wakefield Civic Society Comments**

### **1. Rail**

Rail will always have the advantage over bus and Mass Transit for inter-urban travel and longer-distance commuter travel as an alternative to car travel. Rail is good for inter-urban travel e.g., Wakefield to Leeds and Huddersfield to Dewsbury and Leeds, but unless planned with modal connectivity in mind, **heavy rail is of limited use for shorter journeys and Mass Transit and buses are the better option for single-mode door-to-door travel.**

Local rail has greatly improved since the post-Beeching era of the early 1970s with several local stations and lines reopened and a few stations newly opened. However, the rail network is still not as comprehensive or coherent as it might be.

The current proposals maintain the focus on Leeds as a major rail hub. For passengers to and from Wakefield travelling between Wakefield and other destinations, this creates problems – both for Wakefield and for Leeds. Wakefield appears to suffer in this plan from having good rail connections with Leeds and so the majority of east west journeys are focussed through Leeds. There is a need for a direct rail service connection to Manchester, Manchester Airport and Liverpool. There also appears to be no plans for a direct service to Hull. This means that Wakefield, Yorkshire's third oldest city, is being side-lined and this is damaging for our economic growth and opportunity. In any infrastructure plan, Wakefield should be seen as more than just dormitory of Leeds.

The need to travel via Leeds adds to the journey times for Wakefield passengers and creates additional, and in some cases unnecessary, congestion at Leeds Railway Station.

For example, until the last 10 years it was possible to travel hourly from Wakefield Kirkgate to Manchester Victoria via Huddersfield and even beyond. This was often a preferred route for people from Wakefield working in Manchester City Centre. Now, to avoid Leeds, a lengthy wait is required at Huddersfield Station for journeys and overall journey times are increased by something in the region of half an hour each way.

The skeleton rail service between Kirkgate and Huddersfield is all that currently remains of this route. West Yorkshire Combined Authority has seen fit to develop the corridor between Westgate and Knottingley at the expense of the Huddersfield to Westgate service this has deprived Huddersfield of its most convenient link with London and Cross-Country services, and this was before the stringencies of Covid. This means more pressure on Huddersfield - Leeds Services which appear to be overstretched.

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One reason for this is that, despite promises made at the time, no additional platform capacity was planned into the relocated and rebuilt Westgate Station about 10-12 years ago. The Wakefield – Huddersfield line is not supported at local level and unlike the Knottingley/Five Towns routes it is not seen as a social priority. We hope that proposals to open station at Horbury Bridge for Horbury and Ossett will give added impetus to create additional services that connect Wakefield and Manchester directly.

**The Connectivity Infrastructure Plan appears to gloss over this point, neither recognising this route as part of a wider rail network nor suggesting a Mass Transit route as an alternative to the existing heavy rail.**

The Plan also recommends a switch from HGVs using the road network to rail for freight. Quite apart from the virtual dismantling of rail freight other than for train loads of heavy minerals and use of container-borne traffic as recommended in the Beeching Report, most freight lines and depots have been closed or are now used by increased passenger services. The Calder Valley route via Sowerby Bridge and Todmorden is now the primary route for Trans-Pennine freight rather than the more steeply graded Huddersfield route and there is limited further capacity even for more passenger services on the latter route. The construction of HS3 might alter this situation.

**Any switch to freight must be planned with capacity of existing and committed future lines in mind.**

Although Kirkgate's services and station facilities are a big improvement on those of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, its linkage with Westgate has not improved. There is no reference to re-considering the possible links between Kirkgate and Westgate. The two stations are over a mile away from each other and only easily accessible to each other via the daytime only Wakefield City Free Bus.

**The lack of overall rail planning at and between Wakefield Stations requires immediate attention. along with a wider look at what the heavy rail system in West Yorkshire is supposed to achieve in local terms.**

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## 2. Bus

**At the local level for services from outlying villages and estates, bus has the advantage. It is much cheaper to operate than the proposed Mass Transit but less attractive to the motorist.**

In a city the size of Wakefield an improvement in the timing and frequency of bus services, apart from the 110 from southern Wakefield to Leeds, is crucial if bus is going to improve its image in relation to that of car travel. Additional bus lanes could be introduced, especially during peak hours, e.g., in-bound between Chevet Lane and Walton Lane in Sandal.

In our view, the Connectivity Infrastructure Plan must address the need for better and more frequent buses services and, in this context, we think the plan needs more clarity and greater ambition. Stated improvements need to be delivered over a defined – and short – timescale. If we wish people to use buses more often the service needs to be convenient and affordable, this means bus services between towns and workplaces must offer a service when and where they are needed. Irregular working hours are becoming more common and so a good service is required out of current peak times. On high demand routes there needs to be as close to a turn up and ride service as possible.

Some bus routes go ‘round the houses’ which can add considerably to journey times of some routes. A motorist with a Wakefield to Leeds journey to make which can be done by car in as little as 20 minutes (with no waiting time) will need some persuading to swap to a bus service with an hour-long journey time (plus an often unpredictable waiting period and the risk of a bus not turning up at all). While parking costs (and availability) will also be a factor for a motorist to consider, sharing a car with others and the added comfort and convenience of personal transport will often help to mitigate the additional cost.

The need to buy a second ticket if a change of bus service is required en-route is almost peculiar to British buses, most countries on the Continent having a ‘transfer’ ticket system whereby the overall cost of the journey is greatly reduced, subject to some time-limit such as 60 minutes for the transfer to take place.

**A wholesale revision of the ticketing system is required, to the extent of trans-modal journeys and ‘through ticketing’**

There are national issues such as the 1986 privatisation of most bus services and the abolition of the Regional Traffic Commissioner who played a role in co-ordinating local routes, which need urgent review. Widespread stories abound as to the hiring of a taxi by several parties being financially comparable with that of a single bus fare.

**A fresh look at issues such as fare structure and handling need to be considered.**

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One of the undoubted successes in Wakefield in recent years has been the introduction of the free 'City Bus'. As greater effort is made to lure motorists out of their cars, it will be essential to ensure that the frequency, capacity and route of this facility is kept under review to meet what is likely to be increasing demand. Indeed, we would urge that consideration is give to opening additional routes, possibly to include direct shuttle routes between Westgate and Kirkgate railway stations. The opening of the new Tileyard North is bound to add passenger numbers to the service(s).

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## 3. Mass Transit

The idea of Mass Transit is a fascinating one. It would not just use rail or tram-train but high-capacity buses. If the routes do not have some degree of separation or preference from other forms of road transport, then it will not be any faster. The Sheffield to Middlewood/Malin Bridge Supertram service noticeably slows to the median speed of local road traffic as it passes through Hillsborough. Leeds has developed the guided busway system mainly along dual carriageway arterial roads such as Scott Hall road and York Road. But there has been no further progress of this since the debate on the Leeds Supertram.

The trams in Manchester and Sheffield (and the Metro system in Newcastle) are greatly preferable to bus travel in terms of comfort. People can be persuaded to use such modes of transport where comfort, safety, **reliability and frequency** compete favourably with the alternative of private car use.

A feeder system whereby change of mode is linked to out-of-town car to tram/train nodes for a fast journey into the centre has been tried in this country, on routes such as the above-mentioned tram service, although it is widespread elsewhere.

The dispersal of workplaces away from town centres and the development of peripheral estates for retail, employment and residential has not helped the development of a coherent public transport system. All too often, new developments are approved with little regard to the suitability of existing public transport services to match shift working and journeys made for leisure, particularly on an evening.

**Any future improved public transport system must be done within the context of overall land use transport planning, as proposed in the early 70s.**

It will cost a large amount of money to lay the tracks and acquire the necessary rolling stock and infra-structure. The degree of separation from highways would have an effect both on the speed of the Mass Transit (and therefore its attractiveness to motorists) and its cost. Manchester was fortunate in that most of its Tram routes outside the City Centre other than in the vicinity of Salford Docks were along former railway lines whereas Sheffield had to start mainly from scratch. Nevertheless, the idea that a city the size of Leeds with similar physical challenges to Sheffield cannot support a tram/light rail system of Mass Transit does not, in our view, stack up.

**A commitment at national level to improved local transport is essential if the Connectivity Infrastructure Plan is to make any progress in this area.**

The desire of privatized bus companies to be compensated for the loss of revenue as happened with the Leeds LRT proposal of the 1990s is a comment on the dysfunctional nature of the British public transport system as it has existed over

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the last 30-40 years. **Some thought will need to be given to how a new Mass Transit system will relate to privatised local bus services affected by competition from the new routes.**

With the existing rail connections to Leeds and Kirklees, Wakefield is perhaps understandably not a priority for the Mass transit proposal. However, it would be a lost opportunity to improve connections between Wakefield and the 5 towns if the connection between Wakefield and the Castleford Mass transit route is not established within the plan.

The proposed Mass transit is routed along several corridors where the former rail line has been converted to walking and cycling routes. Whilst the plan identifies that Mass transit should not take away from active travel this has to be a critical part of planning process. Any movement of cycling and walking routes must only be to improve the current provision otherwise we lose well established and well used facilities.

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## 4. Walking and cycling

Walking and cycling are at the heart of this plan and without the correct level of investment in active travel the Connectivity Infrastructure Plan has the potential to fail.

Cycling has to be seen as a viable and safe mode of transport. Without separated well-lit cycle routes, cycling will remain the choice of a small number of people. Currently most of the cycle routes serving Wakefield are off-road and use corridors that are more rural. Whilst this is good for leisure cycling it is less practical for utility cycling. These paths are not all well surfaced, are mixed use, so cyclists and walkers interact, and rarely lit so unpopular and potentially unsafe during winter months.

It is a pity that most of the current highway system was planned before the widespread development of commuter biking. While better and safer routes for cyclists and pedestrians have been, and still are being, created in town centres, there is a 'hazard belt' around the edge of the city centre which is a legacy of this car-dominated thinking. For example, on the southern route to Sandal there needs to be much greater clarity on the area around the Hepworth Gallery. On both bike and foot, crossing from the Hepworth to the original Chantry Bridge is both difficult and slow. This is why the current cycle desire line is to stay on the main road bridge.

Efforts are being made to improve the situation through development of the Emerald Ring in Wakefield but at present progress seems slow – we recently commented on detailed proposals for improvements to Wakefield City Centre – our letter of 28<sup>th</sup> March refers.

The Connectivity Infrastructure Plan identifies potential cycle routes between Wakefield and Leeds but there are less on-road options between Wakefield and the 5 towns and Kirklees.

The Wakefield LCWIP plans are welcome as travelling North-South across Wakefield can be daunting by bike. The provision of a fully segregated northern cycle route to Newton Bar and a continuation along Leeds Road to Leeds would provide a safe and direct cycle route between the cities. It would connect the residential areas to the north of Wakefield with both cities.

The implementation of Route 2 with a separated cycle lane along Barnsley Road would link well with Portobello and has the potential to link with National Cycle Network at Pugneys.

Planning within large new developments should ensure that both walking and cycling have safe access. For example, there is a safe pelican-controlled walking and cycling route across Asdale Road into Asda but trying to exit from the store on foot or by bike towards the part of Standbridge Lane by the Star pub is a different matter. Many people buy small amounts of goods these days, often by bike, rather

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than the traditional 'weekly shop' and are often overwhelmed by the car-dominated layout.

**A radical change in planning is required not just for better facilities for cyclist and walkers not just on the road but at larger traffic generating destinations.**

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## 5. Car

Never has the aphorism ‘build and they will come’ proved more true than when it is applied to new roads designed to improve traffic flows and reduce congestion.

As the Jevons Paradox demonstrates, attempts to make journeys easier for the motorist can actually encourage more motorists to take to the roads, re-creating the conditions that the original measures were intended to address.

New roads, particularly by-passes and link roads, have often been mooted as a solution to traffic problems and in the short term this may be true. However, once a bypass has to be bypassed by a further bypass the time has come to question this type of solution. Many such roads have been built on a piecemeal basis with potentially vital links missed out for budgetary or environmental reasons, and those that have been built were often to less than ideal highway standards.

More cars on the road, more journeys made by car and more congestion encountered, lead to frustration, wasted time and pollution. We do not think these problems can be satisfactorily addressed via ‘more and better roads’. We welcome the introduction of more park and ride schemes to reduce the number of vehicles entering our town and city centres. Where park and ride schemes are not viable, car parking should be located around the periphery of the town/city centre where possible.

Nationally, car infrastructure is under pressure due to the inability of alternative modes of travel to deliver satisfactory solutions and an apparent lack of co-ordination between land-use planning and infrastructure/transport provision. More and more houses are being built on out-of-town housing developments almost guaranteed to lock in car dependency for generations to come. This in turn increases demand for more inner-city car parking as a result. Arguably, land dedicated to inner-city car parking, is land that is wasted – it could be turned to much better use.

Bottle necks during rush hour, both in the city centre itself and at points outside the city e.g. Denby Dale Road /M1 and the link from Asdale Road, almost seem self-inflicted given the number of residential and employment sites which have recently been built and now take direct access from it. Most current land use proposals in and around Wakefield seem to be built with little consideration of implications for traffic and environmental considerations.

**The greater use of integrated land use and transport planning is therefore essential if the Connectivity Infrastructure Plan is to create any lasting benefit to West Yorkshire. It must be done in a holistic fashion, taking account of quality of life with all that means in terms of air quality, congestion and road safety among other considerations.**

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Until the early 2000s the Department of the Environment incorporated the Department of Transport. The latter was split off and the Environment was hived off to the agricultural-based DEFRA leaving only the Built Environment to be consolidated with Communities and Local Government. Thus the vital link between the national governance of natural environment, built environment and transport was greatly diminished.

**In conclusion the Connectivity Infrastructure Plan must be considered and implemented in context with the Development Plans of the five Metropolitan Districts**

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