



Federation of Small Businesses
The UK's Leading Business Organisation



**FSB West
Yorkshire
Response to
Leeds
Trolleybus
Proposal**

October 2013

Introduction to the Federation of Small Businesses

The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) is the UK's leading lobbying group for businesses. With over 200,000 members, the FSB is the largest organisation representing small and medium sized businesses in the UK. The FSB has 5,200 members in the county of West Yorkshire and approximately 1,300 of these are based in the Leeds District. The FSB has around 9,000 members across the Leeds City Region as a whole.

FSB West Yorkshire welcomes the opportunity to respond to the 42 day consultation on the proposals for the Leeds Trolleybus. Our response is based on the views and concerns of small businesses based in Leeds, and specifically, business owners located around the proposed routes for the Trolleybus scheme. Between the 23 August and 16 October 2013 we surveyed FSB members in the Leeds District on the Leeds Trolleybus to solicit their views. This survey was also distributed to non FSB members who own businesses located around the proposed Trolleybus routes. FSB West Yorkshire also held a consultation event for local businesses on 15 October 2013 where they could voice their opinions on the Trolleybus proposal.

Summary of Key Points

- FSB West Yorkshire objects to the Leeds Trolleybus Scheme.
- FSB West Yorkshire is disappointed with the lack of consultation that has been undertaken with small businesses on the Leeds Trolleybus. We are particularly concerned about the lack of engagement with businesses located along the A660, and the limited amount of information on the Trolleybus that has been made available to them.
- Much of the consultation with businesses has been conducted with large and national firms which are not based along the proposed routes. We believe that the consultation should have instead concentrated on those businesses which are situated on the proposed routes as these are the businesses that will be directly affected by the scheme.
- FSB West Yorkshire is concerned about the disruption to small businesses during the construction phase, and how this will affect levels of trade. We are also concerned about the lasting effects of a loss of trade in light of the prolonged economic recession.
- There is broad support for the proposed Park and Ride sites. Businesses believe that if it is priced competitively, it could encourage more commuters to travel by public transport.
- There is a general consensus amongst small businesses that Leeds urgently requires a modern, improved and fully integrated transport system to reduce traffic congestion and aid traffic flow. However, we do not believe that the Trolleybus will reduce traffic congestion on the A660 and we are concerned that it could instead hinder traffic flow further.
- FSB West Yorkshire also proposes that a non-stop shuttle bus service operates between Boddington Park and Ride and the city centre.
- FSB West Yorkshire recommends that existing parking provision and parking permits around the A660 are reviewed, to ensure that there is sufficient parking for business vehicles, business suppliers and business customers.
- FSB West Yorkshire proposes that a Quality Bus Framework is put in place across the entire Leeds City Region and that investment is made in hybrid or electric buses.
- FSB West Yorkshire formally requests that a Public Inquiry on the Leeds Trolleybus scheme is held in Spring 2014.

1. Consultation with Small Businesses

- 1.1 Around 98% of the respondents to the FSB West Yorkshire survey on the Trolleybus were small business owners based in the Leeds District. Approximately 47% of the respondents were businesses located in the LS6 postcode area and a further 31% were businesses located in the LS16 postcode area.
- 1.2 FSB West Yorkshire is disappointed with the lack of consultation that has been undertaken with small businesses on the Leeds Trolleybus scheme. We are particularly concerned about the lack of engagement with businesses located along the A660, one of the two proposed routes for the Trolleybus. Our survey reveals that just under one third of small businesses (31%) were consulted about the Trolleybus, either by Leeds City Council or Metro, whilst 69% were not consulted at all.
- 1.3 We are also concerned about the limited amount of detailed and factual information on the Trolleybus that has been made available to small businesses in areas affected by the proposed routes. Just 14% of small businesses consider themselves to be very knowledgeable about the Trolleybus. The majority of respondents (51%) felt quite knowledgeable and 35% did not feel knowledgeable at all. At our consultation event with local businesses, a hairdresser based in Headingley reported that she had received one letter from Metro about the Trolleybus, and that she had contacted them several times with questions but had struggled to obtain answers. A care home manager also stated that it was difficult to find sufficiently detailed information about the Trolleybus proposals on the internet.
- 1.4 Much of the consultation with businesses has been conducted with large and national firms which are not based along the proposed routes, and are therefore not directly affected by the Trolleybus scheme. We believe that the consultation should have instead concentrated on businesses of all sizes which are situated on the proposed routes, as these are the businesses that will be directly affected by the construction and operation of the scheme.

2. Leeds Trolleybus Construction Phase

- 2.1 FSB West Yorkshire is concerned about the disruption to small businesses that will ensue as a result of the construction phase, and how this will affect levels of trade. Over half of the respondents to our survey (56%) were concerned about the impact of the construction on business trade and revenue. Previous research with FSB members in Sheffield and Nottingham on similar transport schemes, demonstrates that there is an inevitable loss of trade whilst construction work is undertaken and access to business premises is compromised.
- 2.2 The Leeds Trolleybus will come at a time when the economy is still recovering from an extended period of recession. We are therefore concerned about the lasting effects of loss of trade for businesses on the proposed routes, and how this will impact on local employment levels and business survival in the medium to long term. This is illustrated by the views of two different businesses in Headingley and Hyde Park:

“We feel that customers will drive elsewhere to dine out and shop during construction of the Trolleybus. It could be the last straw for some businesses in Headingley. It will certainly alter my business model. I employ 50 people and I expect that to drop by 10 people due to the loss in turnover. That’s a decrease in my workforce of 20%.”

Restaurant Owner, Headingley

“The Trolleybus will devastate many businesses in Headingley and Hyde Park during the construction that will not recover. The high street is already full of charity shops and empty units because of the difficult economic climate and high business rates. I would like to see Business Rate Relief for all businesses effective over the next few years. We should have some compensation for the uncertainty that we are having to endure.”

Retailer, Hyde Park

- 2.3 Around 68% of small businesses are concerned about how traffic flow and traffic congestion on the A660, A61 and adjoining roads will be managed during the construction phase. The construction of the routes may require diversions to be put in place, and this will take passing trade away from the businesses located in the construction sites. This will undoubtedly also increase pressure on the surrounding side and back roads as commuters attempt to avoid the roadworks. The networks of roads surrounding the A660 in particular are narrow, and are already frequently used as a cut-through route to avoid the existing congestion on the A660. The addition of roadworks during the construction phase will, in our opinion, exacerbate the problems of congestion and reduced traffic flow, particularly during peak travel hours.
- 2.4 Around 62% of small businesses are concerned about the impact that the construction phase will have on the environment and the general aesthetic appeal of the area where the Trolleybus will operate. Much of this concern is centred on the cabling and electric sub-stations that will be required by the Trolleybus. Apart from fears about the safety of high voltage electric cables being physically attached to business premises, there are also questions about whether the cabling will reduce business property values and whether the general look of the cabling and sub-stations will deter businesses from wanting to be based in the area.

“I received a document on 20 September 2013 which was the first indication that overhead equipment may be attached to my premises. I’m also concerned about the loss of an upstairs tenant due to travel problems during the construction.”

Accountancy Firm, Weetwood

- 2.5 There is also a genuine concern that mature trees will be uprooted during the construction to make way for the routes and will only be replaced with saplings, which will not be permitted to grow large enough to make the areas more attractive because of the cabling. The environmental impact of the Trolleybus scheme is explained by the owner of a publishing business in Weetwood:

“Businesses have said that they would relocate to the parade where my business is based but they’re now having second thoughts because of the Trolleybus. The Trolleybus won’t use the same stops as the buses, the sub-stations will go up and the mature trees will be felled and replaced with saplings. The character of the Headingley area will be ruined. What I want to know is whether the high voltage wires that will be attached to the buildings will be dangerous?”

Publishing Company, Weetwood

- 2.6 Small businesses are also concerned about where the required local funding of £77 million to part-fund the scheme will come from. FSB West Yorkshire has already lodged

opposition to the West Yorkshire Combined Local Authority potentially being given additional tax raising powers to supplement large scale projects, including transport initiatives. Approximately 70% of the respondents to our survey are concerned about how the City Council and Metro will raise the £77 million for the Leeds Trolleybus in light of public sector budget cuts. The fear is that this will be funded from additional charges or levies on Business Rates. We strongly believe that any tax raising powers, which could result in additional charges or levies on Business Rates and Council Tax, must be subject to proper and lengthy consultation with rate and tax payers before these powers are granted by Government.

3. Leeds Trolleybus Operation

- 3.1 There is broad support amongst small businesses for the proposed Park and Ride sites. Businesses believe that Park and Ride is long overdue in Leeds. Questions have been asked however, whether commuters will use the Trolleybus as an alternative mode of transport to the car. There is a belief that whilst car parking in Leeds City Centre is expensive, those that can afford to pay for parking, will still choose their car over the Trolleybus because it is convenient and cheaper. In order to encourage a modal shift in transport, it is vital that the proposed Park and Ride sites offer a cheaper alternative to parking in Leeds City Centre, as well as offering the convenience of a quick public transport system from the Park and Ride sites into central Leeds. If the Park and Ride is priced competitively, and offers a quick journey, it could encourage more commuters to travel by public transport into the city. However, FSB West Yorkshire does not consider the Trolleybus to be the best option from the Boddington Park and Ride site to achieve this. Instead, we propose that a non-stop shuttle bus service should run from the Boddington Park and Ride into Leeds City Centre. We feel that this could encourage commuters to shift from car usage to public transport whilst also avoiding additional congestion along the A660 through Headingley. We also recommend that the charge for the Park and Ride is per vehicle and not per commuter.
- 3.2 The biggest concern that small businesses have about the operation phase of the Trolleybus is how traffic flow and traffic congestion on the A660, A61 and adjoining roads will be managed. This was identified by 68% of the respondents to our survey. The lengthy traffic signal control times on the Ring Road, Alma Road and Shaw Lane in Headingley, that will be required to give uninhibited priority to the Trolleybuses, will disrupt and delay all other road users enormously. The controls required by the Trolleybus to enter and exit the section at the rear of the Arndale Centre could also cause further delay to road traffic on the A660. This disruption and delay could be of such a scale that it nullifies the benefits to the minority of travellers who would be using the Trolleybus.
- 3.3 Two thirds of small businesses who responded to our survey were also concerned about how the finished scheme will affect parking around the Trolleybus routes. This was echoed by the small businesses that attended the FSB Business Consultation Event on the Trolleybus, firstly by the owner of a florists based in Headingley:

“I relocated my business from Meanwood to Headingley because of the availability of parking there. Passing trade from the A660 is essential for my business. I’m concerned about what happens if that parking goes. Without parking my business simply won’t survive.”

Florist, Headingley

- 3.4 Small businesses at the FSB’s Business Consultation Event expressed dismay at the reduction in parking in Headingley over recent years, citing how the introduction of parking permits four years ago had resulted in a reduction of trade as a result of customers being unable to park. Businesses also referenced difficulties in parking on the surrounding streets:

“I have a 40 year old family business. I have seen parking decimated. There is less public parking already. More students have moved in and are parking on the street and now they’re trying to take more parking away. Park and Ride, improved buses and increased parking will resolve the congestion problems. They think people will leave their car at home and use the Trolleybus but if we don’t have parking in Headingley the businesses will go. “

Hairdressers, Headingley

This view was shared by other attending businesses who highlighted a need to retain, if not increase, parking availability outside of the businesses on the Trolleybus routes, to accommodate delivery lorries and service vehicles and prevent them from otherwise blocking the road. FSB West Yorkshire therefore recommends that existing parking provision and parking permits in this area are reviewed, to ensure that there is sufficient parking for business vehicles, business suppliers and business customers.

4. Cost Benefit Analysis of the Leeds Trolleybus

- 4.1 There is a general consensus amongst the small business community that Leeds urgently requires a modern, improved and fully integrated transport system to reduce traffic congestion and aid traffic flow. However, FSB West Yorkshire research has identified that just 18% of small businesses agree that the Trolleybus will be good for their business. The vast majority (64%) believe that the Trolleybus will hinder their business, whilst a further 18% of small businesses are undecided as to whether the Trolleybus will benefit their business or not.

- 4.2 Our research reveals that small businesses are not convinced that the Trolleybus will ease congestion along the A660. Instead, there is a belief that the Trolleybus will hinder traffic flow on the A660 even further, because of the restricted width of the road and the fact that the Trolleybus and regular bus service will use different stops, potentially bringing traffic to a halt. Small businesses have also firmly stated to the FSB that any narrowing of footpaths and reduction in car parking for business customers required to accommodate the Trolleybus would also be categorically unacceptable.

“I am extremely concerned about the LS6 postcode area losing its outside seating space on the pavement altogether. There isn’t much room as it is. It would damage business in the summer time.”

Bar Owner, Headingley

- 4.3 The routing of the Trolleybus around the rear of the Arndale Centre in Headingley is considered to be sensible. However, businesses have legitimate concerns about the impact of the Trolleybus on the small business community. Will Business Rates increase to pay for the scheme, will the construction of the routes deter customers and trade, and will the changing landscape and aesthetic look of the scheme adversely affect business property values?

“We set up the business over ten years ago. Eight years ago we launched a second salon at Otley Road and are expanding to offer more jobs and employment to the local community. The impact of the Trolleybus will be negative so we are looking at other areas.”

Beauticians, West Park

- 4.4 Approximately three in four small businesses disagree that the beneficial impact of the Trolleybus on the Leeds economy is worth the financial investment in the scheme. Just 22% of small businesses believe that the economic benefits of the Trolleybus for Leeds outweigh or justify the financial cost. Small businesses have also considered the environmental impact of the scheme. The felling of mature trees, the demolition work required and the attachment of high voltage cables attached to businesses are all issues of concern for small businesses. However, some have also questioned the low carbon aspect of the Trolleybus scheme if it is powered by the electric generated from fossil fuels.

“Everyone is keen to see something done to improve transport in Leeds but it’s the cabling and the electric sub-stations that are the problem for me.”

Chartered Surveyor, Weetwood

- 4.5 FSB West Yorkshire believes that the Trolleybus scheme represents poor value for money given the financial cost of the scheme, its limited geographical coverage and the loss of trade that is inevitable during the construction phase at least. We believe that the estimates for job creation do not take account of the potential loss of jobs in small businesses that will see a reduction in trade due to the disruption and reduced on street parking availability on the proposed routes. This is supported by our research which shows that 74% of small businesses do not believe that the scheme offers good value for money.

5. Objection to the Proposed Trolleybus Scheme

- 5.1 FSB West Yorkshire objects to the Leeds Trolleybus Scheme. We do not consider that the scheme is appropriate, and we also question the viability of the routes selected for the Trolleybus operation.
- 5.2 The A660 in particular, is a narrow road which is congested both at peak commuting times and during the day. Although part of the Trolleybus route will run adjacent to the A660 rather than along the road, we do question its feasibility as a route, especially as the construction of the Trolleybus scheme will result in longer journey times, inconvenience and reduced trade for businesses, and access issues for customers and suppliers of businesses located along the A660. Interestingly, around 9% of the respondents to our survey suggested that the Leeds Ring Road (A6120) or the A65 would perhaps have been a better proposition for the Trolleybus. This is mainly because the A65 has already undergone extensive widening work in the last two years.
- 5.3 Around 70% of the small businesses who responded to the FSB’s survey do not believe that the Trolleybus is the right transport solution for Leeds. Approximately 82% of these respondents are based in the LS6 and LS16 postcode areas directly affected by the proposed Trolleybus route along the A660. In comparison, 16% of small businesses believe that the Trolleybus is right for Leeds, citing that the city needs an alternative mode of transport. However, just 6% of these respondents are from postcode areas

around the proposed routes of the Trolleybus. A further 14% felt unable to give an opinion, either because they are yet to make up their minds, or because they required more information on the scheme to make an informed choice.

- 5.4 During our consultation with small businesses in Leeds, we identified a lack of knowledge about the broader transport infrastructure plans of Metro. Small businesses were under the impression that the Leeds Trolleybus was a standalone project rather than linked to other transport improvements in other parts of the district. They therefore regarded the Trolleybus scheme as piecemeal. They also struggled to understand why Metro and Leeds City Council were not looking to develop a city-wide integrated transport system that covers a larger geographical area instead. It is clear that the lack of engagement with the business community by Metro and Leeds City Council on the transport plan, and the limited information on how the Leeds Trolleybus fits in with that plan, has created this perception.

6. Alternative Solutions for Improving Transport Infrastructure in Leeds

- 6.1 The respondents to the FSB's survey, who indicated that the Trolleybus was the wrong solution for Leeds, were asked to identify other methods of transport improvement that could be invested in as an alternative. Around 58% suggested investing in modernised and upgraded buses, including hybrid or electric buses, bus lanes and a more frequent bus service. A further 24% suggested greater investment in local rail infrastructure, including a tram or an underground rail system.

"I think the Trolleybus is a short sighted plan which will look old fashioned and outdated very quickly. There must be a better way. I think we should improve the existing transport service by adding an Oyster Card Scheme and improving bus stops and lanes."

Bridal Shop, Headingley

- 6.2 FSB West Yorkshire believes that a better alternative transport solution to the Trolleybus is the introduction of a Quality Bus Framework across the entire Leeds City Region, with investment in upgraded buses (including hybrid and electric buses). This would give the Council and Metro the power to introduce bus services in areas of need across the city that are not considered economically viable by the bus companies. The Quality Bus Framework would also give the city the flexibility to put on temporary additional bus services for special or one-off events in the city, and most importantly, to control the prices charged for public transport. The introduction of an 'Oyster Card' type scheme across the Leeds City Region for bus and rail transport would also be welcomed by the FSB.
- 6.3 In addition, we suggest that a non-stop bus service operates between the planned Boddington Park and Ride site and Leeds City Centre. We recommend that the charge for the Park and Ride is per vehicle and not per commuter. We strongly believe that this is a more viable and more cost effective solution than the Trolleybus for the A660. It will result in reduced congestion and less car usage by commuters who will be incentivised to use public transport rather than drive into the City Centre. We also believe that it will avoid the disruption to businesses and the negative impact on trade and local employment levels that the Trolleybus Scheme will present.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 There is a general consensus that public transport in Leeds needs to be improved, and small businesses are broadly supportive of the proposals for Park and Ride sites in the city. It is clear that the lack of engagement with small businesses on the affected routes, and the limited amount of detailed information on the proposals has resulted in some confusion and dissent amongst the business community. An example of this is the fact that businesses were largely unaware of how the Leeds Trolleybus Scheme fits into the broader integrated transport infrastructure plan for the city.
- 7.2 The majority of small businesses question whether the Trolleybus is the right solution for Leeds, citing the geographical restrictions of the A660 in particular, including the restricted width of the road, the number of mature trees that will need to be removed, the reduction of on street parking and the required demolition of existing buildings.
- 7.3 FSB West Yorkshire proposes that a Quality Bus Framework is put in place across the entire Leeds City Region instead of the Trolleybus and investment in hybrid and electric buses. In addition, we suggest that a non-stop shuttle bus service operates between the Boddington Park and Ride site and Leeds City Centre, and the introduction of an 'Oyster Card' type scheme for bus and rail usage.
- 7.4 Due to the dissent amongst small businesses in the areas affected by the Leeds Trolleybus Scheme, FSB West Yorkshire formally requests that a Public Inquiry on the scheme is held in Spring 2014.

Written by:

Federation of Small Businesses, West Yorkshire
30 October 2013