



Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday 9 September 2024 at 11.00 am

Minutes

Present In Person

Councillor Timothy Huxtable (Chair)	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Robert Alden	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Pervez Akhtar	Coventry City Council
Councillor Keith Archer	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Amo Hussain	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Carol Hyatt	City of Wolverhampton Council
Councillor Leslie Kaye	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Ian Kettle	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Mary Locke	Birmingham City Council
Councillor John McNicholas	Coventry City Council
Councillor Rinkal Shergill	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Harbinder Singh	Wolverhampton City Council
Councillor Gurmeet Singh Sohal	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Ian Ward	Birmingham City Council

Present Virtually

Councillor Samantha Gethen (Vice-Chair)	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Liz Clements	Birmingham City Council

In Attendance

Louise Cowen	West Midlands Combined Authority
Adam Harrison	Transport for West Midlands
David Harris	Transport for West Midlands
Lyndsey Roberts	West Midlands Combined Authority
Jat Sekhon	West Midlands Combined Authority
Anne Shaw	Transport for West Midlands
Sandeep Shingadia	Transport for West Midlands
Janna Simpson	West Midlands Combined Authority

Item Title
No.

101. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Steve Thornley (Staffordshire Non-Constituent Authorities), Councillor David Wilkes (Sandwell) and Councillor Antony Tucker (Coventry).

102. Minutes - 8 July 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

The committee discussed the issue of issuing a military veteran's bus pass. The Executive Director of Transport for West Midlands confirmed that the veteran's bus pass sat under local policy. She indicated that it would be assessed under a policy review and decision would need to be made by the WMCA Board. It was confirmed that the Chair would write a letter to the WMCA Board to request further investigation on the matter and the letter would be reviewed by the committee on 4 November 2024. Councillor Robert Alden noted that the costs could be lower than quoted as it only applied to working age veterans and noted that there were other measures available to help veterans such as training and education to support individuals getting into work. It was agreed that the briefing note be updated to include this, and the Executive Director of Transport for West Midlands confirmed that a discussion would be held with colleagues from the Employment, Skills, Health & Communities directorate regarding wider opportunities to assist veterans.

Councillor Carol Hyatt raised the project management process regarding the Transport for West Midlands funding agreement. The Executive Director of Transport for West Midlands indicated that there was work ongoing to streamline the end-to-end process regarding projects going through the Single Assurance Framework, and the Chair also confirmed that Birmingham City Council had undertaken a scrutiny review in regard to the SAF framework.

103. Deeper Devolution Deal - Transport Implementation Plan

The Principal Policy & Strategy Officer gave an update on the deeper devolution deal that had been agreed with the Government in 2023. This included an update on the Single Settlement, infrastructure, transport planning, bus services, transport innovation, rail, and roads. The Principal Policy & Strategy Officer requested that members review and feedback on current processes.

Councillor Carol Hyatt asked for further information on the Single Settlement and the implications of multi-year profiles. The Executive Director of Transport for West Midlands confirmed that further clarity would be provided in due course as a result of the spending review and the Autumn Statement but would ensure that the WMCA would be asking for long term certainty around transport funding and projects.

Councillor John McNicholas asked which Member Engagement Groups would specifically be engaged with in regard to the deeper devolution deal. The Principal Policy & Strategy Officer responded that all the Member Engagement Groups would be engaged with actively and appropriately, and that a timeline for the Single Settlement and engagement with the groups would be mapped out so that councillors could adequately make plans for this engagement. He confirmed that public progress being made regarding the Single Settlement, such as White Papers, would be shared with the committee. The Chair also asked for Member Engagement Group Scrutiny Leads to be proactive in their engagement.

Councillor Robert Alden queried how the WMCA would be able to maintain

its current projects and implement the proposed plans. The Principal Policy & Strategy Officer confirmed that the implementation of the Deeper Devolution Deal remained a high priority for the WMCA. The Chair requested that a briefing note be circulated to members setting out the planned and actual spend on projects identified within the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement, as well as further information about the Urban Transport Group. Councillor Pervez Akhtar praised the contents of the report regarding the Single Settlement and welcomed the clarification regarding the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement funding.

The Executive Director of Transport for West Midlands added further detail around the complex nature of funding for buses within the region and indicated that there was ongoing work being conducted in regard to basic funding and ticket incentives. She confirmed that a briefing note around the Bus Service Improvement Plan would be shared and that a report would be presented at WMCA Board in October.

Councillor Leslie Kaye highlighted the importance of encouraging people to use the bus network and Councillor Liz Clements raised the importance of sharing funding issues with Government and encouraged collaboration with West Midlands Rail Executive to enhance public transport in the region as a whole.

Resolved:

(1) The progress on delivering against the Deeper Devolution Deal - Transport Implementation Plan was noted.

(2) Further scrutiny around emerging opportunities from the Government's new approach to English devolution, the forthcoming transport bills and the emerging local transport pillar priorities from the Single Settlement between the WMCA and the Government were agreed to be undertaken by the relevant Member Engagement Groups.

104. Rapid Transit Corridor Studies

The Director of Strategic Partnerships & Integration provided an update on the Rapid Transport Corridors Studies and the progress and outputs of the programme. He also provided an update on the work of the Local Transport Plan and detailed the priority rapid transit corridors, the long-term proposal, and the headline milestones of projects within the programme before highlighting the consistent approach being taken.

Councillor John McNicholas noted that in regard to the regional map, Coventry was only being connected to the rest of the region by rail and asked if there was room for other areas of rapid transport that could connect Coventry to the region. He also asked for clarification on what the proposal for the Foleshill corridor planned to be. The Director of Strategic Partnerships & Integration confirmed that the new station studies would be included in the work being conducted, but also stated that councillors would receive communications for specific areas in relation to Foleshill and Coventry.

Councillor Leslie Kaye asked about passenger demand within the region, the prospect of it further reducing and that the ability to maintain the current bus services. The Director of Strategic Partnerships & Integration responded to say that bus patronage had been declining nationally, including within the West Midlands, over many years, but despite this, efforts were being made to strengthen bus usage, as buses played a key part of the region's transport system. He also reported that one of the key factors behind the decline was the availability of other transport options, making the Local Transport Plan critical for setting strategies to improve accessibility for all residents. He confirmed that this was particularly important in areas with low car ownership, where people relied on public transport for essential needs and that focus was on meeting current demand while also planning for future needs by ensuring new housing and commercial developments were well connected.

Councillor Carol Hyatt asked that Ring & Ride be included within the Local Transport Plan as separate to the Demand Responsive Transport as one was available to all, and one was for vulnerable users only. This was acknowledged and due to be actioned by the Director of Strategic Partnerships.

Councillor Liz Clements requested a report to a future meeting on Very Light Rail and how it fared in comparison to the introductions of bus lanes as an effective way of moving people around. The Director of Strategic Partnerships & Integration agreed to consider this request. Councillor Liz Clements also enquired about the list of milestones and their reliability and validity due to resource constraints for transport projects and the possibility of bringing them forwards. She considered that both mass and rapid transport were very important for both the economy and to meet the needs of those in lower socio-economic situations. The Director of Strategic Partnerships & Integration replied that if the studies on the Rapid Transport Corridors were identified and robust then it would be easier to gain funding through City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement 2 in order to implement the projects. He conceded that the timescales were broad but confirmed that they would be confirmed in due time. He shared that it would be unlikely for funding to be received and projects delivered in one go but the opportunity would be there to prioritise the funding in phases.

As a result of questions from both the Chair and Councillor Robert Alden, discussions were held around the upgrading of sprint and metro projects and the use of disused rails track on metro and Very Light Rail projects. The Director of Strategic Partnerships & Integration confirmed that comprehensive work on the lessons learned from projects both nationally and internationally had been undertaken. He also confirmed that the projects would need to be commercially viable complete with finding the right solution for now and the potential for evolution in the future.

Councillor Pervez Akhtar indicated his support for an integrated transport system and thanked officers for their work, noting the importance of capacity funding. The Director of Strategic Partnerships & Integration explained that this was provided to support early work that could not be funded by the main

City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement fund, he confirmed that projects were funded by a combination of sources and all projects would be taken to a certain point to confirm requirements, benefits, funding and other early work deliverables.

Resolved:

The update and progress on the development of the West Midlands Rapid Transit Priority Corridors and associated work programme be noted.

105. WMCA Board Summary Report

The Executive Director of Transport for West Midlands presented four key reports to be discussed at the upcoming WMCA Board meeting on 11 October.

She reported on the Bus Depot Strategy and highlighted the need for the strategy to remove barriers for bus operators entering the region. She confirmed that while no immediate financial decisions were required, each depot site would be assessed through an individual business case, with the aim of being self-financing where possible.

Bus network stabilisation was the second report. The Director for Transport for West Midlands confirmed that it followed discussions held during the summer regarding further grant agreements with bus operators to maintain services from January 2025, as current agreements expired in December 2024.

She reported that the third report outlined a new Target Operating Model for Ring & Ride and Demand Responsive Transport services, starting from April 2025. She confirmed the report emphasised the need for a five-year funding allocation to secure best value, optimise services, and attract new customers.

Finally, the Executive Director of Transport for West Midlands covered the Road Safety Action Plan 2024-2030 report and indicated that it set out key actions involving various partners, including the WMCA, local authorities, and emergency services, to achieve the 'Vision Zero' policy of reducing road deaths and serious injuries by 50% by 2030.

In regard to the Bus Depot Strategy, Councillor Robert Alden requested that a review of the costing be undertaken to ensure that they were accurate and thoroughly checked as the process progressed so that the WMCA Board fully understood what it was committing to. He also indicated that significant number of uninsured drivers were on the road and queried how this could be addressed as they were more likely to be involved in an accident.

The Executive Director of Transport for West Midlands stated that each depot acquisition would be subject to a business case but the report to WMCA Board was more specific around the adoption of the strategy, and she assured councillors that the action plan for uninsured drivers was on the action plan.

In response to Councillor Liz Clements, the Executive Director of Transport for West Midlands discussed the challenges of operating the bus network, including the barriers to competition posed by depot ownership. She highlighted that the bus market was struggling, requiring heavy subsidies, with fewer operators bidding for contracts due to high start-up costs and that the strategy was proposed to address these issues, regardless of the future operating model. Regarding road safety and in response to Councillor Liz Clements and Pervez Akhtar, she reported that a business case on speed enforcement was reviewed, with adjustments being made in collaboration with local authorities. She confirmed that the strategy involved a mix of average speed enforcement, spot enforcement, and mobile units in partnership with West Midlands Police and confirmed discussions were ongoing with the police to explore revenue options, including the potential to retain some of the fines locally. The Executive Director of Transport for West Midlands also confirmed efforts to centralise contracts for camera enforcement aiming for better financial efficiency.

Councillor Carol Hyatt shared anecdotal evidence of Ring & Ride and shared the potential benefit of the proposed target operated model being implemented, stressing the importance of getting it right first time and the value the investment could bring.

Councillor Pervez Akhtar considered that lack of information within the summary report did not allow for effective scrutiny ahead of the Q&A with the Mayor. This was supported by the Chair, and it was confirmed that the call-in process will be shared with the committee along with the final reports once completed.

Councillor Harbinder Singh emphasised that the primary goal of speed cameras was not to generate revenue, but to reduce speed and improve safety. He pointed out that there is no issue of racing cars in Coventry due to the presence of speed cameras and stressed the importance of deploying them across the region to prevent fatalities caused by the absence of such measures. He also highlighted the financial burden on the NHS from injuries and casualties resulting from road accidents. The Chair agreed, highlighting the need for collaboration between Operation Hercules and average speed cameras.

The Executive Director of Transport for West Midlands discussed the costs involved but acknowledged that while protecting lives was priceless, there is still a necessary financial commitment. She confirmed that work was being done within the business case to explore all funding options between organisations.

Councillor Ian Kettle raised additional concerns about the societal impact of racing cars on public highways, including the costs of damages and the antisocial behaviour, such as noise nuisance, affecting communities. Councillor Liz Clements requested continued efforts by local authorities to lobby for funding and seek Government support to cover the associated costs.

Resolved:

The reports that were due to be presented at the WMCA Board on the 11 October 2024 be noted, and committee members continue to input on these subjects through discussions in the Member Engagement Groups.

106. Member Engagement Groups - Progress Report

Before the report was considered, the Chair confirmed that the recommendation from the Member Engagement Group review would be brought to the next committee meeting, although confirmed that any changes agreed would not be implemented until the next municipal year.

Councillors raised key highlights from their meetings set out within the report. Councillor Robert Alden highlighted lessons learned from the speed enforcement rollout and emphasised the importance of timely delivery. He encouraged councillors to share any issues they would like the MEG to cover. Councillor Pervez Akhtar requested that the Midland Metro be considered in future MEG discussions.

Councillor Ian Ward referenced bus retrofitting and Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas schemes and requested an update from the Department for Transport since the July meeting. The Executive Director of Transport for West Midlands confirmed no further updates had been received but assured they would be shared with the MEG when available.

In response to Councillor Carol Hyatt's concerns about the lack of a replacement for the Implementation Manager for Sustainability & Active Travel, the Executive Director of Transport for West Midlands confirmed the recruitment process for a replacement was underway.

Finally, Councillor Leslie Kaye provided an overview of key topics discussed at the recent Passenger Safety MEG with a focus on the draft Safer Travel Plan.

Resolved:

(1) The report received from each Scrutiny Lead in respect of their recent Member Engagement Group be noted.

(2) Specific recommendations made by the MEGs to the committee be agreed, specifically:

(a) It be noted that further details about the challenges facing active travel infrastructure delivery would be discussed at the next meeting of the Sustainability & Active Travel MEG.

(b) The renaming of the Passenger First Member Engagement Group to the Passenger & Communications Member Engagement Group be endorsed.

(c) In respect of the Ring & Ride/Demand Responsive Transport Target Operating Model, the details of this, which was currently being procured and had been supported by the former WMCA Lead Member for Transport and endorsed by Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 22 January 2024 be noted, acknowledging that the service specification reflected the recommendations of the high-level strategic appraisal of the Ring & Ride service.

(d) An action for a briefing note for members of the committee be produced to highlight opportunities around bus options in the short term and in the longer term as part of bus franchising be noted.

107. Work Programme

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer presented the forward plan and work programme. Reference was made to the finance scrutiny sessions, the upcoming Mayoral Q&As and their preparation workshops.

It was requested that a report on bus propositions would be brought to the committee for scrutiny and it was confirmed this would be added to the work programme.

108. Date of Next Meeting

Monday 21 October at 10:00am

The meeting ended at 1.00 pm.