

Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date	4 September 2023
Report title	Member Engagement Groups - Progress Report
Scrutiny Champions	Air Quality, Congestion & Environmental Impact - Councillor Ian Ward Finance & Performance - Councillor Pervez Akhtar Passenger First - Councillor Mary Locke Passenger & Road Safety - Councillor David Stanley Rail, Metro & Sprint - Councillor Tim Huxtable Sustainability & Active Travel - Councillor Martin McCarthy

Background

1. At its meeting on 9 June, the WMCA Board agreed revised transport governance arrangements for the forthcoming year. These new arrangements included the amalgamation of the former Transport Delivery Committee and Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee into a new Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Also approved was the continuation of six Member Engagement Groups, which have existed since 2017 and provide members with an opportunity to meet and discuss in more detail transport-related issues that are grouped around broad thematic areas.
2. Although the Member Engagement Groups are not decision making, they provide a forum for members to develop a deeper understanding of those matters that would not otherwise be able to be discussed in such detail at committee meetings.

Future Arrangements Review

3. The MEGs were originally developed under the remit of the former Transport Delivery Committee, and were retained this year following a clear steer from members that they valued the role of MEGs in complementing and assisting the more formal parent committee.

4. However, given that the MEGs should now have a more clear overview and scrutiny (rather than delivery) focus, it is recognised that there would be value in members and officers agreeing a shared understanding of the remit and purpose of the MEGs, including how they might best report into the Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee on a regular basis and help support this committee's work. It is expected that this work will be undertaken over the coming weeks and will report back to the next meeting of the committee on 30 October.

Member Engagement Groups Meeting Updates

5. An update from Member Engagement Groups that have met since the last meeting of the committee is set out below:

Rail, Metro & Sprint - 31 July (Councillor Tim Huxtable)

6. The Rail Metro & Sprint MEG met on Monday 31 July.

- **Highlights and Performance**

The group received presentations from representatives of all three modes covering operations and capital delivery. On rail, the group discussed the Midlands Rail Hub and the wider network connectivity benefits that would arise from its implementation.

On Metro, the group reviewed the operating key performance indicators and noted that Midland Metro Ltd were working internally to improve reliability, as too many services are turned short. On Metro extensions, the group received an update on all four projects: Wolverhampton, Wednesbury - Brierley Hill, Birmingham Eastside, and Birmingham Westside.

The corridor between Stourbridge and Brierley Hill was discussed, with members hearing that TfWM were developing a corridor study with input from local stakeholders such as PMOL (the current operators of the Stourbridge Town-Stourbridge Junction shuttle).

On Sprint, the group reviewed the key statistics for phase 1 to Walsall. This included evidence of average journey time reductions and improved customer satisfaction. An update was also provided on the Cross City bus project.

- **Challenges and Risks**

The group covered the ongoing station retail reforms and agreed to revisit this at a future meeting. The group noted that a decision on whether Midlands Rail Hub would be funded to final business case stage had still not been made by Government, with the hope of a determination in autumn 2023.

- **Recommendations**

The group recommended that a series of site visits be organised for the group to locations of interest across all three modes, including Camp Hill Line stations and an HS2 construction site. The latter would ideally be extended to all TDOSC members.

7. The next meeting of the Rail, Metro & Sprint MEG will be held on Monday 9 October.

Passenger & Road Safety - 16 August (Councillor David Stanley)

8. The Passenger & Road Safety MEG met on Wednesday 16 August.

- **Highlights & Performance**

Passenger Safety:

Year-to-date crime across the public transport network decreased to 10.1% compared to 22/23 figures.

Bus crime decreased during the past month with 364 crimes (8.7%).

Train crime decreased last month with 206 crimes (2.5%).

Metro crime decreased with 2 crimes last month (75%).

Anti-social behaviour: the number of incidents reported a decrease from 256 to 221 (13.7%).

There were 17.6m passenger journeys made by bus in the last month, approximately 4.9m train passenger journeys and 670,000 tram passenger journeys.

Road Safety:

A report on the Refreshed Regional Road Safety Strategy would be taken to September's WMCA Board. The report was shared and next steps to be discussed in October's meeting.

- **Challenges & Risks**

Long-term funding for Transport Safety Officers, post-2025.

- **Recommendations**

There were no direct recommendations to TDOSC arising out of the meeting. Kerry Blakeman (Head of Security & Policing) extended an invitation to TDOSC to visit the CCTV Suite and the Regional Transport Co-ordination Centre.

9. The next meeting of the Passenger & Rail Safety MEG will be held on Monday 9 October.

Air Quality, Congestion & Environmental Impact - 22 August (Councillor Ian Ward)

10. The Air Quality, Congestion & Environmental Impact MEG met on Tuesday 22 August.

- **Highlights & Performance**

The group considered an overview paper on air quality and the West Midlands. This covered the importance of air quality, the main pollutants of concern for TfWM - PM2.5 (fine particles) and NO2, national legal targets and current West Midlands performance, national, regional and local policy and strategy, key areas of TfWM work to improve air quality and current issues.

The group also considered a presentation on the West Midlands Local Transport Plan (LTP5) and on bus network congestion and bus vehicle emissions.

The group noted its terms of reference without any amendments.

- **Challenges & Risks**

The group highlighted the importance of national policy direction for local air quality improvements, the need for political support to achieve mode shift to public transport, cycling and walking and the need for consensus on the scientific evidence base which informs air quality policy and strategy.

- **Recommendations**

The group agreed a 2203/24 workplan based on understanding West Midlands local authority approaches to reduce NO2 and PM2.5 emissions, a presentation on bus strategy to increase mode share, including the role of Demand Responsive Transport, a presentation from University of Birmingham WM-Air on recommendations to improve public health through better air quality, the role of green infrastructure, and regular updates on West Midlands Local Transport Plan development and TfWM work towards achieving a 100% Euro VI West Midlands bus fleet.

11. The next meeting of the Air Quality, Congestion & Environmental Impact MEG is to be arranged.

Finance & Performance - 22 August (Councillor Pervez Akhtar)

12. The Finance & Performance MEG met on Tuesday 22 August.

- **Highlights & Performance**

New members of the group were welcomed, and the importance of attendance was emphasised. The terms of reference for the MEG were reviewed but it was agreed that these would need to be reconsidered once the Chair and Scrutiny Champions had met to discuss the role of MEGs.

The workplan of the committee for the year was discussed. It was agreed that transport element of the Medium Term Financial Plan, bus delivery options and performance reporting would all be items for future meetings as these represented key areas where the group could support TDOSC with specific finance understanding.

- **Challenges & Risks**

The risk around the Medium Term Financial Plan in relation to transport revenue was highlighted and agreed as an important issue for members to be aware of in relation to transport finances. Members noted the £26m budget gap on transport operations for 2024/25 highlighted in the July WMCA Board report.

The continued risk around bus funding and the risk to the network was also noted.

13. The next meeting of the Finance & Performance MEG is to be arranged.

Passenger First - 23 August (Councillor Mary Locke)

14. The Passenger First MEG met on Wednesday 23 August.

- **Highlights & Performance**

Members were made aware of changes to the senior management team at National Express Bus, with David Bradford and Chris Gibbens both now having left. TfWM's main contact at National Express Bus is now Antony Goozee, which does provide some continuity.

- **Challenges & Risks**

Members were concerned that that changes and potential instability at National Express may have implications for the security of the West Midlands bus network.

As at the time of the meeting TfWM were still awaiting approval from the DfT for the repurposing of some of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding to network support, which aims to secure the majority of bus services until the end of 2024. Once this approval is received, we then have to go through subsidy control (previously state aid law) this is an 8–10-week process, during which no payments to operators can be made. Members expressed concern that we are in a limbo period. The Government have previously given an assurance that Ministers were able to sign off these during the summer recess.

The group was made aware that there is potential for industrial action by drivers at Stagecoach, operating a large number of bus services in Coventry and a number of services in Birmingham and Solihull. Unions have given notice of intention to strike from Tuesday 5th September. Talks are ongoing to hopefully avoid this, but Stagecoach are working up their operational plan as to how the strikes are mitigated, including providing an alternative network of services that they can operate in the event of the strike going ahead.

Members expressed concern that the TfWM website was not being kept up to date, with several pages out of date and lacking information on current important items, such as the West Midlands Bus Passenger Charter and information on the railway station ticket office consultation.

- **Recommendations**

No recommendations were made at the meeting of this Member Engagement Group.

15. The next meeting of the Passenger First MEG will be held on Wednesday 18 October.

Sustainability & Active Travel - 5 September (Councillor Martin McCarthy)

16. The first meeting had to be delayed during the months of July and August and will be held on Tuesday 5 September. This was the first available date the MEG was able to meet.

Strategic Aims and Objectives

Whilst a robust and effective overview and scrutiny function impacts on all of the WMCA's corporate aims, there is a direct link to the following:

Aim 5 - Securing new powers and resources from central government.

Aim 6 - Developing our organisation and our role as a good regional partner.

Financial Implications

17. There are no direct finance implications arising out of this report.

Legal Implications

18. Overview and scrutiny is a statutory function of the WMCA and the activity highlighted within this report contributes towards meeting this responsibility.

Single Assurance Framework Implications

19. There are no direct implications for the Single Assurance Framework arising out of this report.

Equalities Implications

20. There are no direct equalities implications arising out of this report.

Inclusive Growth Implications

21. There are no direct inclusive growth implications arising out of this report.

Geographical Area of Report's Implications

22. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee comprises members from across the constituent and non-constituent authorities participating within the WMCA.

Other Implications

23. There are no other direct implications arising out of this report.