

Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee

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Report title	Member Engagement Groups - Progress Report
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Scrutiny Champions	Air Quality, Congestion & Environmental Impact - Councillor Ian Ward Finance & Performance - Councillor Pervez Akhtar Passenger First - Councillor Carol Hyatt 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. Part of these arrangements include six Member Engagement Groups, which 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.

Member Engagement Groups Meeting Updates

3. An update from Member Engagement Groups that have met since the last meeting of the committee is set out below:
4. **Rail, Metro & Sprint** - 9 October (Councillor Tim Huxtable)

The Rail Metro & Sprint MEG met on Monday 9 October.

- **Highlights & Performance**

The MEG received a detailed update on the impacts of the Government's recent decision to cancel Phase 2a, 2b (west) and 2b (east) of HS2. These impacts included the decision to dispose of land already purchased for Phase 2a and the removal of any safeguards, which would make it extremely difficult to ever reinstate this part of the project.

The MEG were advised that the announcement meant that it would reduce the prospect of being able to deliver much of the recently published West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy. The MEG also noted that many other local authority and Strategic Transport Board plans were predicated on the released capacity provided by HS2, and that these plans would now have to be reconsidered.

A discussion took place on the suite of potential alternative schemes announcement by the Government under the banner of 'Network North'. The MEG heard that these included the Midlands Rail Hub, which was stated to be delivered "in full". The MEG noted that this and other schemes within Network North would still be subject to business case and planning (where necessary), meaning that they were not yet guaranteed.

The MEG debated a paper on Rail Fares and Ticketing reform that was due to be taken to this committee elsewhere on the agenda. The MEG requested more detail on the customer and stakeholder communications plan that would accompany any introduction of the simplified fares structure detailed in the paper.

The MEG noted the good news that the Metro extension to Wolverhampton station opened to passengers on 17 September. Elsewhere on the Metro network, the MEG heard that funding has been identified, subject to value for money checks, to deliver second phase as far as Merry Hill. Works continued to progress along the route.

On the Eastside Metro extension, the MEG were advised that track and highway changes were now installed in section 1 on Lower Bull Street. Governance processes were being completed to start works on section 2 through to the Clayton Hotel.

- **Challenges & Risks**

WMCA are continuing to work on resolving the financial shortfall to deliver the Metro to Brierley Hill.

The MEG noted that passenger bodies Transport Focus and London TravelWatch had until 31 October to complete their analysis of the railway station retail reform proposals that were consulted on over the summer.

Recommendations

- (1) The MEG agreed to devote much of the November meeting to a detailed analysis of Midlands Rail hub following the announcement that it would be delivered 'in full' as part of Network North.
- (2) The MEG is planning various site visits, which will be spread both modally and geographically.
- (3) The MEG intends to invite the community lead from Network Rail to its December meeting to understand more about what the rail industry is doing in this space.

The next meeting of the Rail, Metro & Sprint MEG will be held on 19 November.

5. **Passenger & Road Safety** - 9 October (Councillor David Stanley)

The Passenger & Road Safety MEG met on Monday 9 October.

- **Highlights & Performance**

- Passenger Safety:

- Year to date crime across the public transport network decreased 38.6% compared to 2022/23 figures.

- Against Last month West Midlands force crime has decreased by 0.1%.

- Bus crime decreased during the past month with 295 crimes (23.4%).

- Train crime increased last month with 241 crimes.

- Metro crime increased with 11 crimes last month.

- Anti-Social Behaviour, the number of incidents reported an increase from 221 to 226 (2.26%).

- There were 16.4 million passenger journeys were made by bus in that time period and approx. 4.46 million train passenger journeys, and 698,400 tram passengers.

- Road Safety:

- The Refreshed Regional Road Safety Strategy 2023-2030 was approved by WMCA Board on 15 September. This adopts Vision Zero (eliminating road death and serious injury on our network) and implements a systematic and collaborative approach that guides Regional Road Safety Partnership activity.

- The stretched casualty reduction target is a 50% reduction in the number of people killed and seriously injured by 2030.

- The number of fatalities has reduced from 59 during the 2015-2017 baseline period to 51 in 2022, although when comparing 2019 to 2022 (pre and post COVID19) the number of fatalities has started to increase again.

Despite this, when undertaking a proportionate analysis of fatalities per million miles travelled in the region, 2022 data shows a year-on-year decline in fatalities.

The recent Passenger and Road Safety travel survey shows that enforcement of speed limits is the most important issue for respondents. Also, 55% of respondents agreed with the statement '*Road safety is good in my area*' – (Somewhat Agree 24%, 23% Agree and 8% Strongly Agree).

- **Challenges & Risks**

There were no noted challenges and risks this meeting.

Recommendations

(1) The Terms of Reference of the Group were approved.

The next meeting of the Passenger & Road Safety MEG will be held on 14 November.

6. **Air Quality, Congestion & Environmental Impact** - 26 September (Councillor Ian Ward)

The Air Quality, Congestion & Environmental Impact MEG met on Tuesday 26 September.

- **Highlights & Performance**

The MEG considered a report reviewing current West Midlands local authority approaches and priorities for improving air quality.

This noted the current shift in emphasis to tackling PM2.5's, rather than the recent focus on Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂). This is often based on reducing domestic burning of wood and coal through awareness raising of the air quality issues, and advice-led enforcement of smoke control area restrictions. Use of supplementary planning guidance to minimise emissions from new developments is also highlighted.

Much work to tackle NO₂ is still underway, based on transport improvements to promote public transport, cycling and walking; the installation of electric vehicle charging points; environmental improvements to the bus fleet and traffic management at junctions, including improved traffic signals.

The MEG also received a presentation from the WMCA Environment Team on the draft Regional Air Quality Framework Implementation Plan.

This sets out priorities for regional work over the next two years. The MEG was supportive of the work but noted that the national UK air quality targets have predominantly been established to accommodate the challenges faced by London in reaching them. The MEG therefore stressed the need for WMCA to consider more stretching targets than the national UK targets. These stretching targets should reflect the air quality challenges in the West Midlands and the health interests of the people of the region.

- **Challenges & Risks**

The Group highlighted the importance of maintaining air quality as a high policy priority, even where legal levels for pollutants had now been met. This recognises that World Health Organisation targets for Nitrogen Dioxide and fine particles (PM2.5) are more ambitious than national UK targets.

Recommendations

- (1) That Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommends to the WMCA that it considers adopting, as part of development of the Regional Air Quality Framework, stretch targets which are more ambitious in terms of timescales and pollutant concentration targets than the UK Government air quality targets, and which are closer to World Health Organisation (WHO) targets for NO₂ and PM_{2.5}

The next meeting of the Air Quality, Congestion & Environmental Impact MEG will be held 28 November.

7. Finance & Performance – 3 October (Councillor Pervez Akhtar)

The Finance & Performance MEG met on Tuesday 3 October.

- **Highlights & Performance**

This meeting focussed on 2 key items:

- An update on the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) in relation to transport
- An update on bus funding.

Members were taken through a presentation that set out the process for updating the MTFP and key touchpoints with WMCA Board to report the position, the financial context for financial planning and detail on the transport element. Members were reminded of the position reported to September WMCA Board showing a transport funding gap of £28m for 2024/25 rising to £70m by the end of the MTFP 5 year period. Options to address this gap were discussed at the Mayor & Portfolio Leads Liaison meeting and would be reported for agreement at a future WMCA Board. Members were reminded that c.43% of transport spend delivers statutory obligations. Further detail was provided to members on activities delivered for the transport spend. Finally the key risk within transport revenue finance was identified as being the ongoing risk around bus funding and stability of the commercial network.

Jon Hayes had joined the meeting to give an update on bus funding from an operational perspective. There was an update on the current patronage levels and a description of the process that had been undertaken to determine the funding package that has been put in place to ensure network stability to Dec 2024. £40m of BSIP funding has been reprofiled alongside BSOG+ funding from DfT and WMCA earmarked reserves. The funding package is currently undergoing the subsidy control assessment process under the Subsidy Control Act that has replaced previous state aid regulations.

- **Challenges & Risks**

The continued challenging landscape around transport finances and the need for a sustainable funding solution was noted as well as the requirement for all local authorities and MCAs to set a balanced budget for 2024/25 by the end of February 2024 as a statutory requirement.

- **Recommendations**

- (1) It was agreed that bus delivery options would be part of the future workplan for the MEG and Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee as a whole.
- (2) It was noted that the process for 2024/25 budget scrutiny between Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Overview & Scrutiny Committee was due to be discussed between the Chairs and S151 Officer at a later date.

The next meeting of the Finance & Performance MEG will be held Tuesday 28 November.

8. **Passenger First** - 4 October (Councillor Carol Hyatt)

The Passenger First MEG met on Wednesday 4 October.

- **Highlights & Performance**

The group met on 4 October 2023 and received an update on the WMCA/TfWM Communications team, which has seen some reorganisation of roles. Aimee Dyer the Strategic communication manager gave an overview of the different aspects of communication.

Jon Hayes gave a verbal report to explain some key changes to take place with regards to operator funding and services. Operating within clear financial constraints, the results of operators making choices about which services they are prepared to run and TfWM evaluating which services can be and should be supported have recently been circulated to all councillors. Of interest is that we now have 96% of pre-Covid levels of bus use running on 89% of the network. This means that the buses that are running are by and large fuller and more viable as a result, although this had resulted in an increased cost of operation. There has been a shift in how buses are used with an increase in weekend use. Funding is in place to support a relatively stable bus network until December 2024. Beyond that point funding is to be decided.

The MEG were made aware of a petition which has been received for 6 months free travel for students. Whilst this was not supported as a result of assumptions made about the potential for uptake of existing initiatives, it was asked that this uptake be monitored and that information brought back to the meeting at a later date for review.

Jon Hayes presented a slide deck on the Ring and Ride service, about which concerns have been made by the Chair and the Passenger Satisfaction Steering Group. A re-evaluation of the service provision is to take place which will include retendering of the existing service. The Strategic Committee is also to review the Ring and Ride Service and this group will be kept up to date with progress.

The meeting then progressed to an external meeting which allowed a local councillor to present a second petition about the removal of a section of bus route during weekdays. Whilst the constraints of the timetable, passenger numbers and finances allow little movement at the moment, a commitment to evaluate current passenger experience in transferring from one bus to another to complete their journey and the quality of the existing Diamond provision from the perspective of passengers was gained. The feedback from the councillor can also be considered when the existing provision is next considered.

- **Challenges & Risks**

Concern was raised that communication could be improved, an example given that communication about the Local Transport Plan had not reached Wolverhampton council quickly, it was promised that information about works at the new Dudley Bus station would reach Dudley Council and councillors to share with residents in a timelier manner.

Regarding Ring and Ride the MEG asked if it was worth a lessons learnt, given that the Strategic Committee is to look at the Ring and Ride service and an evaluation is to take place which will involve retendering the service. The results of merging the two provisions in Coventry have still not been reported back. Would this be unnecessary duplication?

Recommendations

- (1) It be recommended that councillors and the resources of individual councils are made full use of when information needs to reach as many passengers as possible.

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

9. **Sustainability & Active Travel** -Tuesday 3 October (Councillor Martin McCarthy)

The Sustainability & Active Travel MEG met on 3 October.

- **Highlights & Performance**

The MEG received a presentation from Eliot Wilde, Zero Emission Bus Programme Manager, on the progress of TfWM's Zero Emission Bus Delivery Plan (ZEB).

The presentation highlighted the alignment of the ZEB delivery plan with fleet modernisation. The MEG considered that this needed more detailed development and delivery planning to support further progress towards improving air quality and achieving net zero emissions objectives.

It was noted that Hydrogen fuel cell busses have the potential to cover long endurance routes that Battery Electric busses struggle to cover without interim recharges.

The MEG discussed the subject of ZEB ownership considering the range of funding options around us.

The MEG learnt of the proposals to convert Walsall Bus Depot to zero emission operations for buses.

- **Challenges & Risks**

There remains around 100 pre Euro 6 diesel buses in service, representing about 5% of the overall fleet, that are yet to be retrofitted with emission reduction technology for harmful pollutants. Whilst WMCA has the funding, the retrofitting of these buses remains on hold pending a review by the DfT/ DEFRA into the efficacy of this technology. Separate funding exists for 6 of these to receive a repower solution to convert them from a diesel to a zero emission battery electric vehicle. These vehicles would be subject to range restrictions which would be lower than a new electric bus. Options around the use of this funding are being considered as this has not been taken up by any existing operator yet.

In discussion of TfWM's ZEBRA project which will deliver 100 hydrogen fuel cell electric buses (FCEBs), members have requested more information is on hydrogen supply and cost concerns.

Recommendations

- (1) Members were interested in how Tyseley power park was performing and as a result the potential for a visit to Tyseley or Perry Barr Depot was identified.

The next meeting of the Sustainability & Active Travel MEG will be held on Tuesday 21 November.

10. Strategic Aims and Objectives

A robust and effective overview & scrutiny function impacts on all of the WMCA's corporate aims.

11. Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising out of this report.

12. Legal Implications

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

13. Single Assurance Framework Implications

There are no direct implications for the single assurance framework arising out of this report.

14. Equalities Implications

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

15. **Inclusive Growth Implications**

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

16. **Geographical Area of Report's Implications**

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

17. **Other Implications**

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