

Councillor John McNicholas
Chair of Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee

15 December 2023

Dear Councillor McNicholas

RE: TDOSC Q&A Transport Policy & Delivery Matters meeting

Thank you to you, and all members of the Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee for hosting the above Q&A session with myself on 30 October 2023 where we discussed a range of Transport matters.

Members observations from that meeting have been shared with me, please see my response below.

(1) Bus Reliability

(O) WMCA officers should consider applying pressure on operators to improve the technology on buses to encourage accurate and reliable real-time information.

(R) The technological architecture for the provision of accurate Real Time Passenger information is complex. Whilst the operators have a role to play in this the responsibility sits across a number of stakeholders including but not limited to TfWM, Department for Transport (DfT), and third-party hardware and software providers. The TDOSC Putting Passengers First Member Engagement Group has requested a more in-depth review of the system, including the responsibilities, technological interdependencies and processes that are required to deliver accurate and trustworthy real time information for passengers. TfWM and suppliers have a robust process in place to monitor the reliability and performance of the system which includes hardware failures and information accuracy and looks to put in place urgent actions to resolve and identified issues.

Whilst this process for continued accountability is in place, we are seeking further development of the system to improve the end result for passengers. We are currently in the process of piloting a process to inform passengers of when a service is cancelled. This is

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in place for all operators with the exception of National Express. The Regional Transport Coordination Centre (RTCC) is leading on this pilot as it is well placed to act upon intelligence relating to bus performance, due to its communication and data links with bus operators. This is primarily through the Customer Information and Officers (CICO's), but additionally through the Duty Managers (DM's) where required, during the operational hours of 06:00 – 21:00 (Monday – Friday) and 09:00 – 21:00 (Saturday). The RTCC will act upon live operational intelligence, initially focussing on cancelled trips provided through the "service updates" email address, inputting these into the ITO world system to update RTI screens on the bus network. Additionally National Express representatives work within the centre, mirroring RTCC operations, which will be a benefit whilst the API from the National Express Mileage recording system delivered by EP Morris is developed and beyond.

Please note that as is current practise, when there is widespread disruption, (e.g., industrial action or severe weather) then a wider response will be initiated to include additional TfWM teams.

As a reminder, the cancelled trip information will not show in the TfWM app due to constraints with the supplier, and Google (and any other "open data" users) will not show the cancellations unless they update their outputs (at their discretion).

National Express (NXWM) are currently developing a technology solution which will take a feed from an existing system for reporting cancelled trips to allow this to inform the RTI system. This API is in the testing phase with National Express West Midlands and EP Morris. Once this is complete and a fully working API is available, Ito will undertake their development on Ito Notify. It is expected that this system will be fully delivered and operational by early Spring 2024, meaning any and all trips cancelled by NXWM will automatically flow through to RTI screens.

Under the West Midlands Bus Service Improvement Plan there is an aspiration to provide a Real Time Passenger Information feed for every bus in the region using smart phone technology to access the information. The ambition of this "RTI everywhere" work stream is for all stops across the network to provide a straightforward way for passengers to access a "virtual" real time information display using their own mobile devices, such as through a QR code or NFC tag, ensuring that this also provides information in a way that is accessible for those with disabilities. The virtual displays will mimic the functionality provided through physical screens and will therefore include information about cancelled trips and disruption messaging.

The contract to provide the system to support "RTI everywhere" has been awarded to Journeo and will commence 2 January 2024. They were the only bidder, and their solution will deliver a QR code-based system. The development of the system to TfWM's requirements is expected to take until April 2024 at which point a beta system and initial code will be produced for testing. Following sign-off for the beta system, the final solution

will be delivered, and a full set of codes will be produced by the summer. At this point, roll out of codes across bus stop infrastructure across the network will commence.

This matter will be covered in more detail during the deep dive with the team and scrutiny committee members.

(2) Demand Responsive Transport

(O) The committee explored whether the WMCA would consider using a demand responsive transport system to improve reliability and agreed that a report be considered at a future meeting.

(R) Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) is being considered as an option for providing transport links where fixed route services cannot be provided efficiently and is currently being trialled in Coventry and the Meriden gap. The future of DRT and Ring & Ride will be the subject of a report to TDOSC scheduled for 22nd January.

(3) Regional Road Safety Strategy - Action Plan

(O) The committee expressed a wish to be kept apprised on the development of the Regional Road Safety Strategy action plan and agreed that a report be presented at a future meeting.

(R) Following on from the Road Safety Partnership Away Days in June and October, a long list of 83 actions were identified as being relevant to the delivery of the objectives of the Local Transport Plan and Refreshed Regional Road Safety Strategy 2023-2030.

These were segregated into six categories (Road Safety Management, Safe Roads, Safe Speeds, Safe Vehicles, Safe Road Users and Post-Crash Care). Using a bespoke sifting criterion, the Road Safety Partnership met again on the 1 December to prioritise each action, modify the wording of the actions to provide greater focus on the Safe System and identify any remaining gaps that needed addressing. These will now be used to formulate a Draft Road Safety Action Plan 2024-2030 in preparation for formal consultation commencing in February 2024.

Between now and the consultation period, TfWM has initiated an Engagement Plan including Road Safety Roads Shows, support of National Road Safety Week and briefings to community groups. The aim of this Plan is to ensure that TfWM, on behalf of the Road Safety Partnership, is reaching out to all road users to gather their views on the long list of actions and their needs, and in particular those that are deemed vulnerable road users and those living in ward areas with high levels of road safety issues. Once the consultation exercise is complete, the intention is to finalise an Action Plan that supports local and regional delivery and works collectively towards Vision Zero and achievement of the 2030 casualty reduction target.

The team will keep the committee updated on progress of the Action Plan at future meetings.

(4) Communications and Engagement

(O) The committee considered that communication and engagement was an area that needed further review by the Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

(R) Both the WMCA Director of Communications and TfWM Head of Marketing & Engagement met with yourself on 18 December to discuss the matter of communication and engagement further. I understand the outcome from this meeting is that the remit of the proposed Task and Finish group has been agreed and will be focussed on member engagement and in particular, members who sit on WMCA boards.

It was agreed that James Hughes will be leading this piece of work, however, to ensure there is still visibility of public communications, TfWM will be taking a paper to the February pre-member briefing.

Thank you for your time at the Q&A session and I hope my response provides all the information you require, however, please do not hesitate to come back to me if you do require anything additional.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Mike Bird
WMCA Transport Portfolio Lead