

## Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date</b>	22 January 2024
<b>Report title</b>	Member Engagement Groups - Progress Report
<b>Accountable Chief Executive</b>	Laura Shoaf, West Midlands Combined Authority email: laura.shoaf@wmca.org.uk
<b>Accountable Employee</b>	Pete Bond, Director of Integrated Transport Services email: pete.bond@tfwm.org.uk
<b>Scrutiny Champions</b>	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

### Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

### The Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- (1) Note the report, and consider whether it wishes to consider any of the matters discussed at the recent Member Engagement Groups at a future meeting.

## 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 Subcommittee 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 – 18 December (Councillor Tim Huxtable)**

The Rail Metro & Sprint MEG met on Monday 18 December. This will be reported on at the 22 January committee meeting as it will fall too close to the date that these papers need to be finalised.

The next meeting of the Rail, Metro & Sprint MEG will be held on Monday 5 February.

5. **Passenger & Road Safety – 13 December (Councillor David Stanley)**  
The Passenger & Road Safety MEG met on Tuesday 13 December.

- **Highlights & Performance**

Passenger Safety:

- Year to date crime across the public transport network decreased 22% compared to 2022/23 figures.
- Against last month, West Midlands force crime has decreased by 6.9%.
- Bus crime decreased during the past month with 338 crimes (-8.7%).
- Train crime increased last month with 159 crimes (16.4%).
- Metro crime increased with 13 crimes last month.
- Anti-Social Behaviour, the number of incidents reported a decrease from 423 to 415 (which were mainly vaping reports).
- There were 18.9 million passenger journeys made by bus in that time period, approx 5.3 million train passenger journeys, and 754,000 tram passengers.

## Road Safety:

- There were three fatal collisions in November resulting in a further four fatalities on our roads.
- This takes the recorded total fatalities to 46 for January to November 2023, compared to 44 during the same period in 2022. That said, 12 fatalities were recorded in December 2022, which is significantly over the monthly average, so we are hopeful of seeing an overall year on year reduction in road fatalities in the region for 2023.
- A long list of 83 actions have been identified by the Road Safety Partnership as being relevant to the delivery of the objectives of the Local Transport Plan and Refreshed Regional Road Safety Strategy 2023-2030. These have been prioritised and will be used to formulate a Draft Road Safety Action Plan 2024-2030 in preparation for formal consultation commencing in February 2024.
- Average Speed Enforcement (ASE): Slow progress is being made in agreeing a new Operational Working Agreement for average speed enforcement between local authorities, West Midlands Police and TfWM. However, WMP has written to all local authorities and TfWM to outline their position and offer for the future management of the scheme.

- **Challenges & Risks**

There were no noted challenges and risks this meeting.

- **Recommendations**

There were no recommendations.

The next meeting of the Passenger & Road Safety MEG will be held on 1 February 2024.

## 7. **Air Quality, Congestion & Environmental Impact** – 28 November (Councillor Ian Ward)

The Air Quality, Congestion & Environmental Impact MEG met on Tuesday 28 November. This led to the item on the role of green infrastructure for air quality and climate resilience being on the agenda of this 22 January TDOSC meeting. The MEG will meet on 30 January. The agenda items for discussion are considered below.

- **Highlights & Performance**

The meeting on 30 January will consider:

- Bus issues relating to improving air quality.
- University of Birmingham WM-Air Research Modelling exercises, covering predicted air quality impacts of motorway and main road speed reductions, electrifying the vehicle fleet and road closures.
- PM2.5 source apportionment

- **Challenges & Risks**

Challenges of improving air quality by the bus and transport sector will be considered.

- **Recommendations**

The outputs of the meeting will be considered for any recommendations to take to a future TDOSC meeting.

8. **Finance & Performance** – 16 January (Councillor Pervez Akhtar)

The Finance & Performance MEG met on 16 January. A verbal update will be provided at the Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

9. **Passenger First** – 3 January (Councillor Carol Hyatt)

The Passenger First MEG met on Wednesday 3 January 2024.

- **Highlights & Performance**

The MEG started as a public meeting by welcoming a representative of Ring and Ride users to share her experiences of how changes had affected the service since the Covid pandemic and subsequent takeover by National Express. It was explained that a key negative change was the inability to block book services for passengers and in advance of travel, this had meant that several users had not been able to attend regular activities. This had also impacted on carers and some users had had to catch taxis, with the level of care users experience when travelling by taxi nowhere near the levels previously provided by the Ring and Ride drivers. Additional operational issues were highlighted including problems with drop off and pick up locations and reliability and punctuality. The Chair asked if the problems were a result of the service being reduced, therefore users being unable to secure a place? It was explained that the main issue was that as carers could not block book on behalf of users, who needed the security of knowing that a place was booked, the service was no longer being used at all by these passengers to attend this specific activity, and there were a lot of service users who would like to use Ring and Ride to attend the sessions. A number of councillors present agreed with the comments that had been made, explaining that they received similar feedback from their constituents.

In response to the concerns raised, officers explained that there was an agreed change, which was previously shared with Transport Delivery Committee, when the service was taken over by National Express from the Accessible Transport Group (ATG), with more of a focus on travel for individuals, not groups, to attend essential services, activities and appointments. Passengers could still use the service to attend group activities, but it was not possible to guarantee travel as a group or facilitate

block bookings. Whilst Ring and Ride could no longer guarantee that users can travel together, effectively private group hire, there were alternative organisations, such as Community Transport Group, who could offer a more bespoke private hire arrangement to not-for profit groups at a reasonable cost. A councillor asked how many Ring and Ride vehicles operated in total and if they were equally applied. Officers confirmed that a total of 70 vehicles were available, and they were equally divided according to population size of each district, with the exception of Coventry, which had additional capacity due to the service there also incorporating the On-Demand bus service. This was a reduction from the 112 vehicles that were available prior to the Covid pandemic and the previous operator, ATG, entering into administration.

Officers committed to getting in touch with the passenger representative for further discussion on the concerns raised and share details of the Community Transport Group who would be able to provide the service being asked for. Additionally, should members have concerns raised with them directly around the performance of Ring and Ride then the specifics of these issues should be raised through the Members Engagement email address for investigation.

The meeting then moved to private session and picked up an item from the previous meeting, the Chair had passed on contact details for a Punjabi speaking language station and NHS recognised, Wolverhampton Community Radio station, however no contact has been made yet. The stations and Wolverhampton's own council were keen to engage to share important information for free, via their channels. It was possible that limiting information to paid for channels only had limited the people reached.

To follow on from the Ring and Ride item previously discussed, officers referred to the draft Ring and Ride Target Operating Model paper that had been shared ahead of it being presented to TDOSC. Councillors asked if the full paper would include comparisons to how such services were provided in other similar areas and if it would expand on the Coventry trial. Officers responded that other large met authorities provide a very similar service, but they did get better value for money, albeit with in some cases much higher fares. The Chair asked for clarification of the timeline and to understand what targets have been set and asked if TfWM had looked at other sources of funding. Officers confirmed that consideration of wider funding streams and benchmarking against similar services in other places would be incorporated into the wider review. Whilst there were no specific targets as yet, these would be developed with the successful supplier and include metrics such as patronage, reliability and punctuality, customer satisfaction etc., with key themes for a more inclusive service. In terms of timeline looking for new model to run from early 2025 to incorporate any changes needed as a result of any changes to local bus service provision. Contract due to be awarded in early mid 2024 with mobilization over the second half of 2024 and service launch in early 2025.

Members received a Bus Business update, starting with an update on festive service provision, with next steps to look at usage to inform proposals for Christmas 2024. Officers confirmed that in the week before Christmas the Terms and Conditions were signed off for Bus Service Operators Grant+ funding and the Network Support Grant using money reallocated with the West Midlands Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). This would result in a largely stable network to the end of December 2024 with the exception of changes required due to changes in travel habits or as a result of congestion on journey times. A region wide bus network review would be undertaken during 2024 for implementation in January 2025 which due to the current funding predictions could result in significant service reductions unless additional funding can be secured. Officers were currently engaged in dialogue with DfT around funding for bus services beyond the end of the 24/25 financial year.

Members were reminded that Dudley bus station would close for redevelopment from 13 January with services moving to a temporary interchange from Sunday 14 January.

Members were presented with an excellent overview of bus network performance system that was currently under development to look at how we can monitor and seek to work with operators to improve the quality of bus journey monitoring. A key change to note was that this now gave us access to all operators operational data. Some of the anomalies and issues with data and technology that had already been discovered was explained, including late and early running and why some services were not being correctly tracked. A councillor asked as to why some timing points had been moved, with drivers advising that timing points had, in some cases been moved to stops that were not suitable. Officers asked for specific feedback as there should be sufficient room at timing points for buses to be able to await time whilst not blocking traffic. Councillors raised concerns around buses running in convoy, officers advised this happened as a result of congestion, but should be managed more effectively and asked for councillors to send officers details to allow further action to be taken.

Members then received some brief comments on a Fares and Ticketing report that had been shared, which the Chair commended the officer on as it was very comprehensive and well structured. Key updates to note that TfWM would have full multi modal capped ticketing and were only 1 of 2 areas that the Government was working on with regards to Swift on rail. The work being done in the West Midlands would shape future national developments.

As delegated by the TDOSC, members received a presentation on work to passengers expressed issues with real time bus information and the current program of work to resolve the issues. The presentation, which was to be shared with members, included details of the challenges and resolution. A councillor raised concerns that in the Dudley area screens only ever showed scheduled times rather than the countdown and asked why destinations were often incorrect. The officer responded that we are aware

that some data errors occurred and did make manual changes where these were brought to our attention. Members were asked to report the detail of such occasions when either services are not displaying real time information or where destination information appeared incorrect. A further detailed discussion around this issue would take place at a future meeting with a full update to be brought to TDOSC in March.

Due to the meeting overrunning it was agreed to defer the customer service update, which included detail around operator complaints to the next meeting. It was also agreed to defer the cycle hire update to the next meeting and to include an update on e-scooters in this item.**Challenges & Risks**

Bus Business: During the festive period bus passenger numbers were slightly down on the previous year and costs are considerably up. Members also made aware that it is extremely likely that we will be looking at significant bus service changes from January 2025 with service reductions likely as a result of reduced funding.

- **Recommendations**

Ring and Ride: Officers to contact the service user who joined the meeting to investigate the detail of some of her issues. All councillors encouraged to email officer with individual and specific praise and complaints with specific details of where current service is falling short of expectations. All councillors are also encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity to visit the Ring and Ride booking centre at 16 Summer Lane ahead of the next TDOSC on 22 January.

Target Operating Model: Officers to look at specific targets and to see how feedback can best be obtained from a broad range of users including drivers.

Communications: The use of local information radio stations shared by councillors to be acted upon and this to be an agenda item in the forthcoming MEG meeting to assure councillors that this is taking place. Further details of how hard to reach customers are being reached to be part of the report.

The next meeting of the Passenger First MEG will be held on Wednesday 7 February 2024.

## 10. **Sustainability & Active Travel** – 9 January (Councillor Martin McCarthy)

The Sustainability & Active Travel MEG met on Tuesday 9 January.

- **Highlights & Performance**

The MEG was hosted at the West Midlands Cycle Hire depot in Selly Oak and the group received a presentation from Andrew Thrupp, Head of Operational Assets, TfWM and Stephen Bermingham, Implementation Manager (Micromobility), TfWM.

The presentation outlined the West Midlands Cycle Hire (WMCH) scheme, which was a regional scheme that had been signed off by the WMCA Board, on the basis of having the provision across each of the West Midlands Combined Authority areas.

Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) currently had a 5-year contract in place with Serco, which is due to end in October 2025, originally launching in March 2021. 1500 bikes are available, 10% of them e-bikes. At present, e-bikes were well-used, scheme users appear to be willing to pay an additional fee to have the benefit of pedal assist.

In order to tackle bike availability, vandalism and crime related to the West Midlands Cycle Hire scheme, TfWM had liaised with different regions nationally who were in similar circumstances. An options report with a recommended way forward is being compiled following these concerns being raised at Strategic Transport Board. This would aim to make improvement to the scheme in the short term and make it sustainable in the long term. A key element of this approach was identified as liaising and collaborating with West Midlands Police, through TfWM's Safer Travel Team.

In terms of mitigations to tackling vandalism, TfWM were delivering a full contingency plan which would be rolled out until the end of the contract, October 2025. This plan explicitly explored a range of areas such as reporting, having dedicated police resource to tackle crime. Guests noted the impact of vandalism taking place nationally across similar schemes, with a particular reference to a scheme in Cardiff, which had recently been cancelled because of ongoing vandalism and theft.

Usage data was shared and explored with members. The Chair queried which mode of Active Travel would be seen as most successful in terms of comparing datasets for both bikes and scooters. Financially, it was said that there is a better case for scooter usage due to price points, as scheme users were willing to pay more for the unlock and usage fee in order to have an electric assist. It was also shared that e-bikes were used 2-3 times more than pedal bikes due to pedal assist, which increases the likelihood of a customer starting a journey or willing to take a longer journey.



It was noted the performance of e-scooters were positively impacting other micromobility schemes, such as West Midlands Cycle Hire due to the large popularity growth of scooters nationally.

As the cycling network across the West Midlands expands, funded by both Active Travel Fund (ATF) and CRSTS, TfWM expect to see increased usage in the West Midlands Cycle Hire scheme.

- **Challenges & Risks**

The MEG was joined by Logan Gray (Serco), who supports the operation of the scheme. Logan shared some of the scheme challenges due to vandalism and the costs implicated to repair and recommission bikes back into operation. As well as the cost of the repairs themselves, this clearly also has a secondary impact in terms of revenue generation due to the reduction in the availability of bikes.

Questions were raised by members regarding approval from central government, in terms of legislation in relation to e-scooters. It has been confirmed that there is a restriction on scooters nationally, however, the e-scooters part of this scheme are currently operating as part of a government trial, until May 2026. Though there was temporary legislation covering this mode, TfWM still had control over how e-scooters perform, through the use of enhanced security measures, such as speed, and location of operation.

- **Recommendations**

Members discussed opportunities to reduce vandalism and crime through CCTV. It was understood that a large proportion of cameras within the Combined Authority area are TfWM operated. The chair of the MEG suggested to compile a list of stations for other modes, such as bus and rail, which are located alongside West Midlands Cycle Hire. This list could then be used to angle cameras in order to have visuals of particular docking stations where we are currently seeing vandalism take place. TfWM Officers to action this recommendation.

The next meeting of the Sustainability & Active Travel MEG will be held on Tuesday 23 January 2024.