



Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday 26 February 2024 at 1.00 pm

Minutes

Present In Person

Councillor John McNicholas (Chair)
Councillor Mary Locke (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Pervez Akhtar
Councillor Robert Alden
Councillor Timothy Huxtable
Councillor Carol Hyatt
Councillor Narinder Kaur Kooner OBE
Councillor Martin McCarthy
Councillor Saddak Miah
Councillor Josh O'Nyons
Councillor David Stanley
Councillor Robert Tromans
Councillor Ian Ward

Coventry City Council
Birmingham City Council
Coventry City Council
Birmingham City Council
Birmingham City Council
City of Wolverhampton Council
Birmingham City Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Birmingham City Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Warwickshire County Council
Birmingham City Council

Present Virtually

Councillor Emma Marshall

Worcestershire Non-Constituent Local Authorities

Councillor Barbara McGarrity
Councillor Alan Taylor
Councillor Antony Tucker

City of Wolverhampton Council
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Coventry City Council

In Attendance

Dan Essex
Helen Edwards
Lyndsey Roberts
Kate Taylor
Adam Harrison
Mike Waters
Pete Bond
Thomas Skidmore

Governance & Scrutiny Manager
Director of Law & Governance
Statutory Scrutiny Officer
Finance
Principal Policy & Strategy Officer
Director of Policy, Strategy & Innovation
Head of Operational Assets
Head of Integration - Transport Lead

Item Title

No.

65. Inquorate Meeting

The Chair noted that the meeting was inquorate, and therefore the recommendations arising from the meeting would be required to be approved at the next meeting of the committee on 18 March 2024.

66. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Aqeela Choudhry (Sandwell), Councillor Zaker Choudhry (Birmingham), Councillor Amo Hussain (Walsall), Councillor Gurmeet Singh Sohal (Walsall) and Councillor Ian Nellins (Shropshire).

66. Chair's Remarks

The Chair raised the Medium-Term Financial Plan that was presented at the WMCA Board in January and invited the Head of Finance Business Partnering & Strategic Planning to update the committee on the approved 2024/25 budget. She confirmed that the decision to not increase the transport levy would require further discussions with constituent authority leaders to understand and mitigate the implications of the financial challenges within the transport budget. Councillor Pervez Akhtar emphasised the importance of understanding the implications of financial challenges in the context of the current cost-of-living crisis. The Chair confirmed it was crucial for the committee to understand the implications of the funding situation and how it would affect the WMCA's financial strategy and operations. He requested a further briefing on this ahead of the next meeting of the committee.

67. Minutes - 22 January 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2024 were agreed as a correct record, subject to an amendment to minute no. 61 ('Ring & Ride Target Operating Model') to better reflect the discussion held on this item, as follows:

"The committee considered a report of the Head of Network Transformation on the Ring & Ride target operating model. The report set out the drivers of change, along with the emerging future target operating model for the region's Ring & Ride service, seeking endorsement of the proposed approach.

In response to question from the committee, the Head of Network Transformation confirmed that although depots would be centralised, cross-border travel would not be negatively affected.

Councillor Ian Ward emphasised that the review should consider providing fair access and addressing transport barriers. Councillor Carol Hyatt recognised the capacity constraints of the service, with the limiting factors being the number of buses and drivers rather than the potential number of passengers. Councillor Pervez Akhtar inquired about funding possibilities from Network North, and a discussion was held around the allocation of funding for the review and the need for additional data.

The committee suggested that the criteria be reviewed and the possibilities for subsidising service use for community diagnostics, with the possibility of revisiting these matters at a future meeting.”

The Director of Integrated Transport Services reassured the committee that the notes taken by officers on this matter had been comprehensive and would be reflected in future consideration of this matter.

68. Deeper Devolution (Transport) - Implementation Plan

The committee considered a report of the Principal Policy & Strategy Officer providing an update on the Deeper Devolution Deal, particularly focusing on the Transport Implementation Plan. He provided insights into the progress made since the last update and outlined key commitments for the future.

Councillor Carol Hyatt raised concerns regarding the delays in implementing the Bus Service Operators Grant, and the Principal Policy & Strategy Officer confirmed that Transport for West Midlands was advocating for a devolved approach to achieve the best outcomes for the region.

In response to Councillor David Stanley, it was confirmed that the West Bromwich to Brierly Hill Exchange and Arden Cross had received additional funding but would need to go through the business case process, with presentations scheduled for the WMCA Board in July.

In response to questions around the Digitising Street Space project, the Director of Policy, Strategy & Innovation provided details on how street space could be managed more effectively through technical solutions, and clarified that the project primarily involved back-office systems to improve processes. The Executive Director of Transport for West Midlands reiterated the project's objectives and its limited impact on roadside operations.

Recommended:

- (1) The progress on delivering against the Deeper Devolution Deal transport implementation plan be noted.
- (2) The risks emerging on a number of deal elements and the proposed mitigations being taken to manage them be noted and endorsed.

69. Public Transport Real Time Information (RTI) System Improvements

The committee considered a report of the Director of Policy, Strategy & Innovation on the progress made by Transport for West Midlands in enhancing the customer experience through improved Real-Time Information provision. He sought input into a draft communications plan which was intended to inform passengers of the improvements being made and what they could expect to see over the coming months and years.

Councillor Carol Hyatt praised the officers for their transparency and constructive dialogue during the most recent Member Engagement Group and emphasised the critical need for funding to support transportation improvements. Councillor Timothy Huxtable stated that the discussion on Real Time Information would be also brought to the Rail, Metro & Sprint Member Engagement Group in order to be inclusive of the transport network. Councillor Narinder Kaur Kooner highlighted the challenge of Real Time Information access at bus stops without shelter in areas where there was not a high use of technology, advocating for inclusive policies. This was seconded by Councillor Robert Tromans, who emphasised the importance of user-friendly QR codes for Real Time Information.

The committee were assured of the cost effectiveness of QR codes and Councillor Timothy Huxtable suggested promoting these services in order to boost patronage and reduce subsidisation. The committee also received confirmation that all Real Time Information improvements were independent of bus franchising.

Recommended:

- (1) The progress to date in securing funding and implementing an improvement action plan to increase the performance of the region's Real Time Information system, including the on-going performance monitoring regime, be noted.
- (2) The issues within the Real Time Information system which were hampering the targeted level of customer experience, but which were inherent in a complex system of systems operated by multiple stakeholder organisations, be noted.
- (3) Comments were provided on the proposed communications plan to inform customers of the issues and the improvements that they could expect to see over the coming months and years which would be used to inform the development of the final plan.

70. Park & Ride Update

The committee considered a report from the Head of Integration on an overview of the park and ride estate of the WMCA, including background information on the estate and its planned and ongoing strategy and development.

Councillor Timothy Huxtable highlighted the importance of integrating the bus network with park and ride facilities for a cohesive transport system, which was acknowledged by the Head of Integration who mentioned ongoing efforts towards this goal. Legal challenges were noted regarding electric vehicle charging rollout. The Director of Integrated Transport Services confirmed a CCTV camera refresh and plans for environmentally friendly lighting updates. Discussions were held around mobility hubs' integration and parking shortages, and Councillor Robert Alden suggested cost-saving measures for electric vehicle chargers. The Head of Integration agreed to consider adding park and ride facilities to other stations, supported by metro and buses, with additional park and ride options under consideration.

Recommended:

The approach to the continued strategic and operational development of Park & Ride following the Covid-19 pandemic be endorsed.

71. West Midlands Cycle Hire Scheme Update

The committee considered a report of the Head of Operational Assets on an update on the West Midlands cycle hire scheme launched in 2021. The report set out achievement of targets, performance, management and integration with other schemes such as e-scooters.

The committee discussed operational challenges and improvements, with a focus on the recovery plan. Details of scheme realignment and next steps were also considered, including ongoing efforts to secure a sponsor. Councillor Martin McCarthy raised concerns regarding losses and the online sale of batteries. The Implementation Manager for the cycle hire scheme highlighted efforts to redesign the payment and tracker system for future contracts, including secondary tracker implementation and tracker movement. He emphasised the redesign of bike offers to ensure the best value-for-money contract was in place, assuring the committee that work was actively underway.

Recommended:

- (1) The additional funding requirement of £2.1m to take the scheme through to the end of the existing contract in October 2025, requiring WMCA Board approval, be endorsed.
- (2) The conclusion of options appraisal of the existing scheme, and interim measures taken to improve performance of the scheme and mitigate the challenges reported in Autumn 2023, be endorsed.
- (3) The original objectives of the scheme and the level to which these were being met through the existing scheme, as set out in the WMCA Board report of 24 July 2020, be noted.
- (4) The link between the existing West Midlands cycle hire scheme and the developing Local Travel Points, that would include further cycle hire scheme along with improved safety and security measures, be noted.

72. Member Engagement Groups – Progress Report

The lead members of the Membership Engagement Groups provided updates on their last meetings. The committee endorsed recommendations to incorporate discussed matters into the committee's work programme and future member briefings.

Recommended:

- (1) The report be noted.

- (2) It be agreed that a member briefing would be provided on ZEBRA and bus franchising.

73. Work Programme

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer confirmed additions to the committee's work programme, and assured the committee that all matters raised during the year would be addressed by the end of the municipal year.

74. Date of Next Meeting

Monday 18 March 2024 at 1:00pm

The meeting ended at 3:00pm

DRAFT