

## Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date</b>	18 March 2024
<b>Report title</b>	Member Engagement Groups - Progress Report
<b>Scrutiny Champions</b>	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.

### 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:

## **Rail, Metro & Sprint – 4 March 2024 (Councillor Tim Huxtable)**

The Rail, Metro, and Sprint Member Engagement Group Meeting met on 4 March with an agenda focused mainly on rail.

- **Highlights and Performance**

The group received an update on the Cross City Bus consultations for Package 4 (Longbridge to Castle Vale) and Package 6W (Soho Road). These were now scheduled to take place in late May. The group were advised that the consultations on the remainder of the packages would take place after the summer break. In other Cross City bus matters, the group noted that consultants had been engaged to undertake work on identifying priority areas for future BSIP bus priority funding. This work is expected to take a year to complete.

The first rail item on the agenda concerned the rail capital programme. The group noted the opening of the expanded buildings at University, and heard that feedback from users and stakeholders had been overwhelmingly positive. On Package 1 (Darlaston and Willenhall stations), the group noted that works were underway at both sites, with a strong focus on ground remediation works. On Package 2 (Camp Hill Line stations), the group were made aware that a major milestone had been reached with the agreement of the fire strategy, whilst a recent blockade of the line had enabled the project team to complete more intrusive works that could only happen when trains are not running. Lastly, the group discussed Aldridge and Witton. On the former, the potential consequences on the scope of the Wrexham, Shropshire and Midlands Railway open access proposals were discussed and noted.

The group then covered more operational matters, with an item on real time information at stations. The group heard that West Midlands Trains are in the process of replacing all of their existing station customer information screens with modern digital alternatives. As well as having better visibility, these can convey more information, and have the functionality to allow bespoke text to be entered (particularly helpful during disruption or special events). The group noted that these works only applied to WMT stations, and that more funding from Government would need to be made available if screens with similar or better functionality were to be provided at Chiltern stations.

The group reviewed some performance statistics pertaining to the Elephant and Bear Line (Leamington Spa to Nuneaton via Coventry). The group noted that cancellations had spiked on several occasions in the last 24 months as a result of staff availability. It was clarified that WMT do have sufficient drivers, but that they have not always been available to work, as a result of driver training and the ongoing industrial action. However, the group did note that the statistics showed that when there are sufficient staff, the line is capable of providing very good punctuality and reliability. The group discussed potential improvements to the route, and an update was provided on the infrastructure interventions that would be required to provide a two trains an hour service.

The group received a presentation on the roll out of Pay As You Go (PAYG) on rail. It was noted that Ministers had approved the move to Full Business Case for the PAYG pilot in the West Midlands. This would cover 75 stations in the TfWM area. Further phases (outside of the pilot) would expand this PAYG best value, fares capping model to the wider West Midlands region. The group heard that there was a requirement to simplify rail fares as part of PAYG, and that WMRE were still working through the detail of this with Government and the rail industry.

An update was provided on West Coast 250, a lobbying organisation to promote the West Coast Mainline today and into the future. The group were advised that West Coast 250 had sent a letter to the Secretary of State for Transport regarding the cancellation of HS2 Phase 2.

Finally, the group discussed the actions arising from the Park and Ride report that was brought to the February TDOSC.

As the final meeting of the municipal year, the Chair thanked members for their contributions, and officers of their support.

- **Challenges and Risks**

The group noted that an item on Network North and Midlands Rail Hub would be considered by the full TDOSC at its March meeting.

- **Recommendations**

It was agreed that further information would be provided to MEG members on real time information on Metro, as well as locations for installation of real time multi-modal information at railway stations.

### **Passenger First – 7 February 2024 (Councillor Carol Hyatt)**

The Passenger First MEG met on 7 February 2024. This was the final meeting of the Passenger First Member Engagement Group for the 2023/24 municipal year.

- **Highlights & Performance**

The group received an update to actions from the previous meeting, which included a note that the Ring & Ride user representative who had joined the January meeting to visit the Ring & Ride booking centre, sharing best ways of communicating with learning disabled adults. The representative had also been informed of alternative transport providers, including Community Transport operators, who will be better placed to provide the travel requirements being requested by the group. Members were also advised that the details of the two local community radio stations provided by members had been added to the TfWM comms list and passed to the media buyer, who will contact them when the next campaign goes live. Both stations will also be used for passing on local disruption information and ticket offers.

The group received an update on the marketing and communications plan for the next few months, which is to focus on bus, including the Passenger Charter, about which a press release had been issued at the start of the year. Members requested that future updates included a greater level of detail on specific campaigns, such as the Passenger Incentive Program, ticket simplification and addressing challenges and work to overcome them. There was also an offer made for the Community Engagement Officer to attend future meetings.

The group then received an update on the grant scheme and reserve funding now available to provide circa £80m to support the bus network between June 2023 and December 2024. Once this funding ends there is the potential for significant changes to the network. To prepare for this, TfWM are in discussions with the DfT around the risks post-January 2025. TfWM are currently asking operators to provide information on a viable network and what is needed to maintain these services. TfWM expect to have a full understanding of the commercial position by mid-March, during April to June will look at initial planning followed by stakeholder engagement in early Summer, with full public consultation during August and September prior to services needing to be registered in the Autumn. Members also reminded to note that on 19 July the WMCA Board will decide as to whether we move to the next stage of bus franchising. All members will be kept fully informed throughout the process including district level discussions.

As delegated by the TDOSC and to follow on from the update given at the January meeting, members had an in-depth discussion on the Real Time Information (RTI) Systems Improvement report to be presented at the February TDOSC meeting. The Chair had also prepared a useful and thought-provoking document detailing some of the current issues, which were discussed. Members were asked to note that monitoring shows that when buses are running to schedule the RTI, and predictions displayed are working well. Around 85% of surveyed observations accurately reflected the real time operation of the service. However, when a journey is cancelled or delayed there is an increased number of inaccurate predictions, there are several workstreams in progress to address this. A councillor added that this was a major failure, as RTI done properly is “a means of defining reliability as the time a bus is expected to arrive, not the time the timetable says it should,” which currently leaves bus operators hostage to increasing road congestion and our bus service with the label unreliable. Members were advised that in the West Midlands current technology is a barrier because of multiple systems in use. Bus operators use different technology suppliers, and all have their own way of interpreting the data for display to the end user. A key issue is that operators are not consistently inputting cancelled journeys at point of origin although this is currently being piloted for all operators except National Express. Fixes are being addressed through technical solutions and manual intervention but is not where it should be at the present time. This issue does not arise in London as Transport for London specify the equipment that all operators must use and how it should be set up. The group was advised that the Regional Transport Co-ordination Centre (RTCC) at 16 Summer Lane receives and processes a lot of information about disruption to the network. Officers extended an invitation to all Members to visit the RTCC to learn about the value of this facility and the role it plays in communicating disruption information. Invitations will be sent out once a date is confirmed. A number of specific issues were then raised by members and all members were encouraged to report faults via the FixIt website [www.tfwm.org.uk/fixit](http://www.tfwm.org.uk/fixit) or to the RTI faults email address [rtifaults@wmca.org.uk](mailto:rtifaults@wmca.org.uk).

An update was given from Customer Services, including details of Dudley bus station closure, highlighting a number of challenges and mitigations. Members were advised that the Customer Service Team are also trialing live chat with an average response time within 10 seconds. A request was made for a report from Customer Services to be brought as a standing item to each future meeting.

The group also received an update on West Midlands Cycle Hire, highlighting the challenges and including an update on E-Scooters, which different to the cycle hire is a totally commercial venture provided by a third party. Focus now to encourage greater use and increase the number of cycles available.

The meeting concluded with an invitation for members to take part in the Air Quality MEG and received an overview of some of the work of this MEG during the past 12 months. A councillor added that at the Air Quality MEG it has been excellent to have input from university academics.

- **Challenges & Risks**

A councillor raised concerns about the contrast on a number of posters shared in the comms presentation, with light text on a dark background presenting a challenge to those with sight difficulties. Officers advised that all comms go through an Accessibility check but will double check that the posters given as examples in the presentation had, and will ensure that any required changes are made to the final product if required.

Members were advised that TfWM are pushing for an earlier understanding of “Network North” funding, as current timelines indicate we may not know the full details of this until early 2025, which would be too late to impact on more immediate decisions.

- **Recommendations**

That future updates from Communications contain more detail and to include an update on Community Engagement activities.

That the proposed visit to the RTCC takes place on the date of the next TDOSC (18 March 2024)

The TDOSC report on RTI be amended to include context and that guidance needs to be offered to include all options, including reference to franchising.

A written report from Customer Services to be brought as a standing item to each future meeting.

#### 4. **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.

5. **Financial Implications**

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

6. **Legal Implications**

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

7. **Single Assurance Framework Implications**

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

8. **Equalities Implications**

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

9. **Inclusive Growth Implications**

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

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

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

11. **Other Implications**

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