



Name of meeting: Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Meeting date: 9 September 2024

Report title: Member Engagement Groups – Progress Report

Responsible Director: Anne Shaw – Executive Director for Transport for West Midlands
Air Quality, Congestion & Environmental Impact - Councillor Ian Ward

Responsible authors/Scrutiny Champions: Finance & Performance - Councillor Pervez Akhtar
Passenger First - Councillor John McNicholas
Passenger & Road Safety - Councillor Leslie Kaye
Rail, Metro & Sprint - Councillor Robert Alden
Sustainability & Active Travel - Councillor Carol Hyatt

Key Decision? No

Is the ability for the Combined Authority to make a decision internally reliant on Constituent or Non-Constituent Councils making a formal decision first?

Yes No

Public/private report: Public

1. Decision/s Recommended

- 1.1 To receive a report back from each Scrutiny Champion in respect of the recent meeting of their Member Engagement Group.
- 1.2 To consider specific recommendations made by the MEGs to this committee, specifically:

Sustainability & Active Travel MEG (*Councillor Carol Hyatt*)

- (a) To note that further details about the challenges facing Active Travel Infrastructure delivery will be discussed at the next MEG meeting.

Passenger & Communications MEG (*Councillor John McNicholas*)

- (b) The name of this MEG be changed from Passenger First Member Engagement Group to Passenger Communications Member Engagement Group.

- (c) In respect of the Ring & Ride/Demand Responsive Transport Target Operating Model, the details of this, which was currently being procured and had been supported by the former WMCA Lead Member for Transport and endorsed by Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 22 January 2024 be noted, acknowledging that the service specification reflected the recommendations of the high-level strategic appraisal of the Ring & Ride service.
- (d) A briefing note for members of the committee be produced to highlight opportunities around bus liveries in the short term and in the longer term as part of bus franchising.

2. Voting Requirements

- 2.1 A majority of voting members, in attendance in the meeting room and indicating their preference, are required to vote in favour of any recommendation for it to become a decision of the Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 The Member Engagement Groups provide members of this committee with an opportunity to meet and discuss in more detail transport-related issues that are grouped around broad thematic areas. 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.

4. Matters for Consideration

- 4.1 An update from Member Engagement Groups that have met since the last meeting of the committee is set out below:

<p>Air Quality, Congestion & Environmental Impact MEG (Scrutiny Champion - Councillor Ian Ward) Date of Meeting: 24 July 2024</p>
<p>Highlights & Performance The MEG agreed its terms of reference.</p> <p><u>Work of Midlands Connect on air quality</u> The work of Midlands Connect on improving air quality was considered. Key points made by the MEG were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) As well as actions to reduce emissions on road networks, Midlands Connect is promoting the electrification of rail lines in central England. (b) The MEG would welcome a speaker from Midlands Connect at a future meeting to hear about its strategy and measures which support, and could support further, efforts in the West Midlands to improve air quality. This includes consideration of the role of reducing motorway speed limits from 70mph to 60mph for some sections of motorway.

West Midlands Local Authority Air Quality Annual Status Reports 2023

Local authority performance to improve air quality was considered. This was through analysis of all seven local authorities 2023 Annual Status reports. Key points made by the MEG were:

- Positive to see a major reduction in the number of sites exceeding national annual average NO² levels between 2018 and 2022 (from 77 sites in 2018 down to 26 sites in 2022).
- Demonstrates that the Clean Air Zone was needed for central Birmingham.
- Electric buses have had a positive impact on air quality in Coventry, eg. Foleshill Road.
- Need to ensure PM^{2.5}'s are tackled effectively.

Bus retrofit and ZEBRA funding update

The MEG heard that the Department for Food, Environment & Rural Affairs was still reviewing its bus retrofit programme. The MEG then noted progress with a change request to be submitted to the Department for Transport soon for new zero emission buses for the West Midlands.

Areas of work for the MEG for 2024/25

The MEG identified a number of themes to be considered in 2024/25. A work programme is currently being developed from the list of themes for papers and presentations. The themes identified were:

- Updates on the WMCA Air Quality Framework and Local Transport Plan.
- Presentation by Midlands Connect.
- Work with schools to help improve air quality.
- London boroughs presentation on anti-idling.
- Congestion hotspots in the West Midlands, and how they are being tackled, including measures to improve bus performance such as traffic signal priority and the role of dynamic traffic management.
- The work of Aston University on predictive congestion traffic modelling.
- West Midlands work for a Centre of Excellence on decarbonising the lifecycle of roads.
- Monitoring results of the Clean Air Zone.
- Capital scheme delivery for schemes which support air quality strategy.

Challenges & Risks

The challenges of delivery of schemes and measures to improve air quality were highlighted at the meeting.

Recommendations

The MEG did not propose any specific recommendations to be considered by the Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 25 September 2024.

Rail, Metro & Sprint MEG (Scrutiny Champion - Councillor Robert Alden)

Date of Meeting: 6 August 2024

Highlights & Performance

The MEG considered updates on the projects contained within the capital programmes for rail, metro, Sprint and Cross City bus.

Rail Programme

The MEG reviewed progress on Package 1 (Darlaston and Willenhall), Package 2 (Camp Hill Line), Aldridge, Witton, Dudley Port, and the TfWM new stations studies (Tettenhall, Castle Bromwich, and Coventry East). Updates were provided on the status of these schemes post the recent WMCA Board. In other rail matters, the MEG heard that the Chancellor of the Exchequer's recent announcement regarding the cancellation of the Restoring Your Railway programme did not affect any projects within the region. An update was also provided on Midlands Rail Hub and the Department for Transport's Midlands, Yorkshire, North East (MYNE) study. The MEG also discussed transport matters related to travel to and from Villa Park and St Andrews.

Metro Programme

Project updates were considered for each of the Wednesbury-Brierley Hill, Eastside, Westside, and Wolverhampton tram extensions. As with the rail programme, a discussion took place on the recent decisions taken at WMCA Board. On Eastside, the MEG was advised of the interface with HS2's Curzon Street station, with operation of services through to Digbeth dependent on the completion of the HS2 works. A MEG site visit to the HS2 Curzon Street site is planned.

Sprint/CrossCity Bus

On Sprint, the MEG was advised that three of the six work packages had now received cabinet approval from their respective local authorities, with work due to start later in the year. This would largely involve lining and signing for bus lanes. An update was provided on the vehicles that are due to be used for Sprint, with these being articulated and electric. The MEG heard that a public consultation on Cross City bus is due to start in September, with some initial stakeholder briefing having already begun.

Lastly, the MEG considered the Mass Rapid Transit Studies that are being developed for several transit corridors across the region. One of these covered Stourbridge to Walsall and was identified as relevant to the Wednesbury-Brierley Hill metro scheme as a means of connect this project into the existing rail/park and ride network at Stourbridge.

Areas of Work for the MEG for 2024/25

Areas identified included:

- Lessons learnt on capital schemes.
- Midlands Rail Hub.
- Mass Rapid Transit Studies.
- Rail fares simplification.
- Rail reforms.

- Seeking examples of best practice from across the UK and overseas.

Challenges & Risks

The challenges of delivery of schemes and cost control were identified.

Recommendations

The MEG did not propose any specific recommendations to be considered by the Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Date of Next Meeting

7 October 2024

Sustainability & Active Travel MEG (Scrutiny Champion - Councillor Carol Hyatt)

Date of Meeting: 7 August 2024

Highlights & Performance

The MEG agreed its terms of reference.

The MEG agreed the workplan for 2024/25, identifying a number of key themes for the year ahead.

The following agenda items were then considered.

- Active Travel Infrastructure.
- Influencing Transport Lab.
- Behaviour Change Hub.

Challenges & Risks

A number of challenges were identified during the MEG:

- Challenges spending allocated funding from Active Travel England (ATE) within set timescales.
- Delays to change requests sent to ATE and meeting design standards.
- Strategic Assurance Framework compliance can take some time, however this is a necessary process to provide assurance.
- WMCA's Active Travel Capability rating may be impacted by departures from ATE design standards.

Recommendations

(1) To note that further details about the challenges facing Active Travel Infrastructure delivery will be discussed at the next MEG meeting.

Date of Next Meeting

26 September 2024

Finance & Performance MEG (Scrutiny Champion - Councillor Pervez Akhtar)

Date of Meeting: 12 August 2024

Highlights & Performance

The first meeting of the year discussed those areas the MEG wished to focus on during 2024/25:

- Medium Term Financial Plan and financial sustainability.
- Bus franchising finances.
- Accessible transport finances.
- Single Settlement finances and what it means for transport.
- Capital performance.

Recommendations

The MEG did not propose any specific recommendations to be considered by the Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Date of Next Meeting

3 September 2024

Passenger Communications MEG (formerly *Passenger First MEG*) (Scrutiny Champion - Councillor John McNicholas)

Date of Meeting: 15 August 2024

Highlights & Performance

The first area of discussion was to review the terms of reference, with several changes made to reflect the key areas to focus on during the course of the year. The name was agreed to be changed to the 'Passenger Communications Member Engagement Group'. Standing items were agreed to include updates from Customer Services, Communications, and bus franchising. It was also agreed that at each meeting there would be a key focus item, suggested items included: Real Time Information and the potential to ask external bodies to join, such as Transport Focus, local disability groups, members of the Youth Forum and input from a local University. Members were also asked to send in their own suggestions for areas to focus on.

The meeting then moved to private session with Pete Bond (Director of Integrated Transport Services) updating the group on current bus funding arrangements and planning for January 2025.

The key item of focus for this meeting was bus franchising, Pete Bond outlined next stages of the process following the WMCA Board's decision on 19 July 2024 to move to audit. It was noted that the Mayor had already indicated that he will be looking to acknowledge the decision of the WMCA Board following the completion of the audit and consultation by April 2025. Should the decision be taken then to adopt bus franchising, there will be a two-year mobilization period for the rollout of the first franchised lot in 2027 with the entire bus network franchised by early 2029.

The group then received a presentation on the Ring & Ride/Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) Target Operating Model, alongside the first draft of the report due to be presented to TDOSC in September. The group was asked to note the details of the Target Operating Model currently being procured and acknowledge specification reflects the high-level review, whilst understanding that contract discussions are not yet concluded.

A copy of the West Midlands Bus Marketing campaign had been shared with members; however, it was agreed to defer discussion around this item until the next meeting.

Challenges & Risks

In respect of bus funding, whilst passenger numbers have increased, costs have also increased, and operators have experienced performance issues. National Express have continued to cut staff, including inspectors, which does have an impact on passenger experience. Further information will be presented to TDOSC in October, by which time the overall cost of retaining existing network or the scale of potential loss of services should be known. A councillor raised concerns about rumours on social media about a particular service, highlighting that passengers are concerned. Another councillor asked that as current services are not sustainable, should we be spending money looking at reshaping bus services as a sustainable model, rather than continuing to pay for loss making services.

The Chair noted that funding issues needed to be resolved to prevent significant service cuts prior to franchising, with officers in agreement and as a reminder that franchising, subject to approval would begin in 2027 with the rollout of the first lot and conclude in early 2029 with the conclusion of the rollout of the remaining two lots. Therefore, there are risks in the interim period up to early 2029. A councillor asked if there was a risk of the operator going bankrupt allowing TfWM to take them over? Officers confirmed that there is a disaster recovery scenario, which may be helped by the new Government bill which may propose to make it easier for local authorities to take over and run bus services.

Another concern raised by a councillor related to the size of vehicles used on some routes and asked if it would be cheaper to run smaller vehicles at certain times. A further comment from a councillor was that fines from bus lane enforcement goes to local authorities and not TfWM and would support money from bus lane enforcement fines going back to TfWM.

In respect of bus franchising, members were reminded that whilst there are potential changes to legislation aimed at making delivery easier for Local Transport Authorities, however, in the West Midlands, this is unlikely to impact on the timescales, as the changes seem to be aimed at making the earlier stages easier and TfWM are already nearing completion of those stages.

In respect of Ring & Ride, a councillor asked how confident were TfWM that young people with care plans will use the service and how do we make sure that by opening up the service to a wider demographic it is not at the expense of the most vulnerable and existing users. Members were reminded that this is not a statutory

service and should not compete with services for the most vulnerable which the local authorities are required to provide. A councillor asked about marketing and suggested the use of community radio who will share information for free. Members asked for an updated progress report at the next meeting, along with a supplementary report on Coventry Demand Responsive Transport trial.

In respect of bus livery, a councillor, whilst appreciating the new electric buses, raised concerns about the grey livery and asked if there were opportunities for different liveries for each district.

Recommendations

(1) The name of this MEG be changed from Passenger First Member Engagement Group to Passenger Communications Member Engagement Group.

(2) In respect of the Ring & Ride/Demand Responsive Transport Target Operating Model, the details of this, which was currently being procured and had been supported by the former WMCA Lead Member for Transport and endorsed by Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 22 January 2024 be noted, acknowledging that the service specification reflected the recommendations of the high-level strategic appraisal of the Ring & Ride service.

(3) A briefing note for members of the committee be produced to highlight opportunities around bus liveries in the short term and in the longer term as part of bus franchising.

Date of Next Meeting

3 October 2024

Passenger & Road Safety MEG (Scrutiny Champion - Councillor Leslie Kaye)

Date of Meeting: 5 September 2024

The MEG will be meeting on 5 September and a verbal report will be provided at the committee.

What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?

Not applicable.

5. Reasons for recommending preferred option

5.1 Not applicable.

6. Implications and Considerations

Priority:	Contribution:
Delivery of Strategic Transport Plan	N/A

Priority:	Contribution:
Promote inclusive economic growth in every corner of the region	N/A
Ensure everyone has the opportunity to benefit	N/A
Connect our communities by delivering transport and unlocking housing and regeneration schemes	N/A
Reduce carbon emissions to net zero and enhance the environment	N/A
Secure new powers and resources from central government	Whilst a robust and effective overview and scrutiny function impacts on all of the WMCA's corporate aims there is direct link to this objective.
Develop our organisation and our role as a good regional partner	Whilst a robust and effective overview and scrutiny function impacts on all of the WMCA's corporate aims there is direct link to this objective.

7. Internal Consultation and Scrutiny:

7.1 Not applicable.

8. External Consultation and Scrutiny:

8.1 Not applicable.

9. Financial implications:

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

10. Legal implications:

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

11. Single Assurance Framework implications:

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

12. Risk implications, including Risk Appetite:

12.1 There are no direct risk implications arising out of this report.

13. Procurement Implications:

13.1 There are no direct procurement implications arising out of this report.

14. Equality implications:

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

15. Inclusive Growth Implications:

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

16. Local Authority Impact:

16.1 There are no direct Local Authority impacts arising out of this report.

17. List of appendices referred to:

17.1 Not applicable.

18. Background papers used to compile this report:

18.1 None.

19. List of Other Relevant Documents

19.1 None.