



## **Transport Delivery Committee**

<b>Date</b>	4 February 2019
<b>Report title</b>	Midland Metro Limited – First 6 months of operation briefing note
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<b>Report has been considered by</b>	Councillor Roger Horton – Lead member Rail and Metro

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

**The Transport Delivery Committee is recommended to note the contents of the report**

#### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 To provide Transport Delivery Committee with an overview of the first 6 months of Midland Metro Ltd's performance as operator of the metro network.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1 On the 24<sup>th</sup> June 2018 Midland Metro Limited (MML) trading as West Midlands Metro (WMM), took over responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the metro under a Public Service Contract (PSC), awarded to MML by the asset owner West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).
- 2.2 The transition followed a 15 month period of mobilisation in which preparations for the handover of the operation from National Express West Midlands to MML were undertaken. This was a significant exercise which saw the transfer under the TUPE regulations of nearly 200 staff into the new organisation; the novation or procurement of

over 50 contracts which support the operation and the creation of a new IT system and new 'back office' for the ticket machines which themselves were all reconfigured on the night of the transition.

- 2.3 The transition itself was seamless which reflects the planning and preparation undertaken by the mobilisation team. Whilst the first 6 months have largely been a period of settlement and stabilisation MML has introduced a number of initiatives to improve the service for passengers.

### **3. MML Improvements**

#### **3.1 New Identity**

At transition a programme of rebranding commenced across West Midlands Metro network. This includes: the rebranding of stops (with those in Birmingham City Centre already completed), a new and distinct tram livery (already applied to tram 31), a new WMM branded website and a smart WMM branded uniform. The new branding which continues to be rolled out forms part of the new transport brand for the region and gives West Midlands Metro a new fresh identity.

#### **3.2 Better value fares and tickets**

MML have also taken steps towards a simple and best value ticketing solution. At transition there were reductions to some singles and return tickets and the introduction of a new metro only day ticket. Previously all day tickets retailed included the ability to travel on bus and therefore were inclusive of a bus premium. The new metro only day ticket fills a gap in the product range by offering customers who do not require the bus element a better value product for their needs.

For the start of the academic year, September 2018, MML also introduced metro only student season tickets and metro only child seasons on monthly direct debit. These new products not only offer better value for these customer groups but are also more convenient to purchase.

For the duration of the 2018 school summer holiday and the Christmas holiday, MML also ran marketing campaigns which saw the £8 Metro only group ticket reduced to £5. Marketed as a 5 for 5 offer, this ticket permits up to 5 adults travelling together unlimited travel on metro throughout the day and is usually only available in the evenings and at weekends. The product is also applicable for up to 2 adults and 4 children travelling as a group and has proven extremely popular representing great value.

It should also be noted that in January 2019 Metro only fares were frozen.

#### **3.3 New ways to pay**

There are now new ways to purchase Metro tickets through a choice of mobile phone apps. In January MML launched the MyMetro app which is WMM's official app and currently retails day, 1 week and 1 month metro only tickets. The app allows quick and

easy ticket purchase and removes the need for conductors to collect cash and give change. The mobile ticket is automatically activated when purchased, with the conductor or revenue protection personnel only required to visually check if the ticket is valid for travel.

MML has also acted as the testbed for the new “Swift on Mobile” Android app. This app integrates with Google Pay to enable customers to purchase Metro tickets without the need for a Swift smart card. Customers simply ‘tap’ their mobile phone on the conductor’s reader to securely authenticate the ticket. This records a ‘smart’ journey just like a plastic smart card, which provides useful journey data to both MML and Transport for West Midlands. For the pilot phase there are four Metro products available (1 day peak, 1 day off peak, 1 week and 4 week). The longer term ambition for the Swift team is to work with ITSO, Google and other phone providers to add other transport modes to the app. This will reduce the need for a separate Swift smart card and enable customers to buy tickets on-the-go from their mobile phone.

#### 3.4 Introduction of Customer Services Officers

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2018 MML introduced a new team of 3 dedicated customer services officers (CSO’s). The CSO’s are available to help customers between the hours of 06:00 and 20:00 Mon-Fri and 10:30 – 18:30 on Saturdays and Sundays ensuring coverage during the busiest hours of operation. Located in the control centre, the CSO’s have access to the most up to date service information enabling them to promptly communicate any changes in service to passengers. The CSO’s role also includes actively monitoring social media, including twitter, and their introduction has seen a positive response from passengers, who appear to appreciate someone being immediately available to answer any queries. This is particularly important during changes to service where the CSO’s presence has proven extremely helpful to those affected.

#### 3.5 Talent Pool

MML have introduced an ongoing programme of recruitment with adverts placed on trams and tram stops and the company website. This is for both driver/conductor posts and engineering positions. Assessment centres are now taking place each month and where talent is identified but no vacancies are available at that time, MML has created a talent pool from which it can refer to should a vacancy become available.

Work is also on-going with Business in the Community (BITC) on operational & engineering roles. Pilots are being planned with several organisations that reach out to people within the local community.

#### 3.6 Keeping customers moving

As part of plans to improve the passenger experience in times of service disruption, MML has made arrangements with Virgin Trains to carry its passengers during unplanned emergency disruptions. This adds to the existing agreement already in place with West Midlands Trains and offers passengers more choice whilst increasing overall capacity to keep passengers moving during these times. Agreements to call on additional resources

to help with frontline customer care have also been put in place with third parties and facilitate a quick response to metro stops should there be significant disruption to service.

### 3.7 Asset Management System

MML has been working with Transport for West Midlands' WMM team on the procurement of a new asset management system for Metro. The tender specification is being finalised. This work forms the early stages of a longer-term plan to improve the management, maintenance and monitoring of metro assets to make the system more reliable for passengers.

### 3.8 Staff Engagement – New Staff App

As part of MML's staff engagement programme a new staff app 'Mya' was launched in September. The app has proven a popular method of communication with frontline staff who being out based are generally more difficult to communicate with directly. The app is a two-way platform which allows staff to put forward ideas and suggestions for improvements including those relating to the passenger experience. These are monitored by the management team who can review, respond and action accordingly. The app also aids with building relations with staff, helping them to feel engaged in the business.

### 3.9 Improved Complaints Handling Procedure

As part of MML's drive to improve the customer experience including how customer complaints are managed, MML has put in place a new complaints handling procedure. Should a customer be unhappy with the way in which their complaint is resolved by MML they are now able to escalate the complaint to Putting Passenger First Group (PPFG). PPFG is an independent body made up of councillors from the across the West Midlands and is impartial in its handling of all complaints. The service is entirely free of charge to customers. The ability to escalate complaints to PPFG ensures the handling of complaints by MML is equitable and transparent.

## 4.0 **Challenges**

Whilst there has been significant progress in the first 6 months of operation the MML has faced challenges.

### 4.1 Staffing

Over the period MML has faced issues with staff availability. At transition the number of employees which transferred under the TUPE regulations was 9% lower the full establishment needed to meet operational requirements. MML has been active in filling the vacancies and has also put in place an ongoing recruitment programme.

MML also inherited a situation of high levels of sickness absence (particularly long-term sick) at around 9% but has over the period reduced this month on month to its current figure 6.7%. MML continues to work towards its target of 5%.

At transition there were also ongoing pay negotiations which had commenced in December 2017 and which MML stepped into. Whilst an agreement was reached in September, such negotiations are known to impact employee relations and morale particularly where they have taken many months to conclude.

## 4.2 Infrastructure

MML customers experienced particular difficulties in July as a result of overhead line failures which caused significant disruption to service. An asset condition survey of the was commissioned and a programme of prioritised improvement works has been put in place and these works are underway. The design of the overhead lines is also being reviewed and this work will consider longer term options to improve reliability and make the system more robust.

## 5.0 **The Future**

Following a positive first 6 months of operation during 2019 MML will continue to focus on its customers and improving performance.

MML plan to:

- Make improvements to the My Metro app which includes expanding the products available to purchase and enabling customers to set their journey information and receive tailored service disruption communications.
- Introduce a new WMM passenger forum 'Metro Matters' which will build on the work of the former Metro passenger group 'Passenger Panel' and will champion improvements to the passenger experience and help shape the future service offer. Plans to launch this new group are currently being finalised with the aim to attract a cross section of passengers. Meetings are to be planned at different venues adjacent to the Metro line for wider reach and will be held during the day time and evenings. Members will given the opportunity to attend MML events and be involved in wider metro activities.
- Undertake works to enhance the stop environments and wider West Midlands Metro network. This will commence with a programme of vegetation clearance which will also improve sight lines and reduce risk of damage to over headline infrastructure from trees, thus reducing the risk of disruption to service. Other enhancements include the repainting of stop infrastructure and the continued roll out of rebranding to give the system a fresh new appearance.
- Deliver a programme of infrastructure renewals which includes improvements to track, overhead line equipment and structures, making the system operationally more robust whilst ensuring safety standards are maintained.
- Work with TfWM on the procurement of the new asset management system which will improve how metro assets are managed in the future by allowing for greater proactive monitoring of asset condition and planning / budgeting of maintenance interventions & renewals.

- Work with the Samaritans to deliver staff training on Suicidal Contacts; increasing staff awareness of the issue whilst giving them confidence in dealing with potential suicide situations.
- Prepare for the opening of Centenary Square extension in December 2019. This includes recruitment of additional drivers and Customer Service Representatives providing additional job opportunities in the region.

**6. Financial Implications**

No financial implications in the nature of this document.

**7. Legal Implications**

No legal implications are recognised in this report.

**8. Equalities Implications**

No equalities implications in relation to this report.

**9. Inclusive Growth Implications**

None.

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

None.

**11. Other Implications**

None.