



## **Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

<b>Date</b>	25 February 2019
<b>Report title</b>	Conclusions of the Bilston Road Task & Finish Group
<b>Accountable Leads</b>	Councillor Stephen Simkins Councillor Angus Lees Councillor Ian Shires
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**Recommendation(s) for decision:**

**Overview & Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:**

- (1) Consider recommendations 1 - 11 as set out in paragraph 12 of the report and determine whether these should be reported to the Managing Director of Transport for West Midlands and recommended for consideration by the Midland Metro Alliance in respect of future programmed Metro works.

## **Purpose**

1. To report the conclusions of the Bilston Road Task & Finish Group.

## **Background**

2. At its meeting on 4 September 2018, Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered the report 'Midland Metro Construction - Proposed Business Support Package'. This report had proposed a package of support schemes for business directly affected by West Midlands Metro construction works undertaken by the WMCA and had been approved by the WMCA Board at its meeting on 20 July 2018. In agreeing the report, the WMCA Board had asked Overview & Scrutiny Committee to give consideration to a number of specific issues that had arisen.
3. Overview & Scrutiny Committee established a task & finish group, comprising Councillor Angus Lees, Councillor Ian Shires and Councillor Stephen Simkins, to report back to a future meeting on the impact that the Bilston Road metro track replacement works had had on nearby businesses and to evaluate the support these businesses had received to mitigate the impact of the works.
4. On 18 October 2018, an initial meeting of the task & finish group was held to establish the scope of its review and to identify how it would wish to undertake its investigations. The group wanted to understand whether a robust and fair consultation process had been undertaken by the Midland Metro Alliance, understand the levels of engagement with businesses along Bilston Road and to review the consultation process that was undertaken. To help with this, it proposed to hold two evidence gathering meetings, with local businesses and then with the Midland Metro Alliance & Transport for West Midlands.

## **Meeting 1 - Local Businesses**

5. A meeting was held on 29 January at the City of Wolverhampton Council with nine local businesses located along and adjoining Bilston Road. Businesses were asked to submit any information that they considered evidenced the pre-works information they received, the consultation process they engaged with, and the support and assistance they received in mitigation during the track replacement works themselves.
6. The Chair provided each local business with an opportunity to provide their perspective of how the track replacement works had impacted them and their business. During the meeting, information was shared with regard to communication, signage, the provision of car parking, stakeholder engagement, and direct experiences with the contractors located on site and employees of the Midland Metro Alliance (including designated stakeholder liaison officers).

## **Meeting 2 - Midland Metro Alliance and Transport for West Midlands**

7. A further meeting was held on 31 January, with the Director of the Midland Metro Alliance, the Project Director for the Bilston Road project and the Metro Finance & Commercial Director representing Transport for West Midlands. The group received a comprehensive document pack from the Midland Metro Alliance that included background information, planning approvals and engagement, construction and re-opening details and responses to the issues raised by local businesses during the course of the works.

## **Further Considerations**

8. The Midland Metro Alliance was formed in July 2016, and at the end of 2016 TfWM had instructed it to provide an outline design and cost to undertake the West Midlands Metro track replacement works on Bilston Road, Wolverhampton, with a requirement that the works be completed by March 2018. The proposals were approved by the WMCA Board in February 2017 and works commenced in June 2017. The tramway reopened in December 2017, ahead of schedule.
9. The Midland Metro Alliance produced an Engagement Plan for the project that included information on consultation, messaging and stakeholder engagement. Residents and local businesses were notified of the scheme six weeks prior to the works commencing.
10. The City of Wolverhampton Council approved the application to undertake works on the highway through a delegated decision making process rather than its committee structure and this may have resulted in the project not receiving wider awareness, either amongst the general public or local councillors. The application process itself did not require any evidence that residents, businesses or other stakeholders had been adequately consulted by the applicants.
11. During the course of the Task & Finish Group's deliberations, there was significant media interest in the potential for local businesses to be offered financial compensation to mitigate for the inconvenience they experienced during the course of the works. The group were informed that under the Midland Metro Act 1989, there was no statutory compensation available for loss of income due to maintenance works. In some instances, councils could consider giving temporary reduction in rateable value to a business affected by works, and traders were notified of this and signposted as to where they could pursue this should they wish to.

## **Task & Finish Group Recommendations**

12. After considering the evidence and comments made by the traders along Bilston Road and representatives from the Midland Metro Alliance and Transport for West Midlands, members of the Task & Finish Group have reached a number of recommendations:
  - **Observation**

Positive steps were taken by the Midland Metro Alliance to plan for and engage with local businesses over the works. The limited time available to Midland Metro Alliance appears to have impacted on the effectiveness of these engagement plans leading to some local businesses feeling disengaged with the project and its wider benefits for the community.

### **Recommendation 1**

Midland Metro Alliance & Transport for West Midlands should ensure that stakeholder engagement plans are developed at the earliest practicable stage of a project and that they are monitored and updated throughout the project lifecycle to ensure that effective two way communication is established and maintained.

- **Observation**

The duration and impact of the works may have been prolonged by keeping Bilston Road open through the track replacement works, as opposed to conducting a full road closure.

**Recommendation 2**

Transport for West Midlands, Midland Metro Alliance and local highway authorities should work together to assess the benefits and impacts of more intensive, shorter periods of disruption arising from complete road closures for future Metro construction and maintenance works.

- **Observation**

Midland Metro Alliance took immediate action to address and remedy situations where the behaviour of some site staff fell below the standards expected by Transport for West Midlands and Midland Metro Alliance. The behaviours did however cause inconvenience to some businesses and impacted on their willingness to accept the inconvenience caused by the track replacement works.

**Recommendation 3**

Midland Metro Alliance should ensure that site staff are trained in the standards of behaviour expected when dealing with the public, and stakeholders and Midland Metro Alliance should ensure that staff behaviour is monitored on a regular basis.

- **Observation**

Whilst the personal efforts of the Project Director and Project Manager to visit with and manage issues raised by local businesses were recognised, it was considered there may be a better approach to splitting responsibilities within the project organisation.

**Recommendation 4**

Midland Metro Alliance should establish a dedicated stakeholder team, focussed on ensuring engagement is established and maintained throughout the lifecycle of future Metro projects.

- **Observation**

Road traffic marshals need to have sufficient local knowledge to assist road users to navigate diversions, and for customers/suppliers to be able to access businesses affected by significant temporary traffic management arrangements for Metro construction and maintenance.

**Recommendation 5**

Midland Metro Alliance should ensure traffic marshals are trained to assist road users and are provided with up-to-date information to pass to customers and suppliers seeking to access businesses affected by major Metro traffic management installations.

- **Observation**  
Comprehensive impact assessments will assist in the effective planning and implementation of major Metro temporary traffic management installations and in the avoidance of unnecessary disruption to traffic and business activity.

**Recommendation 6**

Midland Metro Alliance should work with local highway authorities to ensure the impacts of future Metro temporary traffic management installations are assessed, and that appropriate mitigations are agreed as part of the highway approvals process.

- **Observation**  
The Task & Finish Group welcomed evidence that all parties had worked hard to address the needs of local stakeholders and to share information about the scheme (eg. through letters, leaflet drops to 3,500 properties and news releases).

**Recommendation 7**

Midland Metro Alliance should ensure that the positive actions taken on Bilston Road are captured and incorporated into stakeholder engagement plans for future Metro works.

- **Observation**  
A number of businesses indicated that they had not received advanced information about the Bilston Road Metro works.

**Recommendation 8**

Midland Metro Alliance should ensure that systems are implemented to maintain a comprehensive audit trail of contacts with, and the supply of information to, businesses.

- **Observation**  
Information about the availability or otherwise of financial support (including rate relief) to businesses needs to be clear and unambiguous to avoid unrealistic expectations within businesses.

**Recommendation 9**

Transport for West Midlands should ensure the arrangements for assessing eligibility and claiming financial assistance/business support through the scheme referenced at paragraph 2 are clearly communicated and that businesses are made aware of the timescales for receipt of support and/or rate relief.

- **Observation**  
Businesses suggested that an additional Metro stop on Bilston Road would be beneficial and could have a regenerative impact on the local community.

**Recommendation 10**

Transport for West Midlands should be asked to consider the technical feasibility and business case for the provision of an additional Metro stop on Bilston Road.

### **Recommendation 11**

The cost of providing business support and financial assistance under the scheme described at paragraph 2 should be built into future Metro project costs.

#### **Financial Implications**

13. There are no direct financial implications arising out of the recommendations contained within this report.

#### **Legal Implications**

14. There are no direct legal implications arising out of the recommendations contained within this report.

#### **Equalities Implications**

15. There are no direct equalities implications arising out of the recommendations contained within this report.

#### **Inclusive Growth Implications**

16. There are no inclusive growth implications arising out of the recommendations contained within this report.

#### **Geographical Area of Report's Implications**

17. The Bilston Road track replacement works took place within the City of Wolverhampton Council's geographic area.

#### **Other Implications**

18. There are no further specific implications arising out of the recommendations contained within the report.