



West Midlands
Combined Authority

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Feedback from the Mayoral Q&A Session: Connectivity

13 February 2020

Present

Councillor Lisa Trickett (Chair)	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Cathy Bayton (Vice-Chair)	Association of Black Country Authorities
Councillor Lynnette Kelly (Vice-Chair)	Coventry City Council
Councillor Ahmad Bostan	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Richard Brown	Coventry City Council
Councillor Mike Chalk	Worcestershire Non-Constituent Local Authorities
Councillor Peter Fowler	Birmingham City Council
Aisha Masood	Young Combined Authority Board
Councillor Simon People	Staffordshire Non-Constituent Local Authorities
Councillor Stephen Simkins	Association of Black Country Authorities

In Attendance:

Andy Street	Mayor of the West Midlands
Louise Cowen	Financial Services Manager
Dan Essex	Governance Services Manager
Robert Franks	Managing Director, WM5G Limited,
Linda Horne	Finance Director
Tim Martin	Head of Governance, Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Lyndsey Roberts	Statutory Scrutiny Officer
Laura Shoaf	Managing Director Transport for West Midlands

1. Purpose

A Mayoral Q&A Session was held on 13 February where members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee questioned Andy Street on issues relating to connectivity. This summary details the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's feedback from that Q&A session together with its conclusions for the WMCA Board to consider.

2. Background Information

On 13 February, the committee, along with a representative from the Young Combined Authority, held its third Mayoral Q&A session of the year with Andy Street. This event was focussed on issues relating to connectivity - principally related to transport and 5G. The Q&A session also included Laura Shoaf, Managing Director of Transport for West Midlands and Robert Franks, Managing Director of West Midlands 5G which was established by the WMCA to accelerate the benefit of 5G technology throughout the region.

3. Lines of Enquiry

Members of the committees pursued a number of lines of enquiry, including issues related to HS2, the region's bus network, air quality and the opportunities to be gained from technology developments. Discussions during the Q&A session covered the following issues:

HS2

- Economic benefits of improved regional connectivity with London, and the impact delays in the project have on the region's prosperity.
- Impact of the route initially terminating at Old Oak Common, before eventually connecting with London Euston.
- Environmental and cost implications of route construction.
- Opportunities for regional SMEs to benefit during the construction phase.

Bus Network

- Benefits of an affordable and accessible bus network for young people.
- Scope for expanding the 16-18 Photocard travel pass for use at any time, recognising the revenue expenditure implications of this and the need to judge benefits against other funding considerations.

Public Transport & Air Quality

- Challenges required to facilitate significant behavioural change between transport modes.
- Key role for public transport to help deliver the WMCA's CO₂ reduction target.
- National and regional bus passenger patronage trends.
- Interrelationship between ticket pricing and patronage levels.
- Expansion of Park & Ride facilities.
- Electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

Digital

- Funding requirements to deliver the benefits of 5G to be delivered across the region.
- Mitigating the impact of wifi 'poverty' and the potential of 5G 'poverty'.

4. Findings

The committee reached a number of broad conclusions arising out of the responses it received from the Mayor. The committee had a clear sense that public transport provision needed to respond to modern travel needs and recognise that existing transport planning may not always be addressing these needs. It is intended that the conclusions that members of the committee reached will help inform transport policy thinking and development during the course of the next Mayoral term.

Conclusions

- Further consideration needs to be given to how public transport connects with communities across the West Midlands. Were 'old' solutions still being applied to 21st century problems? Were the needs of younger travellers being reflected in the services being offered?
- Further clarification should be sought from the Government regarding its announcement of £5bn of funding for bus services. How much of this funding would be allocated to the West Midlands? How much of it had already been allocated through previous Government announcements?
- Further consideration should be given to the wider benefits of making the 16-18 Photocard travel pass available for use at any time, including the funding implications that this would have and its ability to help the region meet its #WM2041 CO₂ emissions targets.
- The availability of different funding streams relating to capital expenditure and revenue expenditure, and tensions that this created in the WMCA's ability to address the underuse of public transport within specific demographics, was recognised. Could the WMCA also be seeking a more equitable exposure to financial risk across the transport sector?
- Transport for West Midlands should continue to be minded of the impact that affordability had on passengers' ability and willingness to use public transport.
- The full range of regulatory powers available to the Mayor and/or WMCA to give greater public control and oversight over the public transport network should be more fully considered, as appropriate, to address market failings.
- Greater public accountability should be provided by Transport Delivery Committee and the proposed Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee to hold decision-makers to account and challenge policies where there is clear evidence of public transport not meeting the needs of passengers.

5. The WMCA Board is recommended to:

Support the conclusions of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee following the Mayoral Q&A session on connectivity, as set out within the summary.