

## Background

Following the introduction of restrictions on the general public due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March the past two months have seen changes introduced to the local bus network. This was put in place to reflect the joint needs of key workers accessing their place of work, the general public traveling to shops to access vital amenities and a significant drop in the numbers of passengers using the network.

## Lockdown Response

TfWM, the West Midlands Bus Operators and the West Midlands Bus Alliance Partners jointly worked together to ensure the revised bus network formed part of a minimum level of service that met and continued to meet the needs of key workers and those who have to travel in the region and have also worked together on a number of joint initiatives to improve access and safety to the bus network.

### The minimum level of service

The bus network that was introduced with effect from Wednesday 25th March and forms part of the minimum level of service that TfWM have identified to meet the needs of key workers and essential travel needs in the region. This bus network ensures the majority of bus services are still operating and still operating to their usual span of operation, so have the same or similar first and last trips. The frequencies, on those services that usually operate at frequent intervals, have been reduced to reflect the significantly lower number of passengers travelling on the network. This approach has ensured accessibility across the region is maintained and key workers, who often start work early and finish late, can still get to their places of employment.

Service frequencies were designed to ensure sufficient capacity is provided to allow social distancing to protect out passengers and drivers. On routes where operators operate in commercial competition we have been working with our partners in the West Midlands Bus Alliance to coordinate this and ensure equitable delivery to

best meet the needs of those still travelling at this time.

The West Midlands Bus Operators are working in partnership with TfWM to agree any future changes to this bus network to ensure the principles of the minimum level of service are maintained. This has resulted in further changes from today, Monday 11th May, to some services where some journeys had demand in excess of capacity when taking into account the requirements for social distancing.

For up to date details of the bus network and forthcoming service changes please visit <https://www.networkwestmidlands.com/plan-your-journey/network-overview/bus-updates-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/>

### Supporting Key Workers

Free public transport use on bus and tram for NHS workers in the West Midlands by showing their ID card, this has been in place since Friday 3rd April.

Claribels, who operate subsidised bus services in east and north Birmingham, are additionally allowing care workers/carers to travel free as well.

TfWM have been working with National Express Accessible Transport (NEAT) to support NHS Trusts, their staff and partner organisations, by repurposing the use of the Ring & Ride service to support the wider public transport network. Since 1st April, and using up to 40 vehicles a day initially, we have been transporting NHS colleagues, free of charge, from TfWM Park & Ride facilities and other key transport hubs to some of the larger hospitals and other smaller NHS locations, as a combination of shuttle services and demand responsive transport. These have been successful in carrying thousands of passenger journeys.

These services have carried over 4000 passengers since first being introduced and 26 May, with shuttle services between Wolverhampton St Georges Metro stop, Wolverhampton Bus Station and New Cross Hospital, and between Sutton Coldfield Station

and Good Hope Hospital each carrying over 1000 passengers each.

For more information about this and free travel for the children of other key workers visit <https://www.wmnetwork.co.uk/nhstravel>

### Community Support

Community Transport operators are providing vital support in their communities, including;

- Walsall Community Transport are now shopping for 97 pensioners weekly and also delivering emergency packs for another local community centre when needed. To carry out these services some vehicles and drivers which usual operate subsidised services have been redeployed.
- Community Transport Passenger services, in partnership with TfWM have repurposed subsidised service 41/47 in Coventry.
- Shencare Community Transport, based in South Birmingham continues to support Birmingham City Council Home to School transport taking young people with special educational needs to school as well as children of key workers.

### Supporting Bus Operators

Bus patronage across the West Midlands has fallen by 90% in comparison to pre COVID-19 pandemic levels, but is now starting to see some slight recovery. This has had a significant adverse affect on the revenue levels and the associated cash flow of the bus operators businesses. To support bus operators through this difficult time and to ensure the bus network continued running in the short term TfWM have worked with the Department for Transport to develop and administer a number of measures.

TfWM have developed a package of emergency measures for West Midlands bus operators totalling approximately £25m to include support for subsidised bus payments, English National Concessionary Travel Schemes, Child Concessionary Travel, and Bus Station Departure

Charges. The period of payments is for a period of three months start from the beginning of March and lasting for the period up to the end of June. This was as set out by Government in their notifications to local authorities at the end of March 2020.

In addition commercial bus operators and TFWM will receive some funding from the DfT's COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG) which is designed to ensure bus services can continue to run during the pandemic. The grant is initially for 3 months and is designed to cover some of the loss of operating costs which are not picked up through the TfWM or Government support already in place.

If you do require any further information please do not hesitate to contact the TfWM Bus Delivery Team, Jon Hayes ([jon.hayes@tfwm.org.uk](mailto:jon.hayes@tfwm.org.uk))  
Richard Hardman ([richard.hardman@tfwm.org.uk](mailto:richard.hardman@tfwm.org.uk))

Below some of the key bus network changes at a district level are detailed;

#### *Birmingham*

- Additional peak time journeys were introduced on service X12 to support access the Nightingale Hospital via Birmingham International station, which has not been required to date
- Co-ordination of timetables on service 16 and 50 jointly operated by Diamond Bus and National Express to support social distancing
- Some Claribel services are temporarily suspended or a operating to a revised Saturday timetable
- RK Travel and Discount Travel Solutions who both operate services on the service 11 circular route have temporarily suspended their services.

#### *Coventry*

- Reduced service on Travel de-Courcey service 60 / 61 / 703 / 585 / X6

### *Dudley*

- Co-ordination of timetables on service 4, 4H, 4M and 16 jointly operated by Diamond Bus and National Express to support social distancing

### *Sandwell*

- Co-ordination of timetables on service 4, 4H, 4M and 16 jointly operated by Diamond Bus and National Express to support social distancing

### *Solihull*

- Additional peak time journeys introduced on service X12 to support access to the new Nightingale Hospital via Birmingham International station

### *Walsall*

- Co-ordination of timetables on service 4, 4H, 4M jointly operated by Diamond Bus and National Express to support social distancing

### *Wolverhampton*

- Travel Express who both operate a number of services in Wolverhampton have temporarily suspended their services with the exception of service 303. The suspended services are also operated by National Express and the National Express services continue to operate

## **Restart**

In all areas we are now planning and preparing with bus operators to restart services following discussions with the Department for Transport on week commencing 4th May where they have requested all local transport authorities to prepare for a level of service return. This service return will see TfWM work with operators of commercial and tendered bus services to return service levels to some 75 – 80-% of pre-Covid 19 levels from Monday 25th May, and around 90% plus from Monday 1st June. It should be noted that with social distancing requirements this can only provide for around 35% of pre-Covid 19 capacity across the network, so monitoring and responding will be really important.

Monitoring is being undertaken by operators and reported to TfWM, who are coordinating through the Bus Alliance Restart Group, who are reporting into the regional Transport Cell with TfWM, Local Authority partners, and stakeholders including operators.

TfWM infrastructure is also being monitored, across bus stations, stops and shelters. We have both CCTV and physical checks across the network since Monday 11th May, and are working at speed with local authority colleagues as we identify locations where social distancing measures are made difficult or impossible by our street layout or infrastructure. We are working collaboratively on key areas for monitoring, and on mitigations in areas that have already been identified. All shelter locations now have a reminder regarding social distancing, with further guidance measure being planned. The Bus Infrastructure team have been mobilised to use contractor support for temporary stops. Social distancing measures are also being reviewed across bus stations and interchanges.

We also know that bus journey times and reliability will be critical to managing the limited capacity across the bus network. Over the weekend on 9th May the Government also announced a series of measures with regards to active travel which includes funding for temporary bus lanes, as well as walking and cycling. TfWM Bus team and Resilience team reviewed existing scheme proposals on Monday 11th to share with local authorities on Tuesday 12th for review and comment in an effort to expediate some quick thinking and response on this matter and ascertain what level of ability we have regionally to seek funding from this source to assist with managing recovery. The Bus team had a call to support this urgent piece of work with all authorities.

The Government announcement also made reference to the potential return to schools from as soon as Monday 1<sup>st</sup> June. The TfWM bus team are planning a call over the next few days will all LEA reps on transport to ascertain the level of thinking and risk as the data for what may happen

emerges. It will also enable TfWM to share with LEA transport colleagues the information we have from the bus operator base through this pandemic and the risks to school bus recovery operations.

As we write funding for measures for restart are not confirmed and we continue dialogue with Government, bus operators and others on this matter. As capacity is limited on the network we continue to promote the Prime Minister's advice to avoid public transport and leave it for those who need it as key workers and for essential travel at this time.

#### Further Information

<b>Lead Officer</b>	<b>PETE BOND</b> DIRECTOR – INTEGRATED TRANSPORT SERVICES <a href="mailto:pete.bond@tfwm.org.uk">pete.bond@tfwm.org.uk</a> 0121 214 7388
---------------------	--