

Background

This multi-modal and multi-organisation Transport Recovery Cell has been established to assess the ongoing threat of Covid-19 from a Strategic perspective, within the LRF framework and with a focus on 'recovery/restart'. This forum will ensure that there is consistency in approach regionally, that risks are identified as early as possible and mitigated in the most appropriate way.

The Strategic Objectives under which the Transport Recovery Cell operate are:

- **Keep Passengers Safe**
- **Keep Colleagues Safe**
- **Keep the network running and providing a managed recovery**
- **Keep the public informed**
- **Supporting Vulnerable People**

The Transport Cell is Chaired by Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), and includes representation from bus, rail and tram operators, Highways England, Local Authorities (Highways), Police and Network Rail.

Guidance Overview

The current Government guidance was published on 12th May 2020. The guidance is twofold, with advice given to passengers and advice given to operators.

Subsequent to this guidance the Secretary of State for Transport announced that face coverings on Public Transport would be made mandatory from the 15th June.

Face coverings must be worn in additional enclosed public spaces from 24 July in England, as the government takes further steps to help curb the spread of the virus.

For transport hubs in England, the requirements mean face coverings must be worn in indoor train stations and terminals, airports, maritime ports, and indoor bus and coach stations or terminals.

Anyone who doesn't abide by the regulations – and is not exempt under one of the categories set out in the regulations – could face a fine by the police of up to £100, as is currently the case on public transport.

The Transport Cell has been working to ensure that this guidance is implemented in full, and passengers are advised throughout their journeys as to their responsibilities and measures they can take to reduce risk.

An Operational Order has been put in place to log the framework in which recovery is being planned and delivered on transport. This is being reviewed and amended on a weekly basis.

Bus

Bus patronage has risen to approximately 60% and continues to rise. This is the fastest growth in the UK on bus networks. The bus network is currently operating at 103% pre-COVID levels to help support social distancing which is largely being maintained. Bus operators are working on the basis of a 1m + social distancing on vehicles across the network to increase available capacities of buses across the network.

The bus network timetable change has now taken place with more capacity added to the network and new services put in place to meet new demands.

The use of face coverings remains high with operators reporting 90% compliance. CCTV suggests that these figures are lower amongst young people and lower on stop, in station and on platform, where compliance levels are more like 50%. Face coverings are being distributed to young people at bus stations across the region and a pro-active communications campaign is taking place with posters, audio messages and vinyl's across the network. This is further supported by Safer Travel who are carrying out education and enforcement activities.

National Express, as the largest commercial operator are continuing to have several dynamic

spare vehicles at each depot which will be deployed where routes are busy and require additional capacity.

WMCA/TfWM have been successful in their bid to DfE for £2.3 million of funding to assist with 'back to school' schemes from 1st September until October half term. TfWM have been working with Local Authorities and operators to seek to utilise this money to best support the network and add value and capacity.

To support NHS staff attending site with reduced public transport services, Ring and Ride services repurposed to provide shuttles to key hospital sites from transport stops have been deployed. This has been running on a demand and responsive service and has seen a good take up with NHS colleagues, currently at around 1,000 journeys per week and as of 26th August 17,896 since it started.

Rail

The new rail timetable is due to go live on the 6th September, where additional capacity will be added to the network.

West Midlands Trains are reporting manageable patronage levels across their network with only minor increases being seen in relation to the return to school, however this may increase over the next 7 days and also again at the end of September with the return to Universities.

Using data obtained at the end of August, patronage remains at around 15% pre-COVID levels. This is being monitored closely in line with the push for return to offices.

At present data suggests high levels of compliance with face coverings during the peaks, with lower compliance off peak. Face coverings are available to the public at a number of stations.

Tram

Patronage remains at over 55% of pre-COVID levels and on Tuesday 1st September the Metro returned to normal service, with 6-minute services

in the peak and 8-minute services out of peak. Additional services have also been added during potential school peaks.

At present Metro are carrying no greater numbers of young people than in previous weeks, indicating no early impact in relation to the return to school.

Compliance with face coverings on Metro remains well over 90%, with face coverings being distributed across the tram network.

Roads

Roads is the area where demand has increased most markedly with vehicle counts on both the SRN and KRN is showing that demand on the road network continues to show a day by day and week by week increase.

Highways England have reported that use of the SRN is now over 90% pre-COVID-19 restrictions. The A38 (M) tidal system is now again being utilised for the am and pm peaks. These figures are being replicated on areas of the KRN as well with a 7% increase seen on the return to school week.

RTCC and Return to School

The RTCC has returned to full operational hours, operating from 06.00 to 21.00 Monday to Friday and 09.00 to 21.00 on a Saturday with an on call and remote facility operating at all other times to provide 24/7 provision.

The RTCC has in place a detailed 78-page Operational Order detailing all activities in relation to the return to school.

The RTCC is using real time access to a range of data sources to continually evaluate the transport network, including public transport and highways, pushing out live communications to the public to help inform their journeys. The social media accounts run by the RTCC now have over 10k followers and growing on a weekly basis.

The RTCC is not only being staffed by TfWM, but

also by bus operators and also through the initial return to school by West Midlands Police.

TfWM have pro-actively worked with Local Authorities, schools, colleges and transport operators to develop GIS maps of potential hot spots on the network during the return to school. At these locations, members of TfWM staff along with operators, are patrolling the network to ensure that service is meeting demand, highlighting in real time potential risks and instigating the use of sweeper services.

A robust communications plan has been put in place with a strong emphasis on travel demand management, encouraging passengers, where possible to spread their journeys.

Public Realm and Active Travel

Cycling and Walking – WMCA received notification of the Emergency Active Travel Fund Tranche 1 with an allocation of £3.85m being granted from DfT for an ambitious emergency active travel programme. The amount is more than the indicative allocation, with DfT noting the proposal as being “particularly strong.”

The funding, one of the largest allocations outside of London, is being used on a wide range of rapid schemes, including pop-up cycle lanes and pavement widening, as well as on activation and comms activities.

Tranche 1 is now being delivered across the network and the public will begin to see activities across the region

Further Forward Planning

On 10th August a ‘Lessons Learnt’ review was undertaken to review the initial TfWM and transport response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The outputs from this are helping refine planning assumptions as well as response structures and communication channels.

Whilst a significant amount of work has taken place to mitigate potential risks in relation to the return to school, further works are taking place to

plan for the return to Universities at the end of September when 87,000 students are projected to arrive.

In addition to this, TfWM are continuing to work with Local Authorities and other partners in relation to spikes in cases of COVID-19, making sure that transport is ‘plugged in’ and responsive to information being shared.

Finally, it is important to note that whilst this note is specifically written to update on COVID-19 matters, other events are taking place which are planned over the coming months, which may also have an impact on the network. These include works on the A34 around Perry Barr, construction works in Birmingham City Centre and preparation for Coventry City of Culture.

Risks

There are several key risks associated with the stepping up of transport across the region which have been captured by the Transport Cell. A risk matrix and dashboard has been developed.

- Demand exceeding the maximum capacity detailed within this report
- Lack of public compliance with social distancing rules and with face covering requirement
- Increased congestion on the road network
- Potential for disorder at locations where waiting times are longer than normal, or where services cannot meet demand.
- Localised Lockdown

Further Information

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