

Transport Delivery Committee

Date	14 September 2020
Report Title	Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme – Update
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Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

- To note the update on the development of the Enhanced Partnership and the proposed next steps.
- To note progress with the formal (public) consultation as authorised by TDC at its meeting in March 2020.

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an update on the development of the Enhanced Partnership Plan being developed for the West Midlands and associated Scheme covering the A34(north) and A45/Lode Lane corridors.
- 1.2 The public consultation for the Enhanced Partnership will finish on 13th September. A update of the main themes from the responses will be provided as part of a verbal update to TDC.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 An Enhanced Partnership (EP) is a formal agreement between a local transport authority, local highway authorities and local bus operators to work together to improve local bus services and is one of the new powers available in the Bus Services Act 2017. It requires a clear vision for the improvements that the EP is aiming for, known as the EP Plan. The actions, requirements and commitments to achieve the objectives within the Plan are set out in one or more accompanying EP Schemes.
- 2.2 The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Board approved Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) to give formal notice of the intention to prepare an Enhanced

Partnership Plan and accompanying Enhanced Partnership Schemes as set out in section 138F of the Bus Services Act 2017, at its meeting on 28 June 2019.

- 2.3 Authority was also delegated to the Transport Delivery Committee to oversee the development and subsequent making of the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Schemes.
- 2.4 TfWM issued the Notice of Intention to prepare an EP Plan for the area of the West Midlands Combined Authority¹ excluding the three existing Advanced Quality Partnership Scheme (AQPS) areas due to the way the legislation is written and applied, as they cannot both apply within the same geography; and associated EP Schemes for the A34 (north) and A45/Lode Lane corridors. This was published on 17th July 2019 on the TfWM website. All local bus operators were also made aware of this notice and invited to participate in the formal discussions for the EP.
- 2.5 The formal discussions have been held, with the drafting of an EP Plan and an EP Scheme. The EP Plan is a high-level vision and objectives for bus services in the West Midlands. The strategic Vision for Bus provides a blueprint and starting point for the EP Plan to be discussed during the formal discussions. Through the formal discussions, it has been agreed by the partners to prepare one EP Scheme covering both the corridors of the A34 (north) and A45/Lode Lane.
- 2.6 Within the EP Scheme the details of the infrastructure commitments, service specification and standards, customer standards, performance requirements and maintenance will be agreed between partners. It is intended that this Enhanced Partnership Scheme will complement the introduction of Sprint by providing bus priority as well as higher bus standards for all bus services in the area, in readiness for the 2022 Commonwealth Games.
- 2.7 A notice was published on 20th December 2019 by TfWM (<https://www.tfwm.org.uk/operations/enhanced-partnership/>), giving operators until 24th January 2020 (at least 28 days as required by legislation), within which to make an objection to either the Plan and/or Scheme. TfWM must assess any objections using two criteria – if either is satisfied, it is a legal requirement that the consultation exercise on the Plan and Scheme cannot go ahead. TfWM did not receive any operator objections to the EP Plan or the EP Scheme.
- 2.8 Subsequently, a further review of the EP Scheme has been undertaken with partners. It was agreed to undertake a further operator objection period on the EP Scheme. TfWM issued a further notice on 28th February 2020, giving the relevant local bus operators until 27th March 2020 to lodge a formal objection to the EP Scheme.
- 2.9 No operator objections were received and the scheme proceeded to formal (public) consultation as approved by TDC at its meeting in March 2020.

¹ As defined by the West Midlands Combined Authority Constitution, excluding the three existing Advanced Quality Partnership Schemes

3.0 Public Consultation

- 3.1 The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated a delay in the commencement of the consultation and necessitated a change to the consultation strategy to limit any physical interaction with members of the public whilst ensuring the widest coverage and accessibility.
- 3.2 The revised consultation strategy made greater use of digital technologies including on-line response forms and greater promotion through social media. Awareness of the consultation was raised through printed media and radio.
- 3.3 The consultation commenced on 6th July 2020 and will run through to 13th September.
- 3.4 To date nearly 300 responses have been received to the consultation and a further round of communications is proposed for September ahead of the the process closing on 13th September.
- 3.5 To date there has been a varied response but a healthy amount of participants agreeing with the vision to improve the network through the partnership. The exercise has also generated further suggestions on improvements to the network which will also be collected and considered as part of the process.

4.0 Next Steps

- 4.1 A full report on the outcome of the formal public consultation will be presented to the November meeting of TDC along with any subsequent changes to the enhanced partnership plan or scheme.
- 4.2 Subject to approval the November report will also seek formal sign-off of the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme for the West Midlands.

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this update report. Costs incurred or support provided by TfWM from undertaking activity referred to in this report will be from within agreed overall Sprint and on-street bus infrastructure maintenance budgets and resources.

6.0 Legal Implications

- 6.1 It is noted that paragraph 2.9 (above) confirms that there have been no objections to EP Plan and or EP Scheme. Notwithstanding this, it should be noted that whilst most of the proposed infrastructure and WMCA/TfWM commitments relate to highway land or otherwise land over which appropriate property rights will be secured; the EP Scheme contains commitments on the part of WMCA/TfWM to

deliver infrastructure on third party land. This relates to land in the control and or ownership of network rail ('NR') (at Birmingham International train station) and airport land (Birmingham International Airport) ('BHX').

- 6.2 Appropriate agreement(s) and rights will need to be agreed with NR and BHX as soon as reasonably possible, to allow delivery on WMCA/TfWM commitments given under the EP Scheme; in particular the delivery of such infrastructure by the 30th June 2022. Whilst it is anticipated that matters are being progressed and/or will be progressed both parties, there is a residual risk that there may be delay in concluding discussions and any necessary agreements with both parties; which in turn could have a consequence on the commitments that WMCA/TfWM are providing. Legal will assist as necessary in order to facilitate such arrangements.

7.0 Equality Implications

- 7.1. The revised consultation strategy has considered how to best engage with all groups within the West Midlands. With regards the overall scheme, an Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken, which noted some groups of people are more likely to be reliant on public transport and are more likely to face barriers to public transport. The Enhanced Partnership is likely to enhance the travel experience for everyone but will especially positively impact these groups. From a disability perspective measures such as audio-visual availability will help address some of the key information barriers.

- 7.2 The implementation of cashless ticketing options may exclude individuals who rely on cash as a means of purchase. This can have an adverse effect on individuals who do not have access to a bank account (only a small %) thus being unable to use debit/credit cards to make transactions. Similarly, some of the elderly population feel more comfortable using cash to purchase tickets. In addition, those from a low socio-economic background may not have enough cash within their bank accounts to reach the cap threshold via contactless/card and therefore will rely on cash purchasing being available. Cashless ticketing may restrict the accessibility for these groups. To ensure the measures do not have negative impact on a number of groups (disabled people, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and different age groups) it is important to ensure a) ticketing options are broad and cash payments continue to be an option, and b) pricing remains at the same level for Enhanced Partnership area services as with other services. This assessment will be taken into account during the development of the EP Scheme.

8.0 Inclusive Growth Implications

- 8.1 Bus is a vital component to inclusive growth as it directly supports access to the labour market, and allows people to access education, employment and services. The flexibility of the bus network also makes bus the perfect means of providing public transport options in areas of growth, changing travel demand and new housing; directly supporting our West Midlands Housing Deal and Local Industrial Strategy. This means that buses are central to supporting regeneration, inclusive growth and social integration. Where there may not be a case for investing in permanent rail and light rail infrastructure, new bus infrastructure can be planned to connect new communities and support housing and jobs growth.

9.0 Geographical Area of Report's Implications

- 9.1 This report covers the constituent area of the Combined Authority. Whilst the Enhanced Partnership Plan covers all of this area, the Enhanced Partnership Scheme only covers the A34, A45 and Lode Lane corridors.