

# TFWM BACK TO SCHOOL SUMMARY REPORT

August 25 2020

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## Introduction

As lockdown eases across the country, there is still safety guidance in place when using public transport and as such, journeys will be different. This will particularly affect parents, students and teachers when they return to school in September with DfT data suggesting up to 60% of children who travel by public transport may not be able to easily. There may also be a reluctance to return to public transport following previous advice to avoid travelling on these services unless for essential journeys.

We regularly see (pre Covid) how commuting to education sites impacts the road network and with the risk of more people driving and limited space on the network TfWM has been tasked in coordinating the West Midlands response to this challenge with local authority partners and transport operators.

We committed to our role in getting young people back into education and have secured funding from Government (See Appendix 1 – DfE Funding allocation) to enable us to enhance the public transport network and school services and deliver a Travel Demand Management programme.

We have developed an evidence led approach using a vast variety of data sources so we can monitor and evaluate our interventions and focus efforts on the highest priority areas.

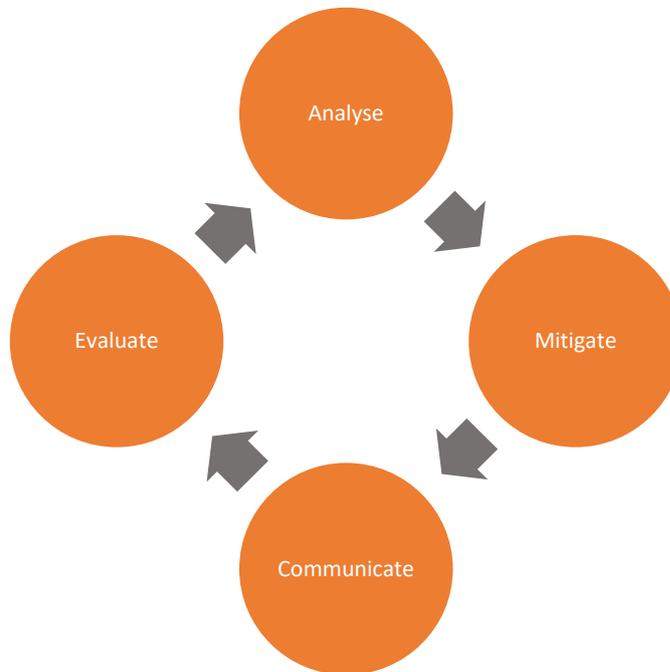
There are over 1,600 educational sites and over 900,000 pupils ranging from nursery places to FE colleges. Developing this action plan has been done in incredibly tight timescales using what information is available. We know there is more to be done, which is why we will be proactively monitoring the network and developing mitigation options that can be implemented as and when issues arise in the coming weeks.

Furthermore, while we have extensively predicted where issues may occur and strengthened the network, the public's choice of how they ultimately choose to travel is a huge unknown and following this year's events, it is likely we will see congestion and delays on the region's roads and work will need to be done to grow confidence in the public transport network once social distancing measures are relaxed.

Anne Shaw  
Director of Network Resilience

## Strategic Approach

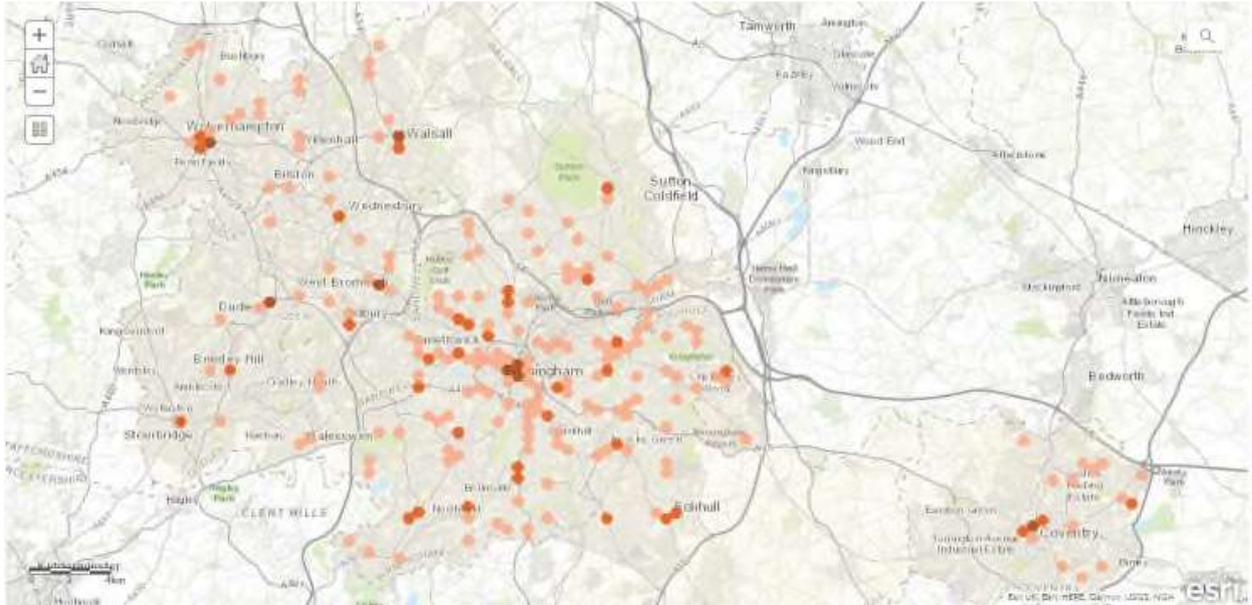
Working across TfWM and our partners through the West Midlands Transport Cell and the Bus Alliance we have implemented a four-stage approach to tackling the back to school challenge that ensures we use an evidence led approach to returning our young people to school.



## Analyse

To tackle a problem on such scale and identify the areas of most concern we have combined various data sources to provide a prediction of demand in each localised area in the West Midlands. This has included current information on the capacity of the public transport network with social distancing measures. We have made great advances in unlocking data from our operators and ticketing information to be able to assess this at a granular level at stop on services.

We have also been able to harness operator intelligence about the services they run and where they see the heaviest demand for school travel. This, together with the travel smartcard “swift” data and we have developed a list of key watch spot areas where demand could exceed capacity. By overlaying the education site data this allows us to identify key education sites of concern to develop mitigations and communicate.



See appendix 2: Back to school watch spots – data analysis

### Key issues identified

- Secondary and higher education sites are at higher risk of public transport issues
- Many school children are travelling through key town and cities creating potential issues at key interchanges at certain times of the day.
- Specific school services will need additional capacity.
- Additional traffic around large schools will cause delays on key routes, impacting business.

It is to be noted that travel demand information per school and by mode was not available. There was an expectation that all schools would be surveyed to provide this but the release of the guidance timed around when schools were breaking up for the summer and the timescales in which to plan has meant that we have had to use proxy information and the best data sources available to undertake the analysis.

See Appendix 3: Bus Demand Assessment  
 See Appendix 4: Bus Route Enhancements  
 See Appendix 5: Rail Key Focus Area and Station Plans  
 See Appendix 6: List of priority education sites

### Mitigate

Working with transport operators and local authorities we have shared the analysis and developed a travel demand management programme to support bus route strengthening and local school mitigations.

## Adding Capacity

- The analysis has enabled TfWM and operators to plan and provide increased capacity on the public transport network. This includes introducing duplicate services on certain routes, closed services specifically for schools and the biggest timetable change in bus services to date.
- Bus services will reach over 100% of pre-covid levels over the August bank holiday weekend. Metro will also resume the pre-covid service patterns with extra running trams during the school travel hours.
- Rail, currently under DfT control, will have a timetable changes week commencing 7<sup>th</sup> September and will be up to 95% of pre-covid levels. West Midlands Trains have analysed their hot spots for school travel and will be introducing station management plans at these key locations to help manage flows through the stations.
- We are also promoting active travel in line with the government guidance for children living under 2 miles to their school who could walk or cycle.
- In addition, we have also looked at other journeys that are made on public transport at the same time and will be seeking to reduce that demand either through a re-timing, removing re-modelling of those journeys thus releasing capacity for school travel.
- Local Authorities Education teams who provide statutory transport support to children have also assessed those services and added capacity to ensure social distancing can be maintained as well as keeping to school bubbles where this is possible.
- We are also anticipating that we will see a rise in children being driven to school and this will have an impact on the local road networks and heavier congestion during the school travel times. Working with Local Authorities have looked at additional measures to implement on the highway and are developing an operational plan with West Midlands Police to help tackle any severe congestion should it arise.

## Travel Demand Management

TfWM is coordinating a TDM programme that aims to:

- Encourage customers to plan ahead and consider re-time, re-route, re-mode and/or remove journeys on the network around schools travel times.
- Consider routes available to education sites based on mode and informed by any planned disruption e.g. road closures or unplanned incidents.
- Education sites to consider the benefits of staggering start and finish times for reducing pressure on public transport services (increasing significantly the ability of public transport to support school reopening).
- Business along key travel corridors to larger education sites to understand and respond to known changes to staggered timings.
- Active travel to be considered strongly - in particular, for journeys to school of two miles or less (and which are currently undertaken by public bus); and
- Temporarily accepting increased use of cars for longer journeys that cannot be accommodated on public transport or realistically switched to active travel. Ideally combined with 'park and stride'.
- Colleges to consider options including online registration and virtual open days.

- Capacity has been provided through funding from DfT to gather school travel plan data in the first weeks of return and support schools with developing or updating their school travel plans. This will add to our data sources.

See Appendix 7: Travel Demand Management Strategy

## Keeping the network safe

With the need to encourage social distancing is maintained on public transport and to manage the potential rise in traffic as part of our operational plan we will be making best use of resources at our stations and busiest stops.

## Safer Travel

TfWM in partnership with West Midlands Police and British Transport Police patrol the public transport system to keep passengers safe. During the Covid Pandemic, they have been supporting the travelling public by encouraging the take up of face masks as well as dealing with other policing matters. As part of the operational planning, the Safer Travel Partnership will be tasking and supporting key locations where we will see heavier foot fall to ensure compliance with wearing face coverings and maintaining social distancing.

See Appendix 8: Safer Travel Plan

## TfWM Bus stations and travel shops

Staff at bus stations and travel shops will be supporting customers to travel safely, maintain social distancing and encouraging the use of face coverings. In addition we have accessed the governments volunteer scheme and we will have deployed on the network a number of volunteers who will be providing additional support to customers. We will also be handing out face coverings and information on how to make a face covering to school children of 11 or over who arrive without these, the aim to help encourage compliance with this requirement and to keep them and other passengers safe.

See Appendix 9: Local Transport Volunteer Plan

## Managing the Highway Network

Working with the Roads Policing unit, we are developing an operational plan to help manage congestion hotspots and encourage safe use of the road. This is particularly important where we will see heavier pedestrian and cycling around schools mixing with those being driven to school. Intelligence from Local Authorities and the RTCC will help with a dynamic deployment. In addition, Local Authorities will introduce additional traffic management at

some locations where they consider problems will be occurring to help manage traffic flows. As part of the communication campaign, we are encouraging those being driven to school to think about dropping of a little further away and walking the last part.

## Communicate

Our communication and engagement plan aims to support the Travel Demand Management response and aims to support those travelling to school in September as well as ensuring communication messaging is consistent and targeted effectively across all partners.



### Objectives:

- Inform parents and students of public transport arrangements and provide reassurance around safety, availability and cleanliness of services.
- Enable education sites to provide guidance and support on school travel in an easy and simple way.
- Communicate and engage with key education sites to provide proactive solutions around identified hotspots or areas of concern highlighted by the data and research undertaken by the TDM programme.
- Target, by route, other public transport users to discourage travel at school/college start and finish times.
- Work with local authorities, education sites and operators to promote consistent messages through existing forums.

### Audiences

- Young People
- Parents
- Education sites
- Wider traveling public

### Communications Activity

- Social media – paid and organic
- Media release
- Web hub
- Back to School toolkit for head teachers

- Back to School information pack for faith leaders
- Posters for school uniform shops
- At a glance factsheet available in 7 different languages
- Radio advertising
- Google ads
- Email campaigns
- Partnership with Birmingham Updates to target Facebook groups in priority areas
- Journey planning exercises with schools
- Webinar for parents
- Business Travel Advice
- Back to Schools – Comms and Engagement Plan
- Back to Schools – Comms Toolkit



See Appendix 10: Communications and engagement plan

See Appendix 11: Back to school toolkit for schools

See Appendix 12: Business travel guidance

## Evaluate

### Monitoring and Evaluation

- Monitor capacity on the network in real time via the RTCC.
- Monitor public transport loading/ capacity figures e.g. bus via operator data and intelligence
- Collaboration with operators.
- Track changes in travel behaviours via COVID-19 travel surveys (conducted with individuals, businesses and colleges) to test impact of interventions during the time period of schools return.
- Monitor communications metrics.

The dedicated groups tracking the project stages include:

- Operations ITS Leadership Team

- West Midlands Transport Recovery Cell.

Given the multiple impacts and interventions in the West Midlands, progress will be tracked in the TfWM EATF and pinch point Business and School interaction dashboard in ArcGIS.

## The role of the RTCC

Even with extensive data analysis it is difficult to predict exactly how the public will respond and how they will choose to travel. The Regional Transport Coordination Centre will be stepped up in the first few weeks of September to not only provide real time monitoring but coordinate a multi-agency response to any issues that arise.

Where mitigations have not worked, or additional measures need to be implemented, the RTCC with its links across all modes of transport and local authority partners will ensure information is shared and solutions are found.

The RTCC is able to not only communicate with partners but directly to the public so we can influence demand in real time and encourage people to re-time, re-mode, re-route or remove journeys in areas we see delays, overcrowding or incidents.

Appendix 13: RTCC Operational Plan

## List of appendices

1. DfE Funding allocation
2. Back to school watch spots – data analysis
3. Bus demand assessment
4. Bus route enhancements
5. Rail Key Focus Area and Station Plans
6. List of priority education sites
7. Travel Demand management strategy
8. Safer Travel Plan
9. Local Transport Volunteer Plan
10. Transport Communications and Engagement plan
11. Back to School Travel Toolkit
12. Business Travel Advice
13. RTCC Operational Plan