

Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Date	19 th October 2020
Report title (*)	Supported Travel Policies Review Update
Portfolio Lead	Transport - Councillor Ian Ward
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Report has been considered by	TfWM Leadership Team Strategic Transport Board

Transport Scrutiny Sub Committee recommendation(s) for action or a decision:

- (a) Introduce TfWM's current Supported Travel Policies and note the role of TfWM in developing and delivering such discretionary travel policies.
- (b) Note TfWM's Equalities Impact Assessment which was undertaken to assess the impacts of Covid-19 across our communities.
- (c) Note TfWM's current challenging budget position and the impact the pandemic has had on our Supported Travel Policies.
- (d) Note that Strategic Transport Board members have asked for options to be developed for November's meeting, with consideration being paid to the Sub Committee's views on any possible changes to the Supported Travel Policies, in response to current budget pressures and equality issues now being faced.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To introduce and define the Supported Travel Policies to the Transport Scrutiny Sub Committee.
- 1.2 To provide an update on the findings from the Equality Impact Assessment undertaken by TfWM into the impacts of the pandemic on our transport network, policies and schemes and be aware that several new cohorts may now require travel assistance.
- 1.3 To note TfWM's current budget position for the Supported Travel Policies, and that a deficit of around £10.5M currently exists within our wider transport levy budget of £114.7M for 2021/22 (of which the Supported Travel Policies makes up a ¼ of this budget).
- 1.4 While assistance for new cohorts is vitally important, this may only be achievable if significant savings are made elsewhere within the Supported Travel Policies budget or more efficient ways of delivering these schemes are found going forward. Henceforth, a range of options are currently being explored by TfWM Officers and will be discussed with Strategic Board Members in November. We therefore are informing this committee of our ongoing work and seek any comments they may have, in shaping our options going forward.

2. Background

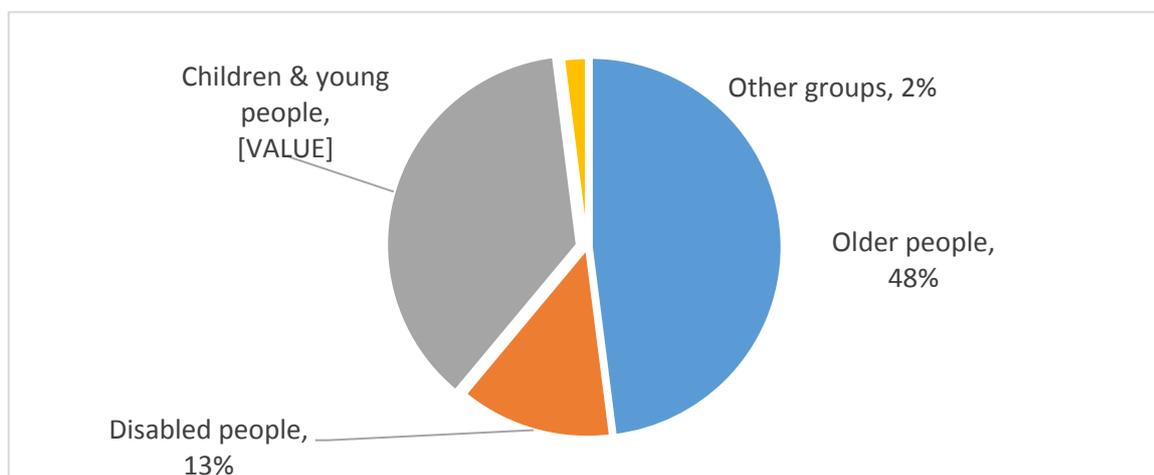
- 2.1 All bus passengers aged over 66 or those citizens with a disability are entitled to travel free of charge on any off-peak local bus service in England. This scheme is called the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) and is set in national legislation. It is funded through TfWM's transport levy at a cost of around £50M.
- 2.2 In addition to the statutory ENCTS, five discretionary Supported Travel Policies are funded by TfWM, to complement the ENCTS at a cost of around £30M from the transport levy. These have been in place since the late 1980's, and are now outlined in the table below:-

Policy/ concession	Definition
Child concessions	Allowing ½ price travel on all modes, for those aged 5 – 18 year olds in the region
Rail and Metro English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) “add on”	Everyone over 66 years of age and eligible disabled people are entitled to a free bus pass under the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) brought in through the DfT. TfWM then offers an extra benefit to this concession by offering additional free travel on the Metro and Rail network after 9:30am to West Midlands residents.
The ENCTS - post 11pm element	Under the DfT's ENCTS scheme, free travel is only valid between 9:30am and 11:00pm on weekdays. TfWM offers additional free travel on all buses after 11pm.
The Tendered Bus Network	Where bus services become commercially unprofitable, financial support is given by TfWM to operators to run these services (i.e. bank holidays, evening and Sunday services and in remoter areas of the region)

Accessible Transport	This includes accessible transport in the form of Ring and Ride, Community Transport contracts and other minor accessible transport contracts to support those people unable to use conventional public transport.
Temporary Schemes	
Women's Concessionary Travel Pass Scheme	For woman living in the West Midlands born between March 6, 1954 and November 5, 1954 were eligible for the Women's Concessionary Travel Scheme. This supported those women most impacted by the Pension Action changes of 2011. However from the 5 November 2020, this scheme will end.

2.3 During the pandemic, TfWM's Supported Travel Policies have continued to deliver accessibility measures for vulnerable communities across the West Midlands and these have been vital for such groups including older people, disabled groups, children and younger people (up until the age of 18).

Current beneficiaries of the Supported Travel Policies



2.4 When combined, these five policies assist over 300,000 people in the region per annum and provide up to 43 million journeys; equating to around 14% of all public transport journeys.

2.5 The concessionary elements in particular have been well used compared to other ticketing options and have provided vital elements to the wider WMCA's recovery objectives. A summary of the benefits these current Supported Travel Policies provide are now outlined below:

- **Child concessions** supports over a ¼ million young people, including those hit by disrupted education, and families experiencing financial hardship. With a predicted increase in the growth of young people at around 2% per annum in the region, this is seen as extremely valued and will encourage young people to continue using sustainable modes.
- **Rail and Metro Add-on and Post 11pm Bus Add-on** assists over 110,000 older people and 35,000 disabled people access the rail and metro network which equates to around 8% of all journeys on these modes (pre-Covid figures). It also assists 20,000 people access our bus network after 11pm. Combined, these have been essential concessions for supporting these

groups access key services and has helped reduce loneliness and isolation. As the amount TfWM pays to rail operators is fixed (under the current franchise) this policy provides good value for money.

- **Tendered Bus Network** supports over 90,000 people access key services including employment and training. It funds around 10.6M trips per annum, and helps reduce social isolation, especially amongst vulnerable groups as well as delivering universal benefits to many, especially those in more isolated areas of the region or those travelling in the evenings and weekends.
- **Ring and Ride** has continued to operate during the pandemic, but operations have been significantly reduced. Pre-Covid, the scheme supported 8,545 users and delivered 2,200 trips per day, yet this is now reduced to around just 700 users, making just 100 journeys daily. And while it continues to support those most vulnerable, it is extremely limited to the people it supports. As other alternatives are often available to substitute Ring and Ride (i.e. Community Transport operations, accessible taxis' and other Demand Responsive Transport models etc) this may be an area where savings could be explored.

3. Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) on Transport Needs of the Region

3.1 In May 2020, a detailed EqIA into the transport inequalities faced by vulnerable groups was undertaken by TfWM as part of developing our response to the pandemic. It applied an evidence-based approach, to ensure our transport services, policies and practices were being undertaken fairly and did not intentionally or unintentionally present barriers to our passengers. The inequalities captured included:

- **Economic inequalities** - covering high unemployment (especially amongst younger people), increased benefit claimants and gaps in the education and skills of people in the region.
- **Social inequalities** - covering the impacts of local assets and centres closing, the lack of community mechanisms being available, the rise in loneliness and isolation and a decrease in people's well-being and mental health.

3.2 And whilst these issues existed previously, all have been exacerbated by Covid-19 and have potential implications on the users of our transport network.

3.3 The EqIA further presented how during the pandemic, a decline in public transport demand, coverage and frequency was witnessed alongside more reliance on car usage. Poorer network accessibility was also seen together with increased safety concerns, cycling inequalities (especially for women, BAME groups and people from deprived communities), reduced community transport operations, and an increase in transport poverty as more people became unemployed.

3.4 Those most vulnerable groups highlighted as having some of the greatest transport barriers in the EqIA included: -

- those on low incomes
- those unemployed
- young people (18 – 24)

- women
- those from BAME communities; and
- those living in deprived areas

3.5 The EqIA concluded that the current suite of Supported Travel Policies does deliver significant benefits to those groups it currently supports, yet it does not deliver equal benefits to all groups. It also identified that there is now a need to consider several ‘new’ groups who are being affected by the impacts of the pandemic and for whom it could be appropriate to provide supported travel policy measures. In turn, greater consideration of ‘new’, excluded cohorts and their travel needs should be sought, and demonstrated in the budget setting process, so a more equitable transport network is delivered.

3.6 At the same time, TfWMs financial pressures mean that there is a challenge to continue to provide the level of funding for the Supported Travel Policies. As it stands there is a deficit of £10.5M from the total £114.7M levy budget, which the Supported Travel Policies are funded from.

3.7 Consequently, the consideration of new cohorts (as demonstrated in the EqIA) may not be financially viable going forward into the next financial year, due to the financial deficit existing within our wider transport levy.

4. Financial Pressures and Implications

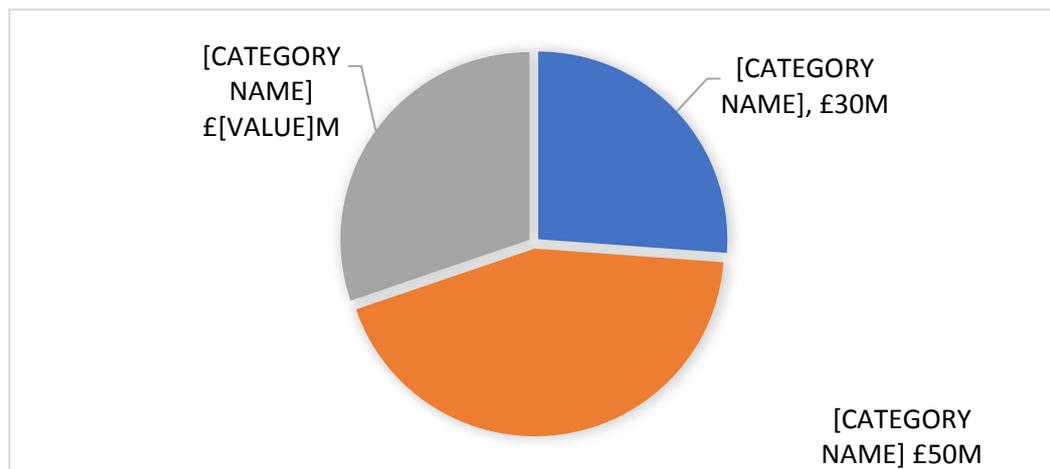
4.1 Based on the existing Supported Travel Policy spend, a forecasted £30M is anticipated for these policies for 2021/22. Yet the wider levy budget requirement currently exceeds available funding by £10.5m. Action is therefore likely over the forthcoming months, to balance this budget and significant savings will need to be made, as well as exploring any income generation opportunities.

Proposed Spend on Supported Travel Policies for 2021/22

Supported Travel Policies	2021/22 (£M)
Child Concessions	6.7
Rail and Metro Concessions (including the ENCTS 11pm element)	4.5
Accessible Transport	6.8
Tendered Network	12.0
TOTAL	30.0

4.2 In addition, 44% of the levy budget is earmarked for the statutory ENCTS (which TfWM must legally fund). A further 30% is allocated for essential on-going operations of the transport network including staff costs and debt repayments. TfWM’s levy budget requirements therefore currently exceed the available funding and significant savings may need to come from the Supported Travel Policies budget.

Current Spend of the Transport Levy (£114.7M)



- 4.3 Consequently, with this level of budget pressure on our transport levy, retaining all existing Supported Travel Policies, in their current form is unlikely. Henceforth reviewing the affordability of our Supported Travel Policies is now required.
- 4.4 One avenue is exploring possible efficiency savings and introducing more innovative ways of using the Supported Travel Policies budget, yet these may not translate into financial savings, especially if there are greater requirements on TfWM to plug future gaps (i.e. if bus services are withdrawn by operators on the tendered network).
- 4.5 Therefore, support for those new cohorts (as highlighted in the EqIA) would only be possible if other budgets, including those for existing supported groups, were significantly reduced.

5. Possible measures to explore going forward

- 5.1 Given the current environment and ongoing financial strains, it is unlikely any new funding will become available to support new cohorts. Only if additional funding sources are found, sufficient savings are made or existing Supported Travel Policy schemes are reduced in scale or removed – creating a budgetary surplus, could new initiatives be developed to support new groups.
- 5.2 Exploring possible efficiency savings and more innovative ways of using the Supported Travel Policies budget is one avenue to further investigate, and this may provide some answers, such as: -
- Introducing new commercial models of Demand Responsive Transport, and trialling, soft market testing to plug the gaps in our current accessible transport network; allowing for a more integrated public transport network to develop.
 - Exploring 'total transport' approaches by joining up transport services that are currently commissioned by different agencies/operators. For example, home to school transport or adult social care transport. This then allows resources to be allocated and co-ordinated more efficiently and effectively. An example of this is the Ring and Ride free on-demand shuttle service; supporting hospital staff get to and from work. On-demand services operate from key

park and ride sites, metro stops and rail stations to the main hospitals across the region.

- Exploring new social finance models with greater involvement of Community Transport operations, including greater use of volunteers.

5.3 If in the future a funding surplus is found, potential schemes to explore could focus on those which members have previously requested information on, together with those suggested with in the EqlA. These schemes have included:

- **An Enhanced Young Persons Concession (covering 18 – 24)**, which could support up to 250,000 young people most impacted by Covid-19; assisting them into work and training opportunities.
- **Free travel for 16 – 18 year olds**, which could support up to 80,000 young people access school and college as well as leisure and well being activities.
- An **Enhanced WorkWise Offer** to support those 4.6% currently unemployed in the region and gain improved access to jobs and training. This could also support the 15% of young people currently out of work in the region.
- **Specific transport support for Care Leavers and those Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs)**, to support those most vulnerable young people in the region with a range of tailor-made travel support initiatives.

5.4 Pilots for new mobility schemes could also be explored, in alignment with TfWM's wider innovation and mobility programmes. For example:-

- **A Wheels to Work Scheme** providing mopeds and scooter loans, along with training and support. This scheme may support those living in more remote areas of the conurbation to access work, where public transport availability maybe limited.
- **Taxicard scheme** for those unable to use public transport or Ring and Ride.

6. Next Steps

6.1 There is a clear ambition that our recovery from the pandemic should be one that supports the ambition for a fairer, greener, healthier West Midlands, that builds on the needs for a more equitable transport network. This will support those more vulnerable communities across our region, together with fully supporting the recovery economy. Yet, we must also be aware of the financial challenge which lies ahead and that difficult decisions maybe required, as to what we prioritise going forward. The next steps for this agenda should include:-

- 1) Transport Scrutiny Sub Committee members to feed into any possible changes to the Supported Travel Policies and shape any possible options going forward.
- 2) Subject to member feedback, present a range of possible options at Novembers Strategic Transport Board

7. Financial Implications

7.1 See section 4, where this is covered within the main section of the report.

8. Legal Implications

8.1 At this stage, the main legal implications arise from the potential removal of future Supported Travel Policies such as our concessionary schemes. Obviously, any statutory concessions or support may only be changed as a result of changes in legislation however as this report notes a number of these policies are discretionary.

8.2 The legal implications are being kept under review and the Authority is involved in national discussions through the Urban Transport Group of Transport Authorities where others are making similar decisions. It will be particularly important to review the equalities implications when considering any changes to ensure that the statutory obligations under equalities legislation are satisfied.

9. Impact on Delivery of the Strategic Transport Plan

9.1 Any change in TfWM's Supported Travel Policies will likely impact on the wider delivery of the 15 Strategic Transport Plan policies, covering the following:

- The National & Regional Tier
- The Metropolitan Tier: Rail and Rapid Transit Network, Key Route Network, Strategic Cycle Network
- The Local Tier
- Smart Mobility Tier

9.2 The policies that are supported include:

- Policy 1 - Accommodate increased travel demand by existing transport capacity and new sustainable transport capacity;
- Policy 2 - Use existing transport capacity more effectively to provide greater reliability and average speed for the movement of people and goods;
- Policy 3 - Maintain existing transport capacity more effectively to provide greater resilience and greater reliability for the movement of people and goods.
- Policy 6 - To improve connections to areas of deprivation.
- Policy 8 - To improve connections to new housing development locations to help them flourish, primarily through sustainable transport connections.

10. Equalities Implications

10.1 The report makes reference to the widening of transport inequalities following the Covid-19 outbreak. Groups most likely to be impacted include; younger people over 18, those unemployed, people on lower incomes; those living in deprived areas, BAME communities and those who rely on public transport to get to work.

10.2 The further widening of inequalities (the region already faces significant inequality challenges) will continue to then impact on WMCA's inclusive growth aspirations and wider recovery work. The EqIA of Covid-19 transport inequalities lays out the

potential impacts in more detail of who is most impacted and suggests a range of support mechanisms to support new cohorts and vulnerable groups in the region.

11. Inclusive Growth Implications

- 11.1 As noted, Covid-19 has exacerbated many already underlying inequalities – be it socioeconomic or health. As more evidence comes to light, it demonstrates how vulnerable groups are suffering more – which are then further exacerbated as we move into Recovery. Their transport barriers then present significant challenges for delivering Inclusive Growth and there is a need to consider how best to use existing tools such as the Inclusive Growth Toolkit, to ensure all WMCA investment drives more inclusive and sustainable growth.

12. Geographical Area of Report's Implications

- 12.1 This report impacts on the seven local authority areas of the West Midlands.

13. Other Implications

- 13.1 None.

14. Schedule of Background Papers

- 14.1 None.

Note; (*) denotes mandatory field