



## Transport Delivery Committee

<b>Date</b>	9 <sup>th</sup> November 2020
<b>Report Title</b>	Bus Business Update
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<b>Report has been considered by</b>	Putting Passengers First Lead Members Group

### Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

- To note the contents of this report.

### 1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report matters relating to the performance, operation and delivery of bus services in the West Midlands. This report includes:

Section A	<b>Bus Services Performance Summary</b> Punctuality and reliability – October 2020
Section B	<b>Tendered Bus Services Contracts – October 2020</b>
Section C	<b>Bus Operational Matters and Passenger Impacts</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Network Recovery and Response during Covid-19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School Return</li> <li>Supporting Operators</li> <li>Bus Stop Information Update</li> <li>Social Distancing &amp; Key Messaging at Stops</li> <li>Task Force</li> <li>Emergency Active Travel Fund (EATF)</li> <li>NHS Key Worker Shuttles</li> </ul> </li> <li>Local Bus Network Updates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Birmingham - Westside</li> <li>Birmingham - HS2</li> <li>Birmingham - Bus Gate: Moor Street Queensway</li> <li>Birmingham - Perry Barr</li> <li>Coventry Station Masterplan</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bus Stop Infrastructure</li></ul>
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## **2.0 Section A – Bus Services Performance Summary**

- 2.1 As reported in the previous Bus Business Report TfWM is reviewing how bus network performance is measured and reported.
- 2.2 A Bus Performance Board through the West Midlands Bus Alliance has been established involving the Traffic Manager from each of the seven constituent authorities, TfWM Director of Integrated Network Services, TfWM Head of Network Delivery and local bus operators.
- 2.3 This Board will enable improved accountability of how well bus services are operating and what we can do to improve them.
- 2.4 The available data to inform the bus performance reporting is being reviewed with the proposed bus performance measures, approach and reporting governance to be agreed by the Board and will be brought to the Transport Delivery Committee.
- 2.5 Due to Covid-19 pandemic and the resultant significant network changes and changes in network operating conditions the Bus Performance Board was paused during the period between March 2020 and September 2020. However, with the return of a more stable bus network, the Board has now re-commenced.
- 2.6 Following a recommendation from a Coventry City Council Scrutiny Panel an additional Bus Performance Board has been established which will cover the performance of the Coventry bus network. As a result, Coventry City Council will no longer sit on the main Bus Performance Board which will now be made up of six constituent authorities.

## **3.0 Section B – Tendered Bus Services Contracts – October 2020**

- 3.1 Due to unusual and difficult market conditions, including ongoing financial support provided to the bus industry and a level of uncertainty in estimating future demand,

Officers considered it was not an appropriate time to issue tenders as part of a competitive tender round.

- 3.2 Taking the above into consideration the Bus Delivery Team have worked with the existing operators to agree an extension of applicable contracts for a period of approximately two months, which results in those contracts which have been extended having a revised expiry date of Saturday 2nd January 2021.
- 3.3 There were a total of 84 contracts due to expire in October 2020. A total of 78 contracts have been extended and the remaining six contracts have either been commercialised by the bus operator or the provision has been revised.
- 3.4 The contracts with a revised provision include enhancements to service A7, A8 and A10 in Solihull and services 63, 64 and 65 in Wolverhampton.
- 3.5 Revised provision on service A7, A8 and A10 was originally due to commence in April 2020 and includes new provision and network links to the Blythe Valley employment and residential development in Solihull. The commencement of the provision was delayed due to Covid 19 but following discussions with Solihull Council and the Blythe Valley site a revised October start date has now been agreed.
- 3.6 Wolverhampton local services 63, 64 and 65 have been extended for a longer period and the vehicles used on the contract enhanced to Euro VI vehicle emissions standards. This enhancement has been funded through a Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) clean air grant. The revision to this contract will introduce a further three Euro VI vehicles into the subsidised bus network with effect from October 2020. This will further contribute to the enhancement of the West Midlands bus fleet working towards our clean air objectives.

#### **4.0 Section C – Bus Operational Matters and Passenger Impacts**

##### **Network Recovery and Response During Covid-19**

- 4.1 This section of the report provides an update to the previous report on bus services and infrastructure provided in September 2020 in relation to the bus network recovery and response to operating during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 4.2 As lockdown restrictions have continued to be eased and the demand for travel and local bus travel has increased. Bus patronage has shown a steady rate of growth.
- 4.3 The bus network is carrying approximately 60% of expected patronage in comparison to what would be expected for the equivalent period pre-Covid. This usage on the West Midlands Bus Network is the highest proportion of bus patronage of all the City Regions in the UK outside London.
- 4.4 Most buses across the network continue to operate to around 50% of their standard capacity due to social distancing requirements on vehicles.

- 4.5 To ensure the West Midlands Bus network has been able to continue to meet the demand for bus travel, despite these capacity restrictions, TfWM have worked very closely with bus operators. This has ensured that the level of service available has continued to be sufficient, maintaining accessibility and connectivity for the region.
- 4.6 The network has maintained flexibility to ensure where passenger demand grows quickly service levels can be revised accordingly. This has been especially important since the schools have re-opened in September resulting in increased demand across the network at school times.
- 4.7 TfWM has worked with all operators to understand usage of bus services which has enabled any journeys which are regularly busy to be identified and suitable mitigations implemented. In addition, National Express have providing a number of dynamic spare vehicles across the network which can be deployed to meet any acute increases in demand.

### ***School Return***

- 4.8 A significant amount of planning has taken place across TfWM, bus operators and other bodies such as Local districts, Local Education Authorities, schools and Further Educational Establishments. This planning work informed the areas of the network which needed additional capacity.
- 4.9 TfWM and bus operators has also accessed funding from the Department for Transport and the Department for Education to provide additional journeys at school times to meet the extra demand. Along with other measures such as ensuring double deck vehicles are on the most appropriate routes, duplication of journeys at school times, some dedicated school bus provision and the availability of spare vehicles to be deployed where required.
- 4.10 The network changes have coincided with TfWM's most comprehensive ever back to school marketing and communications strategy which has covered multiple aspects of return to school travel for all passengers and stakeholders.

### ***Supporting Bus Operators***

- 4.11 As bus operators continue to carry reduced passenger numbers the associated revenue generated is also reduced. To support bus operators through this period and to ensure the bus network continues to operate TfWM have worked with the Department for Transport to develop and administer a number of measures.
- 4.12 TfWM have continued to provide support in the form of maintaining subsidised bus payments, English National Concessionary Travel Schemes and Child Concessionary Travel.
- 4.13 Commercial bus operators and TFWM are receiving funding from the DfT's COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG) which is designed to ensure bus services can continue to operate to full service levels during the pandemic. The grant has

been extended to run through to October 2020 and the DfT have committed to a notice period ahead of the discontinuation of the funding which has not been realised as yet. The funding is designed to cover some of the loss of operating revenue and enable a comprehensive bus network to continue to operate and ensure connectivity for the region.

### ***Bus Stop Information Update***

- 4.14 TfWM carried out a complete refresh of roadside printed information through July and August to update and reflect service changes on 5th July and 30th August. This refresh coincided with anticipated points of network stability across the region.
- 4.15 This refresh has resulted in the production of over 10,000 posters and approximately 1,500 flags, with information being posted over the course of several weeks and key areas and interchange locations being prioritised.
- 4.16 TfWM has agreed with bus operators to update roadside information approximately every 4 weeks.
- 4.17 Digital information, through journey planners and apps, is being kept up to date on a weekly basis and real-time information screens are being updated as service changes occur.

### ***Social Distancing & Key Messaging at Stops***

- 4.18 Throughout lockdown and recovery, TfWM has worked with Local Authority partners to prepare bus stops and bus stations to ensure compliance with new regulations and to improve social distancing. This has involved messaging on shelters, on totems, in bus stations, and through our online presence.
- 4.19 A series of messages continues to be displayed in bus stations and across roadside infrastructure. These include reminders to Stay Safe – Stay Apart, and the need to wear face coverings when travelling by public transport.
- 4.20 Through a robust campaign, which saw all bus infrastructure receiving an internal classification, every bus shelter in the West Midlands receive prominently displayed vinyls with these key messages.
- 4.21 Key interchange locations have also seen footways being stencilled to further guide customers to keep apart, reminding them to socially distance whilst waiting for their service, keep to one side, follow one-way systems, and not sit next to each other.
- 4.22 On the network, at key points, bus service stopping patterns have been reviewed and amended.
- 4.23 Additional temporary stops have been added to Colmore Row and Livery Street in Birmingham to help spread services, and their intending passengers, across a larger area and reduce the potential for crowding.

- 4.24 Set-down only stops have been introduced in Chelmsley Wood and Solihull interchanges, to reduce the potential for boarding and alighting customer conflicts in some of TfWM's more enclosed infrastructure. Walsall St Paul's Bus Station has also seen the introduction of set-down stops on a nearby approach road, to help reduce the footfall and pedestrian flow conflicts within the facility
- 4.25 In some locations with narrow footways, for example Carrs Lane in Birmingham, existing stops have become set-down only in order to reduce congestion and potential conflicts between pedestrians and intending passengers.
- 4.26 Regular monitoring of social distancing and face covering compliance has been taking places at bus stations and at key stops on the network.
- 4.27 To further assist in directing appropriate interventions at or around stops on the network where social distancing may be an issue, TfWM continues to work closely with operators and Local Authority partners in considering intelligence related to bus boarding at key times and, in particular, in relation to school traffic uplift.
- 4.28 Early engagement was undertaken around business parks due to peaks in demand associated with shift patterns and, more recently, there has been engagement with the Local Education Authority and educational establishments based on emerging patterns.

#### ***Task Force***

- 4.29 Following the announcement of the mandatory use of face masks on vehicles TfWM worked with operators and partners to ensure a high level of compliance was adhered to across the network.
- 4.30 Free masks were made available across bus stations, Travel & Information Centres, were handed out at transport hubs and on the Metro and this continues to date to keep the network safe and to build passenger confidence in the use of public transport.
- 4.31 The use of face coverings remains high but where lower compliance has been seen in specific groups targeted campaigns have been implemented.
- 4.32 The Safer Travel Police Team (STPT) were deployed to help with enforcement across the network and implement the 'direction to leave' used on non-compliant passengers and TfWM along with the STPT recently started a pilot project where a 'task force' from both agencies, supported by National Express provide additional assistance at 'hotspot' locations.
- 4.33 The joint Task Force initially commenced on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> October, with the objective of increasing face covering compliance on the transport network, providing customer assurance and providing a high visibility presence. This high visibility is intended to help prevent and deter further issues.
- 4.34 In the first two days of operation the team had talked to over 1700 people about not wearing their face covering which has been well received by members of the public.

- 4.35 We also have as part of the DfT 'Journey Makers' group and our own TfWM 'Passenger Champion scheme' a team of volunteers who also support at the busiest locations to help distribution face masks, support passengers, assist with crowd management activities, social distancing, as well as providing active management to prevent passengers accessing services that are at capacity and guide them to other vehicles.

### ***Emergency Active Travel Fund (EATF)***

- 4.36 Since lockdown, TfWM has been working closely with Local Authorities regarding Emergency Active Travel Fund (EATF) Tranche 1 measures, which has seen pop-up cycle schemes and some more permanent measures being developed as part of Tranche 2.
- 4.37 Through collaboration, TfWM and operator partners have provided vital feedback on proposals to Local Authority colleagues, and this has resulted in several schemes being amended for the benefit of bus and coach customers.
- 4.38 Key EATF Tranche 1 Schemes are being monitored and some have been withdrawn or amended by Local Authority partners as the demands of the network have changed through the recovery period.

### ***NHS Key Worker Shuttles***

- 4.39 As previously reported, shuttle services, which were introduced through TfWM's work with National Express Accessible Transport (NEAT) in order to support NHS Trusts, their staff and partner organisations.
- 4.40 This was undertaken through the repurposing of the Ring & Ride service to help support the wider public transport network.
- 4.41 Four shuttle operations continue to be provided free of charge to NHS staff at the present time, and these link Good Hope, Russells Hall, New Cross and Manor Hospitals, with Park & Ride and Transport Interchange facilities
- 4.42 The service has now carried over 24,000 passengers since its introduction at the beginning of April 2020, with around 750 people a week now being carried.

### **Local Bus Network Updates**

#### ***Birmingham - Westside***

- 4.43 As reported previously, phase two of the Birmingham Westside extension is ongoing, as the metro is extended from Centenary Square along Broad Street to Hagley Road on Edgbaston (just west of Five Ways).
- 4.44 Significant bus mitigation measures have been implemented, in order to facilitate and maintain bus services in the area and provide suitable passenger facilities. These mitigation measures, including traffic regulation orders, parking restrictions, traffic management and physical highway works, are benefiting bus services operating along this corridor.

- 4.45 It is anticipated that services will be able to return to Broad Street from late Spring 2021, subject to Metro work progress.

### ***Birmingham - HS2***

- 4.46 On Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2020 HS2 undertook their permanent closure of the section of Park Street in Birmingham City Centre, between Masshouse Lane and Bordesley Street to facilitate construction of the new Curzon Street station.
- 4.47 Bus services that previously used Park Street have been diverted along Moor Street Queensway, and the opportunity was taken to revise some bus stopping patterns in Birmingham City Centre.

### ***Birmingham - Bus Gate: Moor Street Queensway***

- 4.48 Birmingham City Council is currently introducing a bus gate on Moor Street Queensway, by Moor Street Station and Primark. By prevent the movement of other vehicles along Moor Street Queensway.
- 4.49 This work was proposed as part of a mitigation measure for HS2's closure of Park Street in July 2020, however the implementation date for this was changed to October 2020 due to challenges regarding the advertising of Traffic Regulations Orders during the period of lockdown.
- 4.50 The bus gate will help ensure that sustainable transport modes are prioritised within the city core, also preventing dispersed car traffic from routing along Moor Street Queensway, as this would have a detrimental effect on the bus network.
- 4.51 The introduction of the bus gate will also help with the introduction of the Clean Air Zone in Birmingham during 2021.

### ***Birmingham - Perry Barr***

- 4.52 TfWM is working closely with National Express West Midlands and the Birmingham City Council team regarding the ongoing project to remove the Perry Barr fly-over in advance of the Commonwealth Games in 2022.
- 4.53 All parties are working collaboratively to mitigate the impact that the work may having on bus services and key interventions, mostly in the formal of signal optimisation, have been introduced to assist services through the area.
- 4.54 The mitigation and intervention opportunities to assist bus customers remain a key focus as traffic management requirements on site change.

### ***Coventry Station Masterplan***

- 4.55 Following the move from the bus interchange to the temporary stops by the canopy at the front of the station building in January 2020, as the work on the Coventry Station Masterplan (CSMP) project has continued, the next phase saw buses resume operation from the interchange on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2020.
- 4.56 Work is ongoing with the CSMP project team regarding the introduction of the new bus interchange, which will be located the other side of the Warwick Road from the existing facility and will provide space for both scheduled and rail replacement services.

### **Bus Stop Infrastructure**

- 4.57 In accordance with a key West Midlands Bus Alliance deliverable, and reported previously, TfWM continues to invest in improving the safety, security and appearance of our bus stop infrastructure estate.
- 4.58 Digital advertising is being introduced as part of a committed programme that also seeks to provide further capital upgrades, and re-branding of existing infrastructure as part of the West Midlands Bus brand update.
- 4.59 Since March 2020, up to 20<sup>th</sup> October 2020, a further 120 new shelters have been installed across the network, of which 105 have been installed this financial year. This brings the total number of new shelters to 243.
- 4.60 TfWM has completed upgrades to 1161 bus shelters, rebranded with the new West Midlands Bus colours as part of the re-branding programme. This is an additional 141 shelters since the last update.

## **5.0 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The considerable impact of Covid 19 on Bus service and infrastructure provision has resulted in significant financial pressures. Bus operators have lost ticketing revenue on both commercial and tendered bus routes and additional costs have been incurred by both operators and the WMCA on Covid19 related activity such as enhanced cleaning, infrastructure modifications and additional information provision on social distancing.
- 5.2 DfT has provided financial support to compensate operators for lost income on commercial and tendered routes, the latter passported through the WMCA from CBSSG funding. CBSSG has also helped to fund additional enhanced cleaning and information provision as a result of the pandemic.
- 5.3 Funding from the DfE has also been passported to Authorities to fund additional services and measures required for the safe transportation of children to and from home and schools and colleges. TfWM has also used some of the £2.4m funding allocation to provide additional services on the network to facilitate social distancing. Funding was made available for the first Autumn half-term and notification has now been received that further funding will be available for the second half-term although the amount has yet to be confirmed.

5.4 The WMCA has also provided financial assistance to operators through its Concessionary and Subsidised Services payments. DfT has issued Public Policy Notices (PPNs) outlining the support it will provide to operators. The PPNs state that its support is based on the assumption that Authorities will continue to provide financial assistance to operators by basing Concessions and other Local Policy payments for the period from March 2020 on what would have happened in the absence of Covid19. The last PPN covers the period up to 31<sup>st</sup> October so the WMCA has agreed to continue to support operators up to that date. Tendered services are now operating at pre-Covid levels. Payment arrangements for Concessions beyond 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020 has yet to be determined and will be reviewed in the light of any further notices from Government.

## **6.0 Legal Implications**

6.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from the contents of this report.

## **7.0 Equality Implications**

7.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report

## **8.0 Inclusive Growth Implications**

8.1 There are no specific inclusive growth implications arising from noting this update: however, buses are the most important part of the public transport system to the majority of people in the West Midlands, and it is therefore crucial that people can access bus services in a way which is safe, convenient and affordable. Buses will also be an important component of the region's transition to net zero. As such, bus patronage will be a key indicator of how clean and inclusive the region's economy is, and should be, watched closely.

## **9.0 Geographical Area of Report's Implications**

9.1 This report covers the constituent area of the Combined Authority but due to the importance of cross boundary services – into and out of the constituent area – partnership working with non-constituent and shire authorities is crucial in undertaking activities referred to in this report.