



Transport Delivery Committee

Date	8 February 2021
Report Title	Bus Alliance Update
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Report Considered by	Councillor Hartley, Lead Member for Putting Passengers First

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Transport Delivery Committee is recommended:

- I. To note the content of the report and current status of the West Midlands Bus Alliance, and note its work programme for 2021.
- II. To submit the report to the West Midlands Combined Authority Board for information.

Purpose of Report

1. To report matters relating to the governance, operation, delivery and performance of the West Midlands Bus Alliance. This report is presented by Chair of the Lead Member Group for Putting Passengers First and Bus Alliance Board Member; Cllr Kath Hartley.

Background

- 1.2.1 The West Midlands Bus Alliance was established in 2015 by the then ITA to oversee the joint delivery and governance to improvements and objectives for improvements to bus across the region, seeking to bring about greater investment in the bus network, improvements to customer satisfaction, increases in patronage, and improvements to bus journey times and reliability of services.
- 1.2.2 The Alliance brings together bus operators, local councils and their elected members, Transport for West Midlands, Confederation of Passenger Transport, Safer Travel Police, the Department for Transport (DfT), as an observer, and Transport Focus, who independently chair the Bus Alliance Board.
- 1.2.3 Since its introduction the Alliance has overseen, influenced and monitored the investment of over £140 million in new and upgraded buses, investment in new bus priority, as well as the reallocation and removal of some bus priority in the region, one of the areas within the responsibility

- 1.2.4 Prior to the start of the Covid pandemic patronage on bus was at over 267 million passenger trips per annum, which was a testament to some of the credible interventions being made in the region for bus. Of course this picture has now changed but it should be reason to be optimistic and ensure that when building back for bus we are clear that bus will still play a vital and essential role in the integrated transport network, supporting hundreds of millions of journeys each year.
- 1.2.5 Whilst the challenges of Covid-19 are clear for all to see, it is also important to note that the West Midlands Bus Alliance is still being recognised and held up across the UK as a first rate example of partnerships working to achieve outcomes in often challenging and competing environments across various stakeholders of both public and private sector. The Alliance has addressed audiences nationally influencing discussions in Scotland amongst the bus industry supported by the CPT and many other partners.
- 1.2.6 Moving into 2021 the Bus Alliance is an important body acting as a catalyst to oversee the regional industry interface between bus operators, Transport Authorities, and Local Authorities, as well as the DfT. This report looks to set out some of the major critical deliverables of the Bus Alliance in 2021 and why it's work has never been more important, regardless of any future assessment of bus delivery options.

West Midlands Bus Alliance Board Governance

2. As a result of Covid-19 the West Midlands Bus Alliance Board continues to meet virtually. Since the last report two full Board meetings have taken place in September and November 2020 with the Board being kept updated on developments via virtual meetings in between. There was also an Extraordinary Bus Alliance Board held in October 2020 to which operator representatives were also invited, primarily aimed to share an update on discussions with the DfT around proposed covid-19 recovery and improvement funding and the potential delivery mechanism.
3. Bus Alliance Board member Graham Vidler and the CPT has been continuing to work extremely hard to ensure that bus services and operators have been given the priority they deserve in high level discussions with the DfT throughout the pandemic.
4. The Bus Alliance provided a submission to the Transport Select Committee report on "Reforming Public Transport after the pandemic", a copy of this report is attached as an appendix.
5. The 2021 dates for the Board meetings have been agreed as 3rd February; 12th May; 8th September and 17th November.

Managing the Impacts of Covid-19

6. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the bus network and dominated the work of the Alliance throughout 2020 and will shape the work of the Alliance for the foreseeable future. Managing the impact has materialised in two

distinct ways; firstly, managing the network to ensure it continues to operate for those people who need it and secondly adopting safe practices to ensure that passengers and staff remain safe.

7. At a time when national Government has engaged with the bus operators and Local Transport Authorities in two very separate processes with very separate dialogue, the Bus Alliance has proved an invaluable place where both sources of information and all parties come together to agree a common understanding, the impact of Government announcements, and the best ways in which to manage and mitigate them. The Bus Alliance has been used as the mechanism to disseminate information, have constructive dialogue across all partners and collectively deliver the agreed measures.
8. At an operational level the Alliance has facilitated weekly operator calls to set direction, create and deliver a shared consensus on key issues and share information & knowledge emerging from central government and other national bodies such as the Urban Transport Group and the CPT. This group has collectively agreed, orchestrated and overseen the introduction of a number of measures in response to the pandemic. This has included but not limited to the following;
 - A number of multi-operator network reviews and changes to reflect fluctuations in patronage and requirements of the DfT and TfWM funding. This included introducing a significant number of additional services and capacity in September to facilitate the return to school and college and allow for social distancing where required.
 - Implementing new processes and procedures to allow and encourage passengers to meet national guidance when using public transport such as social distancing, wearing face coverings, providing passengers information on the best time to travel etc.
 - Coordinate the introduction of enhanced cleaning methods across vehicles and infrastructure to reduce the risk of the spread of infection.
 - Developed, agreed and implemented passenger information with regards to key messages for using the bus network.
 - Agreed and introduced data provision and monitoring in order to challenge processes and procedures and ensure objectives are being met. This includes daily reporting of passenger levels, reporting of services at or close to capacity and passenger adherence to wearing face coverings.
 - Introduction of multi-agency and operator task force for 'patrolling' bus stations and the wider network monitoring passenger behaviour and adherence to national guidelines.
 - Agreement for introduction of free travel for NHS staff and children of essential workers attending school during the first period of national lockdown.

- Agreeing a standard set of terms and conditions across the West Midlands Network in return for the continued payments of grant support, concessionary travel reimbursement and contract payments.
 - Introduction of free shuttle services for NHS staff working at some hospitals in the West Midlands. The service uses currently underutilised R&R drivers and vehicles and has to date provided nearly 35,000 passenger trips for essential NHS staff.
9. Using the communication channels established under the Bus Alliance, TfWM have coordinated a Bus Infrastructure working group which continues to meet every two weeks. The aim of the group has been to ensure that bus passengers and operations are considered when developing highways measures to aid social distancing and encourage sustainable travel. This group also assisted in providing additional infrastructure at the busiest bus stops and areas of public realm specifically for bus passengers. This group has also been engaged by the respective members in regards to the design of the tranche 1 emergency active travel fund schemes and the future tranche 2 schemes proposed to be designed in the coming months.
 10. Local Authority Alliance partners have enabled engagement with district officers responsible for the provision of education transport to coordinate the return to school in September 2020 and also the distribution of DfT funding across the combined authority. This forum has and continues to included direct engagement with the colleges of the West Midlands to aid the return of college students at the start of the new academic year and ensure there was sufficient capacity on the bus network to enable social distancing.
 11. Both of these forums will have legacy value beyond the pandemic and there is an expectation these will continue under the Alliance umbrella. One example has been to aid discussions between colleges and operators to seek mutual efficiencies in the bulk purchase of tickets.
 12. The Community Transport Operators Panel (CTOP), which reports to the Bus Alliance Board and includes representation from the national Community Transport Association, have worked through the pandemic to provide services and assistance to the more vulnerable and isolated members of the West Midlands Community. The group has continued to provide essential food and health trips for their customers whilst also introducing new services to deliver food and other essentials. Using funding from the DfT, TfWM have been able to financially support the groups with payments for additional costs associated with the pandemic.
 13. Throughout the pandemic the Alliance and partners have been engaged by the Department for Transport, the office of the Traffic Commissioner, Department for Education, other UK city regions and other national and international bodies to contribute to developing national policy and guidance, share best practice and provide advice and guidance on how to learn from what has been achieved by the Alliance in the West Midlands.
 14. Looking to the medium term it is highly likely that the next tranche of funding from the DfT to aid the recovery and ultimately the improvement of bus services will

require local transport authorities to establish voluntary partnerships to give a mechanism with agreed governance to agree how the funding will be spent. The West Midlands Bus Alliance is a recognised and trusted forum to enable this to happen and move forward. Additionally, there may be a requirement to invite other partners or authorities into the Alliance to aid and assist the recovery further. The strength of the partnership will be key to ensuring a swift and successful recovery.

2021 Work Programme

15. At a time when Covid recovery is at the front of everyone's mind, it will be the return to the public transport network that will set out the type of recovery that we have and how well that can help the region meet its targets under the climate emergency. Nowhere will that be more important than bus which still carries around 80% of all public transport trips in the region. At this point in time there are less passengers travelling, but the work programme for the Bus Alliance has never been more critical and never been more important in its 6 year history.
16. Multi-modal network review - Members of the Alliance recognise that the bus network is one element of a wider integrated public transport system. Through the various partner organisations the Alliance has continued to engage with other modal partnerships and bodies including the Grand Rail Collaboration and the Midland Metro Alliance. The next stage of recovery from covid-19 will require a multi modal network review where a collective approach across these partners and with local authorities will be required.
17. New Partnership Agreement – The Government will require TfWM to enter into a partnership with bus operators as part of the Bus Recovery proposals. The West Midlands Bus Alliance will oversee discussions and plans for this following the National Bus Strategy.
18. Unprecedented investment in priority – The local authorities and TfWM are now overseeing the delivery of £165 million of investment in bus priority to support improved journey times and reliable journeys, crucial to customer confidence. As set out in this report the number of schemes is without historical parallel and through the Bus Alliance it will continue to monitor the delivery of many of these schemes, which will help it to realise the benefits of its lobbying to support funding into bus journey improvements over recent years.
19. Greener Buses – The Alliance continues to monitor the WMCA bus emission targets following its commitment to get all buses to Euro VI by April 2021. Whilst this commitment has been impacted by funding and Covid the region expects to have over 90% of bus service mileage to Euro VI by April 2021, and further push towards 100% at the soonest opportunity when funding allows. Additionally, the region now has its first 29 all electric double decker buses in service with National Express; whilst Birmingham City Council has purchased 20 hydrogen double decker buses that will be in operation by National Express during 2021. We also expect to see the first 5 single deck electric buses operating during 2021 with Diamond Bus, funded through the Government's Clean Bus Technology Fund. The WMCA has also invited suppliers to tender for a framework contract to supply pantograph chargers to support electric bus operations, initially looking to support bus services in Wolverhampton and Sprint.

20. Beyond 2021, Coventry is set to become one of the UK's only two all-electric bus cities as part of a DfT pilot to test the impact on air pollution. This ground breaking project, which is designed to improve air quality and significantly lower greenhouse gas emissions, which subject to a successful business case, will see up to £50 million invested by Government, with a further £75 million investment from local bus operators to put an all-electric bus fleet on the streets on Coventry by 2025. TfWM are now working closely with government to finalise the business case, alongside other partners through the Alliance of Coventry City Council, local bus operators and Warwickshire County Council.

A Bolder Bus Alliance 2020

21. The Bus Alliance Board has received updates in relation to the progress made towards delivering a number of the commitments of the Bolder Bus Alliance under the key aspirations of being;

- **The greenest**
- **The best value**
- **The simplest ticketing**
- **The most reliable**
- **The safest**

The most reliable

22. The Alliance has continued to be engaged and assisted in the development in bus priority investment including funding secured for the Birmingham Cross City scheme and Clean Air Zone early measures.
23. A summary of the major schemes at delivery and development stages are provided in the Table 1 and 2. Whilst we have seen the bus gate on Moor Street Queensway delivered in December 2020.

Table 1; Bus Priority - Delivery Schemes (£165.1m)

Scheme Name	Scheme Description	Scheme Value
CAZ Early Measures	Tranche 2a covering schemes for Rea Street, Upper Dean Street, Smallbrook Queensway and Coventry Road. Tranche 2b for bus lanes on Hockley Hill.	£1.5m
Bus Lane Enforcement Phase 2	Bus lane enforcement scheme to expand enforcement capacity to current bus lanes that are not actively enforced. Installation of 26 new bus lane enforcement cameras and their associated infrastructure (lineage, signs and back office solution) and modifications to any existing Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO's) to allow enforcement to take place at various locations across the city to protect existing bus priority measures where contraventions are occurring and impact on bus reliability and journey time.	£0.595m
Journey Reliability	Revalidation of SCOOT signal control systems, implementation	£0.7m

Improvement Growth Areas	<p>of MOVA control to give freight and public transportation priority, and installation of selective vehicle detection at 5 sites.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A38 (S) Bristol Road - Selly Oak Station • A38 (S) Bristol Road - Sir Herbert Austin Way • A38 (S) Bristol Road - Bell Lane -Church Road • A38 (S) Bristol Road - Frankley Beeches Road • A38 (S) Bristol Road -Great Stone Road 	
Dudley Road (A457)	<p>Proposals are to widen the existing substandard lane carriageway to provide wider lanes allowing traffic to flow freely</p> <p>Together with realignment of junctions. This would provide junction improvements, new footways construction, improve accessibility by including provision for shared/ segregated cycling, additional controlled pedestrian crossings to improve safety, reduce congestion and improve network capacity.</p>	£28.15m
Sprint Birmingham to Airport (A45)	<p>Delivery of Phase 1 of highway works to provide enhanced bus priority in readiness for Sprint and the CWG, between Birmingham City Centre, Sheldon and towards Birmingham Airport/Solihull.</p>	£55.4m
Sprint Birmingham to Walsall (A34)	<p>Delivery of Phase 1 of highway works to provide enhanced bus priority in readiness for Sprint and the CWG, between Birmingham City Centre, Scott Arms and Walsall</p>	£32.4m
Cross city bus priority: Druids Heath - Dudley	<p>Bus priority measures between Druids Heath and Dudley along the A435 and A457.</p>	£13.7m
Cross city bus priority: City Centre	<p>New bus lanes, bus gates, junction upgrades and improved passenger environments in Birmingham city centre.</p>	£14.8m (inc. £4.225m BCC contribution)
Queen Elizabeth Hospital Bus Priority (New Fosse Way)	<p>Delivering bus priority at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) as part of the National Productivity Investment Fund 2 programme.</p>	£0.580m
Alcester Road Bus Priority	<p>Delivery of a revitalisation of bus priority between the Ring Road and Moseley.</p>	£2.6m (inc. £0.5m BCC contribution)
Sprint Hagley Road	<p>Proposed early works for utility diversions and highway improvements in and around the future Edgbaston Metro Terminus.</p>	£7.9m
Capacity improvements B4106 Spon End, Coventry		£5.8m
Bus Gate Michaelmas Road / Warwick Road		
Completion of DEFRA funded junction improvements A491/A461		£1m

corridors.	
Traffic signal upgrades at key junctions on high frequency bus corridors	

Table 2; Bus Priority - Development Schemes

Cross city bus priority (4 packages)	4 Packages for the initial cross city region bus priority to complement Sprint and the cross city bus priority in delivery: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Package 2: Perry Common (7) / Hamstead (16) –Hawksley (35) / Longbridge (45/47) • Package 4: Sutton Coldfield (907/X14/65/67 –Longbridge (X20/X21/61/63) • Package 5: Harborne (23/24) – Castle Bromwich (55/94) • Package 6: West Bromwich (74) – Meadway (97) 	£56.5m (delivery)	Concept Designs completed
A41 Soho Road BID Highway, Connect & Plan	Development of a delivery strategy based on the A41 Soho Road framework (2015), highway and connectivity proposals. The strategy will seek to encourage inclusive economic growth along the Soho Road corridor within, and adjacent to, the BID area by delivering connectivity and public realm improvements.	£0.045m	Development Stage completed
Harborne BID transport and connectivity study	Development of interventions to make Harborne BID fulfil its potential as a greener, cleaner BID	£0.075m	Development Stage (funding request)

Towards the best value and simplest ticketing

24. A Fares and Payments update was presented to the September Board providing details of the following developments:

Swift Go – Best Value Capping through Account Based Ticketing

25. TfWM has now delivered the Swift Account Based Ticketing solution ‘Swift Go’ that enables best value capping on the West Midlands Metro that has been used by customers to provide confidence that the solutions is technically robust.
26. There has been significant progress in completing the developments required to rollout Swift Go with capping onto the Bus network. The vast majority of operators in the Alliance have confirmed that they will accept Swift Go once it is available and the legal contract is currently being finalised for operators to sign.
27. Swift Go on West Midlands Metro is currently set up to provide customers with a daily cap. This is being enhanced to enable both three days and weekly capping which may be more appropriate for the flexible working expected as a result of

Covid-19. It is expected that such functionality and products will also be available across the bus network.

Swift App

28. The Swift App brings together public transport payment, validation, journey planning and ticket finding into a single App to make it as simple as possible for customers to access public transport. The first iteration of this App was released for a staff trial on the 19 August 2020. The trial is complete with the feedback being analysed. Early feedback suggests that there are a number of bugs that need to be resolved particularly associated with mapping and 'nearby' searches. These issues will be resolved before rollout to customers which, depending on the wider feedback, should be in late autumn.

cEMV contactless payment

29. Through the TfWM lease scheme, we have ensured that all bus operators now have cEMV enabled ticket machines that can accept contactless payment bank cards. This has been really popular with customers. However, the issues of integration between operators is still unresolved and as such it is not possible for customers to achieve a multi-operator best value cap and those using a bank card to travel on more than one operator's service is likely to pay more for their journey than any other customer. TfWM working with Midlands Connect and industry experts has designed a solution to this issue and continue to seek funding for delivery.

Community Transport

30. At the November Board Chris Busst presented a report on behalf of the Community Transport Operators Panel, highlighting the serious challenges the sector is currently facing due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The report raised awareness of what the various CT operators (Community Transport; Shencare CT and Walsall CT) could bring to the table and details of a number of collaborative initiatives that various CT operators and TfWM are working on towards delivery of their commitments to the Bus Alliance deliverables. This includes:

- Over 100,000 passenger trips in the first 6 months of 2020/21;
- Community Transport integration with wider public transport services;
- Walsall CT buses branded in the West Midlands bus livery; and
- Tackling loneliness by offering a service where people otherwise would not travel.

31. During January 2021 Walsall Community Transport have become the first operator in the West Midlands to have all of their fleet painted to carry the West Midlands Bus Livery. This was an 'added value' contractual commitment with TfWM to act as a trial operator for the wider roll out of the brand and to better understand the impact on passengers and operations.

Passenger Satisfaction and Wider Acclaim

32. At the November Board a report on the work of the Passenger Satisfaction Steering Group was given, detailing that the group had reconvened and had met most recently in October 2020. The group has the responsibility to ensure there is a structured approach to surveying passenger satisfaction and to action on feedback and priorities. During the Covid-19 pandemic the group has been working through the findings of both TfWM passenger research and that carried out by Transport Focus. The Transport Focus research highlighted a reduction in satisfaction on face covering compliance in the West Midlands on bus, this and our own intelligence led to the development of the taskforce, which has been out on the network to engage with passengers and encourage greater compliance.
33. The West Midlands Bus Alliance continues to be held up as best practice of partnership working through the Alliance. Linda McCord, Chair of the Bus Alliance Board has been asked to speak at a number of conferences recently about the West Midlands Bus Alliance is on a panel for Transport Scotland soon to discuss how we work well together for the benefit of the passenger.

Financial Implications

34. There are no direct financial implications as a result of this update report. The Bus Alliance has been successful at bringing together development budget funding and in identifying additional funding sources through successful funding applications and operator investment.

Legal Implications

35. This report is for information only and there are no new direct legal implications arising.

Equality Implications

36. This report is for information only however, bus priority measures are likely to help enhance the customer experience which is, in turn, likely to have positive impact on a number of equality groups given that many of these groups are reliant on public transport for their travel. The best value capping solution is also likely to have positive impact on equalities by supporting people to make the best, most cost-effective ticket purchase decisions. It is important to ensure that solutions are sought to ensure that people are not penalised for purchasing day rather than longer-term passes as this has an impact on lower socio-economic groups who cannot afford weekly/monthly etc. passes and therefore have to pay higher prices for day tickets. Finally, it is important to ensure full accessibility of the app solution before it is launched – this should include engagement and testing with disabled user groups.

Inclusive Growth Implications

37. This report is for information only; however 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.

Geographical Area of Report's Implications

38. 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.