

Introduction

Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) is the local transport authority covering the seven constituent authorities of Birmingham City Council, Coventry City Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council and the City of Wolverhampton Council.

The use of public transport and the way that people choose to travel, both locally and for longer domestic journeys;

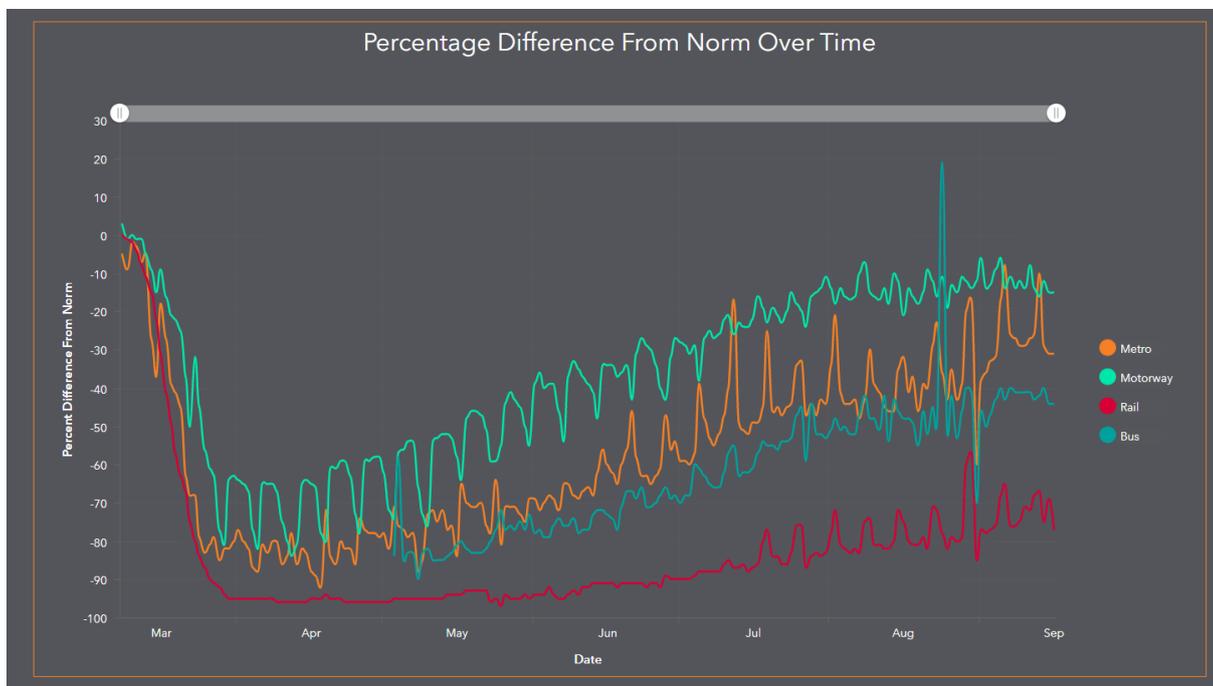
The impact of Covid-19 on transport and travel behaviour has been significant. As cases began to rise in the UK and abroad, measures were put in place to restrict public movement and interaction, with clear guidance not to travel.

TfWM has produced significant insight into the impact of Covid-19, utilising data and surveys, to help coordinate and support transport in the short-term, and to also understand some potential long-term changes in transport and travel behaviour that could have implications on future policy.

Local Travel Statistics

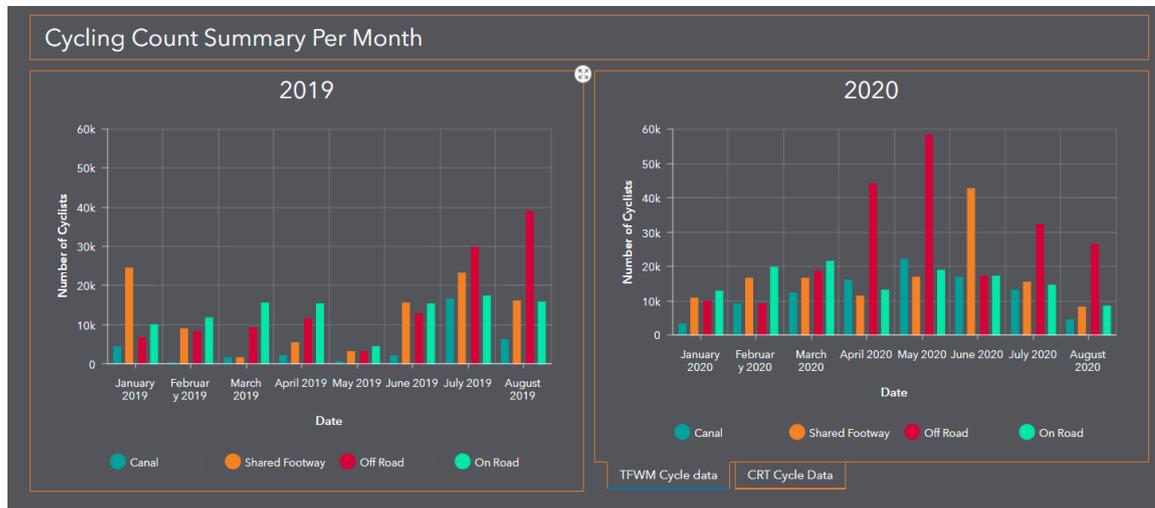
TfWM collated travel demand statistics as part of the Covid-19 dashboard. Figure 1 shows how travel by car, rail, bus and metro all decreased significantly as the lockdown was implemented in mid-March 2020. As lockdown restrictions were eased post June/July 2020, car traffic has seen the biggest rebound and currently sits just below the norm. Metro and bus have also shown an increase, whereas rail has experienced the least recovery (as of mid-September 2020).

Figure 1: Multi-Modal Comparison



The bus network is operating at over 100% of its pre-covid service levels with substantial timetable changes taking place over the August bank holiday weekend. Rail service changes took place on the 6th September which increased services to approximately 90-95% of pre-covid levels. From 1st September, West Midlands Metro is now running its normal timetable bringing daytime frequency back to every 6 minutes (during AM /

PM Peaks) on weekdays and every 10 minutes at weekends. We have also seen a continued increase in cycling since March 2020, as shown in Figure 2 below:

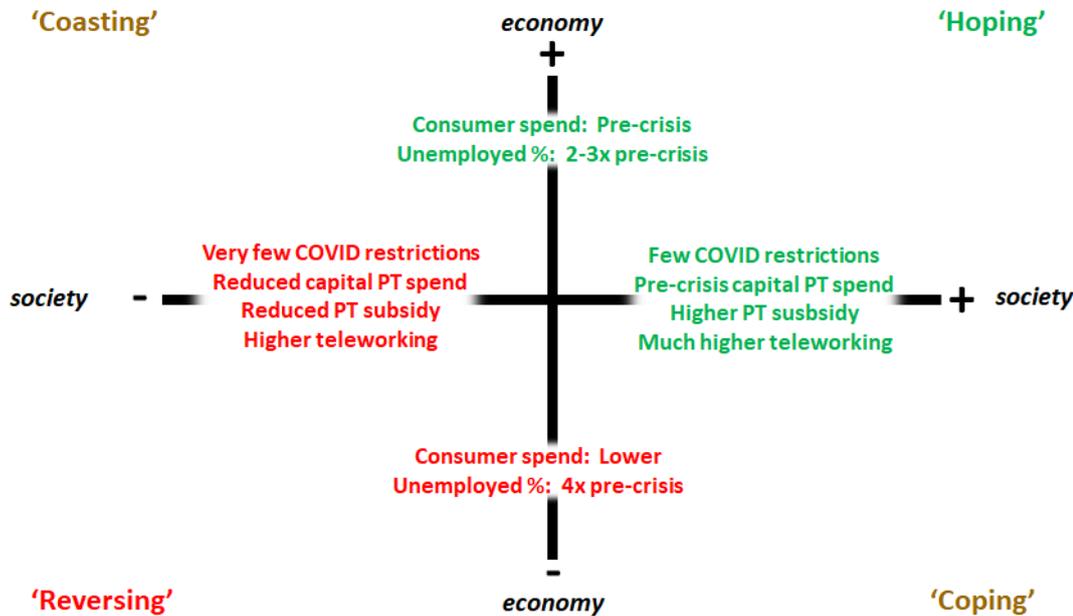


Longer-term impacts

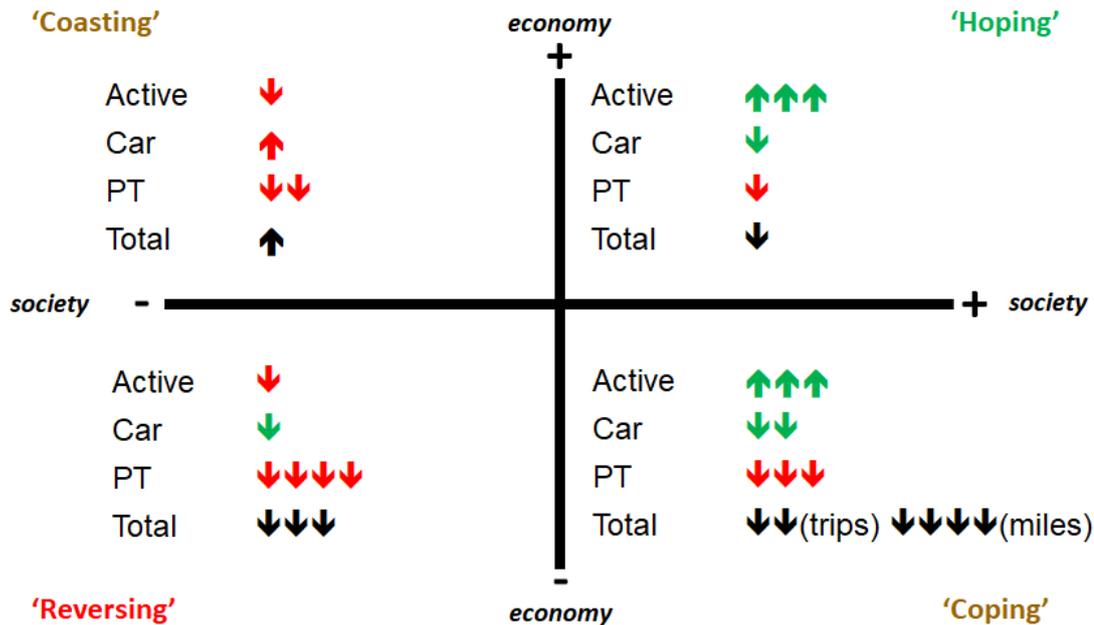
There must be considerable uncertainty about these longer-lasting changes, however, as they depend on the medical outlook first, which is uncertain, and they depend on the economic impacts, with the potential social adjustments in response to both. This means layers of uncertainty make the standard forecasting approaches impractical, or not useful for thinking about the long-term.

Instead, scenarios offer a way to think about the spread of changes possible, combining different but plausible directions for the different factors influencing local travel behaviour. TfWM has developed four broad scenarios, looking ahead a year or so into the current ‘pre-vaccine’ period.

These consider two of the key drivers of change as affected by the pandemic; the economy, and social change (plus some linked transport policy choices). Thinking about plausible, relatively positive or negative developments in each case, as shown on the economic and social axes below, suggests the four scenarios in each corner, characterised in terms of progress on our objectives; ‘Coasting’ (economy recovers, little adaption), ‘Hoping’ (economy recovers, with positive social changes), ‘Coping’ (economic problems, social adaptations in response), and ‘Reversing’ (negative economic and social change):



Applying the developments on each axis to our understanding of the factors underlying demand for local transport, and our local travel data, gave the results below for each scenario (compared with the pre-lockdown situation), and it is notable that even the most positive (Hoping) sees a reduction in public transport use:



Figures are for the personal (e.g. excluding a doctor's rounds) domestic (and mainly local) travel of an average West Midlands resident

Now we are some way into the 'pre-vaccine' period of the scenarios, we can compare the travel changes in each to the recent actual data, including the 'Local Travel Statistics' above.

That data suggests a continued recovery in car trips (and miles) to pre-crisis levels (somewhere between Coasting-Hoping and Coasting-Reversing), an increase in active travel (especially cycling, although from a low base) overall (somewhere between Hoping and Coping), and a sustained, significant reduction in public transport use (somewhere between Reversing-Coasting and Reversing-Coping). Public transport is held

back by the continued capacity issue and passenger concerns linked to physical distancing, and a shift to home-working reducing the need to travel (and attractiveness of best value season tickets). These issues apply especially to rail as its passengers are generally wealthier than bus and Metro passengers, and more likely to have a car alternative, and to be in a job that allows working from home.

Central and local governmental transport priorities and finances and funding for transport;

With the unprecedented impact of the pandemic crisis, it is not surprising that the measures taken to close the local transport funding gap in the early stages of the pandemic sought to patch and mend existing complex and inefficient local government funding structures.

The main weaknesses in the way additional Covid-19 funding has been provided in England so far are it is short term and it is mode by mode (with different criteria, end dates and arrangements for each mode).

Example: Bus services funding

For example, the mechanisms for bus support during recovery sees Government funding most bus services directly with commercial operators through BSOG and CBSSG (uplifted BSOG). TfWM has then had to negotiate further support through ongoing locally funded concessionary reimbursements at pre-Covid rates (for passengers not being carried), tendered bus payments at pre-Covid rates (for services not operating), and other mechanisms such as breaks from bus station charges.

Whilst this has been effective in supporting bus companies during a time of crisis, during the longer term, as the government funding available reduces and patronage does not fully recover, it will encourage operators to consolidate resource on the most profitable services at the detriment of the more marginal routes that in many cases are essential for providing access to employment, skills and healthcare for many of our most vulnerable communities.

Given the substantial public funding that is supporting the network, there needs to be clear local accountability in the West Midlands for supporting the recovery from the pandemic and the ability to protect future bus services. Providing money to operators simply to run buses is a very blunt instrument. Funding should instead be targeted at making the bus market as a whole more financially sustainable, by

- Reducing costs; such as funding investment in zero emission vehicles or bus priority infrastructure both of which lower operational costs and help support wider policy objectives, or by;
- Increasing passenger numbers, for example by funding fares reductions or providing targeted concessions for groups such as job seekers or young people.

The mix of tools will be dependent on specific local geographies and policies, but devolving funding and powers to local decision makers, will produce better outcomes than simply funding bus operators to focus on their short-term commercial imperatives. This is a model that has the support of commercial bus operators in the West Midlands, through the West Midlands Bus Alliance.

Infrastructure

It is worth noting, in terms of infrastructure delivery, that it is too early to fully understand the financial and deliverability impact of the pandemic. Government support enabled Local Authorities and TfWM to deliver social distancing, adapting high-street, new bus priority measures and new active travel schemes supported by changes to the TRO process). However, measures could have been in place earlier if government had avoided cumbersome application processes for the Emergency Active Travel Fund (EATF).

To aid economic recovery, it will be vital to continue investing in infrastructure projects, as set in the '*Recharge the West Midlands*'¹ submission to government. Government, working with bodies such as TfWM, will need to provide the right levers and mechanisms to drive forward devolved infrastructure programmes. The HS2 'Notice to Proceed' and Getting Britain Building Fund are examples of government commitment to accelerating projects.

However, with the forthcoming CSR, it might also be pertinent to review the forecasts and assumptions for future travel demand and the type of infrastructure investments that are being made to ensure they deliver outcomes such as net zero carbon goals and levelling up.

The resilience of the transport system for future crises;

The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities within the West Midlands, worsened by the significant disruption to public transport. Pre Covid-19, around 80% public transport trips were taken by bus and more than 50% of bus users do not have access to a car in their household. Public transport was critical in supporting NHS and key workers.

As 31% of our regions households do not have access to a car/van, our public transport network has been vital - especially those low-income key worker groups, younger people, older people, disabled groups and those from deprived backgrounds. For these groups, access to the internet is often much lower, with only 40% of those living in deprived areas and 70% of older people having access to the internet when compared to higher earning groups – which witness 99% coverage.

Transport affordability during the pandemic has also been a barrier especially for those on lower incomes or those currently unemployed or young people. Such households spend a relatively high proportion of their income on commuting (25% compared to 13% for higher income households). Public transport costs are one of the greatest barriers faced by young people when accessing education and training and is linked strongly to increased post-16 education dropout rates.

It will be vital to develop the appropriate policies for ensuring that impacted groups are supported in the Covid-19 recovery period, and that transport interventions continue to focus on supporting inclusive growth, with funding devolved accordingly.

Walking and Cycling

Government announced an indicative allocation for the West Midlands of £17m from EATF. The West Midlands was successful in an EATF Tranche 1 application, with an allocation of £3.85m being granted from DfT. The amount is more than our indicative allocation, but a cumbersome application process had to be followed (as previously stated).

TfWM submitted a Tranche 2 bid on 7th August, we are awaiting a decision from DfT. Tranche 2 schemes plan to deliver cycling segregation, being aligned to a long-term Walking and Cycling Plan²; which includes a West Midlands Bike Hire Scheme and supporting e-scooter trials.

As shown in Figure 2, Walking and cycling have grown in popularity during the Covid-19 lockdown. There is an opportunity to lock in this positive travel behaviour and deliver permanent measures, helping to reduce a high carbon recovery from the pandemic and help the public maintain physical and mental wellbeing.

Travel demand management (TDM)

TfWM has undertaken a TDM programme throughout the pandemic to support businesses and help recover the transport network. This approach is helping to tackle congestion on our networks (supported a multi-

¹ <https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/3975/west-midlands-economic-recovery-our-ask-and-offer-hd-spreads.pdf>

² <https://www.wmnetwork.co.uk/ways-to-travel/cycling/starley-network/>

agency Regional Transport Coordination Centre (RTCC) and to manage short capacity issue on public transport networks (due to social distancing and the recent school return).

TfWM implemented a unique set of activation measures to support the uptake of EATF delivered infrastructure, targeted behaviour change and road safety education. There is a long-term opportunity for DfT to mainstream and upscale this approach nationally.

The devolution of transport policy-making responsibilities and powers;

As public investment is required to support the recovery of the transport system, it is imperative this investment is used to build back better and to adopt a new model for long term sustainable funding for Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCA's) and Local Authorities.

West Midlands Devo Next Programme

As set out in 'Devo Next'³ (*Submission to Local Recovery and English Devolution White Paper*), we require enhanced powers and local responsibility for the development, management and operation of our transport system. This includes:

- Devolving all Bus Services Support Grants directly to MCAs, as well as the flexibility to revise and reinvest statutory schemes such as ENCTS and its payment arrangements to operators.
- Local rail devolution, through the West Midlands Rail Executive, building on the clear successes of London Overground and Mersey Rail.
- MCA areas should also have access to powers, functions and duties equivalent to Transport for London, as outlined in the DfT's published plan 'Gear Change: A bold vision for cycling and walking'. Areas of enhanced powers should include civil enforcement of Moving Traffic Contraventions and Pavement Parking, with revenues raised and retained at the MCA and/or local authority level.
- As set out in the WMCA's CSR submission⁴, a critical priority is to work collaboratively with Government to develop a rolling five-year infrastructure programme. This single pot approach to funding has a specific focus on critical enabling infrastructure. Enabling infrastructure will drive inclusive growth and present coherent recovery response to the pandemic.

The decarbonisation of transport and the capability to meet net zero carbon emissions targets by 2050

As reported to WMCA Board in July 2020⁵, Transport is the sector that accounts for most of the WMCA's and UK's emissions. Transport emissions have remained broadly unchanged since the 1990s. Most of the emissions are from cars. Decarbonising transport at a rate that meets the #WM2041⁶ carbon reduction pathway will not be possible without unprecedented technological and behavioural change.

Provisional work carried out by the Tyndall Centre has found that even if all new cars were ULEVs by 2035, a 58% reduction in UK car mileage between 2016 and 2035 would be needed for car CO2 emissions to fall to an extent consistent with the Paris Agreement. However, Government's current transport carbon reduction pathway which aims to deliver domestic legislative commitments would likely not require such a profound level of change.

As we recover from Covid 19 there are a number of drivers that represent a real risk of a high carbon recovery:

³ <https://dmscdn.vuelio.co.uk/publicitem/28abbfd5-147b-4634-b84f-8471cf477106>

⁴ <https://governance.wmca.org.uk/documents/s4655/Appendix%201.pdf>

⁵ <https://governance.wmca.org.uk/documents/s4451/WMLTP%20Review.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/4008/wm2041-final-003.pdf>

- Lack of availability of public transport if commercial and financial challenges require reduction of services if support is not provided; and
- A shift to more remote living and migration away from denser urban areas due to the accelerated rate of digitisation (working from home and teleconferencing for example) and desire for greater living space and access to green space.

These risks will not only jeopardise efforts to decarbonise UK transport, they will also result in wider external impacts affecting quality of life and productivity.

Five Motives for Change

Work has already started to review a new Local Transport Plan (LTP) for the West Midlands, including evidence base research and workshops with stakeholders to start to develop a case for change for our transport system. From this Five Motives for Change have been developed:



The climate emergency is an important motive for change, however, there are wider improvements to equity and quality of life that are also critical. Building consensus for the change required to meet decarbonisation objectives will need to be based on wider improvements that reflect citizens' wider aspirations and values.

Policy priorities for decarbonisation

The following areas of priority have been identified by TfWM following analysis of what is needed to meet national, WMCA, and local stakeholder decarbonisation targets/budgets:

- **Freight decarbonisation.** Accelerated development of viable ULEV solutions and supporting infrastructure is urgently needed with particular progress needed on heavier road vehicles. Greater understanding of the potential for emissions to be reduced through consolidation of deliveries is needed and sustainable policy levers that would make such consolidation commercially viable (and indeed favourable) need to be identified. This area is picked up with the draft West Midlands CSR submission⁷.

⁷ <https://governance.wmca.org.uk/documents/s4655/Appendix%201.pdf>

- **Transforming private vehicles.** Current land use patterns have been shaped by the high level of individual mobility people have through access to cars. Beyond a shift to less carbon intensive energy sources, reduced energy consumption is needed to bridge the policy gap. Transformation of private vehicles so that they require less energy is needed to allow for rapid decarbonisation without high social and economic impacts from reduced mobility.
- **Transforming travel patterns and land uses.** In the longer term there is the potential to reduce the carbon emissions from transport by more fundamental changes to travel; shorter distance travel, less frequent (consolidated) travel, mode shift.
- **“Electrification” of passenger travel.** Electrification of road and rail is critical for decarbonisation and will reduce the need to otherwise reduce travel to close the policy gap.

Innovation and technological reform within transport

New technologies and business models will offer a host of opportunities including greater consumer choice; better informed decisions by travellers and transport authorities and more efficient provision of transport networks and services.

In order for these benefits to be realised, we need a framework from Government that:

- Provides greater flexibility to deliver innovation on local network. This could be supported by DfT accelerating measures contained in the Future of Transport Regulatory Review such as Future Transport Zones and special sandbox environments.
- Provides a legal and regulatory framework which gives cities and transport authorities sufficient agility to manage the potential impact of new transport innovations. As a result of the pandemic, this could include the flexible use of DRT to link NHS staff and key workers to a recovered bus network; and
- Sets national minimum standards in critical areas such as safety, accessibility and data: local areas provide local areas with the flexibility to set standards that exceed the national baseline.

E-scooters trial

TfWM, Birmingham City Council and Coventry City Council have launched an E-scooter hire scheme in collaboration with Sweden based supplier VOI. Our priorities in selecting a supplier were to ensure they share our goals and vision of creating safer more sustainable transport options whilst allowing us to encourage social distancing and cleanliness.

The trial will last for one year and we will utilise the data we gather during this period to understand the potential for this mode of transport as an alternative to private car use. This trial will allow TfWM to provide informed feedback and advice to the DfT as we identify challenges and considerations and in terms of physical infrastructural and safety requirements to support this mode.

E-scooters, West Midland Bike Hire and wider micro mobility options could provide first or last mile integration to our rail, tram and bus networks.