



West Midlands
Combined Authority

Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Monday 13 September 2021

Minutes

Present:

Councillor Liz Clements (Chair)
Councillor Thabiso Mabena
Councillor Barbara McGarrity

Birmingham City Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
City of Wolverhampton Council

In Attendance:

Emma Beswick
Pete Bond
Mark Collins
Dan Essex
Steve Hayes
Councillor Gurdev Hayre (joined by Teams)
Lyndsey Roberts
Kate Taylor
Mike Waters

West Midlands Cycle Hire (Project Manager)
Director of Integrated Transport Services
Innovation Integration Lead
Governance Services Manager
Head of Network Transformation
Coventry City Council
Scrutiny Officer
Head of Finance Business Partnering
Director of Policy, Strategy & Innovation

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ken Hawkins (Solihull) and Councillor Adam Hicken (Walsall)

2. Inquorate Meeting

The sub-committee was inquorate and therefore the decisions taken would be submitted to Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 8 November 2021 for formal approval.

3. Appointment of Vice-Chair

The appointment of the Vice-Chair was the responsibility of the Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee and had to be a member from a different political group to the Mayor. The Chair proposed that Councillor Barbara McGarrity be appointed as Vice-Chair of this committee.

Recommended:

Councillor Barbara McGarrity be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee for 2021/22.

4. Chair's Remarks

(a) Pre-Development Scrutiny: Air Quality and the Role of the WMCA

At its meeting on 6 September 2021, Overview & Scrutiny Committee were informed of an opportunity for a small group of members to work with the Inclusive Growth & Public Service Reform directorate to review and understand the additional requirements arising from the outcome of the Environment Bill as it progresses through Parliament.

The Chair advised that she would be joining this small group of members and would report back on progress.

5. Minutes - 28 July 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

6. Future Bus Delivery Options

The sub-committee received a presentation from the Head of Network Transformation on the Future Bus Delivery Options for the region.

In 2019, the WMCA Board approved the region's Vision for Bus strategy that set out the objectives to define the role of the bus in meeting some of the challenges as a region, and also requested an Outline Business Case for future bus delivery options. The National Bus Strategy was subsequently launched requiring all Local Transport Authorities to utilise either an enhanced partnership or bus franchising model.

Whilst it was recognised that work was yet to be completed, there were clear themes emerging from this work, including whether franchising provided the best opportunity to deliver the 'Vision for Bus' strategy most effectively. Whilst it might provide positive value for money over the longer term, franchising was not without its risks that would need to be mitigated against. Enhanced partnerships had delivered significant benefits within the region and it was important to maintain and further develop relationships.

Members discussed and shared comments on the benefits, challenges and risks associated with bus franchising, market monopoly, accountability and relationships, the impact of COVID-19 on patronage and service operation, the importance of the passenger experience and the need for an integrated public transport system including taxis.

In terms of next steps, Transport for West Midlands would confirm the financial cost of moving to a full franchising assessment, and the outcome would be presented to the WMCA Board in January 2022 with a recommendation whether or not to proceed with the full franchising assessment. Transport for West Midlands would continue to develop Enhanced Partnerships as an initial mechanism to deliver the Bus Service Improvement Plan.

Recommended:

- (1) The comments and questions raised in relation to bus franchising and the emerging findings be noted.

- (2) Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee be kept abreast of the developments with regards to future bus delivery options.

7. Progress Report on West Midlands Cycle Hire Scheme

The sub-committee considered a report from the Director of Development & Delivery on the progress being made with the West Midlands cycle hire scheme and future developments.

Transport for West Midlands terminated the contract with nextbike UK on 25 July 2019 and provided a public notice of this termination on the Transport for West Midlands and Network West Midlands websites. Transport for West Midlands recommenced the procurement process and subsequently appointed Serco as the successful supplier to deliver and manage the West Midlands cycle hire scheme contract for five years with an option to extend for a further three years.

The sub-committee noted the work undertaken to integrate the cycle hire scheme with other transport modes.

Recommended:

That the update be noted.

8. Progress Report on West Midlands eScooter Trial

The sub-committee considered a report from the Innovation Integration Lead on the West Midlands eScooter trial and future developments.

The West Midlands eScooter trial commenced in September 2020 in Birmingham and Coventry. An additional trial area covering West Bromwich town centre became operational in December 2020. Around 600,000 individual rides had been undertaken and over 1.6m kilometres ridden to date. Surveys indicated that around 30% of eScooter journeys replaced a car journey, equating to removal of approximately 180,000 car trips during the operation of the scheme to date. Fourteen incidents involving eScooters had resulted in serious injury (classified as injury requiring some professional medical attention). There had been no known emergency admissions to hospital as a result of incidents involving eScooters within the West Midlands region.

Emerging evidence suggested that the West Midlands eScooter trial fleet were operating at least as safely as comparable modes such as cycling. There had been an excellent uptake of Voi4Heroes initiative to assist key workers travelling during pandemic lockdown with 70,000 rides taken under the scheme free of charge. eScooters were popular for leisure travel, however surveys indicated around a quarter of journeys were undertaken for day-to-day travel to work purposes. Travel surveys so far indicated that eScooters were complementing the operation of public transport services, with around two fifths of journeys connecting to/from public transport routes as a multi-modal form of travel. This was particularly evident for trips undertaken for the purpose of accessing work and education.

Members discussed and shared their concerns on the safety of eScooters, the location of docking stations and the need to prioritise pedestrians. The Director of Policy, Strategy & Innovation assured the sub-committee that work was being undertaken to review how eScooters were left once they had been finished being used, particularly where pavements were busy and competition for space.

Recommended:

That the progress to date of the West Midlands eScooter trial be noted.

9. Department for Transport Key Route Network Consultation: 'Powers and Responsibilities for Locally Important Roads'

The committee received a presentation from the Principal Policy & Strategy Officer on the Department for Transport's wish to devolve further powers and responsibilities for Key Route Networks.

The Department for Transport would like Mayors to be able to deliver the Gear Change cycling and walking plan, the National Bus Strategy and Transport Decarbonisation Plan. The consultation sought formal views on giving mayors more decision-making powers and accountability over the management of Key Route Network's.

Recommended:

That the update be noted.

10. City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Bid

On 20 July 2021, the WMCA and other Mayoral Combined Authorities received guidance from the Department for Transport pertaining to the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement. Previously called the Intracity Transport Settlement, the fund was a five-year capital settlement to enable the region to achieve its ambitions in terms of transport investment, carbon reduction, economic growth and levelling up. The guidance requested that the WMCA submit a bid on behalf of the region as soon as possible after the end of August.

Recommended:

- (1) It be noted that the WMCA had been invited to submit a City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement bid into Government to support capital transport investment within the region (April 2022 to March 2027), with both Highway Maintenance and Integrated Transport Block being subsumed within this new fund.
- (2) It be noted that the actual final allocation would be between a range of £0.780bn and £1.280bn for the five years, with the final allocation being dependant on the quality of the region's bid relative to the other seven city regions.
- (3) It be noted that, dependent upon the final agreed financial allocation, the WMCA would be required to locally agree a programme which fitted the funding envelope approved by the Government.

(4) The requirements placed on WMCA as the accountable body and the management / monitoring arrangements which accompany this fund be noted.

11. Work Programme

The sub-committee discussed its work programme on business for consideration at future meetings and at the WMCA Board.

Recommended:

That the work programme be noted.

12. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the sub-committee would be held on Friday 22 October 2021 at 10.00am.