



West Midlands
Combined Authority

Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Friday 22 October 2021 at 10.00am

Minutes

Present:

Councillor Liz Clements (Chair)	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Barbara McGarrity (Vice-Chair)	City of Wolverhampton Council
Councillor Thabiso Mabena	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Martin McCarthy	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

In Attendance:

Dan Essex	Governance Services Manager
Adam Harrison	Principal Policy and Strategy Officer
David Harris	Transport Strategy and Place Manager
Councillor Gurdev Hayre	Coventry City Council (joined by MS Teams)
Councillor Ian Kettle	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council (joined by MS Teams)
Lyndsey Roberts	Scrutiny Officer
Anne Shaw	Interim Managing Director, Transport for West Midlands
Kate Taylor	Head of Finance Business Partnering
Councillor Ian Ward	WMCA Portfolio Lead for Transport

1. Welcome & Introductions

The Chair welcomed the Portfolio Lead for Transport and members of the sub-committee to the meeting that would focus on transport policy-related matters.

2. Inquire Meeting

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

3. Portfolio Lead for Transport's Opening Statement

The Portfolio Lead for Transport provided an opening statement that focussed on the recent transport-related activities within the WMCA, including the Bus Service Improvement Plan, the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement bid, decarbonisation, transport and inclusive growth, the Local Transport Plan and preparation for the Commonwealth Games.

4. Questions to the Portfolio Lead for Transport

The sub-committee pursued a number of general lines of enquiry with the Portfolio Lead for Transport, including the Commonwealth Games transport needs, bus franchising, congestion and public transport funding.

In relation to the Commonwealth Games, the Portfolio Lead for Transport explained that the Commonwealth Games Transport Plan had been subject to a period of public consultation with stakeholders and would be submitted to WMCA Board in January 2022 for adoption. Transport for West Midlands, alongside transport colleagues from the local authorities hosting Games events, were currently undertaking work to understand capacity requirements, the number of spectators and visitors for each of the venues and traffic flows. The specification on how the demand would be addressed would be published later this year.

In terms of connectivity, Transport for West Midlands was examining a series of transport solutions to connect the key transport hubs to all venues, which also included the identification of key routes to transport athletes, officials and spectators to the sporting venues. In addition, Transport for West Midlands had undertaken initial design work on additional traffic management measures. Consideration would also be given to the 'business as usual' activity in addition to the expected extra demand for the Commonwealth Games.

In response to a question raised, the Portfolio Lead for Transport noted that the main mode of connectivity between Birmingham and Coventry was rail, and that shuttle buses would be used for people wanting to access Coventry Stadium for the events it was hosting.

The Portfolio Lead for Transport recognised that there would be some disruption on the transport network across Birmingham and the wider region, but emphasised the work of Transport for West Midlands to ensure that there was a smooth flow of traffic during this important event. He added that the venues for the Commonwealth Games were located across the region and therefore further information would be provided to spectators on the best sustainable transport options available between arriving at the various gateways into the city and venues for the different sporting events. He noted that everyone who had purchased a ticket for an event would also receive a free local transport ticket to get to and from the venue.

With regards to the passenger experience, the Portfolio Lead for Transport explained that the Commonwealth Games provided an opportunity to encourage people to use more sustainable modes of transport. The sub-committee also noted the work being undertaken to enhance the customer experience, including providing a good level of customer service training for bus and taxi drivers.

The two biggest risks for the Commonwealth Games were passenger security and transport. West Midlands Police were leading on security measures and in terms of transport, the sub-committee were advised of the measures that would be undertaken to address vehicle reliability during the Games.

In relation to traffic management around residential areas during the games, the Interim Managing Director, Transport for West Midlands brought the sub-committee's attention to the local area traffic management plans to address the indiscriminate parking.

The sub-committee sought the views of the Portfolio Lead on the comparable merits of bus franchising and enhanced partnerships. He explained that Transport for West Midlands was currently assessing future delivery options for bus services in the West Midlands in order to best achieve the objectives of its Vision for Bus strategy. In order to access funding through the Bus Service Improvement Plan, a decision had to be made as to whether it pursued franchising or enhanced partnerships.

In terms of the roll-out of zero emission vehicles, the WMCA Board endorsed the submission of a full business case to the Department for Transport for grant funding under the Government's Phase 2 of the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas 2021-2022 competition. A decision as to whether the WMCA had been successful was expected to form part of the Spending Review announcement later in the month.

In response to a question raised on the funding allocated to eliminate congestion, it was noted that if the WMCA Board was successful in the City Region Sustainable Transport Bid, local authorities would be able to deploy funding to address congestion issues. However, it was recognised that there also needed to be a behavioural change to the way in which people chose to travel.

The sub-committee enquired about the progress on the development of the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill metro extension and asked whether funding had now been secured. The Portfolio Lead for Transport provided an update on the development of the project and added that funding for the scheme was predicated on the fare box and, as with other capital projects, there would be review points during the development of the scheme to review funding streams.

During discussions on the transport levy and the future of the non-statutory concessionary fare schemes, it was noted that as a result of the transport levy being reduced over many years, efficiencies within the WMCA and Transport for West Midlands had to be sought and within that included a review of the discretionary concessions. Members recognised the financial pressures on local authorities.

The Young Combined Authority welcomed the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement bid and the opportunities and benefits that it would bring. The sub-committee discussed the implications if the WMCA's bid was not fully funded.

[NB. Kashmire Hawker declared a non-prejudicial interest in this item as he was an administrator for the Ceremonies, Culture and Queen's Baton Relay at the Commonwealth Games Organising Committee.]

Recommended:

The following observations be shared with the Portfolio Lead for Transport for consideration and response:

(1) Commonwealth Games

Members were reassured at the transport planning activity carried out to date for the Commonwealth Games, but recognised that significant work would follow on from the approval of the Games Transport Plan. They would wish the sub-committee to be sighted on the implementation stages, and to receive regular updates from Transport for West Midlands in the lead up to the Games starting in July 2022.

(2) Hydrogen Buses

Members welcomed the potential rollout of hydrogen powered buses across the region, and stressed the value of learning from other local authority areas as to the challenges and mitigations that particularly related to these types of vehicles.

(3) Bus Franchising

Members looked forward to seeing the report that was evaluating the merits of operating a bus franchise model within the West Midlands, and urged the Mayor and all members of the WMCA Board to consider the matter with an open mind and ensuring that the services provided to passengers were the overriding consideration.

(4) Autonomous Vehicles

The sub-committee would welcome an update at a future meeting on the work being undertaken regarding the use of autonomous vehicles on the region's road network.

(5) Metro

Members welcomed the progress being made on the Wednesbury - Brierley Hill Metro extension, but shared their concern at the potential impact of shortages in materials that may delay construction over the next 12 months.

(6) Transport Levy

There was strong concern that current and future reductions in the transport levy would impact on a number of the discretionary concessionary fares currently provided by Transport for West Midlands. These concerns were to be explored further by members at the Mayoral budget Q&A in December.

The sub-committee also wished to see the current usage data for the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme within the region.

(7) City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Bid

Members awaited the outcome of the funding bid that had been submitted to Government, and indicated that, should the bid be not fully funded, they would wish to then understand the process by which schemes would be prioritised.