



**West Midlands  
Combined Authority**

## **Transport Delivery Committee**

<b>Date</b>	10 January 2022
<b>Report title</b>	Park & Ride Update Report
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<b>Report has been considered by</b>	n/a

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

**Transport Delivery Committee is recommended to:**

- (1) Note the contents of this report

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides an update on Park & Ride matters within the West Midlands Combined Authority Area and the impacts of Covid-19 (Coronavirus) on car park operations and development.

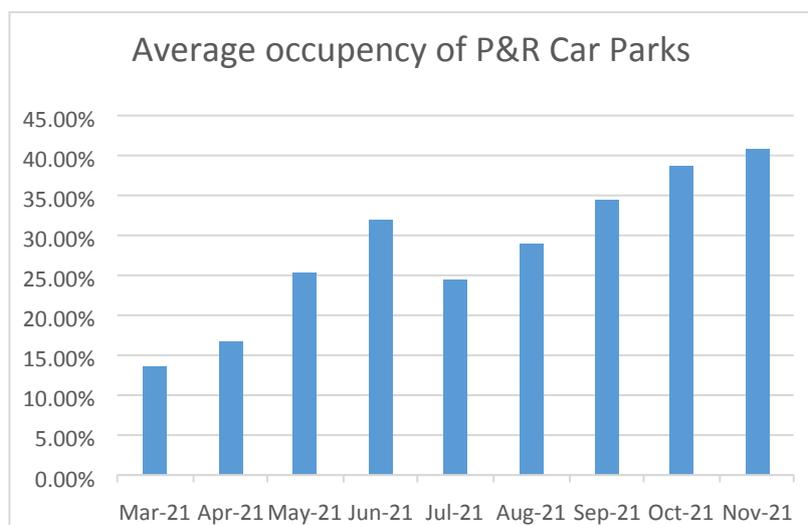
## 2. Background

- 2.1 Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) currently operates just over 9,100 Park & Ride spaces on the region's public transport network. These are located in 65 car parks serving 39 railway stations and five Metro stops.
- 2.2 Prior to the Coronavirus pandemic, all Park & Ride sites were generally full on a weekday by 8am with the exception of Bescot Stadium and the then recently opened facility at Bradley Lane.
- 2.3 As a result of this high demand, there has been a focus by TfWM in conjunction with the West Midlands local authorities on expanding Park & Ride at the locations that will be most beneficial to the region strategically, economically and, fundamentally, for our customers and communities.
- 2.4 With regards to Park & Ride usage *prior* to the impacts of Coronavirus, as an average across the network:
- One third of people drive to Park & Ride sites from within a mile of their location;
  - One third of people drive to Park & Ride sites from 1-2 miles away from their location;
  - 97% of people driving to Park & Ride are making a single occupancy car journeys;
  - 81% of Park & Ride users are commuters travelling for work with 73% travelling to central Birmingham;
  - 22% of parking at railway stations/Metro stops is on street; and
  - One in nine people do not travel to their nearest station/stop.
- 2.5 Park & Ride currently costs the West Midlands Combined Authority approximately £2.7m per year in operational costs. This is predicted to rise to £3.2m over the next five years if expansion aspirations are realised.

## 3. Impact of Coronavirus on Park & Ride operations

- 3.1 As was reported in the previous update report following the announcement on the evening of 23 March 2020 of a national lockdown in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, the occupancy of Park & Ride sites significantly reduced as trips on the public transport network have declined (especially the rail network where 61 of TfWM's 65 Park & Ride sites are located). Whilst during 2021, as restrictions eased, there has been some recovery in usage of our car parks, this has not exceeded 50% of total capacity on any one day.
- 3.2 Figure 1, below, demonstrates the average percentage occupancy of TfWM's car parks during each month since March 2021. The data does not include the new Longbridge car park which opened in August 2021. With at best around 40 cars parked each day at Longbridge out of an available 627 spaces this would distort the figures as the capacity at Longbridge represents around 7% of the available capacity across the whole TfWM estate.

Figure 1 shows average usage of car parks by month (not including Longbridge) using data that was collected by the authority's CCTV team



- 3.3 In the most recent months since the schools returned in September until the most recent announcement on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2021 that England would move to plan B, where people are once again encouraged to work from home, car park usage had stabilised at a weekday daily average of between 45 and 50% occupancy. This is an average across the estate. However, this does not show the whole picture as a few car parks like Cradley Heath and Olton are consistently more popular than the average. TfWM are monitoring usage on a site by site basis and aligning resources accordingly.
- 3.4 During the suspension of the Metro services, the overall average number of cars in our car parks remained the same. Sandwell and Dudley station car park did see increases. Some of this would have been due to the initial ticket acceptance agreement with the rail operators to allow the use of Metro tickets on their services.
- 3.5 The decrease in overall demand has highlighted a number of suspected misuses of our free car parking by those who are not public transport users. One such location is Shirley where TfWM suspected local workers and residents were parking on the car park. Following several complaints from rail users who were unable to park at the station, TfWM undertook an exercise in collaboration with the control centre and parking enforcement staff to monitor. This resulted in 15 penalty charge notices being issued to those parking who were not public transport users. Since that exercise there have been less cars in the car park and we have had no reports of public transport users not being able to park.
- 3.6 From the beginning of October we reintroduced the member of staff at Sutton Coldfield station to charge non rail users for car parking. As with Shirley our observations and monitoring had shown the car park was quite obviously being used by non-rail users mainly by shoppers for the nearby town centre. Again this measure has appeared to control the misuse of this car park.
- 3.7 On Monday 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021, TfWM opened the new 627 space car park at Longbridge. This was originally planned to open in May 2020. Covid restrictions meant we were unable to complete much of the snagging and get new electricity and communication cables (to run the payment systems) installed. The car park is now being used by an average of around 40-50 cars a day which is about 60 cars short of the usage projections for the first year. The car park will now provide good reliance when special events require

and it is likely to play a part in providing car parking for the spectators at events at Birmingham University for the forthcoming Commonwealth Games in 2022.

#### **4. Park & Ride development work**

- 4.1 Following an evaluation of existing Park & Ride schemes, a decision has been made to continue to place the majority of development works for Park & Ride expansion on hold.
- 4.2 Covid-19 has had significant impacts on demand for Park & Ride as demonstrated in section 3 of this report. This provides significant uncertainty on whether the sites prioritised for expansion last year are still the correct ones to take forward or whether the pandemic has changed people's travel habits in such a way that other locations or initiatives are more appropriate for focus in the future.
- 4.3 Furthermore, Covid-19 has significantly impacted on financial budgets within TfWM and therefore the limited capital money available needs to be focussed on priority schemes where there are urgent timescales and/or there is more certainty about ongoing delivery.
- 4.4 Where funding has already been allocated and there is evidence to show that a project is highly likely to remain a priority in the future, work is continuing to take place.
- 4.5 Chiltern Railways currently lease Solihull car park from TfWM, an arrangement that was due to conclude at the end of the current Chiltern franchise in December 2021. During 2021 TfWM worked with Chiltern Railways to agree arrangements post December 2021. The car park has user charging and pre Covid the revenue collected more than covered the car park operating costs. With reduced demands for car parking there were concerns that by taking on the car park would add additional pressures on the TfWM revenue budget however following monitoring of usage during 2021 revenue collected should cover the operating costs.
- 4.6 With delays in agreeing new contractual arrangements between Chiltern Railways and DfT and the possibility of the DfT imposing the operator of last resort if agreement could not be reached we agreed with Chiltern Railways that we would enter into a new 2 year lease from December 2021, on the current terms for Solihull but with a break clause so that TfWM could take the operation on at some point during that 2 year lease. At that point TfWM would propose taking on the operation of the car park in a similar way to that of Longbridge and Bromsgrove car parks with users charging covering the cost of operating the car park.

#### **Scheme Development**

- 4.7 At Tile Hill, TfWM has continued to work in partnership with Coventry City Council to deliver an Outline Business Case (OBC) for a new car park which would add c. 250 spaces to the Park & Ride offer at this location. There will also be scope to add additional spaces in the future in response to local and HS2 related development. £100,000 has been allocated to the business case development from the Coventry South funding package.
- 4.8 The OBC will undertake more detailed works into the design and delivery of the car park, and also determine whether there are enough benefits vs. costs to justify taking the scheme forward. It is anticipated that the OBC work will be completed in early 2022.

- 4.9 For a potential bus based Park & Ride on the A38 at Minworth, Midlands Connect has provided £25,000 of funding towards a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for a bus based Park & Ride to intercept traffic coming in to the region from Sutton Coldfield, the A38, the M42 and the M6 Toll.
- 4.10 The first phase of development for Minworth has identified a number of potential sites which could be acquired to accommodate a Park & Ride close to the strategic highway network. The next stage will be to work with colleagues at Birmingham City Council on options as to whether a potential scheme could be developed.
- 4.11 As part of the A34 Sprint corridor options have been looked at for a Park & Ride site in line with WMCA Park & Ride Strategy Document. All potential options are in the green belt with potential planning issues. Discussions are continuing with the relevant district partners to agree a way forward with this potential project. Whether a Park & Ride car park can be delivered will not affect the planned delivery of highway improvements on the A34 linked to the Sprint project.
- 4.12 At Dudley Port a feasibility study and Strategic Outline Business Case has been completed which specifically looks at ways to improve access to Dudley Port by all modes, interchange in the station area and improved facilities. Options are currently being looked at how this can be delivered and funded.
- 4.13 In partnership with Solihull, we are focussing on revisiting the scheme for expanding Park & Ride and improved access arrangements for Whitlocks End. This has become increasingly important following the publication of Solihull's Draft Local Plan which identifies several sites for residential development within the catchment of the station. At Olton working once again with Solihull we are looking at options of how the blue badge parking could be relocated so as to create more parking for general rail users.
- 4.14 In addition to work to take back the operation of Solihull car park we are also working with Chiltern Railways and Solihull on options for TfWM to take over the current car park at Dorridge that is operated by Chiltern Railways. TfWM already operates a second car park at Dorridge next to the station and options are being looked at for TfWM to integrate the operation of both car parks together.
- 4.15 TfWM's Park & Ride team have continued to feed into the design and development process for the car parks at the new railway stations at Willenhall and Darlaston and the proposed station at Aldridge.

## **5. Wider Park & Ride work streams**

- 5.1 With Park & Ride expansion development works being scaled back, the Park & Ride team in conjunction with internal and external stakeholders, is focussing on the development and delivery of measures that maximise opportunities from the car park estate and bring added value to customers, communities and partner organisations. It will also explore how Park & Ride can aid the WMCA and the region in its management of and recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **Data review**

- 5.2 A key work stream in the coming months is to continue to explore options to improve data collected in relation to Park & Ride. Prior to Covid-19 bi-monthly counts were undertaken to understand levels of car park usage as a snapshot on a weekday morning. In addition to this, user surveys took place every few years with a proportion of customers to understand their travel patterns and behaviours. This gives little insight into how car parks are used through the day and week, which sites fill up earliest, where customers are travelling from and to, how frequently they travel and for what purpose. Since March 2020 our CCTV team have undertaken counts at all of our Park & Ride car parks. Depending on the level of Covid restrictions these have varied on the number of counts per day and time of day they have been undertaken. Since September 2021 we have counted all usage at 1100 on all days apart from Sundays. This data has proved very useful as part of the general data TfWM has collected on transport usage during the period since March 2020.

## **Electric Vehicle Charging**

- 5.3 As reported previously TfWM had appointed Cenex to create an electric vehicle charging strategy for the Park & Ride estate. This has created an outline plan for the roll out of electric vehicle charging infrastructure over the next 10 years and considers a number of key criteria including:
- Wider regional plans for electric vehicle charging point roll out e.g. local authority proposals;
  - Electric vehicle ownership across areas of the region;
  - Types of residential and commercial development in areas of the region;
  - Grid capacity;
  - Car park data;
  - Local authority planning guidance; and
  - Requirements for electric vehicle charge points by businesses.
- 5.4 This work concluded that a network of slow and rapid electric charging points are needed to be rolled out across the TfWM car park estate. To achieve this TfWM will work with local authority and delivery partners. In November 2021 Birmingham City Council approached TfWM with a proposal to deliver 22 rapid electric charging points at 10 of our car parks in Birmingham. This is part of a much larger contract Birmingham City Council has with ESB Energy. If introduced these chargers will be deployed for ten years and will create an income stream of 5% of income generated for TfWM on revenue share with the operator.

## **Commonwealth Games**

- 5.5 It is planned to operate a number of bespoke Park & Ride facilities for the Alexander Stadium, Sandwell Aquatics Centre and Coventry Arena venues during the Commonwealth Games for both spectators and staff. These will operate from existing car parks or facilities like schools. These are designed to provide more than adequate facilities for the games period but are not suitable to turn into more permanent facilities.

- 5.7 The provision of bespoke facilities will ensure minimum disruption to people who still need to travel for work and other purposes not related to the Games on the existing Park & Ride network (other than Longbridge where there is more than adequate unused capacity). Furthermore Games Park & Ride sites will be in the main larger facilities of over 700 spaces to assist in ease of customer use, planning and bespoke bus services to and from the venues.
- 5.8 The TfWM Park & Ride team and other internal colleagues are continuing to support the Commonwealth Games transport team in the planning and delivery of Park & Ride and Park & Walk facilities for the event including providing input to licence arrangements, operational plans, design, booking options and information provision.

### **Lease / rental reviews**

- 5.9 As lease and rent reviews present themselves, TfWM will continue to work to maintain its existing Park & Ride portfolio, subject to assessment of value for money including the cost of maintaining and operating the sites.
- 5.10 Nearly all of TfWM's Park & Ride sites remain free of charge to users, however there has been an increase in lease and operational costs at a number of locations. Consideration will need to be given regarding sites where cost increases render the car park poor value for money as to the future of that site, including potential withdrawal, alternative site uses and exploration of other funding opportunities.
- 5.11 A number of leases with Network Rail are due to expire in March 2022. These leases were created at rail privatisation in the mid 1990s and are between rail operator and Network Rail who in turn sub-leases them to WMCA. TfWM operates and maintains these car parks in a similar way and look to all of the other car parks. In some cases these leases are for parts of car parks with the remainder of the rail car park being either owned outright by WMCA or on a separate lease from Network Rail. Significantly, these leases expiring in March 2022 do not allow for any user charging to be introduced should we wish to do so in the future.
- 5.12 Indications are that new leases will be agreed with Network Rail and West Midlands Trains in the next few weeks to maintain the current arrangements.
- 5.13 As outlined in 4.5-6 discussions have been taking place with Chiltern Railways over the Solihull car park lease. TfWM is looking to take back operation of this car park in the future. The intention will be to retain the user charging so that TfWM can cover the operating costs of this car park.

### **Booking options**

- 5.14 In late 2017, TfWM partnered with developer Accelogress to create a car park space booking service following a successful bid to Innovate UK for funding.
- 5.15 Accelogress developed a mobile app based platform which allowed people to reserve a parking bay in a small number of TfWM Park & Ride car parks as part of a trial to understand if there was demand for such a service.

- 5.16 Pre Covid interest in the scheme was significant with very positive feedback from customers involved in the trial. People particularly found it useful when they could not arrive early to secure a parking space due to shift patterns or other commitments such as dropping of children off at school/nursery. Users reported that the ability to reserve a parking space reduced their anxiety and stress related to trying to find somewhere to park.
- 5.17 Due to the scheme's success, additional spaces and car parks have been added to the trial during 2018 and 2019. There are now bookable bays available at Four Oaks, Whitlocks End, Stourbridge Junction, Rowley Regis, Northfield and Tile Hill.
- 5.18 In March 2020 a charge of £3.60 was introduced for the service to allow it to continue as the initial committed funding to support the trial had come to an end. Unfortunately this coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic and so we have been unable to assess the success of the charged trial as there is no demand to book parking spaces due to large amounts of capacity within car parks.
- 5.19 The Park & Ride team will continue to work with Accelogress to explore options for Save a Space with a particular focus on how the scheme could assist customers and restore confidence in using public transport at an appropriate time.
- 5.20 During 2021 Accelogress was successful in gaining funding from Innovate UK to develop the Save a Space concept into something that could additionally book and pay for electric vehicle charging bays potentially at our Park & Ride car parks. The concept being that users would by pre booking have the confidence that an electric charging bay would be available at a particular location before they arrive and we would have a way of recovering our electricity costs through user charging. Going forward TfWM potentially have the opportunity to link our Save a space and electric charging together to improve the user experience.

## **6. Financial Implications (\*)**

- 6.1 The operational costs of the Park and Ride facilities have remained within budget in 2021/22. Due to Covid, and the correspondingly lower than anticipated occupancy at Longbridge, there has been a significant impact on income generation in-year. However, as the site only opened in August 2021, the impact on income has been largely mitigated by lower operational costs. To be sustainable in the longer-term, however, occupancy will need to increase significantly to cover the ongoing operational costs associated with the site.
- 6.2 As outlined above, future Park & Ride developments, including the potential transfer of lease arrangements at Solihull and Dorridge, remain under continuous review whilst the impact of Covid, and how and when occupancy will increase, is considered to ensure the maximisation of cost and customer benefits of any future investment.

## **7. Legal Implications (\*)**

- 7.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from this report

**8. Impact on Delivery of Strategic Transport Plan**

N/A

**9. Equalities Implications (\*)**

9.1 New Park & Ride sites will need to meet key access standards in line with BS8 301. Moreover, an equality impact assessment of the charging proposals at an early options development stage will help ensure any equality concerns are appropriately addressed.

**10. Inclusive Growth Implications**

N/A

**11. Geographical Area of Report's Implications**

N/A

**12. Other Implications**

N/A

**13. Schedule of Background Papers**

None