



Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Wednesday 23 February 2022 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Liz Clements (Chair)	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Ian Kettle	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Martin McCarthy	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

In Attendance

Councillor Barbara McGarry (Vice-Chair) – Joined via MS Teams	City of Wolverhampton Council
Pete Bond	Director of Integrated Transport Services
Dan Essex	Governance Services Manager
Councillor Kath Hartley	Chair of the Transport Delivery Committee
Lyndsey Roberts	Scrutiny Officer
Anne Shaw	Executive Director of Transport for West Midlands
Sandeep Shingadia	Director of Development and Delivery

Item Title

No.

38. Welcome and Introductions

The Char welcomed the Chair of the Transport Delivery Committee and members of the sub-committee to the meeting that would focus on transport delivery-related matters.

39. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Gurdev Hayre (Coventry).

40. Inquorate Meeting

The sub-committee was inquorate and therefore the decisions taken would be submitted to Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 7 March 2022 for approval.

41. Questions to the Chair of the Transport Delivery Committee

The Chair of the Transport Delivery Committee provided an opening statement that focussed on the recent transport delivery-related activities within the WMCA and the priorities for Transport Delivery committee and the challenges facing the region.

The sub-committee pursued a number of general lines of enquiry with the Chair of the Transport Delivery Committee, including the challenges and threats facing public transport within the region, how those responsible for delivering services were held to account, reporting of financial and performance information, the metro suspension and the Commonwealth Games transport plan.

In relation to the level of the financial challenges facing the region, Transport Delivery Committee reviewed financial and performance monitoring information on a regular basis, received regular briefings on particular projects or areas of concern, including the financial impact of the recent metro suspension, metro scheme delivery and delays, the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Fund and the identified schemes. In addition, a Member Engagement Group had been established to specifically focus on the financial situation facing the region and to work with officers as appropriate.

With regards to the Midland Metro, Transport Delivery Committee believed its governance could be strengthened to enable it to be more transparent. It was acknowledged that the Mayor of the West Midlands had commissioned a governance review on the delivery of extensions, the operation of services and maintenance and infrastructure. Members of the sub-committee expressed their concerns regarding the delivery of the Wednesbury - Brierley Hill metro extension due to the way in which the scheme had been funded, and noted the importance of its delivery for Dudley.

The sub-committee sought assurances from the Chair of the Transport Delivery Committee that the root cause of the cracks on the tram fleet, which caused the metro service to be suspended during 2021, had been addressed and therefore would not reoccur. The Chair of the Transport Delivery Committee was confident that the correct action had been undertaken and trams were now suitable and safe for operation. The Executive Director of Transport for West Midlands confirmed that there was a method of fix for the trams that was being applied and it had been independently assured by an expert as appropriate. A separate briefing would be arranged to enable members to explore questions further.

In relation to the delivery programme for the Wolverhampton metro extension, the Chair of the Transport Delivery Committee assured members that the extension would be operational before the Commonwealth Games and noted that dialogue continued with Network Rail. It was reported that members would be advised on the timescales in due course.

In respect of holding those responsible for the delivery of transport services to account, transport operators attended meetings of the Transport Delivery Committee, there was regular engagement with the Bus Passenger Champions and the West Midlands Bus Alliance. In relation to funding, the Government had provided the bus recovery funding directly to the bus operators, which members considered made it more difficult for Transport for West Midlands to have an influence.

The Chair of the Transport Delivery Committee considered the Commonwealth Games Transport Plan to be ambitious and robust. There were a number of co-ordinating bodies that were working to ensure that plan was delivered on schedule. With regards to the bus fleet, a contract had been awarded to Stagecoach, and through the organising committee and Transport for West Midlands there was ongoing dialogue with them to ensure that its vehicles were compliant with the requirements for the Games. It was noted that twenty hydrogen buses would also be in operation on the major games' routes.

In addition to the bus network, the Aquatic Centre would also be serviced by shuttle services. Members were assured that efficient transport links to access this venue would be provided.

Transport Delivery Committee continued to have ongoing engagement with the newly appointed Cycling & Walking Commissioner for the West Midlands and would help to assist in the delivery of his priorities.

Recommended:

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

(1) Transport Governance Review

There was a recognition that the governance of transport within the WMCA could be further improved. Strategic Transport Board was well regarded as providing a forum to discuss transport policy matters, but lacked any delegated authority to make decisions, and the informal nature of its meetings meant there was no public visibility or organisational oversight of its meetings.

There continued to be a lack of clarity and sufficient differentiation between the roles of Transport Delivery Committee and Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee, which meant that neither meeting was as effective as it could be and there was the potential for a high degree of duplication between the meetings.

The Portfolio Lead for Transport should set a clear expectation that he wished to see transport governance within the WMCA rationalised and strengthened so that it was fit for the challenges of the next few years.

(2) Financial and Performance Monitoring Information

It remained unclear as to the extent that the Transport Delivery Committee was responsible for scrutinising either the revenue or capital expenditure of the WMCA as it related to transport matters, including whether it was monitoring/reacting to overspends on capital project delivery.

With the financial challenges the WMCA will experience over the next few years, there needs to be strong oversight and challenge regarding transport expenditure, which is provided within local authorities by overview & scrutiny committees but is absent from within the WMCA.

(3) Strategic Delivery

The Portfolio Lead for Transport should satisfy himself that the Transport Delivery Committee has sufficient oversight of the delivery of the strategic objectives of Transport for West Midlands, and that elected members are actively driving the delivery of these projects. There was some concern that concerns over delivery were not being escalated to the portfolio lead in sufficient time for mitigation measures to be considered.

(4) Cycling & Walking Commissioner

Transport Delivery Committee was demonstrating good engagement with the Cycling & Walking Commissioner, and this should be maintained.

42. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the sub-committee will be held on Wednesday 23 March 2022 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm.