

## Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee

<b>Date</b>	23rd March 2022
<b>Report title</b>	Midland Metro Closure Lessons learnt report
<b>Accountable Chief Executive</b>	Anne Shaw, Executive Director, TfWM email: <a href="mailto:anne.shaw@tfwm.org.uk">anne.shaw@tfwm.org.uk</a>
<b>Accountable Employee</b>	Mark Corbin, Interim Director of Network Resilience Email: <a href="mailto:mark.corbin@tfwm.org.uk">mark.corbin@tfwm.org.uk</a>

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

**Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee is recommended to:**

1. Note an update on the lessons learnt across Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) following the Midland Metro closure in November 2021, in particular the next steps and recommendations for future actions as set out in section 6.

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide a report on the lessons learnt by teams from across TfWM following the Metro closure in November 2021 and the best way to implement changes for the future to ensure an improved customer experience.

## 2. Background

### Headlines

- 2.1 Physical cracks were identified on the Metro fleet potentially impacting the safety and integrity of the service and a decision was taken to close the Metro service following ongoing assessment of its fleet.
- 2.2 Initially it was announced that there would be no service from Monday 15 November 2021 until further notice (at least 4 weeks). This was later altered to no service from Saturday 13 November until further notice.
- 2.3 The closure lasted for 32 days from Saturday 13 November until Wednesday 15 December 2021.

### Customer impact

- 2.4 There are approximately 20,000 daily journeys undertaken on the Metro network (Monday to Friday) and normally there is around a 20% uplift in patronage heading towards Christmas on Saturday and Sunday services. Our customers were required to find alternative modes of transport, with recognition that the impacts would be felt on service users and on background demand of all modes.
- 2.5 It was recognised at the outset that there would be busier bus and rail services and more vehicles on the road network. Examples of some initial communications are shown below.



A yellow notice titled "METRO SERVICES SUSPENDED". The text reads: "We are sorry that there will be no Metro services from Saturday 13 November until further notice." It explains that a repair programme was implemented to address cracks identified on several of the Metro fleet, and that a decision was made to close the service to ensure a safe and reliable service. It lists alternative travel arrangements: National Express bus service 74 between West Bromwich and Birmingham, National Express bus service 79 between Wolverhampton and West Bromwich, and West Midlands Railway and Avanti train services between Wolverhampton and Birmingham. It also provides contact information for West Midlands Metro, including the website westmidlandsmetro.com, phone number 0545 835 8181, and Twitter handle @wmmmetro.

### 3.0 The response

#### TfWM Organisational response

- 3.1 There was some initial anxiety across the organisation particularly about the timing of the event which at the outset was being considered as a perfect storm; comprising Metro out of service, alongside rail and bus driver shortages, the Christmas peak, seasonal events and the winter season.
- 3.2 Internally at the start of the week commencing 08 November, once the issue became apparent, a dedicated multi-modal response team was initiated by the Interim Director of Network Resilience. Personnel involved within this forum were drawn from across TfWM, Midland Metro Limited (MML), West Midlands Police and British Transport Police to ensure a coordinated and consistent response.
- 3.3 The response team met on the weekend of the closure, then twice daily, on Monday 15 November and Thursday 18 November. On Friday 19 November PM, a further session was held to refine the plans for the weekend.
- 3.4 Further meetings of the team occurred twice during the weeks commencing 22 and 29 November, and twice during the week commencing 07 December 2021.

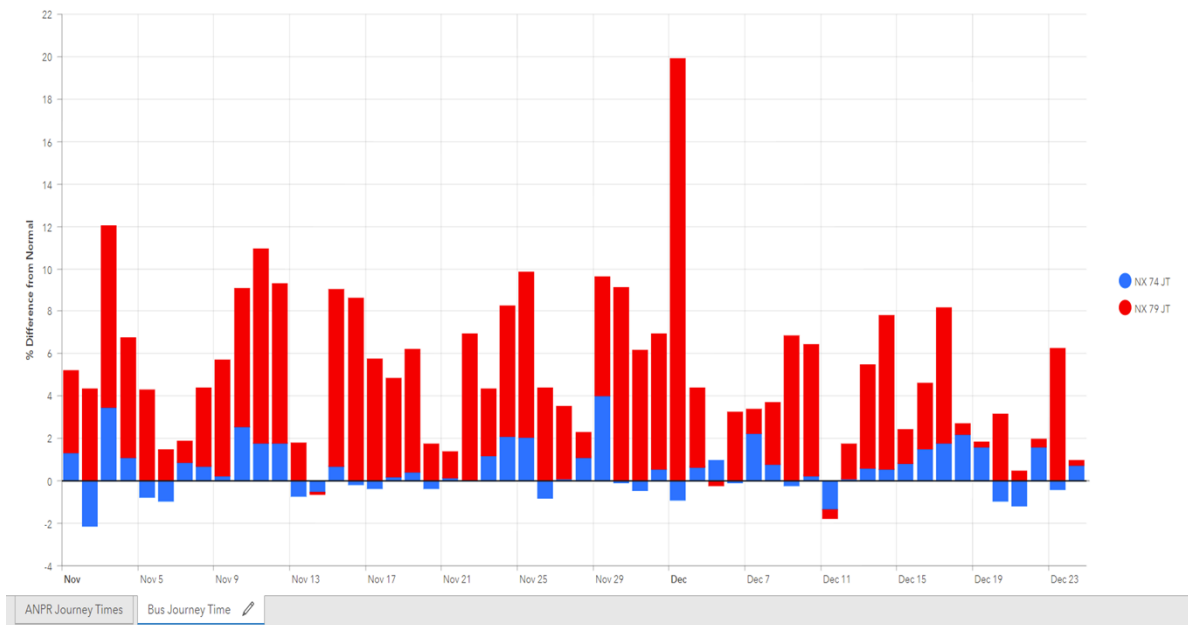
<b>TfWM multi-modal response team</b>	
Aimee Dyer/Andrew Purchase/Rachel Foy	Communications
Antony Sloan	Emergency Planning
Charmaine Swann	Data
Claire Williams	Active Travel
Colin Whitehouse/Sian Fox	Travel Demand Management
Jon Hayes	Bus
Mark Corbin	Network Resilience (Chair)
Zoe Smith	Key Route Network
Stuart Lester	Data
Tom Painter	Rail
Anne Marie-Horvath	Integrated Transport Services
Richard Mayes	Integrated Transport Services - Bus
Warren Eden-Williams	Integrated Transport Services - Ticketing
Gemma Hawkes	Integrated Transport Services - Bus
Sarah Jones	Integrated Transport Services – Customer Services
Sophie Allison	Midland Metro Limited, MML
Vicki Bennett	Midland Metro Limited, MML – Customer Service
Rachel Crump	WMP
Adam Holland, Chris Talbot, Darren Thrupp	RTCC Duty Managers
Paul Finlayson	BTP

#### 3.5 Transport community response

##### Bus

- 3.6 National Express, where feasible, provided additional strengthening on the 74 and 79 services. Ticket acceptance was widened to the 16 and 101 services. Bus services particularly the 74s and 79s became very busy during the response and on occasions, some passengers were left at stops in both the AM and PM peaks.

3.7 On 3<sup>rd</sup> December, we can see that the Bus Journey times for the National Express (NX) 79 spiked to nearly 20% above the normal, however, the NX 74 experienced a lower journey time than normally expected for that day (see graph below). We concluded that this was likely due to high levels of traffic, however, because the patronage levels on the 74 were so high, many buses were forced to miss the later stops of their journey completing their journeys to the final stop quicker. Therefore, this is going to be a consideration in future should transport disruption of this kind occur.



3.8 At key moments during the response there was no patronage data available; questions such as - were people being left at stops? Do we need to provide more NX74 services? - became difficult to answer completely.

3.9 On this day (3<sup>rd</sup> December) we saw 4 Incident Management System incidents along the bus routes of the NX74 & NX79 which could also have contributed to the especially high journey times for passengers of the NX79.

3.10 Missing Services and Drivers were a problem during the Metro closures. This peaked on 30<sup>th</sup> November for National Express with 28 missing services.

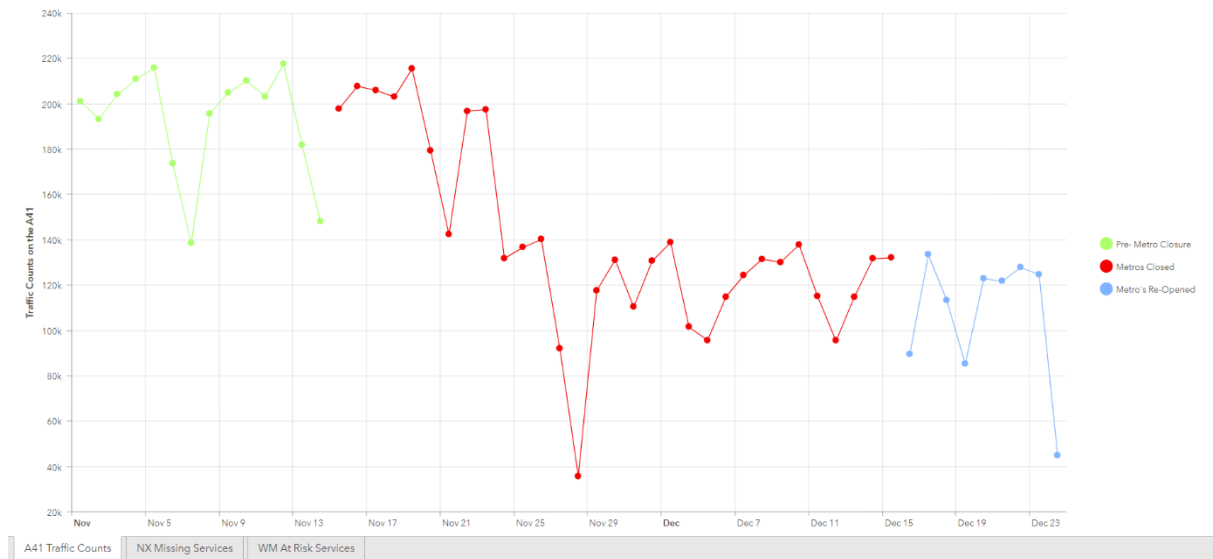
## Rail

3.11 The overall response was compounded by the number of at-risk rail services daily, this peaked on 11<sup>th</sup> December with 168 at risk services.

3.12 There was ticket acceptance across all services until 5<sup>th</sup> December, after which customers were advised to buy new tickets for the services they required. This was very helpful in alleviating the pressures on the wider transport network.

## Road

3.13 The A41 was the primary local road which was monitored during the response as it falls within the Metro corridor. Roadwork impacts and journey time performance were monitored and reported daily. The graph below summarises the traffic counts on the A41, prior to, during and post Metro closure.



3.14 Average daily traffic volume along the route peaked at just under 220,000 vehicles on 20<sup>th</sup> November during the closure. Interestingly, despite reports of substantial traffic volumes, the data shows a gradual decrease in traffic counts. Our interpretation is that this is due to the National work from home order, which was announced at the end of November, therefore decreasing traffic counts. It is important to note that if this had not been the case, and particularly given the data about the capacity of the bus services, this situation could have been a lot worse.

### RTCC

3.15 The Regional Transport Coordination Centre (RTCC) provided a valuable link with partners and particularly National Express during the response. The team continued to coordinate and monitor the network highlighting to partners the impacts on the corridor. They actively monitored and communicated the at-risk rail services on a daily basis and assisted with coordinating the ticket acceptance with National Express. The team also engaged actively with event venues to promote the various impacts to increase awareness to the public.

### Safer Travel Partnership

3.16 The Partnership supported the initial response and worked with local neighbourhood Police teams across the affected Metro stops in Birmingham assisting with patrolling the key locations. British Transport Police was also actively involved in providing operational support at key rail locations such as Wolverhampton Railway Station and Birmingham New Street, to support the increase in rail patronage.

### TDM and Communications response

3.17 The Travel Demand Management (TDM) team led the engagement with the business and education community during the closure. The team reviewed the key stakeholders who would be most affected by the Metro closure and used this as their contact list.

3.18 On Friday 12 November and Monday 15 November, the team phoned 71 businesses and educational establishments to notify them of the closure, ticket arrangements and advice for

students and staff on how to travel. Positive feedback was received from all sites on the notification and advance warning. However, due to the timing of confirmation of the closure on Friday 12 November, the education establishments were not able to be contacted until Monday 15 November, which did cause some negative feedback and frustration with the situation. This forms an important recommendation around timing of notifying stakeholders.

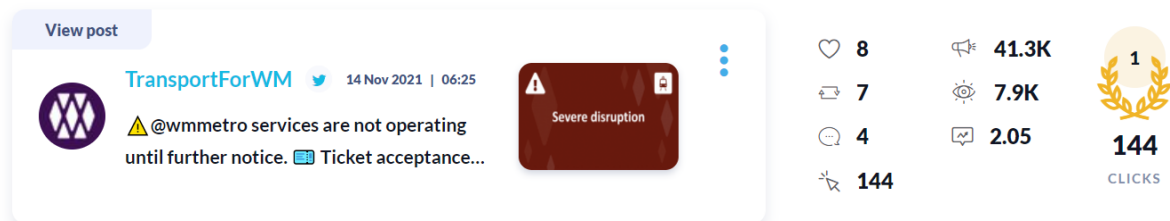
3.19 There were 781 sites contacted via email during the closure at 3 separate points: Announcement of closure (13<sup>th</sup> November), Update on ticket acceptance (23<sup>rd</sup> November), and on the return of services (Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> December). The overall consistent messaging was specifically tailored for the schools and businesses.

### 3.20 Communications messaging

3.21 Our communications campaign was designed to inform users of the Metro about the impending shut down of services, as well as ensuring other public transport and road users were aware of the potential impact of the disruption to their journey. Designed around the four Rs, our focus was to encourage users to Retime their journey to even out demand, Remode to unaffected forms of transport and active travel options. We supported this by encouraging the Reduction or Removal of journeys where possible.

3.22 Communications were issued on social media, via the website and through press releases, all informed by cross-partner communications colleagues, with messaging agreed centrally ensuring one version of the truth.

3.23 Our social media campaign evaluation evidences that we achieved a total reach of 774.3k, 183.4k impressions, with the campaign generating a total of 663 clicks. There were 111 shares and retweets and we can see that the following was our most popular post:



## 4.0 What went well

### Coordinated approach

4.1 The key positive outcome was the benefit of a single multi-modal group for communication between internal teams and external partners such as Midland Metro Limited and British Transport Police. A single call with the working group, was an effective way of disseminating key information and feeding metrics into data analysis. Our established relationship with partners such as West Midlands Trains was important in creating a response that was effective.

### Consistent messaging

4.2 This coordinated approach resulted in consistent messaging across the communications from TfWM and MML. It created a clear message for customers wherever they sought their information.

### Positive feedback under pressing timescales

- 4.3 The response was well-received by affected stakeholders and refunds were successfully handled by the customer service team. Despite the concentrated timescales, and challenging elements including events at The Hawthorns and reduced train frequency, the closure did not result in consequences as significant as initially predicted.

#### Use of Data

- 4.4 The Metro disruption performance reporting was a useful tool, harnessing data from across TfWM, and external organisations. The project highlighted the benefits that data analysis can bring to better manage and communicate an unpredictable situation.

### 5.0 What didn't go so well?

#### Accessibility of Data

- 5.1 Given the important insights the data could provide, the response to the closure highlighted some issues and gaps. The lack of available data regarding bus passenger use was particularly difficult. Multiple manual processes were needed which required significant amount of information to be analysed or manually inputted. IT resilience could be improved to ensure data reporting can be completed quickly and easily during a rapidly evolving situation.

#### Resilient Ticketing

- 5.2 As a multi-modal response was needed, with existing Metro customers required to move to bus or rail, the response highlighted the need for ticket recognition on other modes. Other modes could not read Metro passes as the functionality was not activated and agreements with operators could be improved.

#### Targeting messaging

- 5.3 Our communications and messaging could have better addressed customers who bought ticket acceptance and there is a need to ensure education facilities are aware of the multiple ticketing products that are available to them.

### 6.0 Recommendations

- 6.1 There are a range of suggested recommendations shown in **Table 1 below**, mainly focused on improving our internal processes to ensure we are more prepared for future unexpected events requiring immediate actions. It is advised these recommendations are implemented and that this is coordinated by Network Resilience.

Theme	Recommendation
<b>Ticketing</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Investigate opportunity of checking and using tickets across all modes at once i.e. for ticket acceptance. Infrastructure investment needed.</li> <li>2. Improve our understanding of where we have agreements and who makes sales i.e. Visibility of our sales channels, to include a register, key contacts of third-party sellers who sell our multi-modal products, e.g. Corporate scheme customers/corporate organisations.</li> </ol>

<b>Engagement and Communications</b>	<p>3. Ensure communications and engagement externally are coordinated at the earliest opportunity, if there is an opportunity to pre-warn of something happening then this would be appreciated by stakeholders.</p> <p>4. Ensure all stakeholders from all parts of the organisation are considered for all emergencies including Direct Debit customers, business and educational establishments and LEA contacts as well as schools. Where possible focus on Head offices for communications.</p>
<b>Data</b>	<p>5. Ensure data dashboards are built in advance for areas of potential disruption and allow for resourcing to build these and then manage these daily during a disruption.</p> <p>6. Develop a standard reporting metric template (linked to dashboards)</p>
<b>Unplanned event requiring immediate action provision</b>	<p>7. Developing a plan for implementing alternative transport for unplanned event requiring immediate action. Ensure major events during a disruption are incorporated into additional capacity provision discussions – how can this enable additional services/modes? What might need to be the situation to enact additional capacity provision?</p> <p>8. Developing a formal process for approval of a pot of money; a form to complete outlining the unplanned event/fund available/what will the fund do/sign off required. Need to ensure recorded cost is captured and appropriate procedures are followed.</p> <p>9. Formalise a team who will be the response team to any future unplanned events requiring immediate action – use the team who responded to Midland Metro, suggest adding Anna Sirmoglou to this team to ensure the impacts on vulnerable and disabled communities are better considered.</p>
<b>TDM</b>	<p>10. Ensure a TDM strategy is developed for Midland Metro line 1 to enable a more proactive approach in the future to mitigation advice and the stakeholders involved. TDM and Communications team to work together to form the messaging using the information in the strategy.</p>
<b>Lessons learnt</b>	<p>11. Ensure relevant post disruption processes are in place e.g. feedback from TDM team on feedback from schools and colleges/customer experience is provided to the relevant team and used to evaluate internal processes.</p>

## 7.0 Next steps

- 7.1 A Travel Demand Management (TDM) Strategy is underway led by the TDM team to develop a formal strategy to better understand the baseline position and data available. This Strategy will then outline a proactive approach to dealing with potential future scenarios across Midland Metro Line 1 focused around TDM, engagement, communications and mitigations. This strategy is being put together as part of conversations with teams across TfWM.
- 7.2 In addition to this, the Key Route Network team are putting together a report to summarise the data gathered from the Metro closure and what we can learn from this which will be completed by the end of March 2022.



## **8.0 Financial Implications**

- 8.1 There are no direct Financial Implications arising regarding the recommendations as set out in the report. However, following the implementation of the recommendations, there will likely be financial implications to consider, which will need to be investigated as part of the implementation of these recommendations.

## **9.0 Legal implications**

- 9.1 There are no direct legal implications arising regarding the recommendations set out in the report. However, following the implementation of the recommendations, there may be legal implications to consider, which will need to be investigated as part of the implementation of these recommendations.

## **10.0 Equalities implications**

- 10.1 The proposed recommendations will help to support a better customer experience for our passengers, better connectivity and improve the transport network, with a subsequent positive equality impact.

## **11.0 Geographical Area of Report's Implications**

- 11.1 The report focuses on the Midland Metro Line 1 area; Wolverhampton to Birmingham City Centre (Bull Street/Grand Central). However, this encompasses passengers from across the West Midlands region and therefore a wider travel to work area.

## **12.0 Other Implications**

- 12.1 There are no other implications.