



**West Midlands
Combined Authority**

Transport Delivery Committee

Date	14 November 2022
Report title	Bus Delivery Monitoring Report
Accountable Chief Executive/TfWM Director	Pete Bond, Director of Integrated Network Services, Transport for West Midlands Email: Pete.Bond@TfWM.org.uk
Accountable Employee	Jon Hayes, Head of Bus, Transport for West Midlands Email: Jon.Hayes@TfWM.org.uk
Report has been considered by	Putting Passengers First Member Engagement Group

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Transport Delivery Committee is recommended:

- (1) To note the content of this report.

1. Purpose

To report matters relating to the monitoring and delivery of the high-level deliverables and wider performance monitoring of bus services in the West Midlands.

The high-level deliverables within the Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) Business Plan directly relating to the delivery of bus are;

- Delivering our bus vision to support growth, inclusion and reduced car dependency.
- Enhance infrastructure and improve customer experience at TfWM passenger waiting facilities, our bus stations and major interchanges.
- Creating and maintaining a world class system for accurate and reliable public transport travel information including the requirements set out in the National Bus Strategy and regional Vision for Bus.

2. Background

Delivering our bus vision to support growth, inclusion and reduced car dependency.

Covid-19 Response & Recovery

Local Bus Services

Since covid restrictions have eased the demand for travel has increased. Bus patronage has shown a steady rate of growth and is at 86.3% of expected patronage in comparison to the equivalent period pre-covid. This compares to 73% in February 2022 when this report was last provided. Tuesday 11th October was the busiest day on the network in 2022, reaching nearly 770k individual trips. The week in total saw 4.53 million bus trips.

Scheduled mileage on the bus network is currently 93.2% of pre-covid levels. In the current period this mileage is distributed across a similar network although there has been some concentration of resource to the core network to provide additional capacity due to the increasing passenger numbers and move towards commercial sustainability.

Driver shortages are having a significant impact on the ability of some operators to deliver their scheduled mileage. National Express and Stagecoach are both reporting issues. This is more pronounced in the region for National Express given their overall dominance. National Express have reported that they are around 7% short of establishment and sickness levels are around 5% higher than forecast. This is resulting in approximately 6.3% of all mileage not being operated.

In an attempt to partially mitigate the impact on passengers TfWM are seeking for operators to introduce more robust processes to ensure that passengers are kept informed of missing journeys and, in the medium term, developing the Real Time Information system to better inform passengers. National Express are making operational adjustments in an attempt to mitigate the impact for passengers including focusing resource on less frequent services and seeking to space buses on the frequent services to try and reduce gaps between buses. Whilst not all bus operators are reporting driver shortages it is widely acknowledged to be a national issue. However, some smaller operators seem to be keeping better management of the situation.

Driver overtime plays a part in addressing driver shortage issues which becomes harder in times of higher driver sickness levels.

The driver shortage has been caused by a number of factors. The high demand for drivers across all driving professions was seen as economic activity increased and changed rapidly in the autumn as the country recovered from the pandemic. This high demand for drivers resulted in the provision of enhanced terms and conditions across all industries. This general enhancement has resulted in the movement of drivers between companies and wider industries. Within the West Midlands bus market this resulted in some bus operators enhancing their own terms and conditions to retain and attract drivers. Additionally, operators reported that driver availability was impacted by a higher than usual retirement rate and a lower propensity for drivers to work overtime. It is understood both trends have developed following the pandemic as drivers are placing a greater value on their non-work time due to their personal experiences during the pandemic.

Supporting Bus Operators

Since March 2020 the shortfall in fare revenue, and to a lesser extent the increase in costs, has been met through publicly funded grants and by maintaining subsidy payments at pre-covid levels to operators from National and Local Government. This has included maintaining payments to operators for the carriage of English National Concessionary Travel Pass holders at pre-covid levels, paid at a rate to reflect the long-term and continuing reduction in concessionary journeys.

The scale of funding nationally has exceeded £2bn in support for bus operators. The main remaining fund known as Bus Recovery Grant (BRG) is scheduled to end on December 31st 2022. Approximately £7.3m of DfT grant funding has been passed to operators through the WMCA for support on tendered services with significant sums being given directly from Government to operators to support commercial services. In addition, the DfE made £10m available to support school services during the height of the pandemic.

Government has announced that some additional targeted funding support for operators and Local Transport Authorities from central government will be in place between 1st January 2023 to the end of March 2023. At the time of writing this report it is not known how much of this will be available for the West Midlands, how it will be paid or passported. Our discussions with National Express, Diamond and Stagecoach indicate that they do not think there is enough funding available to maintain the existing network.

During this final period of funding operators are being encouraged by Government to revise their networks to become commercially sustainable and to reflect new passenger levels. They are encouraged to do this in conjunction with Local Transport Authorities and to also work together to make best use of the overall available resources.

Local Authority Support

Since March 2020 local transport authorities have received support from the DfT to enable them to maintain their subsidised networks. TfWM have used this money to meet the shortfall between the fare revenues expected by the operators and the actual amount being received and to provide services where commercial operators feel they are no longer commercially sustainable. TfWM have continued to apply the same pre-COVID level of locally funded subsidy to bus services to and support cheaper fares, despite the reduce levels of travel.

TfWM secured an additional bespoke devolved funding package to stabilise the network in the West Midlands throughout the Commonwealth Games. This enabled us to commit bus operators to providing 90% of the pre-covid network to the end of December 2022. Although the Government went on to agree the same funding for all of England bus services and operators, the fact that the West Midlands negotiated early and had it devolved to us enabled us to negotiate more effective terms and conditions with the operators.

At the time of writing there is no additional Government support detailed to prevent the level of service cuts and changes identified in this report to be implemented on 1st January 2023.

Network Review

It is a requirement of the on-going bus funding for operators to undertake a commercial review of their services with the aim of moving towards longer term commercially sustainable networks without the need for on-going Government funding. National Express have committed to delivering a network equivalent to 90% of the pre-covid mileage from 1st January 2023. The details of the changes and the resulting impact on the tendered bus services were reported to the Transport Delivery Committee at its meeting on Monday 11th October 2022.

Since presenting this paper TfWM have commenced a comprehensive programme of engagement with key stakeholders and passengers to ensure they are aware of the potential impact to bus services in the region from the 1st January 2023. This engagement process has included invitations to all local councillors and MPs to attend detailed briefing sessions to better understand the impacts in their areas.

These briefing sessions were undertaken over the 2nd and 3rd of November and were well attended by Cllrs from all areas. There were a number of overlapping themes which were raised in the questions including.

- a) School services – capacity on the alternative services – safety and security at interchange points – performance of the alternatives.
- b) Network Performance and Driver Shortages.
- c) Future Governance.
- d) Concerns over future deregistration's.
- e) Passenger communications.
- f) R&R performance.
- g) Driver Shortages.
- h) RTI accuracy and keeping passenger informed of missing trips.

Actions and questions asked at the session were recorded and will be made available to the respective authorities. We are continuing to engage with stakeholders and passengers with a focus towards ensuring passengers are aware of alternative travel options when the final decisions are made in early December.

As reported in October the result of the commercial review has resulted in a number of additional services requiring support from TfWM this is in addition to the 116 contracts due for renewal from 31st December. TfWM have commenced 2 significant tender rounds for the procurement of these services. Evaluation of the tender responses will be undertaken later in November using the revised Value for Money Criteria as agreed by TDC at its meeting on the 10th October.

A third tender round commenced on the 28th October containing a number of transformational changes to enhance bus services in specific areas supported by funding received from government to deliver the West Midlands Bus service Improvement Plan.

The results of these tender rounds will be known in late November and will determine the revised bus network from January 2023. Once known we will commence a comprehensive engagement exercise with passengers to inform them of any changes to their services and their alternative options for travel.

There remain several risks for the delivery of the West Midlands Bus Network.

Operator Capacity – driver shortages and the constrained timescales for mobilisation mean that operators may not have the capacity to meet the resource requirement (Drivers, vehicles, depot space etc..) to deliver all the services being tendered by Transport for West Midlands. We are currently engaging with the market to better understand the available capacity and encourage new market entrants to the region. This will be clarified through the competitive tender exercise and may require a revision of the plans currently under consideration to meet the confirmed available resource.

Network Performance – Performance on the network remains extremely challenging due to driver shortages. On average around 6% of scheduled mileage is not being operated by National Express each week. Other operators in the West Midlands appear to be less affected than the dominant operator. This poor performance is inevitably leading to a significant reduction in passenger satisfaction and will result in a reduction in passengers. If this level of performance continues this will have a longer-term impact on the sustainability of the network from January 2023 and threaten any growth we are seeking to achieve through the BSIP.

The BSIP funding allocation includes revenue funding to deliver improvements in how the network is monitored and managed across all operators and how this can be better coordinated with the Regional Transport Coordination Centre (RTCC). Work is underway to specify and scope these requirements.

Further Commercial De-registrations – National Express have confirmed a network which will be around 90% of the pre-covid mileage from the 1st January 2023. However there remains a very real risk that National Express and other operators will need to consider further commercial de-registrations early in 2023 to meet the changing commercial landscape. This uncertainty is due to several factors including but not limited to; continued fluctuations in fuel costs; increase in driver wages and other work force pressures; driver shortages resulting in the inability to meet scheduled commercial mileage; increasing cost of materials due to inflationary increases etc.

Funding – we have options to mitigate the financial pressures on the subsidised bus budget resulting from the current commercial deregistration's and increases in costs. These are making best use of BSIP funding to create transformational changes in areas most affected by the changes; seeking efficiencies from existing tenders through reducing frequency or operating hours; removing the very worst performing contracts that significantly exceed the VfM criteria within the Access Standards; Utilise any remaining government funding from grants already received. We are also expecting 3 months of further support from the DfT however the amount and the associated Terms and Conditions are not yet known.

The above measures will fully commit all available budgets for the provision of subsidised bus services for the 2023/2024 financial year. Should we see any further commercial deregistrations during that financial year then, without external funding, it is highly unlikely that TfWM will be able to mitigate any further commercial deregistration's without further cuts in services. TfWM along with National Express are engaging with the DfT to relay these concerns and make the case for additional funding to maintain the 90% network planned from January 2023.

Ring & Ride

Use of the West Midlands Ring & Ride remains very low with passenger trips currently at just 25 - 28% of pre-covid levels. This is expected given the demographic of the users and the number of regular destinations still being closed or on limited opening but does significantly fall behind patronage recovery on other modes. We are hoping to see patronage increase as destinations continue to re-open and confidence to travel continues to grow.

From December the service hours were expanded to operate Monday to Saturday 0800 to 1800 and Sunday 0800 to 1530. During peak times we have also agreed an increased number of vehicles to be available to provide additional capacity on the service and improve availability.

Like other public transport operators National Express Accessible Transport (NEAT), the operators of Ring & Ride, have also been affected by driver shortages due to increased sickness levels and drivers moving to other driving jobs within the sector. NEAT experienced a significant loss of Drivers in September 2022 which resulted in around 33% of the scheduled vehicles being unable to operate. NEAT has subsequently put in place processes to recruit more drivers. At the time of writing the driver shortage is around 10% of requirement.

We are continuing to work with NEAT to minimise any disruption for passengers although current performance levels are leading to a significant increase in complaints. Where disruption is unavoidable, we are working with NEAT to ensure that passengers are kept informed of any revisions to their planned journeys. We are jointly meeting with passenger groups and other stakeholders to keep them informed of the current position and receive feedback from users.

TfWM are in the process of agreeing a revised contract with National Express Accessible Transport (NEAT) up to the end of March 2023. We continue to have discussions regarding contractual and service arrangements to ensure the service reflects any changes in travel demand and aligns with the ambitions of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which may include wider use of Demand Responsive Services in the region.

National Bus Strategy and Bus Service Improvement Plans

TfWM received confirmation from the DfT over the summer that it would receive £87.8m to deliver it's agreed Bus Service Improvement Plan, subject to the commitments being incorporated into a revised Enhanced Partnership (EP) Scheme for the region. This will enable delivery of various transformational activities, including fares freezes, passenger incentive scheme, new services, a customer charter and additional Transport Security Officers on the network.

The EP is currently going through local authorities' own approvals processes and was approved by TDC on 10th October and by bus operators on October 25th. Following approval, TfWM can start to draw down the funding which is phased over the next three years, subject to demonstrating to the DfT progress against the commitments.

Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)

West Midlands on Demand (DRT) service has been operating since April 2021. The service expanded in February 2022 to cover the Eastern side of Coventry and now carries an average of 120 passenger daily.

The Service is still operated by CoachScanner supported by technology and service planning by Via, with customer support and passenger bookings by TfWM's Customer Relations team.

The service is managed through Via's Operations Centre (VOC), which manages booking requests, pick-up and set-down locations, vehicle routings, driver breaks, gives real time locations of vehicles and works in conjunction with the West Midlands Bus on Demand App. It enables Transport for West Midlands to gather data around user demographics, repeat usage and trips being made.

Whilst the majority of customers choose to use the app for bookings and managing their account, there is also the opportunity to contact the team by email and telephone, helping ensuring access to all user groups including those who don't have access to mobile technology. The TfWM Customer Relations team has been overseeing customer interactions and are feeding back on queries. The number of queries has been low and there have also been very few issues with the system and app and few reported issues regarding general user experience. The service has maintained a rider rating of 4.9*/5* throughout the period of operation.

A marketing plan is in place to entice users to use the service, and we have received support from the marketing teams at both TfWM and Warwick University. Based around their input, offers have been sent out to entice users to use the service, and a survey to understand those who have previously used the service are no longer doing so is also being undertaken. The current fare structure is based on distance travelled and ranges from £1 for the shortest trips to up to £6 for the longest trips. Additional passenger can travel for £1 up to a maximum of 3.

The 'Multi-Pass' ticket has proved very popular with riders, with more than 50% of all journeys undertaken on this pass. This has seen the number of repeat users of the service increase over time. ENCTS discount is available at 50% off all journeys, with approximately 19% of all journeys qualifying for this discount.

In April 2022 the scheme also made corporate bookings available. This means rides can be discounted on behalf of employers and bookings made by employers too. Various organisations have started to use this offer to encourage sustainable travel to places of work.

As part of the scheme's continued development, the service is looking at opportunities to incorporate other local services. An option to co-mingle the service with Coventry's Ring & Ride provision is currently under review. This would see one service, operating under the WMoD banner carrying passengers of both services together. It would mean an increased fleet and longer operating hours as a single service, as opposed to two individual ones.

Scheme Development and Delivery

Coventry Electric Bus City

In March 2021 TfWM were awarded £50m of grant funding for the Coventry Electric Bus City programme to replace all 291 diesel buses operating in Coventry with electric buses by the end

of 2025. The total cost of the programme was estimated as £136m with the remaining £86m coming from Commercial Operators, WMCA and Local Authorities. The grant is to fund 75% of the cost difference between a diesel and an electric bus plus 75% of the cost of installing the necessary charging infrastructure.

The grant has been made available to operators through an application process in two stages; one for commercial operators and the second to cover buses and charging infrastructure for Subsidised Services in the City.

Following successful negotiations with National Express, funding was provided to enable them to order infrastructure and vehicles, the first of which began to enter operation from September 2022 with deliveries of new buses ongoing into 2023. National Express have introduced the first 33 electric buses into service with a further 17 expected this current calendar year.

Negotiations are being undertaken with Stagecoach to provide funding to renew their fleet and also an approach being developed for operators of subsidised services, which will be incorporated into contracts from 2024.

Birmingham Cross City Network

As part of the Better deal for Bus Users funding package, TfWM received over £20 million to fund the first phases of prioritised bus priority measures. These measures are the beginning of a journey to unlock and free buses from delays in Birmingham city centre and support the wider delivery of cross-city bus routes. The measures include; providing new bus only roads, junction upgrades and enhanced waiting facilities whilst complementing projects such as Sprint (Bus Rapid Transit in the West Midlands), Metro and rail networks.

The Cross-City works are currently delivered in packages;

Package 1 - Birmingham city

- Margaret Street. Road alignment, reducing car parking bays and creation of two new bus stops.
- Newhall Street. Bus, Hackney and Cycles only right turn from Great Charles Street Queensway to Newhall Street with traffic signal improvements.
- Bristol Street. Southbound bus lane on Bristol Street from junction of Wrentham Street to A4540 Belgrave Middleway.
- Snow Hill Queensway. New 24-hour Bus, Hackney cabs, motorcycles and cycles lane and bus gate* through the junction with A4400 (inner ring road Queensway)
- Summer Hill Road / Sandpits / Paradise. Eastbound bus lane.

Snow Hill, Newhall and Margaret Street have now been through TRO Consultation. Construction is anticipated for these three projects from May to August 2023. TRO Consultation for Summer Hill Road/Sandpits is affected by the Octagon development, and we are working to confirm timescales for these works.

Package 3 – South;

The southern segment of Package 3 operates along the Alcester Road corridor, serving Moseley, Kings Heath and Druids Heath. Service number 50 operates along this route. Projects being developed are.

- Northbound bus lane Alcester Road South Appian Close – Featherstone Rd.
- Right turn pocket on Alcester Rd South (Broad Lane / Cocks Moors Leisure)
- Northbound bus lane Alcester Rd South (Idminston Croft – Millpool Gdns).
- Southbound bus lane on Alcester Road South (Sladepool Farm Road to Stot Fold Road)

Extensive traffic modelling of this area has been undertaken and public consultation began in October 2022.

Package 3 – West

The western arm of Package 3 is served by the 82 and 87 routes. The 82 runs to Bearwood, which is a spur off Package 3, and the 87 runs to Dudley. This package extends beyond the Birmingham boundary, into the Sandwell and Dudley, serving Dudley Bus Station. Schemes proposed are;

- Cape Hill Junction Improvements – Cape Hill / Shireland Road / High Street / Windmill Lane junction and convert streets to one-way.
- Oldbury Ring Road Bus Lane
- Waterloo Road Crossing Improvements – Upgrade Zebra Crossing to signal controlled to increase pedestrian safety and junction capacity. (now complete)
- Burnt tree island junction improvements – Junction upgrade (New Birmingham Road/Birmingham Road/Burnt Tree and New Birmingham Road/Tividale Rd/ Bunn's Lane)

Extensive traffic modelling has been undertaken on Cape Hill and Oldbury with a preferred option shared with Sandwell Officers for consultation. Discussions are ongoing with Sandwell Officers.

Burnt Tree Island preliminary design has been completed and we are now undertaking public consultation and moving into the detailed design phase. of this scheme.

We have produced Strategic Outline Business Cases for the bus priority packages contained within the CRSTS funding agreement and these are currently being reviewed by WMCA's programme assurance and appraisal team. Once approved development on these schemes will commence in earnest.

Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme

TfWM successfully bid for funding to deliver 124 Hydrogen fuel cell buses to the region, funded through the DfT's 'ZEBRA' scheme. This includes 100 double deckers and 24 articulated buses for Sprint and will be the largest Hydrogen bus scheme outside China. Work is currently underway to appoint a bus operator partner and ensure appropriate mitigation is in place to manage the risk associated with a project of this nature. If all goes to plan, vehicles should enter operation from 2024.

Partnerships

West Midlands Bus Alliance

The West Midlands Bus Alliance is made up of the individuals and organisations representing different sectors responsible for delivering bus services in the region. Appendix 1 gives a complete list of the current membership.

The Alliance has continued to oversee, influence and coordinate the bus network and has sought to ensure that operators and wider stakeholders are fully aligned on issues affecting passengers and delivery of the BSIP.

The Alliance has continued to play an integral role in the development of the West Midlands BSIP, with active operator engagement to achieve bold ambitions for Better Buses, Better Journeys and Better Fares. This includes more bus priority measures, improvements to bus emission standards to decarbonise the fleet, initiatives to improve the fares and ticketing structure and RTI passenger information as part of an integrated network.

The Bus Alliance board agreed a new governance structure that will oversee the BSIP and delivery through the Enhanced Partnership. This will allow current and future BSIP initiatives being delivered by partners to be captured through the Enhanced Partnership.

Advanced Quality Partnership Schemes

TfWM continues to monitor adherence to the Advanced Quality Partnership Schemes (AQPS) Solihull Town Centre and Wolverhampton City Centre. Current elements receiving closer scrutiny include operator adherence to Euro VI emission standards, dwell times and vehicle idling in Birmingham City Centre. Where individual issues are identified TfWM are engaging with operators to understand any barriers and seek better adherence.

The Birmingham AQPS expired in July 2022. The requirements contained within this statutory partnership have been subsumed into the existing Enhanced Partnership. This will be strengthened in future variations. TfWM are seeking to agree the revocation of the AQPSs in Solihull and Wolverhampton to be included in variation 3 of the EP. Inclusion within the EP will give a greater level of oversight and enforcement and especially so when combined with the adoption of bus service registration powers.

Franchising Assessment

Following consideration of the Outline Franchising Assessment earlier in 2022, work is commencing on the Full Franchising Assessment, to determine whether this might prove a more effective way to achieve the Combined Authorities bus policy objectives in the future compared to the current partnership model. This work is being undertaken in line with the rigorous processes set out in the Bus Services Act 2017 and is likely to conclude in 2024, following which legislation requires the mayor to determine whether or not a scheme should proceed.

Enhance infrastructure and improve customer experience at TfWM passenger waiting facilities, our bus stations and major interchanges.

Bus Stop Infrastructure

In accordance with a key West Midlands Bus Alliance deliverable TfWM continues to invest in improving the safety, security and appearance of our bus stop infrastructure estate.

Digital advertising is continuing to be introduced as part of a committed programme that also seeks to provide further capital upgrades, and re-branding of existing infrastructure as part of the West Midlands Bus brand update.

Between 14th January 2022 and 21st October 2022, a further 71 new shelters have been installed across the network with 35 of these being the new style Sprint shelter.

To date, 1658 shelters have been rebranded with the new West Midlands Bus brand, 1111 have been repainted (1 of these on Summer Lane at the junction of Tower Street has been vinyl wrapped rather than painted as a trial with) and 547 replaced through the TfWM capital programme or other various schemes/projects, out of a total of 5,056. All stop flags have now been changed to the new brand.

TfWM have in partnership with supplier Bus Shelters Limited installed 2 ENV Bus Shelters as part of a pilot in Halesowen. The shelters are made from recycled materials, have a full sedum roof, are equipped with solar panels for lighting and to power mobile phone charging units. 4 additional ENV shelters have been installed in Coventry as part of the new rail and bus interchange. These shelters will be considered at interchanges across the region as part of renewal/redevelopment plans.

Putting Passengers First on the Network

Birmingham Metro & Rail Interface

Birmingham – City Centre

Bull Street and part of Corporation Street have closed to all traffic since June 2021 to facilitate the construction of Section 1 of the Metro Birmingham Eastside Extension.

New bus infrastructure is being installed on Corporation Street, by Old Square, but the road has not been reopened to traffic yet as Metro work is ongoing.

The alternative bus stop and stand locations remain in use at the present time as mitigation for this phase of work.

The Bus team continues to work with the Metro team and Birmingham City Council around possible impacts because of further phases of work in the city centre area, however there are no plans for stop or stands at the present time.

Birmingham – Eastside

The Construction of Section 5 of the Metro Birmingham Eastside Extension, which commenced in July 2021, is still ongoing at present and this has seen changes to bus services and their

stopping arrangements through the Digbeth area whilst it is prepared for the introduction of the Metro.

Temporary stops have been provided along the route and have been adjusted as necessary through the different phases of the delivery programme, in conjunction with bus operators and the Metro team.

Birmingham – Westside

Phase 2 of the Birmingham Westside extension has now been completed, with the exception of some snagging, and bus services have returned to Centenary Square and Broad Street.

The bus mitigation measures that were previously implemented, in order to facilitate and maintain bus services in the area and provide suitable passenger facilities, are still in place and are being utilised. One the bus service is continuing to operate on the route that was used as diversion, to maintain connectivity for this area. The long-term diversion created new travel patterns for passengers and local residents, and we were keen to maintain a service for these passengers.

Birmingham – Perry Barr

The new bus interchange at Perry Barr station is now open and is use for buses and passengers. Services have returned to the facility, although there has been a need to amend service calling patterns to make best use of the space available in the interchange itself and on the in-line bus stop.

Coventry Station Masterplan

The new station building, and associated bus interchange, opened in March 2022. The new bus interchange is located the other side of the Warwick Road from the previous facility. This new facility provides space for scheduled and rail replacement services bus services, Ring and Ride and West Midlands on Demand.

When the bus interchange opened there were changes to bus services in the area to ensure the facility is served and that passengers are able to conveniently change between modes. A cycle hub has also been introduced at the location.

The bus interchange was used as a gateway to the Commonwealth Games bus services for the Coventry, as the shuttles buses from Coventry station to the Stadium and Arena operated from here, showcasing the facility.

Creating and maintaining a world class system for accurate and reliable public transport travel information including the requirements set out in the National Bus Strategy and regional Vision for Bus.

Passenger Information

Digital information, through journey planners and real-time electronic information screens, is being kept up to date on a minimum of a weekly basis. This has included special timetables covering the Easter and May half term periods, as well as special days for the Platinum Jubilee period. All digital information systems were also updated to inform customers about service provision on the day of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's State Funeral.

The Integrated Information team continue to be agile in approach to updating printed roadside information, due to the continued frequent bus service changes that are a result of bus operators managing their services in line with available funding and due to operational issues. Since February, there's been 8 Network Stability Periods (NSPs) to update printed information for registered changes cross the network. Many of these changes were not registered and coordinated with NSP dates which has been challenging. As part of the NSP changes, 1,918 flags and 25,183 At-stop timetable posters have been generated, printed and positioned.

In order to limit passenger confusion, the focus has been on prioritising significant and high impact changes including route changes, service renumbering and withdrawals. Bus Stations and key interchange hubs were also prioritised and include "Where to board your bus" interchange posters and advice regarding new stopping locations

TfWM Integrated Information Team also continue to support specific service changes a result of infrastructure works such as Perry Barr Interchange, Coventry Rail Interchange and Metro work on Digbeth High Street, as well as to support the re-opening to buses of Broad Street, with the provision of enhanced information at stop.

The team has also supported the rollout of Sprint shelters, providing printed information in advance of the stop opening, as well as ensuring the electronic information screens are commissioned and displaying real time information.

A key milestone in the Transforming Real Time Information Project was reached in March with the transition to use the Ito World Transit hub for all bus operator real time information predictions. The system also provides enhanced performance and monitoring of bus movements as well as providing a "single source of the truth" to be used by consuming parties, whether that is electronic information screens in bus stations, Google or the tfwm.org.uk website.

The migration of the on-street electronic information displays has also commenced during the reporting period, with 750 out of 901 displays successfully connected to the new Transit hub at the time of writing, with the remainder to be complete by mid-November. This means that predictions of when the bus is due for all bus operators, not just National Express (which was a limitation of these screens prior to migration) is now being provided to customers.

Unfortunately, the impact of driver shortages on the reliability of bus services and the short (less than 24 hours) notice that the non-running of trips is determined, means that real time information has not always accurately reflected the reality of whether a bus is due to arrive at a stop or not. Therefore, to provide better information to customers we are working with National Express West Midlands and Ito World to create a tool whereby the bus operator can input information about cancelled trips ahead of time which will then be shown on outputs to customers such as electronic information screens or through apps.

Commonwealth Games

The Bus and Integrated Information teams worked closely with the TfWM Commonwealth Games team on the delivery of bus public transport for the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, supporting on tendered and commercial service options during periods where temporary changes were being introduced around venues and road events.

The Integrated Information team was commissioned by the Commonwealth Games Organising Committee to deliver tailored information across the bus network to support the successful

delivery of the Games. This resulted in the positioning (and subsequent removal) of 5,300 vinyls at all bus shelters across the network advising “plan ahead for the Games” several weeks before they commenced, 254 posters at locations where stops were out of use or had significant changes for the whole of the Games period and 1661 posters to advise of changes on days of specific events.

Around 30 bus services were also registered to provide enhanced public transport at provision at key times of day to support the Games and all of the data regarding these was entered into our digital information systems and available prior to the start of the Games.

The team also worked on a joint project with Birmingham City Council and West Midlands Growth Company to update the “base map” for the Wayfinding system within Birmingham City Centre and ensured all on street assets were in good order ahead of the Commonwealth Games. 20 key locations had mapping updated on them ahead of the Games and the team created a new “tear-off” A4 map, which included a map of visitor attractions across the whole of the West Midlands region on one side, as well as Birmingham City Centre on the other. This map was not Games specific but was handed out to visitors during that period as well as being available from locations across the City such as the Library and hotels.

3. Financial Implications

Covid 19 continues to have a considerable impact on Bus service and infrastructure provision and result in significant financial pressures. Bus operators have lost ticketing revenue on both commercial and tendered bus routes. The WMCA’s income also continues to be impacted, for example through lost ticket commission and reduced rental income. As a result of the reduced commerciality of routes, the WMCA has been required to plug more gaps on the network through its Subsidised Services budget and has also seen sharp increases in Bus tender prices due to a combination of increasing costs and falling revenue for operators. Furthermore, some operators have now ceased to trade meaning that fewer operators are available to bid for work, impacting competition.

The DfT has continued to provide financial support to compensate operators for lost income. Bus Recovery Grant (BRG) funding has been paid directly by Government to operators to compensate for fare income shortfalls on commercial routes between April and the beginning of October 2022. For the same period, £1.9m of Local Transport Funding (LTF) has been allocated to the WMCA to reflect income shortfalls on tendered services as well as covering additional costs to Authorities for providing tendered services which are no longer deemed commercial by operators, and which have fallen to Authorities to support. In early 2022/23, a package of measures was agreed between the WMCA and the DfT to reflect the need for stability during the Commonwealth Games. This package provided one-off funding for operators of £14.88m (entitled Network Stability Fund) to cover the period of the games together with an extension of LTF/BRG support of £8.58m (entitled Network Planning Fund) to the end of December 2022. Since the package was agreed, the DfT has announced that there will be further financial support to operators across the country until 31st March 2023. Because of the separate negotiation with the DfT on a one-off package to support the Commonwealth Games, the DfT has stated that the West Midlands will only be eligible for this further support for the period from 1st January 2023 – 31st March 2023. No details have as yet been provided as to how much money will be available during the final quarter of this Financial Year.

Alongside the significant operator support from the DfT, the WMCA has continued to provide financial support to operators through its Concessionary payments, by paying at pre-Covid levels rather than on actual journey numbers, which for ENCTS are currently approximately 70% of

pre-Covid levels. This arrangement is currently in place to 31st December 2022 and will continue to be reviewed in the light of available DfT funding and associated terms and conditions.

The DfT has agreed an indicative BSIP allocation for the West Midlands of £87.8m subject to the receipt of certain clarifications about the programme. These clarifications were submitted in September, but the WMCA has yet to hear back from Government about when the funding will be made available. The programme of work will only be able to begin in earnest when the funding is made available, and discussions are continuing with the DfT about payment timescales so that appropriate planning of workstreams can be undertaken. The BSIP proposals will work alongside other proposed measures which will be funded from other income streams such as CRSTS and ZEBRA.

The WMCA was successful in obtaining funding of £50m for the Coventry All Electric City project which will see Coventry's Bus fleet transition to electric by 2025. Buses continue to roll-off the production line and move into service. The WMCA has also been successful in obtaining a potential allocation of £30.4m from Government for ZEBRA to provide hydrogen buses and associated infrastructure. The WMCA is currently reviewing bids for this funding from operators.

4. Legal Implications

There are no specific legal implications arising from the contents of this report. The legal team will continue to support specific work streams including development of the BSIP, the resulting Enhanced Partnership and the adoption of powers.

5. Equalities Implications

There are no specific equality implications from this update report. However, individual schemes and initiatives (e.g., zebra, BSIP) are/have been equality impact assessed to ensure key equality and inclusion considerations have been embedded.

6. Inclusive Growth Implications

There are no specific inclusive growth implications arising from noting this update however, buses are the most important part of the public transport system to the majority of people in the West Midlands, and it is therefore crucial that people can access bus services in a way which is safe, convenient and affordable. Buses will also be an important component of the region's transition to net zero. As such, bus patronage will be a key indicator of how clean and inclusive the region's economy is and should be watched closely.

7. Geographical Area of Report's Implications

This report covers the constituent area of the Combined Authority but due to the importance of cross boundary services – into and out of the constituent area – partnership working with non-constituent and shire authorities is crucial in undertaking activities referred to in this report.

Appendix 1

West Midlands Bus Alliance Board

Membership

01 November 2022

Organisation	Name	Role	Sub Group Responsibility for reporting up to and from to the Bus Alliance Board
WMCA	Andy Street	Mayor	-
Birmingham City Council	Cllr Ian Ward	Lead Portfolio Holder – Transport	-
Birmingham City Council	Cllr Liz Clements	Cabinet Member for Transport	-
Walsall Council	Cllr Richard Worrall	Chair Transport Delivery Committee / Chair Sprint Member Engagement Group	Transport Delivery Committee
Bus Users UK	Claire Walters	Chair of the BSIP / Enhanced Partnership (EP) Reference Group	BSIP / Enhanced Partnership (EP) Reference Group
Bus Operator – National Express	David Bradford	Managing Director of UK Bus for National Express	-
Bus Operator - Stagecoach	Mark Whitelocks	Managing Director, Stagecoach Midlands	West Midlands Bus Operators Panel
Bus Operator (<i>smaller operator rep</i>)	Vacant	-	-
Bus Operator – Diamond Bus	Bob Baker	Director, Diamond Bus	West Midlands Bus Operators Panel
Community Transport Operator – Community Transport	Liz Rowe	Operations Director, South Community Transport	Community Transport Operators Panel
Safer Travel Police Team	Sinead Sweeney	Chief Inspector, West Midlands Police – Safer Travel	-
WMCA	Anne Shaw	Executive Director Transport for West Midlands	Strategic Transport Officers Group (STOG)
Traffic Manager from a local Highway Authority	Paul Leighton	Chair of the West Midlands Traffic Managers Group	The West Midlands Traffic Managers Group
Transport Policy/Strategy from a local Highway Authority	Stuart Everton	Black Country Director of Transport	Strategic Transport Officers Group (STOG)
WMCA	Mark Corbin	Director of Network Resilience, TfWM (interim)	West Midlands Transport Infrastructure Resilience and Response – Tactical Group
WMCA	Pete Bond	Director of Integrated Transport Services, TfWM	Bus Alliance Programme Delivery Board
Confederation of Passenger Transport	Graham Vidler	Chief Executive, Confederation of Passenger Transport	-

Organisation	Name	Role	Sub Group Responsibility for reporting up to and from to the Bus Alliance Board
Transport Focus	Linda McCord	Senior Stakeholder Manager	-
Department for Transport	Steve Blackmore	Local Partnerships	
Secretariat	Stephen Holloway	Partnerships Coordinator, TfWM	-