



West Midlands  
Combined Authority

## Transport Delivery Committee

<b>Date</b>	14 November 2022
<b>Report title</b>	Park & Ride update report
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<b>Report has been considered by</b>	Transport Delivery Committee members

**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 outlines the continued impacts Covid-19 has had on car park operations and development.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) currently operates 9,186 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 except for Bescot Stadium and the then recently opened facility at Bradley Lane.
- 2.3 As a result of this high demand, there was a focus by TfWM in conjunction with the West Midlands local authorities on expanding Park & Ride at the locations that were 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 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 £2.65m per year in operational costs. This is predicted to rise to £3.2m by 2024/25 and does not yet reflect significantly increasing costs including a large rise in energy prices.

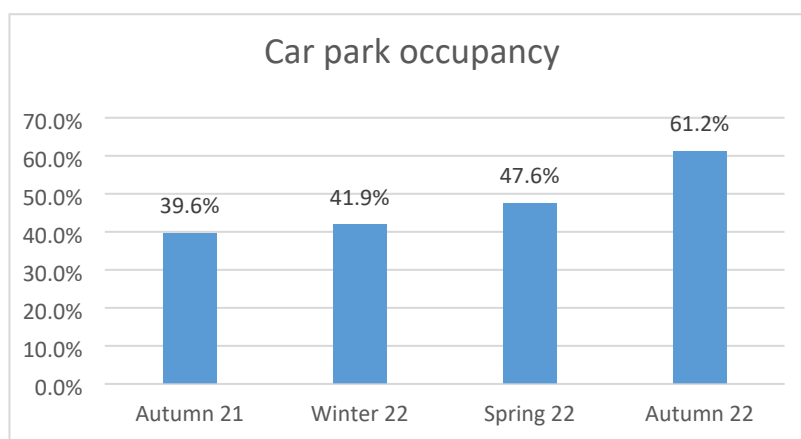
## 3. Impact of Coronavirus on Park & Ride operations

- 3.1 As was reported in the previous update, the lasting effects of the Coronavirus pandemic has affected the occupancy of Park & Ride sites significantly. During 2022 we have seen a steady increase in usage of our car parks with the weekday average now being more than 60% of capacity. Very large car parks bring down the average, and so this figure does not reflect the fact that several of our smaller car parks like those at Coseley, Shirley, Olton and Tipton are now regularly close to or at capacity as demonstrated in Table 1 below. Unlike before March 2020 these car parks are generally full later in the morning – usually at around 0930 – rather than earlier in the morning peak.

	No. spaces	Avg weekday	Avg weekday %	Max	Max %
ACOCKS GREEN	136	73	53.7%	94	69.1%
BERKSWELL	95	56	58.9%	74	77.9%
BESCOT	122	36	29.5%	50	41.0%
BLACK LAKE	87	67	77.0%	90	103.4%
BLAKE STREET	163	66	40.5%	119	73.0%
BRADLEY LANE	196	63	32.1%	86	43.9%
BROMSGROVE	359	120	33.4%	173	48.2%
CANLEY	123	55	44.7%	98	79.7%
CHESTER ROAD	201	169	84.1%	223	110.9%
COSELEY	102	86	84.3%	104	102.0%
CRADLEY HEATH	249	224	90.0%	277	111.2%
DORRIDGE	90	83	92.2%	94	104.4%
DUDLEY PORT	87	31	35.6%	45	51.7%
FOUR OAKS	343	237	69.1%	291	84.8%
GALTON BRIDGE	77	59	76.6%	72	93.5%
HALL GREEN	112	62	55.4%	85	75.9%
HAMPTON IN ARDEN	134	85	63.4%	125	93.3%
HAWTHORNS	185	113	61.1%	192	103.8%
KINGS NORTON	321	172	53.6%	212	66.0%
LANGLEY GREEN	31	22	71.0%	30	96.8%
LEA HALL	29	29	100.0%	35	120.7%
LYE	20	8	40.0%	13	65.0%
LONGBRIDGE	624	46	7.4%	75	12.0%
MARSTON GREEN	122	110	90.2%	143	117.2%
NORTHFIELD	194	135	69.6%	189	97.4%
OLD HILL	54	22	40.7%	32	59.3%
OLTON	93	98	105.4%	140	150.5%
PREISTFIELD	148	113	76.4%	165	111.5%
ROWLEY	741	307	41.4%	387	52.2%
SANDWELL and DUDLEY	393	269	68.4%	354	90.1%
SELLY OAK	454	185	40.7%	251	55.3%
SHIRLEY	71	59	83.1%	70	98.6%
STOURBRIDGE JUNCTION	1069	332	31.1%	472	44.2%
SUTTON COLDFIELD	317	124	39.1%	201	63.4%
TAMBRIDGE PARKWAY	226	162	71.7%	240	106.2%
TILE HILL	347	200	57.6%	301	86.7%
TIPTON	71	66	93.0%	87	122.5%
WEDNESBURY PARKWAY	152	71	46.7%	120	78.9%
WHITLOCKS END	324	117	36.1%	172	53.1%
WIDNEY MANOR	297	130	43.8%	182	61.3%
WYLDE GREEN	57	48	84.2%	71	124.6%
YARDELY WOOD	170	91	53.5%	119	70.0%
	9186	4601	60.2%		

**Table 1: Average and maximum occupancy of Park & Ride car parks Autumn 2022**

- 3.2 Figure 1, below, demonstrates the average percentage weekday occupancy of TfWM's car parks during each term time from September 2021 until mid-October 2022.
- 3.3 Occupancy for our car parks has very much followed national trends for rail usage post the Covid lockdowns. The peak days for occupancy is mid-week on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays with less usage on Mondays and Fridays. Thursdays usually have the highest occupancy. With a trend to increases in leisure rail travel over the last 12 months or so we now see significantly more usage of our car parks on Saturdays (average occupancy of 43.4% during September and October 2022).



**Figure 1: Average car park usage using data collected by the authority's CCTV team on weekdays**

- 3.4 During the recent long-term suspension of Metro services due to issues with the tram cars the overall average number of cars in all our car parks remained the same. Metro car park users initially transferred to rail station car parks as there was an agreement, they could use their Metro season ticket on rail services at no additional cost. Sandwell & Dudley station car park saw significant increased use during this period. Once the ticket acceptance was discontinued there was a marked decrease in usage of Sandwell & Dudley car park. It was not clear from the demand for parking where these customers transferred to. However, within days of the tram service returning, demand for Metro Park and Ride parking returned to pre-closure levels.
- 3.5 Longbridge car park has been operational for just over a year, opening on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021. The 624 space car park is being used by around 50 vehicles a day (7% capacity) which is much lower than the projected demand calculated pre-Covid-19. There are plans for a marketing campaign to encourage usage in the coming months.
- 3.6 Longbridge car park did play an important role during the Commonwealth games as outlined in paragraph 5.8 where the car park was used by over 550 vehicles proving the car park is more than capable of accommodating these numbers and is ideal for use for other such initiatives whilst the background demand builds for the car park.

## **Train Operator Industrial Action**

- 3.7 Since July 2022 all the train operators in the West Midlands and Network Rail have been affected by strikes as the various rail unions take action in their pay and conditions dispute. Car park demand has been significantly lower on strike days due to there being a much-reduced rail service or no service at all. There has been an element of modal transfer to Metro on strike days.
- 3.8 On the days where there has been no rail service at all, we would not expect any demand for car parking at rail stations. However, we did find more than 20 cars parked at Cradley Heath, Dorridge, Four Oaks, Hampton in Arden, Kings Norton, Longbridge, Olton, Sandwell and Dudley, Selly Oak, Stourbridge Junction and Sutton Coldfield. This would suggest those parking are not public transport users which tallies with anecdotal evidence. We will continue to monitor the situation and seek to conduct enforcement as necessary to ensure parking is reserved for use by train, tram and bus customers in line with lease requirements and the car park Terms & Conditions.

## **Industrial action on the Metro**

- 3.9 From mid-October staff at Midland Metro have been taking strike action as part of a dispute with their employers. Midland Metro have to date been able to offer a reduced service on strike days covering the key times many customers use the service. As a result, there has been no material reduction in demand for car parking at the metro stops with car parks.

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

- 4.1 The aftermath of Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns have had significant impacts on demand for Park & Ride as demonstrated in section 3 of this report. This provides uncertainty on whether the sites previously prioritised for expansion 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.
- 4.2 Furthermore, Covid-19 has continued to significantly impact 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.
- 4.3 With this in mind, alongside other changes impacting rail and car park use such as reduced frequencies, strike action etc. we are planning to review the existing Park & Ride strategy to understand how best to approach future Park & Ride development and, fundamentally, improve access to sites by other modes.
- 4.4 From a Park and Ride perspective we were successful in securing funds to continue the development work on Tile Hill and Whitlock's End car park projects through the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement from the DfT. Details are outlined in paragraphs 4.5 - 4.7.

## Scheme Development

- 4.5 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 around 250 spaces to the Park & Ride offer at this location. The scheme has a budget allocation in the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement which will be used to develop the business case. The project will seek to deliver an expansion of car parking, on-site bus facilities and improvements to encourage more users to walk or cycle to the site.
- 4.6 In partnership with Solihull, again using funding from the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement, we are focusing on revisiting the scheme for expanding Park & Ride and improved access arrangements for Whitlock's 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. Like Tile Hill, this scheme is likely to develop into more than just a car park expansion with an emphasis on more sustainable means of getting to and from the station.
- 4.7 The OBC will undertake more detailed works into the design and delivery of the car park, and determine whether there are enough benefits vs. costs to justify taking the scheme forward. It is anticipated that the OBC work will be completed during 2023.
- 4.8 In the previous report, information was provided on work to explore the feasibility of a potential bus-based Park and Ride on the A38 at Minworth. Work was jointly undertaken with Birmingham City Council and specialist land agents to look for a suitable location for such a facility. Finding suitable land has proved difficult so currently development of this scheme is on hold with a view to revisiting the options in the medium term.
- 4.9 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, enhance interchange in the station area and provide improved facilities for customers ready for when the Metro opens in 2024. Dudley Port will be the only Metro station on the new Wednesbury to Dudley/Brierley Hill Metro alignment so providing improved access to and connectivity within the site is key.
- 4.10 Following an allocation of money from the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement, we are now working to update the SOBC and deliver an OBC. The updated SOBC will include exploring more significant, longer term development options for the railway station itself such as step free access, improved waiting facilities and longer platforms to follow on from the shorter-term integration, access and customer experience measures.
- 4.11 As previously reported TfWM has agreed a short-term extension to the lease with Chiltern Railways for the operation of Solihull station car park. This is to allow TfWM to develop a business case to evaluate whether the operation of this car park should fall back under TfWM's remit. The financial model developed in house to develop a financial case for the Longbridge, Darlaston and Willenhall car park projects is being used to evaluate whether it is financially viable to take back operation. To bring the car park up to the standards of other TfWM car parks will require upgrades in lighting and CCTV alongside the installation of a similar customer payment system as is in place at Longbridge. Costs for these upgrades are being factored into the business case work.

- 4.12 Currently TfWM operates one of the car parks at Dorridge and Chiltern Railways operate the other one, which they lease from Solihull MBC. As with Solihull Railway Station car park, TfWM is keen to look at the options to take on the operation of both Dorridge car parks once the elevation of the Solihull car park has concluded.
- 4.13 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.
- 4.14 At Olton, TfWM has been working with Solihull MBC to look at how blue badge parking could be relocated to create more parking for general rail users. To facilitate this a Traffic Regulation Order has been consulted on to move the station car park blue badge parking onto the road outside the station building providing space for approximately 7 additional normal parking bays. This has now been approved and we are discussing appropriate timescales for implementation with Solihull officers.
- 4.15 At Coseley the local ward councillors have raised concerns that the two station car parks are regularly full and that this is having an impact on local on street parking. Monitoring was undertaken during September where it was found on street parking was low. One hotspot for on street parking close to the station is without on street parking restrictions. Dudley Officers have explored the introduction of parking restrictions however this met with local opposition from residents. Therefore it has been agreed to continue to monitor the situation.

## **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 and meeting Local Transport Plan objectives.
- 5.2 Day to day operational management our car parks is undertaken by a specialist car park operator to allow us to undertake car park enforcement and operate the car park payment systems at Longbridge, Bromsgrove and Sutton Coldfield stations. The current contract ended on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2022. Following a retendering exercise over the summer we received bids from three operators including our existing operator Excel Parking Services who were successful in retaining the contract.

## **Data review**

- 5.3 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 usage at 1100 at all TfWM sites every day apart from Sundays. This data has proved very useful.

- 5.4 In addition to the above we are working with our CCTV provider TIS and 4sight Imaging to understand what data we can receive via our CCTV network. We are undertaking a trial at Sutton Coldfield to collect information on car park entries and exits, types of vehicle, length of stay, busiest days and times etc. We are in the process of agreeing the level of data and how it is presented. If successful we may seek to roll out such an initiative to other sites, focusing on those where development is due to take place.
- 5.5 We are also working with WMCA's Customer Intelligence and Transport Planning teams and WMRE to undertake a new round of rail user surveys next year. This will provide a much more detailed insight into customer behaviours post the Covid-19 pandemic and be invaluable in informing development schemes and supporting business cases.

### **Electric Vehicle Charging**

- 5.6 Following a successful funding bid to Innovate UK, we have been working with Accelogress, our Save-a-Space provider, to develop a proof of concept for an app based pre-booking service for Electric Vehicle charging points. This is being deployed at Rowley Regis and Tile Hill, and has included the replacement of the existing, outdated chargepoints at these locations. It is hoped the system will help to solve a key issue for electric vehicle users of being able to find a charger that is both available and working. Options to fund the next stages of development and testing work are currently being agreed before the system goes live. The chargepoints are freely available to use by customers in the meantime. With a small investment in additional hardware the Electric vehicle chargers at Longbridge car park would have the same capability. This leaves the chargers at Yardley Wood and Bradley Lane to be upgraded.
- 5.7 TfWM has also been working with Birmingham City Council and their supplier ESB Energy to install some rapid 50KW chargers in our Birmingham area rail station car parks. The first one has been installed at Selly Oak Railway Station. We are continuing to work with ESB and Birmingham City Council to explore further roll out to up to ten sites, prioritising based upon availability of power supply and lease arrangements.

### **Commonwealth Games**

- 5.8 The 2022 Commonwealth Games took place from Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> July to Monday 8<sup>th</sup> August and Park & Ride played a key part of the public transport offer for both spectators and the games workforce. Bespoke Park & Ride facilities were provided for the Alexander Stadium, Sandwell Aquatics Centre and Coventry Arena venues during the Games with 64,910 parking spaces being booked. These parking facilities allowed approximately 179,800 spectators to access the Games. They operated from a variety of locations including Bescott Stadium, staff car parks for Jaguar Land Rover (who were on their annual holiday shut down during the games) and schools.
- 5.9 The provision of bespoke facilities ensured minimum disruption to people who still needed to travel for work and other purposes not related to the Games on the existing Park & Ride network. Our permanent car parks did play their part in ad hoc provision and there was no evidence that any business-as-usual users were negatively impacted.



- 5.10 On 30<sup>th</sup> July - the first Saturday of the games - many West Midlands Trains operational staff were on strike as part of their ongoing pay dispute. As a result, our Bromsgrove, Longbridge and Rowley Regis car parks were repurposed into bus-based Park & Ride sites for specific games events. Despite arrangements having to be very much last minute they proved to be very popular with spectators. To avoid potential knock-on disruption on 31<sup>st</sup> July the bus-based Park & Ride facilities were also provided on Sunday from the same locations. In addition, a further facility was provided at Four Oaks to cater for the Triathlon event in Sutton Park. Success of these operations were very much down to the organisation across teams at TfWM, WMCA and the Commonwealth Games, and the various bus and coach operators who provided the vehicles. Particular praise should go to the team from First Kernow who provided the Longbridge operation.

### **Lease / rental reviews**

- 5.11 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.
- 5.12 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.
- 5.13 Several leases for some of our car parks on land owned by Network Rail expired in March 2022. These leases were specifically created at rail privatisation in the mid-1990s where the car park land forms part of the station lease arrangement the train operator has with Network Rail for the operation of the remainder of the station. The train operator, West Midlands Trains, then sub leases the car park area to the WMCA.
- 5.14 These leases are like all the other leases WMCA has with Network Rail area protected under the 1954 Landlords and Tenants Act which means as long as we continue to use the land as a car park then on expiry of the lease a new arrangement has to be granted and if at any time Network Rail wants the land back, they would have to compensate WMCA for early termination of the lease.
- 5.15 The negotiations concluded that we maintain the current arrangements until 2026 including retaining our protection under the 1954 Landlords and Tenants Act.
- 5.16 As outlined in 4.11 – 4.12 discussions have been taking place with Chiltern Railways over the Solihull car park lease. TfWM is exploring an option 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.

### **Car Park Booking and Charging Options**

- 5.17 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.
- 5.18 Accelogress developed a mobile app-based platform called Save-a-Space 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.

- 5.19 Pre-Covid-19 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 stress related to trying to find somewhere to park.
- 5.20 Due to the scheme's success, additional spaces and car parks were added to the trial during 2018 and 2019. Bookable bays were in place at Four Oaks, Whitlocks End, Stourbridge Junction, Rowley Regis, Northfield and Tile Hill.
- 5.21 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 the initiative was put on hold due to large amounts of capacity within car parks.
- 5.22 The Park & Ride team are currently working with Accelogress to explore the possibility of re-introducing the service at the stations that had it pre-covid in the coming months. Additionally, we are looking at some of the other car park sites that currently are at or close to capacity as we feel customers would benefit from being able to pre book a parking space at these locations.
- 5.23 As part of the agreed Park & Ride Policies and Principles, formed and approved based upon the Park & Ride strategy in 2018, work commenced to look at options for charging and booking on the Park & Ride estate. This work was put on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In light of current budgetary challenges and levy discussions, it is planned that work to explore potential options around charging for parking are resumed.

## **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.
- 6.3 As outlined above, the operating cost predicted increase to 2024-25 does not take into consideration the large rises predicted to future energy prices.

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

- 7.1 There are no immediate legal implications arising from the contents of this report.

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

No comments

## **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**

No comments

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

No comments

## **12. Other Implications**

No comments

## **13. Schedule of Background Papers**

None