



Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Thursday 13 October 2022 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Cathy Bayton (Chair)
Councillor Chaman Lal (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Martin McCarthy
Councillor Barbara McGarrity
Councillor Rupinder Singh
Councillor Vera Waters

Association of Black Country Authorities
Birmingham City Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
City of Wolverhampton Council
Coventry City Council
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

In Attendance

Dan Essex
David Harris
Lyndsey Roberts
Anne Shaw

Governance Services Manager
Transport Strategy & Place Manager
Scrutiny Officer
Executive Director of Transport for West
Midlands
Portfolio Lead for Transport

Councillor Ian Ward

**Item Title
No.**

76. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed the Portfolio Lead for Transport and members of the sub-committee to the meeting that would focus on transport policy-related matters.

77. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Karen Simms (Sandwell) and Councillor Mark Westwood (Dudley).

78. Portfolio Lead for Transport's Opening Statement

The Portfolio Lead for Transport provided an opening statement that focussed on the budgetary pressures being faced by Transport for West Midlands during 2022/23 and 2023/24 and the impact that the short and medium-term financial pressures were expected to have on the delivery of Transport for West Midlands services.

79. Questions to the Portfolio Lead for Transport

The sub-committee pursued a number of general lines of enquiry with the Portfolio Lead for Transport, including financial challenges and their impact on capital projects, concessions to help with the cost of living pressures, the effectiveness of the processes to hold bus operators to account and meeting the WMCA's net zero carbon objectives.

In relation to the delivery of the Wednesbury - Brierley Hill metro extension, the Portfolio Lead for Transport explained the funding pressures to deliver the scheme and whilst it was recognised that funding had been secured for the delivery of phase one of the scheme (Wednesbury - Dudley), it was understood that additional funding was being sought to deliver phase two (Dudley - Brierley Hill).

The Portfolio Lead for Transport explained how he considered the WMCA to spend resources more effectively than if it was undertaken by the Government. He suggested that the Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee could review how funding devolved by the Government to deliver the Bus Service Improvement Plan and the transport projects identified as part of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement was currently being spent and whether it demonstrated better value for money than if the funds were retained and managed by the Government.

With regards to the funding challenges and the impact that this may have on the delivery of the Local Transport Plan, it was noted that due to higher interest rates and the effect that this had on the cost of borrowing, there was a need to review the contents of the plan. Whilst recognising the challenges and financial pressures of the local authorities, the sub-committee emphasised the importance of achieving modal-shift for the West Midlands to achieve its target of becoming net-zero by 2041.

In relation to the WMCA achieving its net-zero target, the Government had allocated funding to help authorities to introduce zero-emission buses and the infrastructure needed to support these. In addition, there were a number of schemes that were being trialled or delivered throughout the West Midlands that contributed towards meeting this net-zero target.

The sub-committee sought the views of the Portfolio Lead for Transport with regard to the Enhanced Bus Partnership scheme. The Portfolio Lead for Transport considered the scheme to be effective, which allowed the WMCA to require bus operators to meet a number of quality obligations. Members shared their views on the level of control and influence that Transport for West Midlands had on the bus network, the need for behaviour change, the importance of enhancing the customer experience and having a safe and reliable bus service and the collection of patronage data and performance information.

The concerns and the experiences of local residents regarding cross-boundary travel and the cost of ticketing for young people were brought to the attention of the Portfolio Lead Member for Transport. Whilst it was recognised that supported travel schemes operated differently within different areas, Transport for West Midlands did engage with boundary authorities and discussed ways to incentivise and support local assisted transport policies for young people.

The sub-committee enquired about the enquiry into the lengthy closure of the Midland Metro service last year due to vehicle defects and were keen to understand the lessons learnt. The Portfolio Lead for Transport explained that he was not aware of an enquiry and in terms of public events, Transport for West Midlands always sought the advice of the West Midlands Police with regards to the operation of services and public safety. The Governance Services Manager undertook to clarify the reviews that had taken place in the aftermath of the tram closure.

Recommended:

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

(1) Commonwealth Games

Members welcomed the success of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and the free public transport provided to those people that had purchased a ticket for the events. The sub-committee also looked forward to receiving a report on the lessons learnt, and whether it had met its objective of being the greenest Commonwealth Games held.

(2) 'Resource vs Ambition'

Funding pressures were recognised and the necessity for difficult decisions to be made. 'Resources vs ambition' seemed to be a consistent theme throughout the responses received from the Portfolio Lead.

(3) Cross Boundary travel for school-aged children

Whilst the challenges of cross boundary travel were recognised, the WMCA should engage with non-constituent authorities to seek an agreement where possible with regard to cross boundary travel for young people, to enable a more affordable and seamless journeys to school.

The WMCA should also lobby the Government for better concessions for young people, similar to the concessionary bus pass scheme for older people.

The appropriate bodies to be brought together to discuss what could be done collaboratively to improve the supported transport system for students in terms of cross boundary travel.

(4) WMCA - Value for Money

Whilst members recognised the work of the WMCA, it was considered that further work should be undertaken to demonstrate to the Government and members of the public that the WMCA achieved excellent value for money in its spending of devolved funding.

80. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the sub-committee be held on Thursday 10 November 2022.

[The meeting ended at 12:00pm]