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26 January 2023

Dear Cathy

**Re: Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee Observations from 13 October 2022**

It was a pleasure to attend the Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee on 13 October 2022 and may I extend my sincere thanks to you as Chair and members of the sub-committee for the kind invitation and welcome I received.

I understand that following questions raised to me as Portfolio Holder for Transport at the WMCA, members submitted the following observations following their reflections, to be considered with a formal written response due to the next sub-committee meeting on 6 February 2023.

**(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.*

On 24 November 2022 there was a report submitted to the Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee on the successful Games Transport Plan. This summarised the lessons learned and highlighted the key successes of Transport for West Midlands and multiple authorities and transport operators throughout the planning and delivery of what I'm sure you and the sub-committee would agree was a hugely successful Commonwealth Games

- [\(Public Pack\) Agenda Document for Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee, 24/11/2022 10:00 \(wmca.org.uk\)](#)

Furthermore, I also have pleasure in providing the Government's Interim Evaluation Report of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games which was published on 17 January and portrays an exceptionally positive picture. However, it is important to note that this is only an interim report and the longer term legacy impacts will be captured in the final evaluation report due this time next year.

- [Evaluation of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games – Interim Evaluation Report – January 2023 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

## (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.*

One of the key insights from the work on the new Local Transport Plan is that some of our more expensive interventions are not necessarily our most impactful in the short to medium term - especially when thinking about what measures can help us change behaviour and improve lives across the region.

Much of the behaviour change needs to come from tackling many of the short trips that are being made by single occupancy private cars across the region. Whilst it is critical to see improvements to public transport, it is not the only change we need. We need to manage the risk of focusing too great a proportion of our limited local resources into large infrastructure projects. These alone will not have the wider more fundamental impacts to travel behaviours we need to see - especially if we are serious about carbon reduction and inclusive growth. This is why we are investing heavily within the City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement on active travel and bus-based measures, as well as continuing to secure additional funding such as Active Travel Funding for walking and cycling investment.

Capital investment into measures which help to create the conditions to support people to walk, wheel, cycle, scoot and to help manage traffic through local neighbourhoods are generally much less expensive than rail or light rail investment, and if delivered and targeted correctly, are likely to have a much higher impact on travel behaviours per pound spent. We also know that in terms of the available rapid transit solutions, priority schemes to support core bus services and Sprint are also relatively less costly.

We also need to consider how we deliver some of these measures at a much greater scale and pace than we are presently. Notwithstanding this target, improvements in rail-based mass transit will continue to be important, both to improve the commercial model for the region’s metro network and to improve access to key economic centres. To help manage the cost challenge of this we are also investing in Very Light Rail, which as a research and development project is intended to provide a more cost-effective alternative to conventional Metro solutions with similar benefits.

Through our engagement on the Local Transport Plan, many of our residents and stakeholders have raised concerns about the level of traffic rule breaking. This creates nuisances, blocking pavements and streets for other users, creating unattractive and less inviting streets and places, that in worse cases are costing lives through road casualties. The measures of the Local Transport Plan would enable a clear policy to support the improved enforcement of the rules of the road, to make our streets safer and fairer. Undertaking this may well create the resources to help us to do more.

To be clear, our policy is not against pursuing measures that are resource intensive – HS2 and Midlands Rail Hub are good examples of costly interventions, however ones which could have connectivity benefits for many generations. As we move forward and develop our transport programmes and implementation plans, we will need to think carefully about how the funding available to us through local and devolved funding is used and the impacts we

want to create. We must also ensure we have the right mix of proposals and will continue to need nationally funded projects to improve the strategic rail and public transport network.

### **(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.*

There are a few factors to consider regarding cross boundary travel for school-aged children. Young people up to the age of 18 receive half fare travel throughout the West Midlands on bus, train and tram and extending this to cross-boundary would require operator buy-in as we have no powers beyond our area. If non-constituent authorities have funding to support, then Transport for West Midlands would be happy to facilitate the negotiations on their behalf, as fares tend to be considerably higher outside of the West Midlands area and therefore could be expensive.

Furthermore, a number of sixth form colleges provide funding for free travel to 16-18 year olds, including colleges outside of the West Midlands area, involving some who provide a dedicated bus. However, it is also worth noting that Transport for West Midlands are undertaking a discretionary spend review. This considers schemes offered in terms of whether better value, or social benefit could be derived through switching the funding to support different groups to those currently targeted, notwithstanding this review being undertaken with significant budget pressures in mind.

### **(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.*

It should be noted that all external funds are required to go through the WMCA Single Assurance Framework (SAF) which is reviewed annually and approved by the WMCA Board.

Adherence to the SAF is a key mechanism for the Government having confidence in the ability of the WMCA to manage funds and is a set of systems, processes and protocols designed to provide a consistent approach for appraisal, assurance, risk management and performance throughout the lifecycle of all WMCA projects, programmes and processes to enable accountability, including value for money.

A key objective of the SAF is to support the WMCA in making judgements about the value for money of potential investments and projects. All business cases seeking approval are

assessed through the SAF process and are evaluated against the HM Treasury's (HMT) 5-case business model highlighted within The Green Book (2022).

For transport projects this is viewed through the Department for Transport's (DfT) own 'WebTAG' guidance, which provides a very clear and established means of assessing value for money. Using the example of the CRSTS funding programme (the largest component of the overall transport investment programme) the region has already had to demonstrate directly to the DfT and HMT a value for money case before the funding was agreed and devolved. The business case for this is in the public domain.

The WMCA also delivers a range of revenue funded activity and policies supported primarily by the regional transport levy. The bulk of this levy is spent on either debt repayment or statutory schemes such as the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS). ENCTS is delivered on a formulae basis in accordance with DfT direction, and so the value for money case is aligned with the national policy setting context. The substantive discretionary component relates to supported travel policies, for which a strategic review is expected to be commenced in 2023. This review will consider value for money against need, policy outcomes and equalities considerations.

I do hope the above responses to the questions submitted provide the Transport Scrutiny Sub-Committee with the clarity and assurances sought.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Ward', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Councillor Ian Ward

**Portfolio Lead for Transport – West Midlands Combined Authority**