

Report to Cabinet

24 February 2021

Subject:	A34 Sprint Bus Rapid Transit
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Jackie Taylor - Cabinet Member for Sustainable Transport
Director:	Tammy Stokes - Interim Director Regeneration and Growth
Key Decision:	Yes: Type (c) - an executive decision which is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the Borough.
Contact Officer:	Andy Miller Strategic Planning & Transportation Manager andy_miller@sandwell.gov.uk Robin Weare Service Manager Highways robin_weare@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That subject to the approval of the making of an Enhanced Partnership Plan and Enhanced Partnership Scheme, the elements of the A34 Sprint Bus Rapid Scheme, Phase 1 within Sandwell as shown on the Drawing Nos scheduled in the appended Agreement with the West Midlands Combined Authority under Section 8 and Section 278 of the Highways Act 1980 including the following drawings detailing the main changes in Sandwell (Appendix B) be approved.

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SANDWELL DRAWING SHOWING

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PAVEMENT TREATMENT PLAN (SHEET 9 PHASE 1)
PAVEMENT TREATMENT PLAN (SHEET 10 PHASE 1)
PAVEMENT TREATMENT PLAN (SHEET 11 PHASE 1)
PAVEMENT TREATMENT PLAN (SHEET 12 PHASE 1)
PAVEMENT TREATMENT PLAN (PHASE 1)
PAVEMENT TREATMENT PLAN (PHASE 1)
A34 SPRINT BUS STOP LOCATIONS

TREES - 10 WILL BE PLANTED AFTER REMOVAL OF 5




- 1.2 That subject to the approval of the making of an Enhanced Partnership Plan and Enhanced Partnership Scheme, the Director- of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Growth, be authorised to enter into the appended Agreement with the West Midlands Combined Authority under Section 8 and Section 278 of the Highways Act 1980 for the purposes of delivering the A34 Sprint Bus Rapid Transit scheme.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 This report provides details of Phase 1 of the proposed Sprint Bus Rapid Transit scheme between Walsall and Solihull/Birmingham Airport via Great Barr and Birmingham City Centre (see route map at Appendix A). Within Sandwell the scheme follows the A34 from the boundary with Walsall through the Scott Arms Junction to the boundary with Birmingham at Old Walsall Road.
- 2.2 Delivery of Phase 1 of the project forms part of the transport strategy for the Birmingham Commonwealth Games and therefore its delivery by early 2022 is crucial.
- 2.3 This report seeks approval to the Phase 1 works within Sandwell by the Council in its capacity as Local Highway Authority and Local Traffic Authority. It further seeks approval for the Council to enter into the appended agreement with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) under Section 8 and 278 of the Highways Act 1980 to allows contractor to implement the scheme on those sections of highway maintained and operated by Sandwell.
- 2.4 The recommendations contained in this report are subject to Cabinet approving the making of an Enhanced Partnership Plan covering the West Midlands Local Transport Authority area, and the making of an Enhanced Partnership Scheme for the A34 Corridor. This is subject of a separate report.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>A connected and accessible Sandwell: The provision of a high quality public transport network will enable Sandwell residents to access jobs, education and services both within and beyond the Borough's boundaries.</p> <p>The A34/A45 Sprint corridor directly connects Sandwell residents in the Great Barr area to Walsall town centre, Birmingham City Centre, the HS2 station at Curzon Street and the associated employment growth hub, and to Birmingham Airport.</p>
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 At the request of West Midlands Combined Authority(WMCA) Leaders, a Strategic Vision for Bus in the West Midlands was produced to develop a clear vision of what the region requires from its bus network. This was adopted by the WMCA Board at its meeting on 9th November 2018. This Vision sets out bold objectives for improving bus travel in the region. Transport for West Midland (TfWM) as the transport executive body of the WMCA are committed to developing these further as part of a delivery plan to ensure the objectives can and will be achieved.
- 4.2 Vision for Bus clearly sets out the objective to achieve modal shift by providing exceptional service and reliability along with comfort and accessibility. The programme of bus rapid transit routes, known as Sprint, is central to this objective. In summary Sprint will feature;
- Dedicated highway infrastructure to give bus priority such as bus lanes, traffic signal modifications. This will reduce journey times and improve reliability.
 - High quality stop infrastructure and off-board ticketing for easier/speedier access.
 - Dedicated branded zero emission Sprint vehicles delivered, paid for and owned by the operator to give improved journey experience and increased public transport profile.



- 4.3 Sprint will give local people access to the employment, training, education, healthcare, shopping and leisure opportunities, being created in Birmingham city centre and at HS2 Interchange/NEC/Airport ('UK Central') in Solihull. This will be achieved by Sprint operating as a genuine cross-conurbation service (Walsall - Great Barr - Birmingham city centre - Solihull/Airport) by linking operation of the A34 and A45 Sprint schemes. This will apply in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 operation of the Sprint service, although this report only deals with Sprint Phase 1, Sprint Phase 2 does not currently have funding.
- 4.4 The introduction of the Sprint Phase 1 corridors by 2022 provides a major opportunity for investment by the public and private sector to achieve a step change in public transport that will set the foundations for benefits and improvements across the integrated transport system throughout the region.
- 4.5 Two Sprint routes (A34 and A45) were identified as a priority for helping to facilitate the transport element of the 2022 Commonwealth Games. Delivering these routes in time for the Commonwealth Games is a commitment that has been made to the Commonwealth Games Federation. Of these two routes, the A34 links Walsall with Birmingham city centre via Scott Arms in Sandwell.
- 4.6 In September 2018, Sandwell wrote to TfWM setting out a number of conditions for the Council's ongoing support of the A34 Sprint project. In summary these conditions were;
- No overall detrimental impact on other road users at the Scott Arms junction.
 - No detrimental impact on the operation of the roundabout at M6 Junction 7.
 - The provision of a Park & Ride facility to support a shift away from car use on the A34 and to alleviate fly-parking by bus users around the Scott Arms.
- 4.7 WMCA approved a revised phasing plan (over two phases) for the A34 and A45 corridors at the WMCA Board meeting on 14th February 2020. It also approved the funding for A34 Phase 1 (£32.4m) and A45 Phase 1 (£55.4m). The Phase 1 works are to be delivered ahead of the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games. The Phase 2 works are indicatively scheduled to be delivered by the end of 2024, subject to a separate funding approval. These will require further approvals from Sandwell as Local Highway Authority and Local Traffic Authority when appropriate.



- 4.8 The Phase 1 works will deliver 70% of the infrastructure, including the delivery of the shelters throughout the whole route and include works at Scott Arms to ensure that there is no overall reduction in the capacity of the junction. This involves the lengthening of the right turn lanes from the A34 Walsall Road to A4041 Queslett Road, and from the A4041 Newton Road to A34 Walsall Road. These works will discharge the first Council condition in paragraph 4.6 above as it is clear from the schedule in the Enhanced Partnership Scheme (to be approved separately) that bus priority is not scheduled for introduction at the A34 at the Scott Arms junction. Consequently, the Enhanced Partnership Scheme rules out the introduction of bus priority on the A34 at Scott Arms. The proposals in the vicinity of M6, J7 form part of Phase 2 so the second condition will not be discharged until that phase is delivered.
- 4.9 A 'Park and Ride' (P&R) site to the north of M6, J7 is also proposed by WMCA/TfWM. This proposal, whilst complimentary to the Sprint project, is a separate proposal for which there is currently no funding. It is not included in the business case for Sprint Phase 1 works. Furthermore, the precise location is yet to be agreed. There is very little publicly-owned land in the desired area in either Sandwell or Walsall, so any chosen site is likely to require acquisition or leasing from its current owner. Planning permission will also be required.
- 4.10 WMCA have asserted that Phase 1 of Sprint is a viable project in its own right and does not require either Phase 2 or the P&R project to justify its implementation. Phase 1 achieves a 'high' value-for-money assessment, and no amendments are required to the Phase 1 infrastructure if Phase 2 and/or the P&R site do not go ahead in the future.
- 4.11 WMCA are therefore proposing to carry out further work with Sandwell and Walsall Councils to identify a suitable site for Park & Ride, prepare the necessary business case and secure funding. The P&R facility would then be delivered in conjunction with the Phase 2 Sprint works.
- 4.12 Whilst this would discharge the Sandwell condition relating to P&R contributing to modal shift in the A34 corridor, it does not deal with the impact of fly-parking in the vicinity of Scott Arms.



- 4.13 Sandwell has therefore secured agreement that WMCA will provide up to £200,000 to fund, as part of the Sprint project, the implementation of residents parking schemes, or alternative parking control measures as deemed appropriate, for the area concerned and cover the cost of residents permits and visitors vouchers over a period of five years. The provision and extent of the resident parking scheme would be subject to statutory consultation with affected residents and appropriate approvals from Sandwell. The agreed commitment and mechanism for delivery and funding is part of the appended s8/s278 agreement.
- 4.14 There remains the possibility that fly-parking will be displaced from the controlled area to adjacent areas or that additional fly parking issues will emerge as Sprint comes into operation. It will therefore be necessary to keep these measures under review and if required, bring forward further resident parking schemes. The provision and extent of further resident parking schemes would be subject to statutory consultation with a commitment from WMCA, in the appended S8/S278 agreement, to fund the implementation and cost of permits/vouchers for 5 years after SPRINT becomes operational also using the capped funding of £200,000 being made available by WMCA.
- 4.15 As stated, Phase 2 of Sprint, and the proposed Park & Ride will require separate approvals at WMCA and at the individual local authorities at the appropriate time and as such do not form part of the scheme for which approval is being sought in this report.
- 4.16 The total estimated capital cost of the A34 Phase 1 works is £32.4m, all to be funded by WMCA as per the February 2020 approval. No capital funding is sought from Sandwell to implement the scheme.
- 4.17 The exact mix of future strategic and local bus services along the A34 corridor remain uncertain and are subject of further work by WMCA and the commercial operator. Sandwell's approval of the project is predicated on the expectation that there is no loss of service frequency, capacity or passenger accessibility for Sandwell residents along the A34 corridor following the implementation of Phase 1, or any subsequent phase of the scheme.
- 4.18 It is TfWM's clear intention that single-deck, multi-door, articulated vehicles will ultimately operate the Sprint service, and these will be fully electric or hybrid-powered. These vehicles would be procured and paid for by the commercial operator.



4.19 A public announcement was made in a press statement by TfWM on 27th January 2021 regarding the commercial operation of the Sprint service. It is intended that the route will be operated using hydrogen-powered double decker vehicles in 2022 with the first six zero-emission articulated multi-door vehicles coming on stream in 2023. It is anticipated the Sprint service will be entirely operated with these vehicles in time for the completion of Phase 2.

Consultation

4.20 WMCA led a public consultation exercise with support from Birmingham, Walsall and Sandwell Councils between 22 August and 5 October 2018. This was advertised via social media channels, letter-drops on the route, local authority websites, bus stop posters, and in local media articles. Consultation information was communicated to older / disabled people and other equality groups, as well as through the Talking News. There were also exhibitions at key locations on the route – these were attended by over 600 people.

4.21 Five hundred and sixty-nine responses were received on the A34 scheme during the consultation, with 73% fully supporting or partially supporting the scheme and 24% not in support of the proposal. The consultation showed that 81% of responders agreed with the need to provide reliable bus journey times on the route. Details of the outcomes are provided in WMCA's consultation report published in December 2018, which is included at Appendix D.

4.22 A further update was provided by WMCA in March 2019 to public and stakeholders, informing them of design changes made as a result of feedback from the earlier consultation. This involved further engagement with the public, local councilors and other key stakeholders along the route who asked to be kept informed. In addition to leaflet drops and on-line publication, additional public meetings were also carried out where required, including some meetings in July 2019.

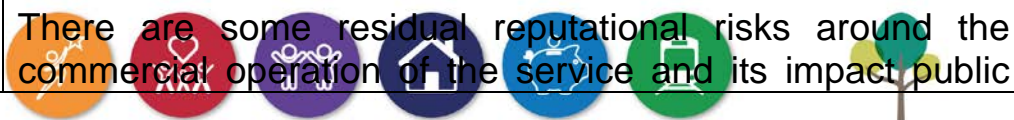
4.23 Additional information events were held in November 2019 to update stakeholders as to how the scheme has been updated following earlier consultation exercises.

4.24 Statutory consultation on the initial Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) necessary for the implementation of the scheme on the A34 corridor commenced on 28 January 2021 and closes on 25 February 2021. The remaining TROs for the A34 corridor will have their period of statutory consultation commence later this month. The TRO process will be concluded in full by the end of March 2021.



6 Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>The total estimated cost of A34 Phase 1 is £32.4m, with £22.1m from WMCA funding and £10.3m from other central government contributions. (A45 Phase 1 has a cost of £55.4m with £20.2m of WMCA funding and £35.2m of other central government funding.) Phase 2 costs for the combined (A34 and A45) scheme are estimated at £50.3m. The delivery and capital funding of the scheme is the responsibility of the WMCA.</p> <p>The financial implications for the Council as a result of this report and the provisions in the appended S8/S278 agreement have been minimised in two ways.</p> <p>In relation to the maintenance of new infrastructure, the agreement of design specifications will substantially offset maintenance liabilities. The small residual maintenance liability associated with the slightly enhanced cost of maintaining additional infrastructure can be met from highway revenue budgets.</p> <p>In relation to the operation of the network in the Scott Arms area the agreement of WMCA to fund Traffic Regulation Orders, capped at £200,000, for residents parking schemes together with the omission of bus priority at the Scott Arms junction will substantially offset operational liabilities.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>The WMCA has agreed with the Council to enter into the appended agreement under section 8 and section 278 of the Highways Act 1980 to enable the WMCA to construct the relevant highway works necessary for the scheme. The Council will remain responsible for all associated traffic regulation orders under the terms of the appended Section 8/278 Highway Agreement and once the works by WMCA have completed the Highway will be maintainable by the Council as local highway authority.</p>
<p>Risk:</p>	<p>All implementation project risk, including financial risk and opportunity, is to be held by WMCA. The residual risks of fly parking extending beyond the provisions for the WMCA funded residents parking schemes are considered small.</p> <p>There are some residual reputational risks around the commercial operation of the service and its impact public</p>



	transport in the corridor as a whole. These risks are being actively managed by officers of TfWM and the four local authorities in conjunction with wider stakeholders.
Equality:	WMCA have undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment and this has demonstrated that there are no current concerns that the proposal will affect, or could affect, people with protected characteristics. WMCA has kept this under review as the detailed design has been undertaken and finalised. The Equality Impact Assessment is in Appendix E.
Health and Wellbeing:	<p>The A34 SPRINT scheme has been tested against the 'Marmot Objectives'. These are;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving every child the best start in life – the project will support travel to school by sustainable modes. The service will also positively improve air quality throughout the borough. • Enabling all children, young people and adults to maximize their capabilities and have control over their lives – the project encourages sustainable travel to stops and interchanges, which helps promote healthy and independent travel choices; • Creating fair employment and good work for all – improved public transport networks help people access employment and training opportunities; • Ensuring a healthy standard of living for all – access to paid employment is facilitated by improved public transport networks; • Creating and developing sustainable places and communities – Sprint will promote and assist with active travel and travel by public transport, which support sustainable places and communities; • Strengthening the role and impact of ill-health prevention – healthy travel choices, such as walking or cycling to and from the route, can help prevent ill health, as well as positively impacting on improving air quality.
Social Value	WMCA/TfWM are responsible for the procurement of contractors, appointment of an operator, procurement of the bus shelters, bus stops, any bus lane enforcement equipment, traffic signal equipment, ticketing and passenger information systems.



7. Appendices

Appendix A – A34/A45 Sprint Corridor Route Map.

Appendix B – The drawings showing carriageway changes, bus stop positions and trees to be replaced.

60599248-ACM-0700-0000-DR-PE-000009	PAVEMENT TREATMENT PLAN (SHEET 9 PHASE 1)
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Note: The A34 Sprint Scheme Proposals are fully detailed on the 300 drawings scheduled in the S8 and S278 agreement in Appendix C.

Appendix C – Final Recommended Draft S8 and S278 Agreement.

Appendix D – WMCA/TfWM Consultation Report

Appendix E - WMCA/TfWM Equalities Impact Assessment

8. Background Papers

West Midlands Local Transport Plan – Movement for Growth (2016)

Report to West Midlands Combined Authority Board 09:11:18

Report to West Midlands Combined Authority Board 28:06:19

Report to West Midlands Combined Authority Board 14:02:20

