

West Midlands Bus Alliance

Achievements 2018



Transport for
West Midlands



West
Midlands
Bus

When it was launched in 2015, the West Midlands Bus Alliance was the first of its kind in the UK. The board consists of Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street; Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), the transport arm of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA); the Safer Travel Partnership; local bus operators, local highways authorities and watchdog bodies Transport Focus and the Confederation of Passenger Transport.



“On behalf of the West Midlands Bus Alliance, I am delighted to tell you about some of the improvements the partners have made to bus services across the West Midlands during the last 12 months.

It is great news that the Alliance has been recognised with a number of awards from the Bus Industry. However and more importantly, we know that it is punctual and reliable services that drive passenger satisfaction and that the top priority for improvement among bus passengers is getting value for money. It is, therefore, really encouraging to see the independent survey results carried out by Transport Focus in the Spring of 2018 showing customer satisfaction on the up across all of these key areas.

This document sets out some of the key achievements towards the 50 Deliverables that the Bus Alliance partners signed up to at the end of 2017. Some of which include; Contactless payment with daily fare capping introduced by Bus Alliance partner operator National Express West Midlands, and half price travel on all buses for Apprentices and trainees aged 16-18, meaning an extra 31,000 young people across the metropolitan area enjoyed the discount.

TfWM have also published the Congestion Management Plan for the region, which set-outs the objectives for dealing with the congestion challenge. The plan recognises the importance in the bus network and is helpful in setting out some of the challenges faced in delivering a reliable bus network that will be key to increasing passenger numbers and overall satisfaction.

We know there are still challenges ahead and the Bus Alliance Board is constantly evolving. In 2018 we said goodbye to a number of Board Members who have been with us from the start and welcomed Members of the Board from more bus operators and the community transport sector, as well as Councillor Waseem Zaffar from Birmingham City Council. We will continue to work together through the Alliance to improve bus services even more for passengers.”

Kind regards,

Linda McCord
Chair – West Midlands
Bus Alliance Board



In October 2017 the members renewed their commitment to the Bus Alliance to build on the success of the first two years and ensure further commitment from the partners towards continuing enhancements to the bus network across the region up to 2020.

The new agreement aims to:

- Improve bus emissions standards
- Make bus travel more attractive for young people
- Make bus journeys better value
- Tackle congestion and speed up bus journeys
- Make it easier to buy a ticket
- Make it easier to catch a bus
- Shape the bus network to improve economic growth
- Make bus travel more pleasant and improve the perception of safety



Tackle congestion and make bus journeys quicker

In very challenging times with unprecedented levels of development works, resulting in additional congestion particularly, but not exclusively around Birmingham City Centre, we have made really good progress in tackling congestion hot spots across the bus network. Bus Alliance partners have secured over £10 million from various funding sources including the National Productivity Investment Fund, the Joint Air Quality Unit and investment from bus operators themselves. Many of these schemes will be delivered over the coming months, including:

- £5 million programme to transform bus travel in West Birmingham, supporting access to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and Birmingham University whilst tackling a critical delay point in Harborne through new bus lanes
- £2.5 million programme of quick win bus-based highway investments in Birmingham City Centre to support delivery of the Clean Air Zone to provide new bus lanes and new traffic restrictions to prioritise bus movements
- £1 million programme of traffic signal upgrades to prioritise bus movement through congested junctions

We need to do more though – the region faces significant challenges in keeping buses moving in the background of intense development activity leading up to the delivery of the HS2 rail line, extensions to the Midland Metro and lots of development.

Bus is a key part of the solution to mitigating these challenges. It is central to the Congestion Management Plan that proposes a bold and ambitious investment programme of bus priority, which, with robust and compelling evidence, can be delivered through further funding opportunities.



Improve bus emissions standards

Air quality is a public health crisis which needs urgent action here in the West Midlands and improving bus emissions rightly remains a key deliverable of the West Midlands Bus Alliance. A great deal of progress has been made in the past 12 months, including:

- £7.6 million to retrofit 468 vehicles in Birmingham and Coventry, from the Clean Bus Technology Fund 2017-2019 and operator contributions.
- 38 new smart hybrid double-deckers introduced by National Express West Midlands onto the Harborne corridor.
- £4.4 million invested by Stagecoach Midlands on 25 Stagecoach Gold single deck buses for their route 48 operating on the Foleshill Road corridor between Coventry, Bedworth and Nuneaton to Leicester or Atherstone. The new vehicles have the latest Euro VI emissions technology.
- Birmingham City Council have approved £13.4 million of funding to deliver 22 new hydrogen buses.
- 75 new Euro VI buses have been ordered by National Express West Midlands.
- £377,500 funding to provide pre-Clean Air Zone bus priority measures to reduce NO2 in Birmingham City Centre

Over the coming years Bus Alliance Partners will continue to investigate funding opportunities in order to work towards the aims of TfWM's award winning Low Emission Bus Delivery Plan, to deliver air quality improvements to all parts of the region.



Make bus travel more attractive for young people



From the start a major aim of the West Midlands Bus Alliance has been to make bus travel more affordable for young people, recognising the positive impact that it can have on young lives.

Towards the end of 2017 a 12 month trial began to give all apprentices and trainees aged under 18 half price travel. This trial will now be incorporated into the child concessionary fares scheme going forward.

In addition, the £10 administration fee for 16-18 year olds accessing the scheme has now been waived. Removing this known barrier will hopefully result in significantly higher take up.

Anyone aged 16 to 18 can apply, that's 105,000 eligible teenagers in the region. The changes mean there will only be one type of 16-18 photocard, usable by students, apprentices, trainees and those in employment. This will replace the two separate cards previously issued. Applicants will no longer need to reapply every year, as their card will be valid until July 31 of the academic year they turn 18. All the new 16-18 photocards will also be Swift-enabled, allowing season tickets to be loaded onto the card – meaning card holders no longer need to carry a separate ticket as well as their photocards.



Make bus journeys better value

All customers deserve to receive good value for money and as such several key deliverables of the West Midlands Bus Alliance are around the real cost of tickets. The January 2018 fares review resulted in a headline overall reduction of 1%.

Bus Alliance partner, National Express West Midlands, introduced their first low-fare zone for Sandwell and Dudley in February 2017. Since then more low-fare zones have been brought in across the Black Country, Solihull and Birmingham. These zones are aimed to help people 'stay local, pay local'. Following work with all Bus Alliance operator partners the multi-operator nBus version has now been introduced in Sandwell, Dudley and Walsall with further discounts available when purchased using Swift Pay As You Go.

Holders of Concessionary passes now benefit from being able to travel for just £1 before 09.30 on weekdays when using National Express West Midlands buses. A number of other Bus Alliance partner operators already offer this and TfWM is working with those that currently do not to widen this offer.





Make it easier to buy a ticket

A number of Bus Alliance partner operators have developed their own Mobile Ticketing Apps, meaning that tickets can be purchased from the users phone, saving the need for cash payments to the driver or purchasing passes from retail outlets.

Contactless technology has been rolled out across the majority of bus operators and National Express West Midlands have now introduced fare capping for their customers. The operator reached a million contactless payments in September 2018 since introducing the technology in April.

Further development is ongoing, including Swift announcing a partnership with Google to integrate Swift into the Google Pay platform meaning that customers will no longer need a physical card to access Swift.

Swift usage on Bus in 2018

July 2018: 87.1% 192,295 Overall

August 2018: 87.1% 194,127 Overall

September 2018: 87.8% 212,748 Overall



Swift vending machine introduced at Wolverhampton bus station has allowed people to obtain a Swift card and purchase Swift tickets outside Travel Information Centre opening hours. This significant technical and commercial success will see rollout of a further 20 machines across the network.



Make it easier to catch the bus

The bold new West Midlands Transport brand has already been brought to life on trains and trams in the region – now the first branded buses are in operation too. The new branding provides distinctive livery for public transport in the region – orange for trains, blue for trams, red for buses and green for bikes.

Buses on the 42/43/43A service between West Bromwich, Dudley and Bilston now feature the new West Midlands Bus distinctive red branding, along with buses on the new 31/32 service between Walsall, Bloxwich, Mossley and Lower Farm. These new bus services are also something of a first: National Express West Midlands and Diamond bus are sharing the routes. The operators previously competed for passengers on these routes – which meant travellers needed the right ticket for the right bus.



Now, passengers can hop on the first bus that comes along. Passengers will benefit from being able to catch any bus with much greater interchangeability of tickets. The buses will also run on an even timetable with no gaps, again to the benefit of passengers.

Other notable achievements this year include:

- In partnership with TfWM and West Midlands Trains, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council has invested in improvements to the bus Interchange at Solihull rail station.
- Improving the travel experience of people with disabilities is a key priority for the Bus Alliance. Our surveys, consultations and community engagement sessions with disabled customers indicated that people would value better staff awareness and understanding more than any other network improvements which led TfWM and National Express West Midlands to the design, development and production of “Welcome Aboard”, a disability awareness DVD resource to accompany bus driver training. The resource is available for all operators regionally or nationally to use and has been shortlisted for the “Inclusive Companies Awards 2018”.



Make bus travel more pleasant and improve the perception of safety

Throughout the last 12 months a number of achievements have been made to improve the overall customer experience:

Walsall Bus Station is undergoing a mid-life refurbishment; the benefits will include improved waiting areas, new flooring, new cycle facilities and refurbished, free-to-use toilets. The whole station will be repainted in the new West Midlands Transport branding, with the addition of big screens showing real-time service information, energy-saving LED lighting and comfortable seating helping to make it more modern and passenger-friendly.

Operators have continued to deliver enhancements to their bus fleets, including Stagecoach Midlands £4.4 million investment in 25 luxury Stagecoach Gold single deck buses for their route 48 in Coventry. The new vehicles have features such as USB charging points, reading lights, free Wi-Fi and high-back leather seats.

National Express West Midlands introduced 38 new smart hybrid Platinum double-deckers onto the Harborne corridor and now run more Platinum buses in the Black Country area.

First have rebranded their 144 “Salt Road” service between Birmingham and Worcester via Droitwich Spa. Offering leather seats, free Wi-Fi and next stop audio-visual announcements on board.

TfWM has been working with bus operators to develop a Customer Charter; this will set out a promise to our customers and is due to be launched in 2019.

TfWM has installed 101 new bus shelters, representing an investment of around £575,000. These were installed as a rolling programme of shelter upgrades across the area including Longbridge Connectivity and Wolverhampton City Centre improvements.

Ring and Ride and igo bus operator ATG have introduced trips to Birmingham City Centre from across Sandwell and Dudley. Ring & Ride meet up with the igo service at Quinton for onward travel to Birmingham. On returning from Birmingham a Ring & Ride bus will be waiting to take passengers home, a similar scheme now also operates with their service from Longbridge station to Droitwich and Bromsgrove.

Continuing to make passengers feel safe when using the bus network remains a key deliverable and the past 12 months have seen a great deal of progress in this area:

- The Safer Travel Partnership (STP), includes a Police Team dedicated to the bus network.
- The STP’s highest volume crime type; criminal damage has seen a 25% reduction in offences in 2018 compared with last year. This reflects the success of initiatives such as our restorative justice programme which has regularly dealt with individuals vandalising buses.
- Funding has been secured to maintain the level of Safer Travel Police resources through 2018/19, with work ongoing to expand the use of Special Constables thus increasing visibility on the network.
- Using additional powers provided to the WMCA work is ongoing to try and put in place “bus byelaws” to tackle a range of anti-social behaviours replicating those already in place on the rail network.
- Funding has been allocated within 2018/19 budgets to expand the use of Vemotion technology, which allows for the transmission of ‘live’ CCTV from buses with existing CCTV.



Transport Focus Satisfaction Survey Results

Transport Focus carries out a twice yearly Bus Passenger Survey (BPS) in the West Midlands to compare and benchmark what passengers think about their bus service.

The BPS measures passengers' satisfaction with their local bus service for a wide range of aspects including the bus stop, waiting for the bus, on the bus, the outside of the bus and the bus driver as well as their overall satisfaction with that bus journey and their rating of value for money.

According to the latest survey results, carried out in Spring 2018, nearly nine in 10 bus passengers in the West Midlands are happy with their service and record numbers think it is good value for money.

Transport Focus - Bus Passenger Survey West Midlands Results - Overall Satisfaction

Spring 2018: **88%**

Autumn 2017: **85%**

Spring 2017: **88%**

Autumn 2016: **85%**

Spring 2016: **87%**

Autumn 2015: **85%**



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