

Minutes of Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

**Thursday, 20 April 2023 at 5.00 pm
at Committee Room 2 - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Taylor (Vice Chair in the Chair);
Councillors Chapman Fenton, J Giles, Owen and Rahman.

Officers: Andy Miller (Strategic Planning and Transport Manager), Alex
Goddard (Scrutiny Lead Officer) and John Swann
(Democratic Services Officer).

13/21 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Simms,
Gavan, Z Hussain and Kaur.

14/21 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

15/21 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 9
February 2023 are confirmed as a correct record.

16/21 Additional Items of Business

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.



17/21 West Bromwich E-Scooter Trial Zone Review

Further to Minute No. 25/21 (30 September 2021), the Board received reports in relation to the E- Scooter trial which had operated between December 2020 and November 2022.

The trial had been in operation for 18 months in Sandwell and Voi had operated 50 E- Scooter's within the trial zone in West Bromwich town centre.

Safety precautions in place during the trial had included a maximum speed of 12.5mph, restriction to roads with a speed limit of 30mph or less and the restriction to the trial area via geofencing technologies. All users had held a photographic driving licence (including provisional licences) and were eighteen or over.

The Strategic Planning and Transport Manager noted that riders had used them primarily for leisure, as longer journeys such as commutes were not possible due to the size of the trial area (just over one square mile).

Complaints by residents and business owners were largely in relation to users riding on the pavement and the poor parking of the Voi E- Scooters.

Whilst anti- social behaviour whilst riding E- Scooters had been reported in the Borough, it was challenging to determine whether these instances had occurred whilst riding Voi's or privately owned E- Scooters. It was acknowledged that privately owned E- Scooter numbers had increased in recent years due to the increasingly cost effective manufacturing and improved technology.

Reported injury accidents had been rare, with only 14 recorded during the trial period in Sandwell. However national research had indicated that accidents were three times more likely to occur whilst riding an E- Scooter compared to a bicycle.

Demand had been low which had resulted in only 50 E- Scooters in operation, this represented a third of the E -Scooters allocated to West Bromwich during the trial period. The monthly average was 223 rides from the data collected however usage was reduced in

Winter months, there were no proposals to reintroduce E- Scooters within Sandwell, either by Voi or another E -Scooter provider.

Sandwell's trial had formed part of the wider West Midlands and E- Scooters had also been deployed across Birmingham and Coventry. Voi was the sole operator across the West Midlands and was managed by a partnership between Transport for West Midlands, Voi and the local highway authorities.

Transport for West Midlands had yet conducted a full evaluation of the trial scheme, however it was anticipated that this would be completed following conclusion of the trials in Birmingham and Coventry.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted:-

- The wearing of helmets although recommended was not compulsory on E- Scooters.
- Sandwell Council had incurred no expenditure directly linked to the trial, however £50,000 had been spent on minor highway repairs to ensure E- Scooters were used safely.
- Although driving licences were required to hire Voi E- Scooters, once hired it was not possible to establish who was operating them.
- The riding of privately owned E- Scooters on public land, although prevalent, was illegal.
- E- Scooters were legally classed as motor vehicles, enforcement powers therefore were the responsibility of West Midlands Police.

(Councillor Rahman joined the meeting during consideration of this item)

18/21 Bus Service Improvement Plan

The Board received the Bus Service Improvement Plan and an overview of the challenges which the network faced across the West Midlands.

The West Midlands Bus Network was the largest outside of London and 80% of public transport trips were made via bus. National Express West Midlands accounted for 89% of the scheduled mileage, with 23 other operators offering routes across the West Midlands conurbation.

Bus patronage was at 82% of the pre- pandemic level and the network required significant public subsidy to remain viable. The cost of subsidies was £9.8m in 2020/21 and 219 routes were subsidised via a tender process, these routes had been assessed as socially necessary despite being not commercially viable.

The Strategic Planning and Transport Manager identified the following ambitions:-

- A simplified ticketing system;
- Improved bus shelters, with real time information via a departure screen;
- Integration with the West Midlands Metro, national rail services and other public transport networks;
- Increased confidence via the reduction of anti- social behaviour through the Safer Travel Partnership;
- Network resilience and protection from disruption.

It was acknowledged that efforts to improve the air quality across the Borough has been made by the bus network. Proposals included a commitment to the bus retrofit programme, the roll- out of electric buses and innovation in bus fuel technology. In addition, National Express west Midlands had pledged to not purchase any diesel buses.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted:-

- Grants were provided by central government to operators to install electric charging points in depots.
- Pantographic charging trials had commenced in Wolverhampton bus station in 2022 and Transport for West Midlands had targets to introduce 36 pantograph charging stations by 2023.
- The range of electric buses was increasing as technology developed, however electric buses were significantly more expensive to operate compared to conventional diesel buses.
- It was acknowledged that 35% of Sandwell residents do not have access to a car.
- Less frequent services which operated during the evenings or on Sundays presented a barrier to increased passenger usage

and contributed to a perception that the bus network was not reliable.

- Enhanced Partnerships were being rolled out between operators across the West Midlands Network, this would specify levels of services for core routes.

Resolved that the Directors of Borough Economy and Regeneration and Growth consider the above when exploring Bus Service improvement proposals.

(Councillor Rahman left the meeting during consideration of this item)

19/21 Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan

The Board noted its Work Programme for 2022/ 23 and received the Cabinet Forward Plan.

Meeting ended at 7.02 pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk