

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Transport for West Midlands (TfWM)

October 2022

1. Local Transport Plan (LTP)

Review and Transport Green Paper WMCA is the Local Transport Authority and has duties to produce and review the Local Transport Plan that covers the West Midlands' seven metropolitan districts. The LTP sets out policies and implementation proposals for tackling the regions transport challenges and opportunities. TfWM advises the WMCA on this responsibility.

The previous update outlined that public engagement on a Green Paper and a draft core strategy has taken place over the past 18 months, with general support from the public and businesses. A Transport Summit also took place last year setting a mandate for a change in direction in transport policy to avoid the risks of carrying on as-is.

Overall, it is recognised that “demand management” is needed to unlock behavioural changes needed to deliver long-standing aims but policies such as reallocating space and priority, introducing targeted restrictions on access, and increasing prices remain politically risky and there is insufficient consensus in support from the public or members. However, Government is increasing pressure on local government to implement such measures.

Further development of the LTP is therefore considering the resilience of policy and strategy options in futures where a critical support for demand management either is or isn't achieved (noting that to unlock transformational changes, consensus has to extend beyond individual neighbourhoods and boroughs, and even our own boundaries to the national scale).

The work that is currently underway is aiming to identify options that are more or less likely to be successful across the region depending on future consensus to manage demand, and depending on local characteristics of place and people. This will help frame local trade-offs of what does/doesn't work as well as highlighting the limits of local action without broader consensus.

This work will help develop four area strategies across the West Midlands (Black Country, Birmingham, Solihull, and Coventry) with a focus on the tailoring of policy and strategy within areas to account for their internal diversity of places and communities. The work will also help inform the development of “6 Big Move” policy documents that will provide a regional position for particular policy options across a range of topics.

Current plans are for WMCA board to consider adoption of the finalised LTP Core Strategy in early 2023, which will include an appendix setting out the understanding of how policy/strategy can be tailored to future scenarios, places and people, and to consider the draft 6 Big Moves. Engagement will be underway with local partners on the development of the Area Strategies but these will be considered by WMCA board later in 2023.

Government has committed to publishing LTP Guidance, with the last guidance issued in 2009. However, the programme for consulting and publishing this guidance is being continually extended. Based on current engagement, Government is indicating the following points of particular interest:

- LTPs should set the strategic context for business case development for policy options
- LTPs should set out investment proposals (but implementation proposals should not be limited just to capital schemes)
- LTPs will become increasingly important in the securing of funding from Government
- In the long term, Government wishes to move from many competitive funds restricted to Governments own specific capital intervention priorities to more stable funding enabling local determination of what interventions are needed to deliver local aims and vision (with LTPs being at the heart of this).
- LTPs will be required to demonstrate how local objectives and aims relate to Government's own priorities (currently: achieving net-zero, delivering transport user benefits, and protecting the local environment) and that therefore investment in LTPs will deliver national objectives
- LTPs will have to include a quantification of the carbon benefit of strategy and proposals to demonstrate progress against net-zero.

2. Bus Network

Local Bus Services

The Covid-19 pandemic had a detrimental impact on bus patronage which has not recovered to pre-covid levels. In the first week of September 2022 patronage had recovered to an average of 84% of pre-covid. This partly reflects how behaviours have changed, including a greater level of on-line shopping, increase in hybrid working and increase in numbers working from home.

There is an expectation that passenger numbers will continue to increase in the future resulting from a number of factors including the cost-of-living increase moving people to more affordable modes, changes in Local Transport Plan policy, population and housing growth, and positive interventions through Bus Services Improvement Plan (BSIP) initiatives, the £2 fare cap (instituted by the Department for Transport), and City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) transformational measures including simplification, better bus services and more bus priority to encourage modal shift.

Performance of the bus network is facing challenges which has resulted in some passenger dissatisfaction. This is largely due to the continuing shortage of drivers. National Express and Stagecoach are both reporting issues, but this is more pronounced in the region for National Express given their large share of the network of services. In an attempt to mitigate the impact on passengers TfWM are working with operators closely with operators and are seeking operators to introduce more robust processes to ensure that passengers are kept informed of missing journeys through a range of measures and additionally utilising TfWM's own resources and estate such as Real Time Information and Bus Stations.

Whilst not all bus operators are reporting driver shortages it is widely acknowledged to be a national issue. National Express, and other operators are working tirelessly on this challenge, and they are making operational adjustments in an attempt to mitigate the impact for passengers, focusing resource on less frequent services and seeking to space buses on the frequent services to try and reduce gaps between buses.

Network changes from January 2023 are also anticipated to help with the performance challenge, and it is anticipated that these amendments will provide for a more reliable base network, meeting the key demands post COVID, and better meeting resource availability.

Supporting Bus Operators

Since March 2020 the shortfall in fare revenue, and to a lesser extent the increase in costs, has been met through publicly funded grants and by maintaining subsidy payments at pre-covid levels to operators from National and Local Government.

This has included maintaining payments to operators for the carriage of English National Concessionary Travel Pass holders at pre-covid levels, paid at a rate to reflect the long-term and continuing reduction in concessionary journeys.

The scale of funding nationally has exceeded £2bn in support for bus operators. The main remaining fund known as Bus Recovery Grant (BRG) is scheduled to end on December 31st 2022, which is why TfWM were requested by DfT to align the Bus Network Review to this date. Approximately £7.3m of DfT grant funding has been passed to operators through the WMCA for support on tendered services with significant sums being given directly from Government to operators to support commercial services. In addition, the DfE made £10m available to support school services during the height of the pandemic. Government has announced that some additional targeted funding support for operators and Local Transport Authorities from central government will be in place between 1st January 2023 to the end of March 2023.

At the time of writing this report it is not known how much of this will be available for the West Midlands, how it will be paid or passported, or if it would have any impact on the level of changes proposed by bus operators. Our discussions with National Express, Diamond and Stagecoach indicate that amendments to funding available may present challenges to changing proposals. However, if funding is available to TfWM it may be too late to mitigate some impacts for January 2023, but any further support from Government will be a welcome help with additional challenges as they continue to emerge through 2023.

During this final period of funding operators are being encouraged by Government to revise their networks to become commercially sustainable and to reflect new passenger levels. They are encouraged to do this in conjunction with Local Transport Authorities and to also work together to make best use of the overall available resources.

The standard used to determine which bus services we will support using the tendered bus budget are called our 'Access Standards'. The current Value for Money criteria, specified in the Access Standards, is £2.55 per passenger journey for fully tendered services and £2.12 for services operated with de-minimis support. Under normal circumstances any service where level of subsidy per passenger trip exceeds this value would not be supported by the authority and passengers would need to consider alternative travel options. However, since March 2020, due to additional funding support from central government, TfWM has been able to continue to support these services and have been able to keep nearly all services operating. If the existing Value for Money (VfM) criteria is maintained, this would result in TfWM being unable to support around 57 contracts, a complete removal of the pressure on the subsidised bus budget and additionally make a saving of approximately £3.1m in 2023/24 whilst seeing a detriment to passengers. Another option was for the VfM criteria within the access standards to be revaluated to £4.10 per passenger journey. £4.10 is in line with the type of VfM criteria used by other authorities where such a criteria exists. The Transport Delivery Committee approved re-evaluating the VfM criteria to £4.10 and agreed it may also be supported by some additional Local Transport Fund (LTF) from Government. Indications are that some of the 36 contracts that fall outside the VfM criteria, may be saved as a result.

Ring & Ride

TfWM commissions National Express Accessible Transport (NEAT) to operate the West Midlands Ring & Ride Service. The service continues to see a significant reduction in passengers as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic, with passenger numbers stabilising at around 28% of pre-Covid levels. The increase in passengers has been far slower than other public transport services due to the nature of the destinations being served and the more vulnerable client group.

The service is now operating 7 days a week, between 8am and 11pm Monday to Saturday and 8am and 3.30pm on Sunday.

Like other public transport operators NEAT have also been affected by driver shortages due to increased sickness levels and drivers moving to other driving jobs within the sector. We are continuing to work with NEAT to minimise any disruption for passengers. Where disruption is unavoidable, we are working with NEAT to ensure that passengers are kept informed of any revisions to their planned journeys. On-time performance is currently around 86%; 86% of passenger collections are within 10 mins of stated times which is the stated traffic commissioner window for flexibly routed services.

TfWM are in the process of agreeing an extension to the contract with NEAT up to the end of December 2022. We continue to have discussions regarding contractual and service arrangements to ensure the service reflects any changes in travel demand and aligns with the ambitions of the BSIP which may include wider use of Demand Responsive Services in the region.

Bus Service Improvement Plan

In 2021 Transport Delivery Committee approved submission of the West Midlands Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). All Transport Authorities were required to submit BSIPs to government in Autumn 2021 in response to the National Bus Strategy, setting out ambitious plans to transform the delivery of bus services in the region. All BSIPs were assessed by the DfT and in February 2022 TfWM was indicatively advised that it was one of 31 Authorities who's plans would be funded by Government, with £87.858m secured to support delivery.

This funding was confirmed in August 2022 and TfWM advised this would be phased over three years:

Financial Year	Funding
2022/23	£18,352,626
2023/24	£36,686,987
2024/25	£32,818,147
Total:	£87,857,760

The 2022/23 allocation will be received following satisfactory responses to a number of detailed clarifications received from the DfT which at time of writing are currently being worked through, and the making of the EP scheme variation 002. Future years' allocations will be dependent upon TfWM demonstrating to the DfT that it has made effective progress in delivery against BSIP commitments.

The BSIP includes many ambitious and exciting commitments that would involve TfWM, SMBC, other West Midlands Local Authorities and bus operators working together to deliver for the benefit of the local area and region. Underpinning this will be a statutory Enhanced Partnership Scheme, which will place binding commitments on partners to adhere to measures within the Scheme. The existing Scheme was implemented in June 2021, specifically covering the A34/A45 Sprint route. An EP scheme variation 001 following the expiry of the Birmingham Advanced Quality Partnership Scheme (AQPS) was made in June 2022 and will be varied (variation 002) to include the committed improvements across the wider network for the BSIP Funding.

The updated scheme has been subject to close partnership working and detailed negotiation with bus operators and Local Authorities and approval is currently being formally sought through SMBC's, and the other West Midlands Local Authorities', own governance processes. Formal approval was granted by Transport Delivery Committee on 10th October 2022.

Tendered Services and Network Changes

Although the increased costs of operating services and slow return of passengers means that less than 70% of the network is currently considered commercial, National Express has shown its confidence in the further recovery by proposing to maintain around 90% of their pre-covid mileage, meaning that the West Midlands has lost around 10% of its bus network miles since 2020.

A lot of high frequency services have had service reductions in recent months in response to driver shortages. When driver numbers increase NXWM will look to increase some frequencies again, but the concern will be if these are implemented at

the expense of more marginal routes across the network which would result in further pressures on the tendered bus network. This is a risk also because changes to these services tend to impact the elderly, the more isolated, and the less well off in the region, and remove critical elements of maintaining a comprehensive network. Any further changes or commercial de-registrations will not be able to be absorbed into TfWM budgets without additional Government support or regionally committed funding, and this is a challenge we are working with operators to avoid wherever possible.

We know that the most disadvantaged groups in the region rely most heavily on the bus network, and alongside the cost-of-living crisis we know how an effective bus network is so vital for those groups. A Supported Travel Policies Review, covering not only the tendered bus network, but all our discretionary policies including the Rail and Metro add-on to ENCTS, Ring and Ride and child concessions is being reviewed alongside other discretionary transport policies and functions, which combined, totals circa £31.6M for 2022/23. This work will involve a public consultation exercise and options presented to the WMCA Board on ways these discretionary policies could change to meet the available level of locally raised funding through the Transport Levy and to best support groups most in need of support. It will further consider if and where future efficiencies could be made in these policies and how different accessibility standards could impact budgets in the longer term.

One of the key factors for West Midlands operators and particularly NXWM maintaining a 90% network is that TfWM will work at pace to expediate the measures and benefits of the BSIP in a way that turns the first-year funding of the overall 3 year £88m programme into measures that see the operators benefiting from that money as soon as is possible. This is set out more within the BSIP report to this Committee.

Following the review of their commercial networks bus operators have indicated service changes in the following specific areas.

- School Services
- Queen Elizabeth Hospital Network
- Solihull
- Dudley Area
- Diamond changes
- Partnership routes
- Tendered Services

There have not been any significant commercial changes or withdrawals registered for the network of bus services in Sandwell.

A number of subsidised bus services that do operate in the Sandwell area are at the time of writing are currently being competitively tendered as the associated contracts are due for renewal and it anticipated the outcome of these tenders will be known in November 2022 ahead of the service renewal of 1st January 2023.

Upcoming service changes are updated on a weekly basis on the TfWM website; Upcoming Bus Changes | Transport for West Midlands www.tfwm.org.uk.

West Midlands Bus Alliance

Through the West Midlands Bus Alliance we continue to work in partnership with bus operators and other stakeholders to improve the quality of all aspects of bus travel and to make travel easier for everyone. Features such as low floor buses, accessible well-lit passenger shelters, easy access kerbing, improved passenger information and audio and visual Real Time Information are helping to make bus travel more attractive for everybody with drivers trained in customer care and disability awareness.

The West Midlands Bus Alliance has continued to oversee and influence the bus network response and recovery to the Covid-19 pandemic and has sought to ensure that operators and wider stakeholders are fully aligned on issues affecting passengers and future aspirations through the BSIP. This has included developing a consistent approach to passenger communication at the various stages to the release from covid measures.

Following changes to TDC Membership in June 2022, Councillor Kath Hartley has been replaced by Councillor Richard Worrall and Councillor Waseem Zaffar has been replaced by Councillor Liz Clements on the Board.

3. Rail Network

WMT's performance is now measured against Time to 3 (T-3). Trains are measured throughout their journey and must reach their destination within 3 minutes of their booked time to be considered on time. WMT's most recent T-3 result (Period 6 – August to September) was 79.17%. This was a slight improvement on the performance during the preceding period.

For a train company with the size and complexity of WMT the normal range of a "good" T-3 measure would be between 80-90%, anything above 90% would be considered very good and anything below 80% considered poor.

The reasons for WMT's performance over the summer can be found in the extreme weather, industrial action, and Commonwealth Games. During the Games, the industry rightly prioritised capacity over punctuality, meaning trains were held at stations if that was the right thing to do to make sure queues could be dispersed quickly (for example at Smethwick Galton Bridge, which was a venue station for the aquatic Centre). Similar logic was applied during the industrial action. The hot weather in early August caused a series of infrastructure faults that delayed numerous trains over several days. It also led to speed restrictions being applied on some lines, which led to trains picking up delays.

Traincrew related cancellations have continued to occur, although not in the same volume as 12 months ago. As of the end of September WMT had 762 drivers on their books against an establishment of 784 (97.19%). Of these 661 were available to work, the rest being mainly sick (non-COVID) or restricted in some way (i.e. subject to return to work following absence). WMT have 115 trainee drivers in the business, with 39 due to qualify by Christmas. Helpfully, nine of these will be at Worcester depot, where sickness and retirements have been especially high.

The first of WMT's new trains are due to enter service later this year. They will be diesel Class 196 vehicles designed for the Birmingham-Shrewsbury and Birmingham-Hereford routes. They will commence operation on the Shrewsbury line first, and thus will call at stations like Smethwick Galton Bridge.

Commonwealth Games

The Games were largely a success for the railways. The rebuilt Perry Barr station coped well with the spectator and workforce demand, whilst the expanded platforms at University station proved invaluable. Staff were deployed in strength and customers welcomed the Games themed giveaways. The timetable was delivered for the most part, with a cable theft at Tyseley on 3 August the single most disruptive incident.

However, the underlying fragility of some operators' traincrew resources was exposed during the Games, with negative consequences for rail users. Avanti West Coast suffered many cancellations throughout the Games, after seeing a reduction in volunteers for Rest Day Work and overtime. West Midlands Trains (WMT) also experienced several traincrew cancellations on Saturday 6 August. The situation at Avanti has continued beyond the Games (see below).

Industrial Action

Three West Midlands train companies affected by strike action by the ASLEF union on Saturday 30 July (day 3 of the Games). Due to the several events taking place at the NEC that day, WMT managed to operate a shuttle service between Birmingham New Street and Birmingham International to help manage demand. This was crewed by driver managers. No other WMT, CrossCountry Trains or Chiltern Railways services were able to operate.

The 30 July was one of eight days of strike action held to date by the RMT, ASLEF and TSSA unions. All three unions are in dispute over pay, terms and conditions and fear of compulsory redundancies. The RMT have a mandate for strike action on Network Rail and all of the DfT contracted train companies with the exception of Govia Thameslink Railway, and Island Line on the Isle of Wight. In the West Midlands ASLEF's mandate covers WMT, Avanti, Chiltern Railways, and CrossCountry. In our region the TSSA have a mandate for action on WMT, Avanti, Network Rail and CrossCountry.

Future strike dates had been called for 15 September (ASLEF and RMT), 17 September (RMT and TSSA) and 26/27 September (TSSA). However, following the passing of the Monarch on 8 September, all three unions announced that the strikes would be postponed. Instead, strikes were held on 1, 5 and 8 October.

Since the summer Avanti West Coast services have experienced a marked decline in the numbers of staff volunteering for Rest Day Work and overtime. This led to the operator introducing a significantly reduced timetable in September. Until early December, just one Avanti train an hour will run between the West Midlands and London Euston. TfWM through WMRE have met with Avanti to urge for the previous timetable to be restored at the earliest opportunity.

Rail Industry Reform

On 5 July Birmingham was announced as being one of six towns and cities shortlisted for to be the headquarters of Great British Railways (GBR). The other finalists are Newcastle, Derby, Crewe, Doncaster, and York.

The visit to Birmingham took place on 9 August, the day after the Commonwealth Games closing ceremony.

GBRTT held a non-binding public vote was held in parallel to the ministerial visits. The result of this vote will be used to measure the level of public support for each location and will be considered as part of final decision making.

The Secretary of State for Transport will make the final decision later this year considering all elements of the process, including the following factors:

- GBRTT's assessment of the applicants' expressions of interest against the selection criteria
- The understanding gained from the visits
- The result of the public vote
- Other public duties (such as managing public money)

Integrated Rail Plan, HS2 and Midlands Rail Hub

The contract for the construction of the HS2 Interchange Station in Solihull has been awarded to Laing O'Rourke and will support up to 1000 jobs according to WMCA Mayor Andy Street. Building work on the station is set to commence in 2024.

The Hybrid Bill for Phase 2b of HS2 from Crewe to Manchester has now been published. However, the Golborne Link which connected HS2 to the West Coast Main Line near Wigan has been formally dropped by the government. The Golborne Link would have by-passed and relieved capacity on a congested section of the West Coast Main Line north of Crewe and would also have further reduced HS2 journey times from the West Midlands to Scotland by circa 15 minutes.

The government has committed to looking at alternative means of connecting HS2 with the West Coast Main Line, including Sir Peter Hendy's "Union Connectivity" proposal to extend HS2 to Preston. Unfortunately, it will take longer to develop an alternative proposal and the government requirement that such an alternative must "fit within the existing budget envelope for the Integrated Rail Plan" will be challenging to achieve.

The recently published Transport Select Committee (TSC) report into the Integrated Rail Plan recognises that the Golborne link was not perfect, but its importance in terms of unlocking capacity for passengers and freight and reducing journey times to Scotland. The TSC members "are concerned that it has been cancelled without an alternative being proposed" and have called on the Department for Transport to set out "alternative plans which add similar capacity as a minimum, by March 2023".

With the future West Midlands to Nottingham market now to benefit from direct HS2 services to Nottingham City Centre, the need for Midlands Rail Hub (MRH) to provide this connectivity has disappeared. However, this has presented a major opportunity for Midlands Connect, Network Rail and WMRE to re-examine the potential benefits of the additional rail network capacity provided by MRH and a new strategic case has been developed to support the delivery of MRH into central Birmingham in full.

The TSC report also recognises the continuing post-IRP requirement for the Midlands Rail Hub scheme to facilitate "connections from Moor Street towards Leicester by providing the eastern chord" and urges "the Government to commit to this element as part of the review of the Midlands Rail Hub".

The current HS2 service plan do not propose any services to the north or Scotland calling at the new Interchange Station in Solihull until Phase 2b has been completed to Manchester which has now been put back from 2032/3 to the late 2030s. WMRE, TfWM and WMCA do not believe that this position is tenable and have been consistently lobbying for HS2 services from the Interchange Station to the north and Scotland once HS2 Phase 2a to Crewe has been completed in the early 2030s.

Midlands Connect has recently analysed the potential for Phase 2a services to Manchester both Birmingham Curzon St and the Interchange. However, the study has indicated that the case for Interchange HS2 services to Manchester is likely to be weak without significant development around the new station.

New Timetables

The December 2022 timetable change is now available in industry systems, Local services between Wolverhampton and Birmingham will move to a clockface 30-minute pattern. The hourly Shrewsbury train will call at Smethwick Galton Bridge, whilst the hourly Transport for Wales service will call at Sandwell and Dudley.

Avanti West Coast's hourly services between London and Preston/Blackpool or Scotland will continue to call Sandwell and Dudley.

WMRE is working with WMT, Chiltern Railways and Network Rail on a new timetable for the Snow Hill lines from May 2023. This will move services onto a more regular which will plug the gaps that currently exist. Chiltern Railways services are also planned to move to a 30 minute pattern giving an improved spread of services between London and the West Midlands.

West Midlands Grand Railway Collaboration (GRC)

The GRC continues to demonstrate the value of collaborative working with the board continuing to meet regularly. With the challenges currently faced by the industry it has been vital for the GRC to consider its role in these times. The board last met on 31st August however it was a more informal meeting with two items of discussion; Commonwealth Games and Industrial Action.

The GRC played a pivotal role in the delivery of the transport network for the commonwealth games with all organisations working very closely together to provide a world class service to the spectators visiting the region. There are a number of stand out moments during the period of the games that really showcased the rail industry. There will be a full GRC lead lesson learned session for the games on 21 September and this will be reviewed at the GRC Board on 12 October.

Industrial Action (IA) continues to be challenging for the industry with further strike days being called causing disruption to customers. The GRC is continuing to work with all organisations to ensure that a consistent message is being broadcast to customers and that responses where appropriate are collaborative.

Work has been continuing at Solihull Station to improve the integration between bus and rail. Bus Service 72 has been retimed to better connect with Monday-Saturday evening rail services. Services X2 and 72 are also timed better to provide in general a 15-minute service throughout the evening from Solihull Station to Solihull Hospital, JLR and Sheldon (The Wheatsheaf). It's recognised that currently the X12 frequency needs reviewing, and that work is being undertaken as part of the Network Review.

A small amount of additional wayfinding signage has been installed at entrance to the station to assist customers in locating the correct bus stand. It is hoped that we are able to install further wayfinding improvements at the station to support the multi modal integration.

4. Project Delivery Programme

A headline summary of activity is set out below:

Sprint: Phase 2 - Sprint design development is currently underway. Aecom have been appointed to deliver the preliminary design. The internal Sprint delivery team are undertaking a review for constructability. On site we are undertaking GPR, (ground penetrating radar), surveys together with trial holes to ascertain the position and depth of utility services. On completion of this work, the design solutions will be passed to Sandwell officers for review. It is anticipated that the scheme, will be on site late Summer 2023.

Phase 1 Construction works have been completed, within budget and prior to the Commonwealth Games

West Midlands Rail Programme

The Rail Programme has enjoyed further success over the past period. In line with our commitment to ensure that University Station was 'fit for purpose' in time for the Games, we opened the wider platforms with full canopy cover, as well as opening the public realm to provide queuing space. The Bus Interchange at Perry Barr also opened in time for the Games and played a key role in supporting transport to and from Alexander Stadium.

The Rail Programme successfully delivered these outcomes thanks in part to our commitment to collaborative working across partners. We were delighted to have this recognised when the programme won one of the national Rail Innovation Awards for Cross Industry Partnership.

Delivery continues across the Programme. We are in the process of rebaselining our projects at University and in Walsall (Package 1) to reflect the impact of a number of challenges including industry-wide resource pressures. Our Package 1 scheme enjoyed a major success with the confirmation of a Compulsory Purchase Order which will secure land access to a key parcel where negotiation had not proven successful. This confirmation underscored the important public interest case for the scheme.

Work also continues in Birmingham on the Camp Hill stations (Package 2) with our contractor undertaking ground investigations and setting up site.

We also look forward to further engagement with the Solihull Station Team to help inform their work as an informed client for the project. Following engagement earlier in the summer we have put some initial proposals for support to the team to help ensure that the project can benefit from the experience and lessons of the rail programme.

Metro Programme

The Metro programme is based on the latest funding position and current project status. Work continues to progress with all extension projects being undertaken by the Midlands Metro Alliance (MMA). During this period, the following activity has been undertaken:

Edgbaston Extension – The route to Edgbaston Village was completed in June 2022, and opened to passenger service in July, just before CWG. There is some small snagging work to be completed, and some works on the side streets as a result of the Metro scheme that BCC and TfWM are implementing. The service has already proved very popular with more journeys starting in Edgbaston than anticipated.

Wolverhampton City Centre Extension – The works for WCCE are almost complete. Work was suspended for the CWG period, and the area was opened up for a better visitor experience. We have a couple of key interfaces to resolve before being able to confirm the date for entry into passenger service, but this is planned to be in November/December 2022. The intention is to open in a first phase just to the station, suspending services to St Georges. Early 2023 the automatic switching and control systems will be in place and a two-terminus service (station and St George's) will be initiated.

Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension – Work has proceeded as planned on many sections of this extension, and in particular in Dudley Centre and at the Wednesbury connection into the existing line. After a lot of discussion across the WMCA and reviewing of finances, the commitment to deliver the full line was re-confirmed, but that the project will be delivered in two phases: top Dudley and then beyond to Brierley Hill, when finances permit. The TfWM team is working hard on resolving that financial issue. MMA has been instructed to proceed with works to Dudley and there is an increased level of activity along the route with many new structures now installed and track installation progressing in Dudley centre. Service is expected to start to Dudley in Autumn 2024.

Birmingham Eastside Extension (BEE) – In the period the work on Lower Bull Street continued up to the Games and was suspended to provide an open walking route for visitors. Work has now resumed there and should be complete by the end of 2022. In Digbeth town centre, we have completed the new highway which will be open to traffic shortly. Much of the urban realm on the north side of Digbeth High St has been put in place and attention will shortly switch to the south side. We have also started laying the track which will cross Digbeth High St. Works between these two end points have now been scheduled and we are discussing with Birmingham their phasing. Discussions with HS2 have progressed and there is a better collaboration, but the stage of development of the Curzon site means that our BEE works will not be complete until 2027.

East Birmingham to North Solihull Extension - TfWM is working with Government to gain further funding to develop a Full Business Case. There is a package in the current CRSTS funding to investigate the different options going forward.

Procurement contract for the new fleet from CAF was completed in October 2021 with a first phase of 21 trams, and options to extend the fleet for the East side extensions. The first 9 trams needed for Edge and WCCE extensions have been delivered and commissioned. They have entered service and are forming the core of the active fleet while we await completion of repairs to the existing fleet.

Road Programme

Hagley Road – Hagley Road Corridor formed part of the CRSTS funding and option appraisal work is underway to develop the Strategic Outline Business Case for bus priority measures and cycling improvements, with further work planned to consider further option appraisal for rapid transit along the corridor including Metro.

5. Metro Operations - Midland Metro Limited (MML)

Metro services were temporarily suspended between the 19th March and 4th June. This was to enable the body panels of the 2G fleet to be replaced due to cracks. To date CAF the manufacturer has been undertaking this warranty work at the Metro Centre in Wednesbury, with almost half the fleet now complete. However due to the depot expansion project impacting workshop space, arrangements have been made for works to continue at the Very Light Rail (VLR) centre in Dudley. This facility is currently being adapted to accommodate the works and the first tram is expected to be transported to VLR in November. The bogie box repair work, as mentioned in the last report also continues and forms part of a comprehensive programme of crack repairs on the 2G fleet.

Since resuming services on the 5th June, trams initially operated between Wolverhampton St Georges and Bull St and subsequently returned to Library. On the 19th July services extended to Edgbaston Village, with the opening of the final phase of the Westside extension. This was ahead of the Commonwealth Games and provides 3 new tram stops connecting people to the hotels, restaurants and the entertainment along Broad St and surrounding areas. Coinciding with the re-opening, Metro Ticket Zones were also introduced replacing the traditional point to point fare structure. The new ticket zones are fairer and simpler and enable customers to purchase season tickets for only the zones they require.

Currently Metro is operating a 12 minute service throughout the day between Wolverhampton St Georges and Edgbaston Village with plans to increase frequency as more trams become available. Within the trams available there are 9 of the new Urbos 100 vehicles and another 1 is undergoing testing and commissioning due to be released for passenger service shortly.

Since November 2021 the operator Midland Metro Limited (MML) has been in discussions/negotiations with Unite the Union regarding the 2022 pay ward. 3 offers have been put forward by MML, all of which were supported by the Union but were rejected at the ballot by members. A ballot for strike action was subsequently undertaken with the outcome in favour of strike action.

MML has proposed using ACAS as a conciliator, but this has been rejected by the Union. The Union have since provided notification of 53 days of strike action starting on the 15th October until 5th January 2023. MML plan to operate a basic service subject to staff availability and the last offer which includes a 15.1% pay increase for tram crew with 1 year service remains on the table.

6. Active Travel

Active Travel Fund (ATF)

The following schemes are being delivered as part of the Sandwell's ATF Tranche 2 programme (indicative cost of £1.4m):

- Blackheath Town Centre Active Travel Interventions – Reallocation of road space and widening of footway to create a new permanent off-road segregated two-way cycleway along the Blackheath bypass from the Oldbury Rd/Henderson Way junction, along the bypass on A4100 Henderson Way to the High St/John St junction.
- Wednesbury Town Centre Active Travel Interventions - Reallocation of road space to provide a new segregated contraflow cycle lane within the town centre, new permanent footway sections, temporary widening of footways using barriers, new TTRO's and new signage and road marking scheme and decluttering of footways along various roads within the town centre to ensure wider footway space. New cycle parking at selected locations will also be provided.
- Bearwood High Street Active Travel Interventions - adjoining Bearwood Road is Waterloo Road and on the northern side of the High Street is Hadley Stadium sports centre which hosts inclusive cycling projects. On this side of the High Street there will be a reallocation of road space (along Bearwood Rd/Waterloo Rd) to provide a new two-way segregated cycle route from Beaks Road to Hadley Stadium with a Tiger Crossing for cyclists.
- A4123 Corridor (Dudley/Sandwell section) – this is a jointly promoted scheme by Dudley and Sandwell Councils. The scheme involves the provision of a dedicated permanent 2-way cycle route along this 1.2km section of the A4123 corridor running between Tipton Road (A4037) and Burnt tree (A461).

Local Authority Capability Fund (LACF)

TfWM and the local authorities have successfully secured DfT revenue funding from the Local Authority Capability Fund. £1.9m will deliver West Midlands wide regional behavioural change activities and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan development. The fund is delivering adult cycle training, cycle maintenance training, plus led cycle rides in Sandwell. LACF is also funding the development of the Black Country Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, to which Sandwell has been an active contributor.

Cycling for Everyone

The Commonwealth Games cycling legacy programme Cycling for Everyone is in delivery with a suite of cycling activities to encourage deprived communities to enjoy cycling as an everyday way to travel and stay active. The project includes a bike giveaway, inclusive of adapted cycles, and an intensive community engagement approach to reach new audiences. The project is currently being delivered in Langley, St Paul's, Soho and Victoria wards.

Community Cycle Clubs

In partnership with Cycling UK, Community Cycle Clubs have been set up in Sandwell. As of March 2022, Community Cycle Clubs in Sandwell include Lightwoods Community Club, Smethwick Beat Streets Community Club, Hadley Stadium and Bangladeshi Women's Association.

Living Streets Walk to School Programme

On Friday 21 May 2021, the Department for Transport announced the National allocation of £2.1m towards the continuation of Living Street's Walk to School Outreach Programme. This funding will help more pupils enjoy the fresh air, freedom and fun that walking to school brings in Sandwell. Living Streets will continue to work with us in the West Midlands until 31 March 2023.

Sandwell has 27 schools currently involved in the Living Streets 'Walk Once a Week' Programme.

West Midlands Cycle Hire (WMCH)

West Midlands Cycle Hire consists of 1,500 bikes across the seven Local Authorities, with 10% of the fleet being e-Bikes. Pedal bikes were launched within Sandwell in June 2021, with e-Bikes added to the fleet in December 2021.

Bikes are available to hire across 10 docking stations in Sandwell, focused around West Bromwich. Sites include close to the West Bromwich Metro stop, Sandwell College, High Street and Sandwell and Dudley Rail station. Key statistics/observations from Sandwell have been detailed below for reference:

- Total rides within Sandwell to-date: Pedal bikes, 4,948 journeys; e-Bikes, 518 journeys
- Average ride time per journey – 37 minutes
- Average distance travelled per journey – 3.36km
- Journeys within Sandwell are roughly a 50/50 split between A-A journeys, whereby the user returns the bike to the same dock that they hired it from, and A-B journeys, whereby the bike is returned to a different location. This indicates a good scheme mix between leisure and utility journeys.
- 89% of bikes within Sandwell are returned to docking stations, representing positive customer behaviours. This compares favourably to other regions, where additional staff resourcing is required to return informally parked bikes to docking stations.

Walking and Cycling Programme

Development Work Stream

The Transforming Cities Funded (TCF) A34 strategic feasibility study from Birmingham to Walsall was completed in February 2021 and it was determined that a segregated cycle route is not feasible. Following the approval of a change request, Sandwell will be using the remaining funding to complete a study on the route A457 Corridor, Oldbury Town Centre to Smethwick High Street and Smethwick Galton Bridge Station.

The Outline Business Case for the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Corridor Access Improvements was submitted by Sandwell and Dudley to WMCA Corporate Assurance and is now approved.

The area under the bridge at the WBHE and A4123 is being widened to accommodate a cycle route and pedestrian access. This has been funded through TCF (£2m) and is being delivered by Midland Metro Alliance.

A third tranche of ATF3 was awarded to WMCA which included additional funding for Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Corridor Access Improvements at stops for cycling. There is also funding for a regional School Streets programme.

TfWM have recently completed a self-assessment for Active Travel England (ATE), which was a requirement ahead of the Capability and Ambition Fund (CAF, formerly Local Authority Capability Fund) and the fourth tranche of ATF. WMCA was awarded a score of 3 overall (out of a maximum of 4) following a submission of evidence. We are one of the few authorities in the country who have received this higher score.

ATE have allocated WMCA £3.1m of CAF pending an application process which was submitted on 30 September. Our bid is ambitious, focusing on increasing local capability for development of active travel schemes.

We anticipate that the next round of funding (ATF4) will be a multi-year settlement, with bidding to open in early October.

Delivery Work Stream

Friar Park Public Realm Improvements

Two applications for the Better Streets Community Fund were submitted within proximity of each other asking for improvements near the Millennium Community Centre and Friar Park Primary School. This project provided improvements at and between these two locations providing a safe and enjoyable space for local people to walk and cycle.

Smethwick Old Church and Dorothy Parkes Community Centre Community Centre Public Realm Improvements

This project improved the public space outside of Smethwick Old Church and Dorothy Parkes Community Centre by reducing traffic speed and making it easier for people to walk and cycle in their local community.

Access improvements to existing crossings

The Better Street Community Fund contributed to improving the accessibility of an existing crossing for cyclists and those with mobility issues by providing small amount of dropped kerb. The crossing in Blackheath forms a part of an existing cycle route between Blackheath and Rowley Regis Train Station and this small improvement will help improve this route.

YMCA Cycle Parking

This project provided public cycle parking outside of the YMCA in West Bromwich Town Centre allowing people attending the YMCA and the wider town centre to be able to park their bikes securely.

Workwise

TfWM's Employment Outreach Lead works with Job Centres to promote discounted travel to those gaining new employment. This approach has been successful and was extended to include libraries, local employers and training providers.

A popular discounted travel scheme is Workwise which offers discounted tickets in the first three months of employment.

The offer includes two 4-week tickets FREE then a third 4-week ticket at a 50% discount from the standard price on selected bus, tram and nNetwork passes.

19 applicants in the Sandwell area were helped with travel to work through Workwise in the last quarter¹.

The Employment Outreach Lead continues to expand promotion to a portfolio of virtual advertising and engagement activity alongside non-virtual activity. This includes online recruitment events, online jobs fairs and social media engagement tools as well as digital newsletters and information packs.

Non-virtual activity includes attendance at jobs fairs, careers fairs and meetings throughout Sandwell. Partnerships with job centres in the Sandwell area have been established to help provide support for their clients in the transition from benefits to their first pay days in employment.

7. Safety, Security and Emergency Planning including Regional Transport Co-ordination Centre

The Safer Travel Partnership is a collaboration of organisations including TfWM, West Midlands and British Transport Police forces, Transport Operators and the 7 regional local authorities. They work together with the purpose of making the public transport network safer.

The Partnership is responsible for delivering the Safer Travel Partnership's 'Safer Travel Plan' the latest version was agreed with West Midlands Police Crime Commissioner, The West Midlands Mayor and the British Transport Police Authority in March 2022.

Since 2021 Safer Travel have employed 3 Transport Safety Officers (TSOs) whose primary role is to provide a visible presence on the Public Transport Network in the West Midlands, providing good Customer Service to Staff and Passengers to tackle low level Anti-Social Behaviour and improve the perception of safety for users of the

transport network. The approach to be followed by the TSO's can be summarized as Engagement, Education, Encouragement and where necessary Enforcement. This team will be increasing to 12 in November following a successful bid for Bus Service Improvement Plan funding from the Department for Transport.

Since February 2022 the 3 Transport Safety Officers have spent **2789** hours on patrol, had **44912** interactions with passengers and staff, engaged with **5251** passengers and issued **461** verbal warnings, also **15** warning letters have been issued to passengers and users of the bus stations in that time.

The Transport Safety Officers have provided a highly visible presence around the transport interchanges in Sandwell, the three bus stations at Cradley Heath, Wednesbury and West Bromwich, Metro stations and bus shelters and they have travelled on all modes of public transport dealing with issues identified in the Safer Travel Tasking process or by partners. They helped with arrests following a serious of criminal damage offences on the number 45 & 47 bus routes. They have also continued to work closely with West Bromwich Neighbourhood Policing Team to deal with the long-term issue of Street Drinkers at West Bromwich Bus Station with members of the group receiving ASB warning letters and criminal behaviour orders.

RTCC continue to liaise with Sandwell Council Highways team for incidents that also impact National Highways' Strategic Road Network, allowing them to set VMS where available/appropriate, and mitigate on signals to any local approaches. This is most commonly at M5 Junction 1 with the teams in regular communication to ensure any issues that arise at this junction are swiftly responded to. CCTV that was part of the Highways Investment Scheme supports this response.

With the recent extensive roadworks at Dudley Port the RTCC have been giving this part of the network increased focus to ensure any network issues are appropriately supported. The team regularly liaise with the senior permit officer to help mitigate the works and have a strong collaborative and communicative partnership.

The Emergency Planning Team worked closely with Sandwell's Emergency Planning Team in response to the passing of Queen Elizabeth II. Ensuring a coordinated approach to messaging, available transport services, required transport mitigations and sharing of information and intelligence that would assist the response. Both teams liaising closely with the regions Local Resilience Forum to ensure communication and regional awareness is maintained.

Appendix 1 – Network Monitoring

Monitoring ensures TfWM understands changes in the performance of the transport system arising from schemes, for example the punctuality of public transport, modal usage, patronage and customer satisfaction. Covid-19 has had a major impact on the public transport network, but patronage is now starting to increase across all modes.

- Headline Measures

The table below shows performance change in August 2022 compared to the previous report (December 2021). Annual data (2020/21 and 2021/22) is also provided where available. Data is annualised (unless stated otherwise) and for the whole of the West Midlands Combined Authority area.

	Dec-21	Aug-22	% Change	2020/21	2021/22	% Change
Bus Punctuality				89.3%	81.4%	-8.9%
Bus Patronage	148.2m	191.8m (July 2022)	+29.4%	97.6m	174.7m	+79.1%
Rail Patronage	30.5m	49.8m	+63.2%	16.7m	39.8m	+137.8%
Tram Patronage	4.3m	4.1m	-2.8%	3.4m	4.8m	+41.0%
Tram Fleet Availability (by month)	94.7%	99.2%	+4.8%	98.8%	93.9%	-5.0%

Bus

Overall bus patronage in the West Midlands has been falling each month since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, with decreases during the 1st lockdown and increases seen in August, September and October 2020 as lockdown restrictions eased. A further decline in bus patronage was seen in the winter months of November, December and January as the 2nd lockdown was in place. Since January 2021 bus patronage has started to recover each month with current annualised bus patronage (August 2021 – July 2022) standing at 191.8 million an increase of +29.4% compared to 148.2 million in December 2021 (annualised). Bus patronage in 2021/22 increased by +79.1% compared to 2020/21. Monthly bus patronage (July 2022) is now at 73.6% of pre-covid levels.

Bus Punctuality stands at 81.4% of non-frequent bus services operated 'on time' (between 1 minute early and 05.59 minutes late) in 2021/22 compared to 89.3% in 2020/21.

During 2021/22 78% of those surveyed (sample size 926 users) were satisfied with the overall journey experience (Source: Travel Trends and Behaviours Survey 2021/22 Final Year Report, Human Insight, TfWM)

Rail

Rail patronage has also been impacted by Covid-19. Current annualised rail patronage is approximately -15.8% of pre-covid patronage and stands at approximately 49.8 million per year (an increase of +63.2%). Rail patronage in 2021/22 was 39.8 million (+137.8%) compared to 16.7 million in 2020/21.

During 2021/22 85% of those surveyed (sample size 250 users) were satisfied with the overall journey experience (Source: Travel Trends and Behaviours Survey 2021/22 Final Year Report, Human Insight, TfWM)

Tram

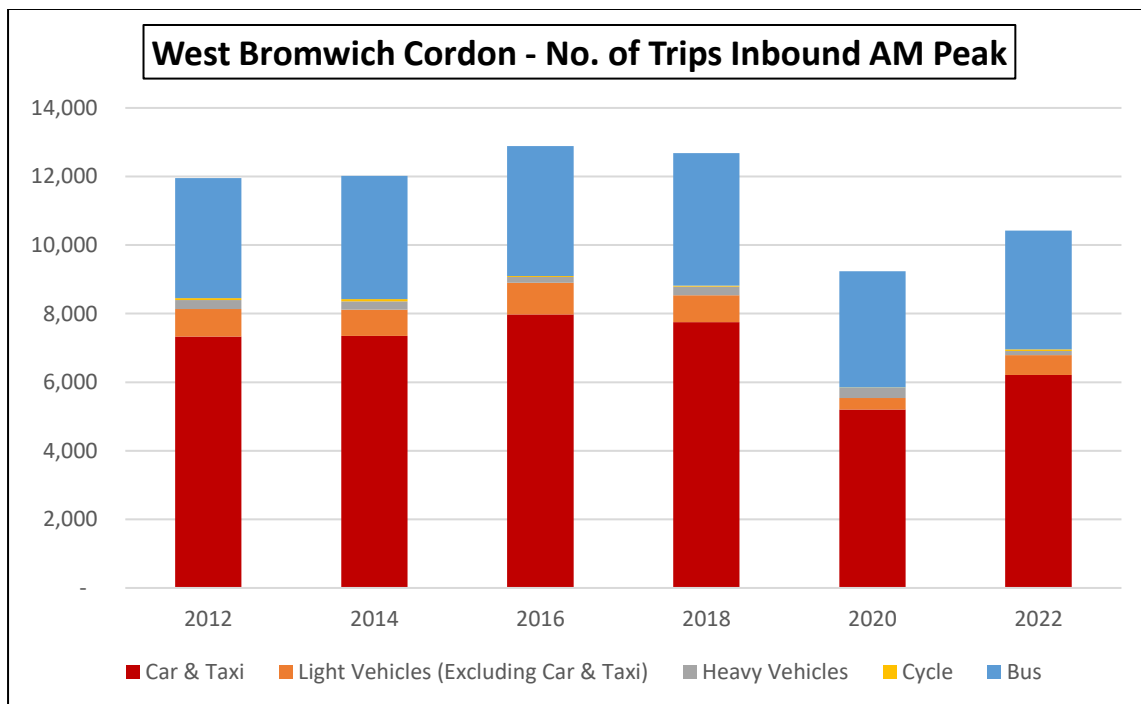
Tram patronage decreased from 8m passengers during the year period April 2019 to March 2020 (pre-covid) and is now 4.1m annually (September 2021 to August 2022), a decrease of -2.8% compared to December 2021. The most recent annual tram patronage (2021/22) is 4.8m, an increase of +41.0% on 2020/21.

Fleet availability (i.e. proportion of rolling stock available as a percentage of the target number needed to run to timetable) stood at 99.2% in August 2022, an increase from 94.7% in December 2021. The average tram fleet availability in 2021/22 decreased by -5.0% compared to 2020/21.

During 2021/22 95% of those surveyed (sample size 139 users) were satisfied with the overall journey experience (Source: Travel Trends and Behaviours Survey 2021/22 Final Year Report, Human Insight, TfWM)

Modal Share West Bromwich

The latest West Bromwich cordon survey was undertaken in March 2022.



The AM Peak (07.30-09.30) Public transport mode share has decreased slightly in 2022 to 40.0% (bus 35.3%, tram 4.7%) from 40.4% in 2020, mainly due to an increased in trips using private vehicle modes (except heavy vehicles) and a decrease in tram trips.

Bus trips have increased by +2.0%, cycle trips by +370% (37 extra cycles), car and taxi by 19.4% and light vehicles by +73.2%.

Heavy vehicle trips decreased by -58.4% and tram trips by -18.6%. Overall public transport trips decreased by -0.9%.

Overall, all trips into West Bromwich (March 2022) have increased by +11.0%. The previous survey in West Bromwich was in March 2020, 2 weeks before the national lockdown.

Further details on modal share for all strategic centres can be found here: <https://community-engagement-tfwm.hub.arcgis.com/pages/modal-split>