

Report to Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

30th September 2021



Subject:	West Bromwich E-Scooter Trial
Director:	Director, Spatial Planning and Growth Director name
Contact Officer:	Strategic Planning and Transport Manager – Andy Miller – Andy_Miller@sandwell.gov.uk Transport Planning Officer – Oliver Ford – Oliver_Ford@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon the proposed running of the E-Scooter Trial up to March 2022.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>People live well and age well</p> <p>E-scooters may encourage modal shift away private car use for short trips, reducing air pollution and decreasing the associated risks of lung and heart damage.</p>
	<p>A strong and inclusive economy</p> <p>E-scooters offer increased accessibility into West Bromwich town centre strengthening its role as a social, retail, educational and employment centre.</p>





A connected and accessible Sandwell

Provision of E-scooters may encourage modal shift from car use for short trips, improving air quality and reducing emissions

The current trial zone provides links from West Bromwich retail core and Dartmouth Park to West Midlands Metro stations and West Bromwich Bus Station.

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 Scooters are one of the new forms of transport emerging as technology, cost effective manufacturing and batteries improve. As with electric bikes, they are starting to be used (illegally in the UK) by private owners. They are also being used in various cities across the world as part of public sharing and hire schemes.

In an urban context they can help with providing easy first and last mile access to destinations. However, as with any emerging technology there are concerns about unintended consequences, particularly the safety of riders and other road users such as pedestrians.

In a wider initiative to promote walking and cycling as part of a green and healthy recovery from COVID 19 the Secretary of State for Transport announced the acceleration of twelve-month E-Scooter trials planned for 2021. The objectives of the trials include:

- Providing faster access to more places;
- Accelerating the ability of the transport system to return to normal;
- Off-setting the potential for a mass reversion to car use in urban areas;
- Supporting a healthy and green re-start post COVID;
- Providing learning:-
 - Improving the evidence base, which globally is inconclusive
 - Understanding if eScooters could be made safer if they are not safe enough;
 - Informing future legislation and/or regulation (particularly important following the transport select committee's recent recommendation to legalise E-scooters in the UK)
 - Better understanding pricing models.



Following a full procurement process led by TfWM in conjunction with Birmingham City Council (as lead authority). Swedish micro-mobility firm Voi were nominated as the sole operator for trials being held in the West Midlands. Founded in 2018, and with approximately 500 employees, Voi currently operate forty-five micro-mobility schemes across Europe in cities such as Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen, Berlin and Hamburg. They have also been appointed to run trials in Northamptonshire, Bristol, Cambridge and Liverpool. Voi have appointed a dedicated West Midlands operational manager, as well as fleet, charging and maintenance teams across the region to support the trial.

Sandwell's trial has formed part of a regionally coordinated programme of E-Scooter trials for the West Midlands. These have been managed in a close partnership between Local Highway Authorities, TfWM and the chosen operator Voi. Local Highway Authorities have lead on the zone identification, whilst Voi have been responsible the operation of the trial itself whilst TfWM have supported through coordination, resourcing and facilitation.

West Bromwich was originally chosen as the location for the trial based on its high footfall (as the primary retail and commercial centre in the borough); low speed roads (due to West Bromwich's 20mph zone); transport links (in particular West Midlands Metro and West Bromwich Bus Station); day time population (estimated pre-Covid at approximately 13,600) and size (just over one square mile). However, the limited size of the original trial area has limited the potential of the trial to drive modal shift away from private car use.

Trial Length: The trial license granted by DfT expires 31st March 2022.

What Constitutes an E-Scooter: Within its guidance for the trials, the DfT has stated that E-scooters will continue to fall within the statutory definition of a motor vehicle. Specifically, an e-scooter has been defined by the department as a vehicle which:

- is fitted with no motor other than an electric motor with a maximum continuous power rating of 500W and is not fitted with pedals that are capable of propelling the vehicle
- is designed to carry no more than one person
- has a maximum speed not exceeding 15.5 mph



- has 2 wheels, 1 front and 1 rear, aligned along the direction of travel
- has a mass including the battery, but excluding the rider, not exceeding 55kg
- has means of directional control via the use of handlebars that are mechanically linked to the steered wheel
- has means of controlling the speed via hand controls and a power control that defaults to the 'off' position

Voi's model of scooter to be used in the trials was assessed as part of the procurement process and judged to meet the DfT's standards outlined above.

Voi's model of scooter includes a GPS tracking device which records where the E-Scooter is. If a scooter leaves the trial zone or enters a 'no ride zone' as reported by GPS, the engine will cut out.

Where and when can E-Scooters be used and by whom: E-scooters can only be used within the defined trial zone and if they are hired from the operator (Voi). E-Scooter use outside the trial zone remains illegal, as does private e-scooter use within the trial zone. E-scooter users must follow the rules set out in the operational play book and will be restricted to riding on the carriageway and Metro Parkway within the trial zone from 06:00 to 22:00.

To hire an E-Scooter, users must be eighteen or over and hold a driving license (provisional licenses are acceptable).

E-Scooters are barred from entering the following areas within the existing trial zone. These areas are specified as 'no ride zones':

- The pedestrianised section of West Bromwich High Street to avoid conflict with pedestrians
- Garden of Remembrance to avoid conflict with pedestrians
- New Square to avoid conflict with pedestrians
- Oak House Park to avoid conflict with pedestrians
- Metro Plaza,
- Private Land, including but not limited to:
 - Sandwell College (including the section of the metro plaza it owns)
 - Astle Retail Park
 - West Bromwich Bus Station



- Kings Square Shopping Centre
- Queens Square Shopping Centre
- Metro Station walkways and platforms: Black Lake; Dudley Street Guns Village; Dartmouth Street; Lodge Road; West Bromwich Central; Trinity Way; Kenrick Park; The Hawthorns.

Fleet Size and Distribution: 50 Voi scooters are operational in West Bromwich town centre. They redistributed throughout the day by Voi employees.

Speed: It is proposed that E-Scooters being used in the trial have a maximum speed limit of 12.5mph, in line with the current speed limit in Birmingham. This is an increase in speed from the initial 10mph originally in place in West Bromwich. This increase would bring West Bromwich in line with regional and national norms, with scooters reaching speeds broadly in line with cycles. This speed offers a balance between convenience and speed for the user and reassurance for pedestrians. Despite having a national maximum of 15.5mph, it is at each authority's discretion what the scooters speed limit should be in each trial.

Helmets: In accordance with DfT guidance the wearing of helmets will be advised but not mandatory for users. The operator will provide helmets for all users who wish to use one.

Parking: Scooter parking will continue to be 'dockless'. Apart from defined 'no park zones', users will be able to leave their scooters wherever their trip ends as long as it follows parking standards (parked on footway, upright and not blocking pedestrian movements). Users must submit a photo of their parked scooter via the Voi app before finishing the ride. Only when their parked scooters is approved as appropriately parked does the user's ride end.

Parking docks or incentivised parking zones (IPZs) may be installed by Voi based on where trips naturally begin and end within the extended the trial zone. Installation of these docks or IPZs will follow the usual process of installation of infrastructure on the highway, including assessment of suitability. All 'no ride zones' are also designated 'no park zones'.



User Interface, Ticketing, Communications: Users book and pay for the E-Scooters using Voi's smartphone app. Users will pay a basic rate of 20p per minute, or £12 per hour. The app will communicate to users' expectations and offer training around safe riding and parking as well as alerting users when they are about to leave the trial zone or enter a 'no ride zone'.

The Trial to Date: Since the trial began in December 2020, the West Bromwich trial zone has seen:

- 85,591km travelled.
- 1,614 total users.
- 0.7 average rides per vehicle per day.
- 0 Serious injuries (self reported, broken bones etc.).
- 4 slight injuries (self reported, falling off scooter, bruises, cuts).
- Average of 5 reports of pavement riding per week.

5 Implications

Resources:	There are no capital or revenue costs associated with the trial for SMBC going forward. Officer time for the development and management of the trial has been required.
Legal and Governance:	<p>The West Midlands E-scooter trial scheme received formal approval at the West Midlands Combined Authority Board on the 5th June 2020. This removed the formal requirement for full cabinet approval at a local authority level. However, on the advice of Democratic Services colleagues, it was decided that approval for the trial should be treated as a key decision and as such require formal cabinet approval. This approval was received in November 2020.</p> <p>The DfT passed 'Electric Scooter Trials and Traffic Signs (Coronavirus) Regulations and General Directions 2020' as secondary legislation to allow the trials to go ahead</p>
Risk:	The operator Voi holds third-party liability and personal accident motor fleet insurance, satisfying the



	<p>requirements outlined in the 1988 Road Traffic Act. This includes public and product liability insurances up to £20 million for each and every claim with a maximum excess of £100,000. This policy specifically indemnifies WMCA and Highway Authorities (including SMBC) where there are third party claims arising from the operator's failure to comply with the requirements of the contract in providing services.</p>
Equality:	<p>Concerns have been raised about the use of E-Scooters by several Visually Impaired groups. These concerns centre around two key issues, firstly the risk of collision between pedestrians and riders if scooters are being ridden on the pavement, and secondly the risk of parked scooters blocking the footway. These issues adversely impact all pedestrians but are particularly problematic for visually impaired, less mobile and disabled groups. These risks have been and will continue to be mitigated by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The enforcement of the parking and riding rules. These rules expressly prohibit pavement riding and inconsiderate parking. • Limiting the number of scooters to a manageable level which will reduce the incidence of poor pavement parking. <p>Sandwell Visually Impaired have been consulted before and during the trial and have raised no fundamental issues with the trial.</p> <p>The proposed tariff of 20p per minute (£12 per hour) will prove a barrier to use by individuals from low income households. This is particularly pertinent to the West Bromwich trial with approximately 22% of residents in the town living in an income deprived household, compared to 15% of people nationally. This can be mitigated by Voi's 'Voi-4-All' scheme which offers an unlimited £10 monthly pass for low income individuals. As the trial expands into residential areas to the north of the town centre, officers will continue to work with Voi to ensure that this offer is available to all who qualify.</p>



	<p>The requirement for users to be able to access a smart phone to hire the scooters will prove a barrier to the elderly and low-income individuals who are less likely to have access to internet accessible devices. There is currently no proposed mitigation to this barrier as Voi's business plan is predicated on the hiring platform being hosted by a smartphone app.</p> <p>The requirement for users to hold a driving license will also act as a barrier to low income and BAME individuals, who less likely to hold a driving license. There is no proposed mitigation to this barrier as holding a driving license is seen as a key safety measure by Voi.</p> <p>E-Scooters may have a positive impact on those with moderate to mild mobility issues, as the scooters remove the need to walk long distances.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	<p>Whilst there is currently little conclusive evidence either way, the concern has been raised that E-Scooter use may displace walking and cycling or public transport use. One study on the use of E-scooters in Raleigh, North Carolina found that out of a sample of E-Scooter users, 50% said that if they had not used an E-Scooter they would have walked or cycled. This would have a damaging impact on resident's health, an issue in Sandwell given that in 2012 24.5% of Year 6 children and 25.4% of adults in Sandwell were classified as obese. Given that the impact of E-scooter on cycling and walking are currently little understood, there is no mitigation that can currently be proposed for this.</p> <p>Similarly, the concern that E-Scooters may be displace public transport use has also been raised, although there is little evidence for this. The aforementioned study of E-Scooter users in Raleigh found that only 11% would have used the bus instead of an E-Scooter.</p>



	<p>E-Scooters do not produce any air pollution. The trial could provide an alternative to the private car for short trips and contribute to an improvement in air quality. Voi conducted a national in-app survey conducted between March and April 2021 which indicated that 27.5% of Voi E-scooters trips replace cars. Reducing car trips is a priority for Sandwell as the whole borough was declared an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in 2005. Sandwell MBC has had an Air Quality Action Plan (2005) for a number of years which has a range of measures to improve air quality in the borough including “implementing a range of measures to promote alternative and sustainable travel”. Despite progress with the council’s Air Quality Action Plan, measured NOx concentrations in the borough are not declining as expected.</p>
Social Value	<p>The increased accessibility into to West Bromwich town centre offered by E-Scooters may contribute to the area’s recovery from the COVID-19 lockdown. The extension of the trial will offer increased accessibility to services with West Bromwich town centre for communities now within the trial zone.</p>

6 Appendices

Appendix A – Trial Zone Map



This page is intentionally left blank