

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Transport for West Midlands (TfWM)

October 2023

1. Local Transport Plan (LTP)

Previous updates for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) provided context on development of the LTP development that remains unchanged. Summarising:

- Developing the LTP is a statutory requirement and the responsibility of WMCA in the metropolitan area.
- The new LTP is called Reimagining Transport in the West Midlands and will be comprised of multiple parts; a Core Strategy, 6 Big Moves, 4 Area Strategies, and an Implementation Plan.
- Information on the new LTP is available online via tfwm.org.uk/wmltp5
- The Core Strategy has already been developed, consulted on and agreed by WMCA board. It sets out the overarching aims and principles of the LTP.
- 6 Big Move strategies have also been developed. These set out more detailed policies, principles and in some cases implementation proposals that apply across the region on a range of thematic areas of policy:
 - Behaviour Change
 - Accessible & Inclusive Places
 - Walk, Wheel, Cycle and Scoot
 - Public Transport & Shared Mobility
 - A Safe, Efficient and Reliable Network
 - A Green Transport Revolution

Consultation on the 6 Big Moves commenced in February 2023 and was in progress at the time of the last update report. Consultation concluded in April and received around 740 responses. As well as open public consultation, TfWM arranged a range of targeted focus groups across the West Midlands to better capture the views of a range of people who were underrepresented in previous consultation and engagement on the LTP. This included but was not limited to [Sandwell Visually Impaired](#). An engagement report summarising findings and proposed alterations to the Big Moves is currently being prepared. It is currently proposed that this engagement report as well as final versions of the Big Moves will be presented to WMCA for agreement at the same time as the draft Area Strategies and Implementation Plan (see below) is also presented to WMCA board for approval to consult.

The timing of this remains at the discretion of WMCA's Transport Portfolio lead, Cllr Mike Bird, in consultation with Strategic Transport Board of which the transport portfolio cabinet member for SMBC is a member.

TfWM has been working with local authority officers to develop 4 Area Strategies and a single Implementation Plan for the LTP. The Area Strategies will set out and assess the impact of local proposals across the West Midlands – a mix of local authority and TfWM sponsored proposals. Our starting point for this has been existing local priorities including projects currently funded for development through funds such as City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement, Active Travel Funds, and Towns Fund. Proposals within Sandwell will fall under an Area Strategy for the Black Country, an arrangement that is understood to be promoted and endorsed by Black Country authorities (as opposed to a requirement of WMCA). The single Implementation Plan will detail local proposals across the West Midlands as well as cross-cutting regional proposals (for example proposals for ticketing that cover the whole region). Details such as funding estimates, funding allocations, development stage and proposal timelines will be set out in the Implementation Plan.

TfWM is working with SMBC and Black Country Transport officers to develop the Black Country Area Strategy and the Implementation Plan. As part of the WMCA's Strategic Transport Board, SMBC's lead transport portfolio member provides direction on LTP development and the latest round of work on Area Strategies and Implementation Plan will be discussed with Strategic Transport board in the coming months. TfWM is arranging to provide a more detailed update to SMBC on the development of the Black Country Area Strategy and the Implementation Plan to enable local scrutiny via Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board. Ultimately, the draft Area Strategies and Implementation Plan will need to be approved by WMCA board – on which SMBC's Leader sits – for both permission to consult and finally to adopt and this is currently anticipated to be later in 2024.

2. Bus Network

Background

Buses in the West Midlands accommodate more than 4 million passenger journeys each week.

Since Covid, the region has lost just over 10% of bus services and TfWM was made aware that at the expiry of the Bus Recovery Grant funding at the end of June 2023, and without any further financial support, operators were preparing to withdraw over 1/3rd of the region's remaining routes. Operators have cited reduced revenue, caused by a reduction in patronage, uncertainty over the continuation of government grants which have supported operators during the recovery from the pandemic and a significant increase in cost. Operators have stated that operating costs are around 125% of pre-covid levels largely due to the significant increases in wages, engineering, uncertainty over fuel costs and inflationary pressure on all general operating costs.

To secure existing services with bus operators until December 2024, TfWM has secured agreement from Government to repurpose approximately £40m of the transformational Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding allocated to WMCA. This reprofiling of the funding has been formally agreed with Operators and Local Authorities through the Enhanced Partnership which was formally 'made' on 12th September 2023.

The provision of the funding to operators is governed by a set of wide-ranging Terms and Conditions which TfWM have developed. One of the key terms is that operators

cannot reduce the commercial services they operate by more than 2%. This reduction is still required despite the funding to remove the least viable services and enable operators to retain the resulting network to December 2024. We are coordinating with operators to ensure any commercial changes are undertaken on the same date to reduce disruption for passengers. This is also aligned with a contract change date on which a number of services operated under contract to TfWM will also change.

Service Changes

Following the intervention to repurpose funding, most bus services will continue to operate past October 2023, until at least December 2024. There will be a small number of changes at the end of October 2023. The following are the changes affecting services running in Sandwell:

45 – Walsall to West Bromwich – Diamond Bus – Commercial service will be operated Monday to Saturday daytime. Early mornings, Evenings and Sunday services currently being tendered, and customers advised to look for further updates on the TfWM website.

89 – West Bromwich to Bearwood – National Express – Service will now run to Bearwood instead of Birmingham City Centre. There is a revised route in the Cape Hill area requiring changes to some tendered routes. All areas retain a bus service.

54/54A – West Bromwich to Worlds End – National Express – Service amended in response to change to service 89. Remove Europa Village (Mon - Sat) and minor route changes to accommodate connections with 89 to provide half hourly on 89. Europa Village Sundays retained.

61 – West Bromwich to Scott Arms – Diamond Bus – Service amended in response to changes to service 89. Will serve Europa Village and has a revised route in Handsworth.

Network Performance

The performance of the network has seen improvements but does remain challenging for passengers. There have been driver shortages and, earlier in the year, services were severely impacted by strikes within National Express West Midlands, with network performance being impacted in the run-up to this action. The driver shortage position has improved, but there are still recruitment challenges in the bus industry as a whole. There have been a number of changes to bus services, that have been designed to bring stability to the network.

3. Rail Network

Rail Industrial Action

Industrial action continues to feature across the UK rail network. The RMT (who primarily represent train guards) and ASLEF (who primarily represent train drivers) remain in dispute with the train operating companies over pay, terms and conditions and fears of redundancies.

Industrial action in recent months has impacted operational performance and slowed the roll out of planned improvements. This is part of a co-ordinated national approach and impacts 14 train operators, including West Midlands Trains. Progress in resolving

the dispute is unclear and may be further complicated by the industry-wide station retail reform proposals (which proposes changes to ways of working in/around ticket offices – see below), which is likely to be of particular interest the RMT and its members.

Station Retail Reform Consultation

In July individual train operators and their industry body the Rail Delivery Group announced a series of individual company consultations on proposals to close the majority of rail station ticket offices in England.

The consultation period ran until 1 September, having been extended by five weeks from the original deadline of 26 July. Approximately 718,000 responses were received by independent passenger watchdogs Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch, which is a record for a rail industry consultation (and potentially for any public policy consultation).

Transport Focus and London TravelWatch have been given an extension to the time available to them to analyse the consultation responses. Their conclusions are now expected by 31 October. They will publish the response to each train operator's proposals online, with an overview of the number of responses received, and the main issues raised in the consultation.

If either watchdog objects, the train operator in question can refer its proposal to the Secretary of State for a final decision. It is unclear from the guidance how long the Secretary of State will need to make any determination. WMRE are actively engaging with the DfT in an attempt to improve our visibility of the Department's Work Force Reform policy team.

Rail Industry Reform

Despite the Secretary of State's commitment to GBR at the Bradshaw Address in February, the government has been unable to commit to GBR legislation in the next King's Speech, due in autumn 2023, and instead there have been warnings that the session is "likely to be congested" and that, on GBR specifically, "much can be achieved without legislation". The government's stated position remains that it is committed to the formation of GBR and that it will bring forth the required legislation "when parliamentary time allows".

The Great British Railways Transition Team (GBRTT)'s planning assumption on the legislation has recently updated to an assumption that there will be no legislation in the next parliamentary session. It is therefore likely to be the case that there will be at least one "interim state" that the new GBR organisation will need to go through before it reaches its final form. The exact shape of this interim state is currently being worked through; timelines associated with this are also not known at present.

Despite the wider uncertainty, we continue to make progress on a partnership agreement between West Midlands Rail Executive and GBRTT. The beginning of August saw our Partnership Oversight Group (POG) established in shadow form. This will be the most senior joint forum between GBRTT and WMRE; it will enable joint oversight of the partnership as it develops to:

- a) Deliver the Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Deal commitments;

- b) Focus on early deliverables, that is tangible outcomes that the partnership can deliver in its early phases; and
- c) Cover all required areas to make sure that WMRE's influence is enhanced and that increased local accountability is delivered for the West Midlands over its rail services.

HS2 Update

On 4 October 2023 the Prime Minister announced the cancellation of HS2 north of the West Midlands with immediate effect. The key points from the announcement were:

- HS2 Phase1 will be completed in full from:
 - both Euston (Central London) and Old Oak Common (Elizabeth Line connections)to
 - the West Midlands stations at Interchange (NEC/Airport/Arden Cross) and Curzon St as well as to the junction with the West Coast Main Line at Handsacre (north of Lichfield)
- The other proposed sections of HS2 will be scrapped with immediate effect
 - HS2 Phase 2a (Handsacre to Crewe)
 - HS2 Phase 2b (Crewe to Manchester)
 - HS2 East (West Midlands to East Midlands Parkway and Midland Main Line)
- In addition, all current safeguarding currently in place for these HS2 sections (primarily Phase 2a) will be removed and land purchased by HS2 Ltd will be resold

This will make it extremely difficult to ever extend HS2 in future should it be required. Detailed work is underway to understand the impact of this decision on service patterns and frequencies on both the Phase 1 HS2 network and the existing conventional network. This will be shared with TfWM partners once complete.

Midlands Rail Hub

Although a formal "Decision to Develop" the Full Business Case of Midlands Rail Hub "West and Central" is still awaited, the Prime Minister has announced that MRH will be completed in full with £1.75bn allocated as part of the new "Network North" proposals.

Details are still to emerge but, with HS2 East now scrapped (see above), it is expected that the West to East Midlands part of MRH will revert to delivering service enhancements to Tamworth, Derby and Nottingham as well as to Nuneaton and Leicester.

A public consultation exercise on the MRH project is likely to follow the recent funding announcement.

New Timetables

Significant timetable changes were implemented on the West Coast Main Line in December 2022, creating a regular 30-minute pattern service on the Birmingham to Coventry line. The timetable structure has been designed to support the provision of a half-hourly Avanti West Coast fast service between Birmingham New St,

Birmingham International, Coventry and London, supplemented by an hourly slower service that calls additionally at Rugby, Milton Keynes and Watford Junction. The full service of three trains per hour currently only operates at peak times, but WMRE is pressing for this to be introduced all day as soon as possible.

In May 2023 a new timetable was introduced on the Snow Hill lines which moved the timetable onto a regular 30-minute pattern removing some of the 40-minute gaps that previously existed at stations like Acocks Green and Hall Green. Performance on the Snow Hill lines has seen a big improvement following the introduction of the new timetable.

WMRE played a key role in developing both the December 2022 and May 2023 timetables, bringing together all the train operators and Network Rail in order to create a coherent overall service for passengers. WMRE will continue to work with all operators in the development of future timetables, recognising that the challenging industry financial position may mean that delivery of service improvements may be difficult to achieve in the short-term.

The financial challenges that West Midlands Trains is facing is resulting in the Birmingham – Stafford – Crewe service being withdrawn between Birmingham and Stafford from 10th December meaning that Tame Bridge Parkway will no longer have its direct service to Wolverhampton and Crewe. WMRE is currently working West Midlands Trains to identify alternative ways of serving this route from the June 2024 timetable change.

West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy

The new West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy (RIS) was published on the WMRE website in early September alongside a summary report on the consultation that was held in late 2022. However, the strategy (along with those of Network Rail and Midlands Connect) was predicated in large part on the assumption that the recently scrapped sections of HS2 would have been built.

Unless there is any further HS2 policy change, the RIS and similar rail strategies will need to be completely revised. In the meantime, WMRE is liaising with Network Rail, DfT and Midlands Connect to identify any urgent changes required to previous proposals which need to be addressed in the short term.

4. Project Delivery Programme

A headline summary of activity is set out below:

Sprint

Phase 2 – Detailed designs have been submitted and comments have been received back from the Sandwell officers during the design development process. TfWM are awaiting response from DfT on the re-baselined CRSTS.

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

Dudley Port Interchange Transformation Programme

Work is ongoing in partnership with Sandwell Council to transform Dudley Port Railway Station into an Integrated Transport Hub.

The programme is split into a series of phases which seeks to provide enhanced interchange, a significantly improved environment and better access from surrounding areas in the short to medium term, followed by proposals to redevelop the railway station in the longer term.

£2.4m from the City Region Sustainable Transport Fund has been allocated to support the delivery of short-term measures ready for when Metro arrives in late 2024 and to align with wider schemes being delivered within the area by the end of March 2027. The focus of “Phase 1” is to create a lighter, brighter and safer feeling interchange which provides more accessible routes to and through the interchange with enhanced customer facilities and information.

Phase 1 is being designed to complement adjacent projects including the Active Travel Fund 3 proposals along the A461 and the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Sustainable Access Measures being led by the Black Country Transport Group and Sandwell & Dudley Councils as well as the Metro delivery.

The Programme Business Case for the Dudley Port Interchange Transformation Programme was approved in June 2023, releasing £495,000 for the next stages of development. This includes a Business Justification Case for Phase 1 which will include options selection and detailed design allowing for delivery to commence in spring 2024. The development funding released will also support the Business Justification Case for Phase 2 and some preliminary work to look at the longer-term major railway station redevelopment as well as any short-term rail measures which could be delivered in the interim.

The longer term plans to transform the railway station include options to provide an additional platform, lengthened island platform, step free access and new passenger facilities. While this is currently unfunded, including it in the Programme Business Case allows us to undertake further development to understand what a scheme could look like and costs which can then be used to identify funding opportunities. It also supports Network Rail’s Access for All bid where Dudley Port is identified as the regional top priority for step free access. We expect to hear the outcome of that bid in the six months.

The Dudley Port Interchange Transformation Programme is being undertaken in partnership with Sandwell and Dudley Councils and the Black Country Transport Group alongside Network Rail, West Midlands Trains and the Canal & River Trust. Local consultation will form part of the ongoing development of the scheme.

West Midlands Rail Programme

The West Midlands Rail Programme is delivering new stations which will improve connectivity across the region and beyond, helping people to enjoy the wealth of jobs, educational opportunities and leisure pursuits available across the region.

Last year we delivered a new station at Perry Barr and improvements at University Station, to help ensure that our rail network was fit for Birmingham’s once-in-a-lifetime Commonwealth Games. That was only the start of our programme, and we are continuing to work hard to:

- Deliver a new, world-class University Station in support of the West Midlands’ world-class institutions.

- Build new stations at Willenhall and Darlaston, slashing travel times by public transport to Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Walsall by more than half.
- Build new stations on the Camp Hill Line in Birmingham, which will see services resume for the first time in more than eighty years.

As well as benefits to rail users, these stations will benefit travellers across the region by helping to reduce congestion on our roads.

University station

Intensive preparations are underway for the opening of the expanded University station later this year. The main focuses of activity are on closing out the snagging items and completing the rail industry's Entry Into Service process.

New Stations

The Package 1 stations (Willenhall and Darlaston) have seen on site progress with enabling works ongoing including ground remediation, de-vegetation, and demolition of buildings ready in preparation for the new stations. On 4 September Buckingham Group Contracting Limited, the main works contractor, entered administration and Kier Integrated Services Ltd bought the rail assets. The rail programme team are working to ensure the best outcome for the West Midlands Combined Authority to protect the organisation financially and reputationally prior to novating the contract from BGCL to Kier. An assessment is underway on the impact to programme and value for money, however there will be a cost and schedule impact as a result of the administration.

Construction on the Package 2 stations (Moseley Village, Kings Heath, Pineapple Road) continues to progress at pace with the current completion date for Dec 24 still being maintained. The project team is in continued negotiations with Network Rail for increased possessions & access over weekend and evenings to try and improve on the 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 Midland 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 remains a few small snagging works to complete, and some works on the side streets as a result of the Metro scheme that BCC and TfWM are implementing. The service has already proven very popular with more journeys starting in Edgbaston than anticipated with around 8% of all Metro journeys starting on the new extension.

Wolverhampton City Centre Extension – Working in close partnership with stakeholders we have overcome some of our difficulties and opened the extension to Wolverhampton Station in September. We are now undertaking works to alternate services between Wolverhampton station and St Georges. We continue to work closely with partners to close out the few remaining difficult issues.

Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension – Work continues to proceed 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: to Dudley and then beyond to Brierley Hill. Funding has been identified subject to value for money checks to delivery of the second phase as far as Merry Hill stop. WMCA continue to work on resolving the financial shortfall to deliver to Brierley Hill. MMA continue to progress with works to Dudley resulting in 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) – Work has now completed on Section 1 on Lower Bull St with tracks installed, paving and soft landscaping installed. Demolition of King's Parade completed in June 2023 and we are completing the governance process to start work on Section 2, through to the Clayton Hotel. Section 5 works in Digbeth High Street have completed on the North side and the planting is complete along with the urban realm. Works on the south side is progressing and due to complete by the end of 2023.

Due to delays from HS2 project, Metro will not be able to start work on the middle section of the extension until January 2026, and so open the line in Spring 2027. In view of this we are looking at the possibility of adjusting the design to allow a partial opening as far as the Clayton Hotel earlier than the rest of the route.

5. Metro Operations - Midland Metro Limited (MML)

Work continues to repair the bodyside and bogie box cracking identified on the 2G fleet. This work is taking place at the Very Light Rail (VLR) centre in Dudley. The final 2 trams are having their repairs completed to the 'c-car' bogie box. TfWM continue to work with CAF on proposals to repair the 'r-car' bogie boxes and waist level panels. Work on these should commence in November.

TfWM has worked with the supplier CAF to bring the new 3G fleet into the UK ahead of schedule, there is now one vehicle left to be delivered. To date this fleet is performing well. Following the opening of the Wolverhampton city centre extension Midland Metro Limited (MML) are looking at timetable options with a view to improve frequencies between The Royal and Edgbaston Village prior to Christmas.

Whilst Metro patronage has started to plateau it is regularly above pre-covid levels.

Two overhead line failures during July led to significant disruption to the network. Work to improve resilience of the power network has also impacted services on a number of Sundays throughout September leading to the late start of services.

Despite the incidents in July the scheduled km delivered is high with August seeing 99.25% of planned timetable kilometres operated. MML continue to add queue buster trams during the peaks as resource allows.

Looking ahead, Easter 2024 sees works to link the Wednesbury Brierley Hill Extension into Line One at Wednesbury. This will lead to significant disruption as services will be unable to operate south of Wednesbury. In addition, TfWM and MML have worked with Officers within Sandwell to enable Sandwell to complete works to Dudley Street Bridge. Whilst most of this work will run concurrent with the delta work the Dudley

Street bridge programme is slightly longer and we continue to work with Sandwell Officers on the logistics around this.

6. Active Travel

Active Travel Fund (ATF)

The following schemes have been 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). This scheme is now completed.

Sandwell's ATF Tranche 3 programme includes:

- Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Extension (WBHE) - Sustainable Access Measures – design underway
- Ferndale Primary School - construction complete

Cycling for Everyone

- Cycling for Everyone 23-24 is in delivery with a suite of activities to encourage communities to enjoy cycling as an everyday way to travel and stay active. This programme focuses on removing barriers to accessing active modes of transport to those from protected characteristic groups and areas of deprivation. The project focuses upon the following wards:
 - Langley
 - St Paul's
 - Soho and Victoria
 - Oldbury
 - West Bromwich Central

- Greets Green and Lyng

The programme includes Dr Bikes, Adult and Child Cycle Training and Cycle Maintenance Training. Sustrans have been appointed to deliver phase 1 of Dr Bike/Cycle Security Measures. They have successfully delivered sessions at Victoria Park, West Smethwick Park and with community group Sikh Helpline. Living Streets have been appointed to deliver three Walking Zone Community Street Audits within Sandwell. Each of the following routes have been selected in collaboration with the Local Authority:

- High Street to Langley Green Railway Station
- Friar Park & Yew Tree to Tame Bridge Railway Station
- Black Country Core Walking Zone in Rowley Village Blackheath

Living Streets Walk to School Programme

In September 2023, the Department for Transport announced the National allocation of £5m 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 2025.

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

Walking and Cycling Programme

Development Work Stream

Sandwell will be using TCF 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. Ferndale Primary School will have school street delivered as part of the programme, with Glebefields Primary School a possibility in the future.

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 awarded WMCA £3.4m of CAF following an application process which was submitted on 30 September. The following schemes are planned to be progressed through the development project cycle (e.g. feasibility studies, concept design) with this funding: Blackheath to Oldbury WM LCWIP route, A457 Oldbury to Smethwick Black Country LCWIP route and WM LCWIP Route – Tipton to West Bromwich.

Delivery Work Stream

Friar Park Public Realm Improvements (completed)

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 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 (completed)

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 formed part of an existing cycle route between Blackheath and Rowley Regis Train Station and this small improvement helped to improve this route.

YMCA Cycle Parking (completed)

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 is now a team of two which includes Employment Outreach Lead and Employment Outreach Assistant Administrator Apprentice. The teamwork 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.

119 applicants in the Sandwell area were helped with travel to work through Workwise in the last six months¹.

The Employment Outreach team 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.

¹ Figures are from December 2022 to May 2023 to be in line with report dates

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. Following a successful bid to the Department of Transport last year, there are now 7 active TSOs in post. An additional 6 TSOs will join us in January 2024. All of the 13 TSOs are trained in all Civil Interventions (including Byelaws) as well as their Traffic Power to stop and direct traffic. They will be getting some new training for Violence Against and Girls and linked behaviours.

In 2023 YTD the 7 Transport Safety Officers have been on patrol for **8,682** hours which equates to **79%** of their total duty time, **7,726** of which were directly linked to our Tasking priorities. A milestone figure of **5,486** Verbal warnings were given out, **175,334** interactions with travellers and staff were made and **43,003** engagements with travellers and staff were carried out.

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 have visited West Bromwich Bus garage to meet with drivers to inform them of their role and to encourage reporting of incidents by drivers. They assisted with our Metro colleagues with the uplift in patronage due to the rail strike during the West Bromwich Albion Home games. They have also continued to work closely with the 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 being dealt with for breaches

of a criminal behaviour order as well as joint patrols with the West Brom BID team. There have been several drone flights carried out by the qualified TSOs in support of Traffic Management issues linked to West Bromwich Albion match day traffic specifically at M5 junction 1 and the Black country spine route in the Great Bridge area.

The RTCC continues to work with and alongside Sandwell Council Highways team monitoring performance around West Bromwich Interchange, a known hotspot for congestion. This will progress towards the end of October when signal upgrade works commence with temporary signals in place. The RTCC will monitor performance and coordinate with internal and external stakeholders to ensure the junction runs as efficiently as possible, with supplementary CCTV being installed giving sight of all key routes towards the interchange.

Additionally, the RTCC, along with Traffic Network Coordination colleagues, have been monitoring the key corridor of the A41 from West Bromwich Interchange and into Birmingham due to an anticipated increase in vehicular use, following significant works commencing on the SRN (M6 J6-7) meaning there is no dynamic hard shoulder available through to June 2024. This is anticipated to increase traffic levels through Sandwell as road users divert. As always football events at The Hawthorns are closely monitored due to the uplift in congestion at ingress / egress times.

The Emergency Planning Team assist Sandwell's Safety Advisory Group with their major event planning, seeking to minimise any transport disruption that may result from particular events such as religious processions and upcoming fireworks night and Christmas light switch on events. Both teams also liaise closely with the regions Local Resilience Forum to ensure resilience communication and situational awareness is maintained across the region.

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 2023 compared to the previous report (January 2022). Annual data (2021/22 and 2022/23) is also provided where available. Data is annualised (unless stated otherwise) and for the whole of the West Midlands Combined Authority area.

	Jan-23	Aug-23	% Change	2021/22	2022/23	% Change
Bus Patronage	211.2m	217.0m	+2.7%	174.7m	210.9m	+20.7%
Rail Patronage	56.4m	56.2m	-0.3%	39.8m	56.6m	+42.0%
Tram Patronage	4.9m	7.5m	+51.4%	4.8m	5.5m	+15.80%

Bus

Since January 2021 bus patronage has started to recover each month with current annualised bus patronage (September 2022 – August 2023) standing at 217.0 million an increase of +10.6% compared to 196.3 million in August 2022 (annualised). Bus patronage in 2022/23 increased by +20.7% compared to 2021/22. Monthly bus patronage (August 2023) is now at 91.3% of pre-covid levels (August 2019).

During 2022/23 81% of those surveyed were satisfied with the overall journey experience compared to 78% in 2021/22. (Source: Travel Trends and Behaviours Survey 2022/23 Annual Report, Human Intelligence, TfWM).

Rail

Rail patronage has also been impacted by Covid-19. Current annualised rail patronage is approximately -24.0% of pre-covid patronage and stands at approximately 56.2 million per year (a decrease of -0.3% compared to January 2023). Rail patronage in 2022/23 was 56.6 million (+42.0%) compared to 39.8 million in 2021/22.

During 2022/23 90% of those surveyed were satisfied with the overall journey experience compared to 85% in 2021/22 (Source: Travel Trends and Behaviours Survey 2022/23 Annual Report, Human Intelligence, TfWM)

Tram

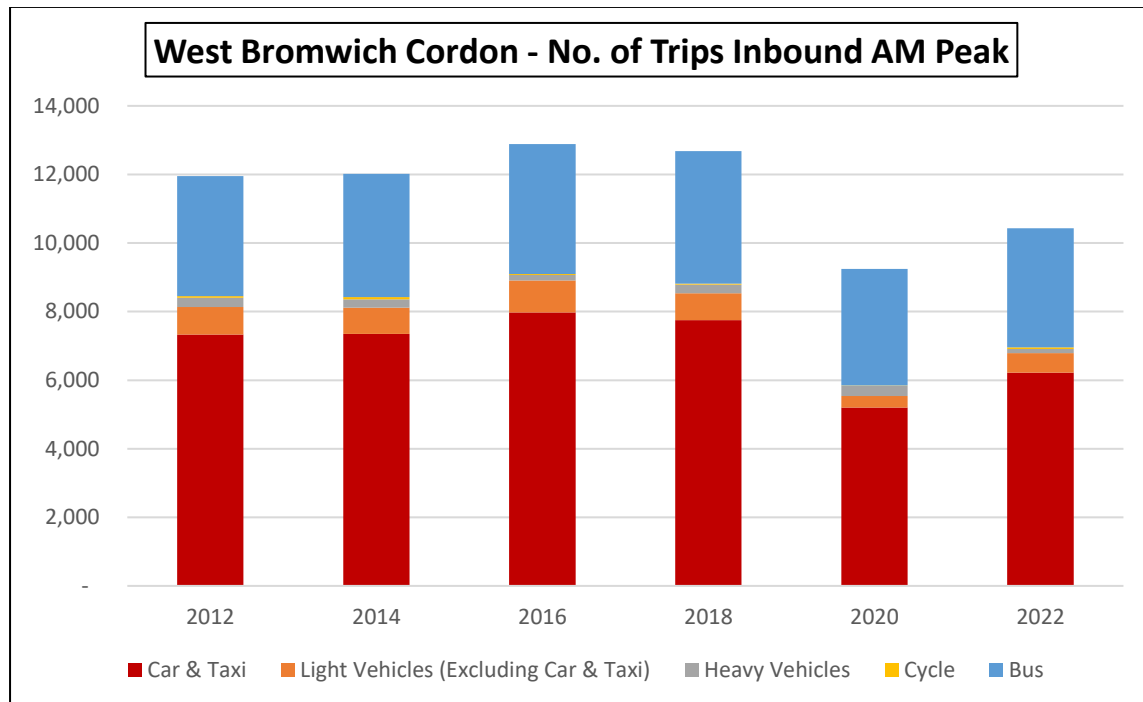
Tram patronage decreased from 8m passengers during the year period April 2019 to March 2020 (pre-covid) and is now 7.5m annually (September 2022 to August 2023),

an increase of +51.4% compared to January 2023. The most recent annual tram patronage (2022/23) is 5.5m, an increase of +15.8% on 2021/22.

During 2022/23 98% of those surveyed were satisfied with the overall journey experience compared to 95% in 2021/22. (Source: Travel Trends and Behaviours Survey 2022/23 Annual Report, Human Intelligence, TfWM).

Modal Share West Bromwich

The latest West Bromwich cordon survey was undertaken in March 2022 and will be undertaken again in March 2024.



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>