

Report to Council

29 October 2024

Subject:	Transport for West Midlands - Update
Director:	Laura Shoaf CBE, Chief Executive of the West Midlands Combined Authority
Contact Officer:	Principal Policy and Strategy Officer, Adam Harrison Adam.harrison@tfwm.org.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Sandwell Council notes the updated report and is asked to consider any other opportunities for the Borough arising in connection with Transport for West Midlands.
- 1.2 That Council notes that work carried out by West Midlands Combined Authority will be presented to the Council's Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Board on 25 March 2025.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 This is a follow up report to the previous report submitted to Council in March 2024, giving an update on key project developments.
- 2.2 Being a constituent member of the West Midlands Combined Authority and its transport arm, Transport for West Midlands, Sandwell Council is offered access to funding and initiatives that positively impact the borough and the people of Sandwell. Sandwell is represented on the WMCA's Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Committee by Cllrs D Millard and D Wilkes.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Council Plan?

Growing Up in Sandwell	Participation as a constituent member of the West Midlands Combined Authority and Transport for West Midlands offers opportunity to contribute positively to all strategic outcomes contained in the Council Plan.
Living in Sandwell	
Thriving Economy in Sandwell	
Healthy in Sandwell	
One Council One Team	

4 Context and Key Issues

Local Transport Plan (LTP)

- 4.1 A new Local Transport Plan (LTP5) is in development by WMCA; a Core Strategy was approved in February 2023, a consultation on draft Big Moves took place in Spring 2023 and work on developing the four LTP5 Area Strategies and the Implementation Plan has been progressed. TDOSC received an update on progress in February 2024.
- 4.2 In parallel to the LTP5, work on progressing the Deeper Devolution Deal and the Integrated Settlement has seen the development of the initial Transport Functional Strategy setting out how that funding will be used to deliver the outcomes agreed with Government over the next spending period. The Functional Strategy is shaped by the LTP5.
- 4.3 Following the Mayoral and General Elections, there have been a number of additional decisions which have had an impact on the finalisation of the LTP5. It is now anticipated, but to be formally confirmed, that the first Integrated Settlement next financial year will provide a 1-year funding profile, to be followed by a multi-year profile in due course. The results of the spending review cannot be anticipated, however the significant pressures on central government budgets are likely to result in less funding available through departmental budgets and any previous indicative allocations such as CRSTS2 could be subject to change.
- 4.4 At the same time, requirement for the region to develop a Local Growth Plan, the new Mayor's independent review of the WMCA's transport capital delivery programme and the region's decision to potentially move towards bus franchising have an impact on what will be set out in the LTP5 Area Strategies and Implementation Plan.
- 4.5 Before the previous Government's 'Plan for Drivers', it was anticipated that updated Local Transport Plan (LTP) guidance was to be published. The new Government have indicated that they expect LTPs to play a key role in setting local priorities for investment and updated guidance will soon be published. It is expected that the proposed Local Growth Plans will also be expected to demonstrate a clear link back to LTPs.
- 4.6 Whilst the work to begin consultation on the final elements of the LTP is now largely complete, progressing this has been paused pending further development of the single settlement discussions and any relevant considerations which may arise from HMG's October 30th Budget. Both of these may plausibly have a material impact on pace and scale of change to the transport system that it is possible to pursue. Consequently, it is

now hoped that the consultation will happen in early 2025 with final adoption of the LTP5 later in 2025.

- 4.7 Informal engagement on the draft LTP5 Area Strategies with TfWM's Keep the West Midlands Moving online community took place in June 2024. This showed that there was broad agreement that the region needed to take more difficult decisions to deliver better outcomes and that there was a need to focus on localised measures to support behaviour change rather than spending significant sums on a limited number of projects.

Bus Network

- 4.8 Buses in the West Midlands accommodate just under 5.1 million passenger journeys each week. Fare paying passenger numbers now exceed pre-covid levels although use amongst citizens eligible for an older and disabled persons bus pass (ENCTS) is slightly behind. Passenger travel patterns have changed with a higher proportion of trips now being undertaken at the weekend and Monday and Friday showing reduced patronage. We believe this reflects how travel patterns have changed post pandemic.
- 4.9 There remains significant financial challenges for Bus operators to continue to provide the current local bus network. Whilst fare revenue has returned to near post-pandemic levels and WMCA have maintained ENCTS at pre-pandemic levels, the costs of operating buses has significantly increased. Operators are reporting that costs have increased by c. 25% and subsequently TfWM have seen the costs of tendered services increase by 25 to 30%. The main drivers to these increased costs are significant increases in wages, engineering, uncertainty over fuel costs and inflationary pressure on all general operating costs.
- 4.10 At the last significant service change date at the start of November 2023, the bus network reduced by just over 12% as a direct result of these challenges of cost increases and reduced revenue.
- 4.11 From the start of the pandemic, bus operators have been supported by national and local funding grants to minimise the impact for passengers and protect the economic recovery of the regions from any significant reductions in services. This Bus Recovery Grant funding was due to come to an end in June 2023. Without further financial support operators were preparing to withdraw an additional 40% of all bus services.
- 4.12 To secure the existing services with bus operators until December 2024, TfWM secured agreement from the Department for Transport 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. A further £21m of support has been devolved to WMCA from DfT and up to £19m of local support has also been identified from WMCA reserves. In total, over £80m of support will be available to operators from July 2023 to end of December 2024 to retain the network.

4.13 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% which was largely actioned in the service changes of November 2023.

The Terms and Conditions also cover:

- An agreed mechanism for reviewing fares.
- Ensuring all marketing for bus services is agreed and coordinated through TfWM.
- Sale of National Express Walsall depot to WMCA.
- Driving improvements in reliability of bus services by only paying grants for the proportion of operated mileage not scheduled.
- Open book accounting process.
- Provision of data to monitor performance.
- Parent Company Guarantee from Mobico to cover any short fall in revenue assumptions and costs for National Express.

4.14 This agreement is due to come to an end in December 2024 which aligns with the end of the National Express financial year.

4.15 TfWM are currently in dialogue with bus operators, and predominantly National Express, with regards to potential funding to continue to support the network from January 2025. Any further grant funding will be subject to approval from the Combined Authority board and also review by the Subsidy Advisory Unit a part of the Competition and Markets Authority. There remains a risk that an agreement on grant funding may not be achieved and that bus operators will seek to reduce their networks to what is purely commercial.

Network Review

4.16 At the point the network support funding comes to an end it is expected that there will be significant changes to the commercial bus network. The scale of change will be dependent upon the whether an agreement can be reached. By implication, this will require changes to the subsidised network

and, subject to funding, an increase in the number of supported services. TfWM are currently working with operators to understand their commercial proposals from January 2025 and the impact on tendered service provision. This process will include engagement with Local Authority partners to ensure their views are considered in this review process.

West Midlands Bus Service Improvement Plan

- 4.17 In 2022, the WMCA secured £87,857m Phase 1 BSIP funding to deliver defined projects. Initial guidance from DfT was for this grant to be utilised on defined projects in the region to bring about transformation to the bus network aligned to the government's National Bus Strategy. The original objectives of the scheme included £39m towards a passenger-led recovery program through incentivising new long-term customers by offering free or reduced fares, nearly £24m for bus network transformation and £18.5m towards a fares freeze.
- 4.18 To prevent the 40% reduction in Bus Services described above and following a change control mechanism with the DfT through their Project Amendment Report (PAR) process, the Phase 1 BSIP funding was amended to deliver the following:
- Fares freeze to July 2023 - £7.708m
 - Bus Passenger Incentive Programme - £23.3m (£19.8m for operator reimbursement of discounted ticketing and £3.5m to support the scheme, through software development, marketing and promotion and staff time).
 - Bus Service Transformation - £10.781m
 - Bus Service Network Support - £39.953m
 - Introduction of Transport Safety Officers (TSO's) - £0.7m
 - Network Performance - £3.2m
 - Bus Network Scheme Development - £1m
 - BSIP Delivery Support - £1m
 - Customer Charter and Monitoring - £0.216m
- 4.19 Delivery of these schemes is underway, on program and subject to monitoring and reporting to the DfT, the West Midlands Bus Alliance, West Midlands Enhanced Partnership Reference Group and WMCA governance processes.
- 4.20 On 23rd October 2023, the Government announced the indicative allocation of a further £150 million of 2024-25 funding for LTAs to improve bus services, as set out in their BSIPs and as part of Network North. This is part of the third phase of BSIP funding and is intended for transformation rather than network support.

4.21 WMCA have been allocated £16,604m of revenue funding to support delivery of the West Midlands BSIP in 2024/25. This is additional to the £87.9m Phase 1 funding.

4.22 The funding has been allocated as follows:

- Pilot use of Bus Auto Vehicle Location (AVL) to provide bus priority at traffic signals.
- Expansion of the Transport Safety Officers (TSOs) initiative.
- Enhanced Marketing and Promotion of Bus network including engagement with harder to reach groups to March 2025.
- Retention of Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) pilot in Coventry to Spring 2025.
- DRT, Ring & Ride and Community Transport capacity enhancements to March 2026.
- Development and Improvement of at-stop Passenger Information including supporting roll out of Real Time Everywhere initiative.
- Better supporting ticket sales across the region.
- Support for Transformational bus service enhancements to March 2026.

4.23 Delivery of these projects has commenced and is being managed through the existing governance processes.

Subsidised Bus Services

4.24 TfWM have been working closely with partners to support the opening of Midland Metropolitan Hospital in October 2024. The following bus network changes are being made in conjunction with National Express West Midlands with effect from 29th September 2024:

- 54/54A Worlds End – West Bromwich (fully subsidised service) will be diverted from Windmill Lane to call at the MMUH site. This service operates 7 days a week up to every 30 minutes.
- 89 West Bromwich – Bearwood (partially subsidised service) – this service will no longer operate to Bearwood and will instead run to MMUH as its new terminus. This service operates 7 days a week up to every 30 minutes.
- 82 Bearwood – Birmingham / 87 Dudley – Birmingham (fully commercial service) – buses travelling towards Bearwood or Dudley will additionally call at Grove Lane bus stops adjacent to McDonalds, a short walk into the MMUH site.

- 4.25 TfWM are additionally working with MMUH to deliver on-site bus stop infrastructure and ticketing incentives to encourage greater uptake of sustainable travel options amongst hospital staff.
- 4.26 Due to the changes being made to the 54 service to accommodate MMUH, this route will no longer serve Europa Village on a Sunday. Currently, Europa Village is served Monday to Saturday by Diamond Bus 61 West Bromwich to Great Barr. The 61 service is being revised to add a Sunday service to ensure continued provision for Europa Village.
- 4.27 A number of subsidised bus services in the Sandwell Borough are approaching the expiry of their contract. We are, therefore, conducting a business-as-usual review and re-tender of these bus services. It is expected that contracts will be awarded mid to late October, with new contracts starting on 5th January. A communications and engagement plan will be actioned to engage with customers and stakeholders to inform them of any changes to subsidised provision in advance of 5th January.

Ring and Ride

- 4.28 TfWM are currently undertaking a procurement exercise for the provision of Ring and Ride services in the region. This includes service enhancements and modernisation to deliver the endorsed Target Operating Model for the Service. This includes wider roll out of booking journeys through the app, introduction of a resized and more modern and rebranded fleet, a review of the fares and ticketing strategy, increased engagement to ensure greater diversity. There will be a greater emphasis on partnership delivery to deliver this service modernisation. The new contract is expected to commence in April 2025.

Rail Network - Train Service Delivery

- 4.29 Punctuality and reliability on the region's rail network continues to fluctuate. Cancellations remain a particular concern, with several train companies experiencing difficulties with staff availability, often as a result of sickness combined with high levels of annual leave. The staffing situation on intercity operator CrossCountry Trains was such that in August the operator requested – and was granted – permission from DfT to temporarily reduce its timetable. This was done to give the operator time to address its training backlog, which was hampering its ability to translate its driver establishment to drivers available to work trains. The timetable reductions will be in place until 9 November. During this time CrossCountry will also implement a Remedial Plan, which has been contracted with the DfT.

4.30 Local services have experienced similar challenges, with routes between Birmingham and Hereford, Birmingham and Shrewsbury, and the Snow Hill Lines (Stratford-upon-Avon/Dorridge to Kidderminster via Birmingham Snow Hill) most affected. Other routes have been more resilient. The variations are a consequence of staffing and sickness levels differing across the depots that resource the different train routes. WMRE continues to work with train operators and Network Rail to ensure that they are focused on improving performance for customers.

Rail Industrial Action

4.31 In August 2024 a breakthrough was achieved in the long running dispute between the train drivers' union ASLEF and the 14 DfT contracted train companies. After talks between the union and the government, the former agreed to put a revised offer to its members. This offer was for a 5% backdated pay rise for 2022/23, a 4.75% rise for 23/24, and a 4.5% increase for 24/25. In contrast to the proposal put forward in April 2023, this offer was not conditional on the union accepting changes to terms and conditions or working arrangements.

4.32 The offer being considered by ASLEF's members differs in several important ways to the deal struck between the rail industry and the RMT union in November 2023. This agreement only dealt with pay up to the 22/23 financial year, with an understanding that a 23/24 pay offer would depend on a commitment to negotiate reforms to working practices at a local level. In response to the ASLEF offer, the RMT, who are about to commence talks with the government and Network Rail on 23/24 and beyond, have stated that they now expect to be offered the same unconditional terms as their fellow union.

Rail Industry Reform

4.33 Following the King's Speech in early July, the government has been continuing to push to deliver its rail reform aims quickly. In particular, the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill has been making progress through parliament and is expected to make its way onto the statute books shortly. This Bill will amend existing legislation so that appointing a public sector operator is the default, rather than a last resort (as is the case currently) and is an early milestone for government plans of bringing train operators into the public sector.

4.34 The Railways Bill, which is the core legislation required to bring the new Great British Railways organisation into existence. This will see the splitting out of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill

from other rail reform legislation was done with the deliberate aim of getting the latter delivered quickly.

- 4.35 On 3 September, the Secretary of State (SoS) made an announcement launching the new Shadow Great British Railways. This is another indication of government desire to build and establish momentum with the delivery of rail reform. The establishment of Shadow GBR was expected, having been trailed in Labour's Getting Britain Moving Plan, however, details of exactly what it will look like have been hard to come by. The announcement confirms that the leaders of Network Rail, the Department for Transport and DfT OLR Holdings (the government's back up train operator) have been remitted to develop a delivery plan for Shadow GBR, although there remains little detail confirmed beyond this.
- 4.36 In this context, WMRE has been developing a vision for its future role which is designed to make the most of the twin opportunities presented by rail reform on the one hand and further English devolution on the other hand. The document sets out how WMRE's vision for enhancing local control and local accountability over the rail network would support its member authorities in delivering their wider objectives on growth, jobs and emissions and integrating rail into the wider transport network. The document is currently in draft and is undergoing a round of local stakeholder engagement. It will then be used with wider stakeholders to promote its aim of further local control over the region's rail network.

Midlands Rail Hub

- 4.37 WMRE continues to strengthen its role as Client Partner for the Midlands Rail Hub programme alongside the DfT. Following the announcement of £123m of development funding in February 2024, Network Rail have commenced the main procurements for the design and delivery of the infrastructure and signalling contracts. These procurements are currently live, with contract award anticipated in June 2025.
- 4.38 There is a need for continued promotion of the project at all levels nationally and locally to ensure the full benefits (East and West) are delivered. WMRE intend to work with the Mayors of both the West and East Midlands to ensure broad support for the programme.
- 4.39 WMRE is working closely with NR, DfT and Midlands Connect to inform the detail of the future train service specification (and therefore customer benefits) for the project. They are also promoting the need to ensure transport integration and the delivery of wider regeneration benefits arising from Midlands Rail Hub, by close working with TfWM, WMCA and other WMRE partner authorities (including Sandwell).

Fares and Ticketing

4.40 WMRE and TfWM are continuing their joint work to implement the multi-modal, best value, capped fare Pay-As-You-Go (PAYG) pilot scheme and accompanying rail fares reforms. The Full Business Case for the scheme is currently going through the government approval process and is subject to significant scrutiny as a result of the wider government funding pressures.

Project Updates

4.41 A headline summary of activity is set out below:

4.42 Sprint

Sprint Phase 2 works in Sandwell have been deferred following the decision of WMCA Board.

4.43 Dudley Port Interchange Transformation Programme

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.

4.44 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.

4.45 £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 autumn 2025 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.

4.46 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.

4.47 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 the first half of 2025. 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.

4.48 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 funding allocation where Dudley Port is identified as the regional top priority for step free access.

4.49 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.

4.50 Earlier this year, we opened the expanded station at University, in support of the West Midlands' world-class institutions. We are continuing to work hard to:

- 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.

Metro Programme

4.51 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:

4.52 Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension – Work continues to proceed on this extension, and in particular in Dudley Town 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 and the value for money case confirmed to deliver the second phase to the Merry Hill stop by refreshing the scheme business case. WMCA approved submission of the Phase 2 refreshed business case to DfT in July and it is currently being reviewed and a decision is expected following the Autumn budget early November.

4.53 WMCA continue to work on resolving the financial shortfall to deliver to Brierley Hill in partnership with Dudley MBC. MMA continue to progress with works to Dudley resulting in an increased level of activity along the route with all of the structures now installed or refurbished and track installation progressing in Dudley centre and along the disused rail corridor. Service is expected to start to Dudley in Autumn 2025.

4.54 Birmingham Eastside Extension (BEE) – Work has now completed on Section 1 on Lower Bull St with tracks, paving and soft landscaping installed. Demolition of King’s Parade was completed in June 2023. Section 5 works in Digbeth High Street have completed with a few outstanding commissioning and snagging items to close out before handover to BCC. Works commenced on Section 2 in February with the crossing of Moor Street Queensway due to complete end September. Works will continue to install the tracks and new kerb lines on Albert Street and in front of the Clayton Hotel.

4.55 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 addition, due to cost increases approval of the scheme is subject to a refresh of the business case and confirmation that the full project still offers value for money. We will be working towards operating to the Clayton Hotel by summer 2025 in advance of the full route being opened.

4.56 *Roads Programme*

Hagley Road – Hagley Road Corridor formed part of the CRSTS funding and the Strategic Outline Business Case was approved in October 2023 WMCA assurance process. Delivery funding for bus priority measures on the corridor was deferred at the July 2024 WMCA Board. However, development activities will continue including a medium-term study to consider further option appraisal for rapid transit along the corridor, including Metro.

4.57 Cross City Bus Package 3 – This package of bus priority measures is funded directly by DfT through ‘A better deal for bus users’ funding. The

corridor covers Dudley to Birmingham via Oldbury, Smethwick and Cape Hill and also the A435 to the south of Birmingham.

- 4.58 Interventions proposed within Sandwell MBC are at: Burnt Tree Island, Dudley Rd on the approach to Oldbury Ringway, Cape Hill and on the A457 between Grove Lane and Icknield Port Road.
- 4.59 Proposals for Burnt Tree Island include improvements for all modes and proposals are integrated with the A461 Walk, Cycle, Bus corridor proposals promoted by Black Country Transport. The scheme has been publicly consulted on twice, with design work now being completed in advance of final scheme approval and construction.
- 4.60 Proposals for the other locations in Sandwell are still at an earlier stage of development with TfWM seeking to integrate the Cross City bus proposals with active travel proposals in the area around Midland Metropolitan Hospital. The Cross City Bus programme of delivery will support improved connectivity and cost-effective efficient bus operations as we explore moving towards a franchised model of bus service provision.
- 4.61 Cross City Bus Package 6 – This package of bus priority measures is funded via the CRSTS package and covers the corridor between West Bromwich and Birmingham along West Bromwich High Street and then Holyhead Road and then Soho Rd. Proposals for West Bromwich High Street have been integrated with active travel proposals led by SMBC and which are now being implemented. This includes bus stop buildouts and enhanced bus shelter infrastructure. TfWM's other proposals in Sandwell on this corridor are modest in nature and include minor amendments to traffic signals in West Bromwich, a short section of bus lane on West Bromwich High Street towards M5 J1 and bus shelter upgrades. More significant measures are however proposed to the east of Island Road on the A41 in the Birmingham CC area.
- 4.62 TfWM would have liked to provide more bus priority on the A41 towards M5J1, but traffic modelling has indicated that any change to the current way the road is configured would likely worsen the existing situation for bus services along this corridor without very significant expenditure beyond the funding currently allocated. We are however working with SMBC colleagues to see if a larger scheme for M5J1 bus, walking and cycling improvements might be possible for future funding.
- 4.63 Cross City Bus Package 2 – This package of bus priority measures is funded via the CRSTS package and covers the corridor between Longbridge in the south of Birmingham to Hamstead in the north, just

entering the Sandwell MBC area. Proposals are at an early stage on this corridor, with modelling underway to assess the impact of proposals.

4.64 Metro Operations - Midland Metro Limited (MML)

4.65 WMCA continue to work with CAF in order to commence the final tranche of tram repairs. CAF has now completed the proposed repairs elsewhere and tested this over the summer. WMCA has reviewed the proposed repair solution and is satisfied with the proposed solution. WMCA continue to work with CAF to agree the repairing solution. The current aim is to commence repairs in November 2024. WMCA are working with Dudley Very Light Rail Centre to see if they can accommodate the repairs there.

4.66 The new fleet of trams is performing well with very few service affecting failures. The operator is working hard to improve timetable performance with reliability hitting 92% in August. Whilst still short of the target of 95% there is an improving trend and Midland Metro Limited (MML) are reviewing further opportunities for improvement. Over recent months staff availability has impacted on reliability. This was a particular problem during June. MML are carrying out continual recruitment to fill gaps in their establishment and also to increase the driver establishment ready for delivery of the extensions.

4.67 Work continues with the delivery of the off-tram ticketing system with most Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) now installed. It is hoped these TVMs will go live later this year with validators going live in Spring 2025.

4.68 Disruptive works on Dudley Street Bridge were completed successfully and were a great example of how Metro and local authority highways partners can work together to ensure minimal disruption to both the highway and tram network. Thanks go to colleagues in Sandwell for this.

Active Travel Fund

4.69 Sandwell's ATF Tranche 3 programme includes:

- A461 between Dudley Port and Great bridge part of WBHE Sustainable Access Scheme – in construction

4.70 *Cycling for Everyone*

4.71 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 for 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

4.72 The programme includes Dr Bikes, Adult and Child Cycle Training and Cycle Maintenance Training. Sustrans have completed a series of Dr Bike/Cycle Security Measures in Sandwell over the Summer and will continue delivery through Autumn and Winter 2024. Living Streets have been appointed to deliver seven Walking Zone Community Street Audits within Sandwell. Each of the following routes have been selected in collaboration with Sandwell:

- 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
- Windsor Olympus Academy, Smethwick
- Fountain Lane, Oldbury
- Causeway Green Road
- Sheepwash- Philip Road to Dudley Port Railway

Living Streets Walk to School Programme

4.72 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 TfWM until 31 March 2025.

4.73 Data collected from the Summer Term (April – March 2024) report shows that Sandwell had 24 schools involved in the Living Streets 'Walk Once a Week' Programme. There were 8,250 pupils logging their journeys and there had been a decline in car journeys all the way to school by 27%. Yew Tree Primary School topped the Summer Leaderboard in the Midlands, coming 4th out of all the participating national schools.

West Midlands Cycle Hire (WMCH)

4.74 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.

4.75 Bikes are available to hire across 8 docking stations in Sandwell, focused on West Bromwich. Sites include close to the West Bromwich Metro stop, Dartmouth Park and Sandwell and Dudley Rail station. Key statistics from Sandwell have been detailed below for reference:

- Total rides within Sandwell to-date: Pedal bikes, 7,474 journeys; e-Bikes, 716 journeys
- Average ride time per journey – 33 minutes
- Average distance travelled per journey – 3.22km
- 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.
- 94% 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

4.76 Development Work Stream

4.77 TfWM completed a Capability and Ambition Fund (CAF, formerly Local Authority Capability Fund) self-assessment for Active Travel England (ATE) in December 2023. TfWM successfully retained our Level 3 rating. We are one of only six authorities in the country who have received this higher score.

4.78 As a result of our Level 3 rating, ATE awarded WMCA £3.1m of additional CAF funding for 2024/25. The following schemes are being progressed through the development project cycle (e.g. feasibility studies, concept design) with CAF allocations received to date: Blackheath to Oldbury WM LCWIP route, A457 Oldbury to Smethwick Black Country LCWIP route and WM LCWIP Route – Tipton to West Bromwich, A4182 Spon Lane to Roebuck Lane, Carter's Green A41.

4.79 An ATF4e (extension) bid of £1.355m was submitted by WMCA to ATE in November 2023 which includes the Sandwell, Blackheath to Oldbury Cycleway (Ph1) scheme. The bid was successful with the full amount awarded to WMCA, and Sandwell are currently developing this scheme. The outcome will be known later this financial year.

4.80 *Workwise*

TfWM's Employment Outreach team works with Job Centres, libraries, local employers and training providers to promote travel schemes relating to employment in the area. 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 Network passes.

122 applicants in the Sandwell area were helped with travel to work through Workwise in the last seven months.

4.81 During September 2024, the Employment Outreach Lead talked to residents at a Catch the bus month event in Sandwell at Wednesbury bus station. 29 people signed up to a 1-week travel pass providing them with free local bus travel for a week. The Employment Outreach team continues to expand promotion to a portfolio of virtual and in-person meetings and events. These include jobs fairs, meetings with job centres, training centres and employers.

4.82 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. Figures are from March 2024 to August 2024 to be in line with report dates.

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

4.83 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.

4.84 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, the number of TSOs has increased to 7 in post. An additional 6 TSOs joined us in January 2024 and a further 4 joined us in late September 2024. Our current establishment is 10 TSOs. They are all trained in all Civil Interventions

(including Byelaws) as well as their Traffic Power to stop and direct traffic. They will be receiving some new training for Violence Against Women and Girls and linked behaviours.

- 4.85 Year to date (2024), the Transport Safety Officers have been on patrol for **6,461** hours, **5,814 of which were** directly linked to our Tasking priorities. A milestone figure of **5,716** Verbal warnings were given out, **226,241** interactions with travellers and staff were made and **59,619** engagements with travellers and staff were carried out.
- 4.86 The TSO's have provided a highly visible presence around the transport interchanges in Sandwell, the four bus stations at Cradley Heath, Wednesbury and West Bromwich and Bearwood, Metro stations and bus shelters and they have travelled on all modes of public transport dealing with issues identified in the Safer Travel Tasking and pacesetter process or by partners.
- 4.87 The TSO's have worked closely with WMCA CCTV Control Room, Safer Travel Police recently to deal with a rise in criminal activity at Wednesbury Parkway Metro Park and Ride. This work has led to offenders being identified and arrested. They have also continued to work closely with the West Bromwich Neighbourhood Policing Team and West Bromwich BID 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.
- 4.88 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.
- 4.89 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.

4.90 The Events and Emergency Planning Team contribute to Sandwell’s Safety Advisory Group, seeking to minimise any transport disruption that may result from local events such as religious processions and West Bromwich Albion football fixtures, as well as looking for opportunities to improve the travel experience for event attendees.

4.91 Both teams also liaise closely with the region’s Local Resilience Forum (LRF) to ensure resilience communication and situational awareness is maintained across the region. Most recently, the Events and Emergency Planning team helped to create a snow-based severe weather exercise for the LRF which was delivered to multi-agency partners, including Sandwell’s Resilience team, in November 2023. The team are now developing a heatwave-based exercise for this Spring.

5. Alternative Options

5.1 Become a non-constituent member of WMCA (TfWM) - Participation as a constituent member of the WMCA enables Sandwell to deliver improvements to the locality that would otherwise be more difficult to achieve. In addition, through WMCA activity, we can ensure that Sandwell residents have the skills to access new employment opportunities both here in Sandwell and across the region, with excellent public transport available connecting the whole of the West Midlands. These benefits would be lost if Sandwell became a non-constituent member.

6 Implications

Resources:	The contribution to Transport for West Midlands from Sandwell Council for 2024/25 is £13.9 million.
Legal and Governance:	Part 6 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (“the 2009 Act”) provides for the establishment of combined authorities for the areas of two or more local authorities in England. Combined authorities are bodies corporate which may be given power to exercise specified functions of a local authority under sections 104 and 105 of the 2009 Act, and power to exercise specified functions of any other public authority under section 105A of the 2009 Act.
Risk:	Section 21 of the West Midlands Combined Authority (Functions and Amendments) Order 2017 has the effect that where costs are incurred by TfWM and are not met from other sources of income, then they fall to

	be met by the seven constituent councils, including Sandwell.
Equality:	The priorities of TfWM reflect the equality and diversity of the West Midlands, including striving to create prosperity through a strong and collective economic strategy and the policy aspiration to champion all that makes the West Midlands a Great Place to Live. The equality impact of any specific proposals will need to be addressed in reports to the WMCA Board or the appropriate decision-making body, as well as through Health Equality Impact Assessments.
Health and Wellbeing:	All constituent members of TfWM are better placed to contribute and influence the Health and Social Care offer for local residents and create: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more sustainable local health and care economy; • Improved quality and experience of care; • Improved population health. The health impact of any specific proposal will need to be addressed in reports to the appropriate decision-making body and through Health Equality Impact Assessments.
Social Value	There is potential in all schemes and initiatives, particularly those delivered directly in Sandwell, to have a positive impact on Social Value.
Climate Change	The Council will continue to work with TfWM to identify net zero projects and programmes to implement in Sandwell.
Corporate Parenting	There are no Corporate Parenting implications arising from this report.

6 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Network Monitoring

7 Background Papers

N/A.

Appendix 1

Headline Measures

The table below shows performance change in July 2024 compared to the previous report (December 2023). Annual data (2022/23 and 2023/24) is also provided where available. Data is annualised (unless stated otherwise) and for the whole WMCA area.

All data is annualised	Dec-23	Jul-24	% Change	2022/23	2023/24	% Change
Bus Patronage	223.6m	240.3m	+7.5%	210.9m	232.2m	+10.1%
Rail Patronage	55.0m	56.0m	+1.7%	56.6m	55.2m	-2.4%
Tram Patronage	8.4m	8.1m	-2.8%	5.5m	8.3m	+49.9%
Ring & Ride Patronage	193.7k	220.4k	+13.8%	159.3k	206.6k	+29.7%

Bus

Current annualised bus patronage (July 2024) stands at 240.3 million an increase of +7.5% compared to 223.6 million in December 2023 (annualised). Bus patronage in 2023/24 increased by +10.1% compared to 2022/23. Monthly bus patronage (July 2024) is now at 93.6% of pre-covid levels (February 2020).

During 2023/24, 79% of those surveyed were satisfied with the overall journey experience compared to 81% in 2022/23. (Source: Travel Trends and Behaviours Survey 2023/24 Annual Report, Human Intelligence, TfWM). The highest rated attribute was personal security on the bus and while waiting. The lowest rated attribute was punctuality.

Rail

Current annualised rail patronage (July 2024) is approximately 75.7% of pre-covid patronage and stands at approximately 56.0 million per year (an increase of +1.7% compared to December 2023). Rail patronage in 2023/24 was 55.2 million (-2.4%) compared to 56.6 million in 2022/23.

During 2023/24, 92% of those surveyed were satisfied with the overall journey experience compared to 90% in 2022/23 (Source: Travel Trends and Behaviours Survey 2023/24 Annual Report, Human Intelligence, TfWM). The highest rated attributes were length of time the journey took and security while waiting. The lowest rated attribute was value for money.

Tram

Current annualised tram patronage is 8.1 million (July 2024), a decrease of -2.8% compared to December 2023. Tram patronage increased by +49.9% in 2023/24 compared to 2022/23, from 5.5 million to 8.3 million.

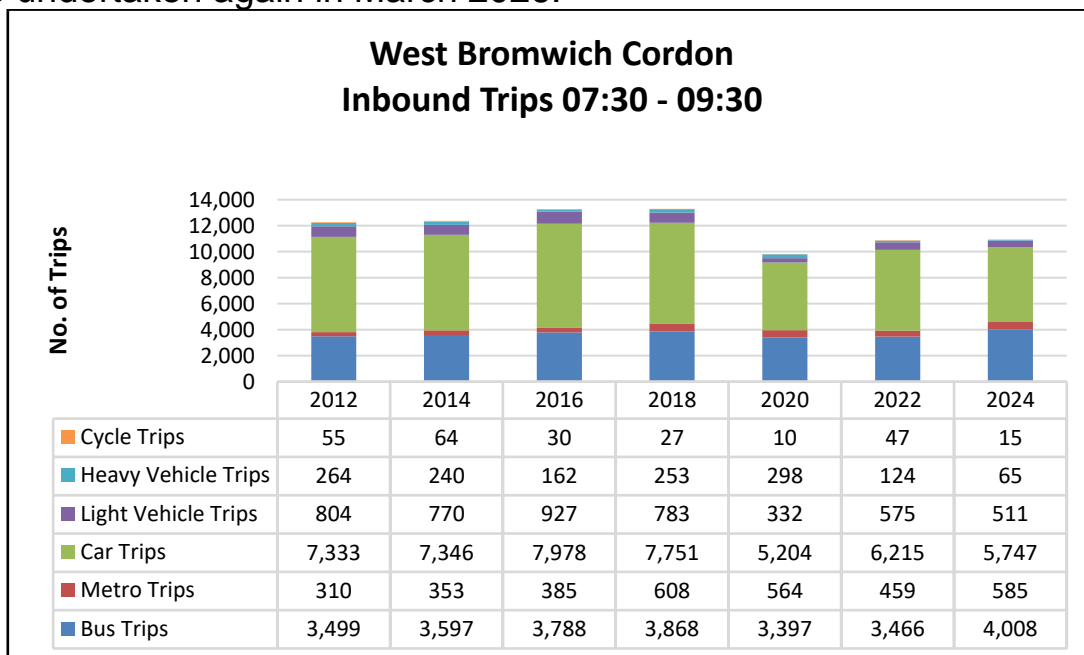
During 2023/24, 95% of those surveyed were satisfied with the overall journey experience compared to 98% in 2022/23. (Source: Travel Trends and Behaviours Survey 2023/24 Annual Report, TfWM). The highest rated attribute was the helpfulness of staff and the lowest rated attribute was amount of personal space.

Ring & Ride

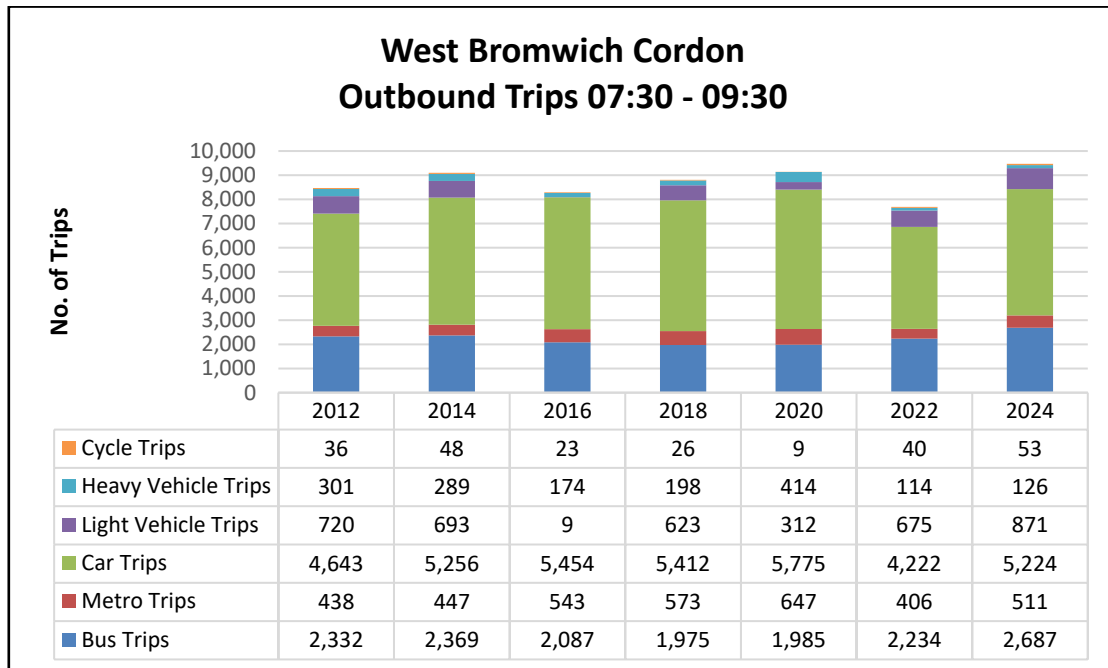
Current annualised ring and ride patronage is 220.4 thousand (July 2024), an increase of +13.8% compared to December 2023. Ring and ride patronage increased by +29.7% in 2023/24 compared to 2022/23.

Modal Share- West Bromwich

The latest West Bromwich cordon survey was undertaken in March 2024 and will be undertaken again in March 2026.



The Inbound AM Peak (07.30-09.30) public transport mode share has increased in 2024 to 42.0% (bus 36.7%, tram 5.4%) from 36.1% in 2022, due to an increase in bus and tram trips and a decrease in all other modes. Overall, there are the same number of inbound trips in 2024 as in 2022, just 45 more inbound trips. Bus trips have increased by +15.6% and tram trips by +27.5%.



The Outbound AM Peak (07.30-09.30) public transport mode share has decreased in 2024 to 33.8% (bus 28.4%, tram 5.4%) from 34.3% in 2022, despite an increase in bus and tram trips. Outbound trips increased in 2024 compared to 2022 with almost 2,000 additional trips.