

Bus Franchising update

Sandwell Briefing

18 February 2026

Why are buses important?

Buses are crucial to connecting people to work, education, shops and leisure

Buses support objectives to reduce congestion, emissions and ensure transport affordability

2024 study showed bus is worth £4.4bn per year to the West Midlands economy

27% of households in the West Midlands do not have access to a car, rising to 40% in some areas

240 million

bus journeys in the West Midlands in 2024

Why Franchising?

In May 2025, the West Midlands Combined Authority Board approved a transition to a Bus Franchising Operating Model, following Public Consultation that saw 75% support for bringing buses back under public control.

- **Passengers First.** The goal is to shift from a system driven by private profit to one that prioritises passengers by working with local people to ensure services are affordable, reliable, and meet the needs of the community. Longer term, Franchising provides the opportunity to co-ordinate and integrate the bus and wider public transport network to significantly increase the customer experience over time.
- **Cost & Control risks.** The West Midlands bus market is increasingly not commercially viable. Significant public subsidy is currently required to continue to offer our residents a comprehensive bus network. Despite the subsidies paid each year there is currently very limited control over the services, frequencies, fares or routes.
- **Public Control through a Contracting Model.** Unlike the current system where private companies decide routes and fares, under franchising, TfWM will be in control of the network's design, routes and fares. TfWM will put routes and services out to tender, with private companies bidding for the contracts to operate them.

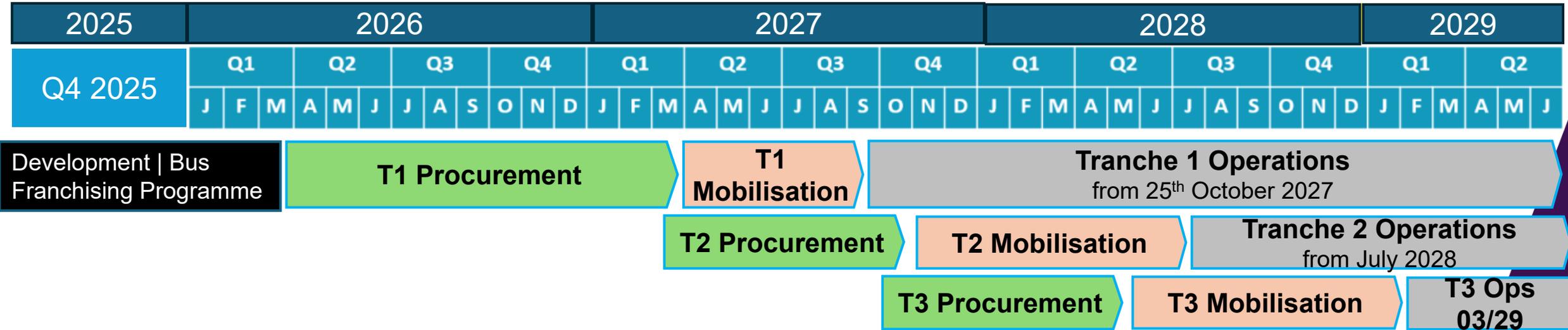
The Model

Under the future Franchising operating model TfWM will design routes, specify hours of operation, set service standards and award Operator contracts following competitive procurement. Operator contracts will be for set periods of time.

- ✓ TfWM will take the revenue risk (i.e. keep/reinvest the fares)
- ✓ TfWM will own the bus fleet and bus depots
- ✓ Operators retain Operational Staff (e.g. Drivers, Engineers)
- ✓ Consolidation of functions currently shared between TfWM and Operators (e.g. Customer Services, marketing, network planning) offering economies of scale
- ✓ TfWM will continue to manage infrastructure (e.g. bus stops, information provision)
- ✓ Local Councils will continue to manage highways



Bus Reform Programme | Status update



Key progress

- Programme Team and key appointments | Sept 25 to Jan 26
- Procurement and Legal Partners onboarded | From November 25
- New Governance stood up | From Dec 25
- Development of Franchising Operating Model | Currently
- Revised Procurement strategy and timeline agreed | Jan 26
- Pre Market engagement with Operators | April 2026

Tranche 1 Key dates
 ITT Release | 17 August 26
 Final tender submission | 18 Dec 26
Operational | 25 Oct 27

Bus depots acquired
 Walsall
 Acocks Green Depot | End Dec 25
 West Bromwich Bus park | End Dec 25

Bus Reform Governance Overview

	January				February				March					April				May				June					
Week Beginning	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	2	9	16	23	30	6	13	20	27	4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29	
Political meetings (POG)																											
Officer meetings (BR Panel)																											
Internal Governance																											
																											
Key decisions	Decision																Governance route										
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bus depot acquisition WMCA Board Sept 25 Approved • Strategic direction on fleet WMCA Board Jan 26 Approved • Revised Procurement strategy and timeline BRSG Jan 26 Approved • Small operators / contracts strategy BRSG Feb 26 Approved • Branding options Mayor & Met Leaders (TBC) 																<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PB, SG, Leaders Briefings, WMCA Board • PB, SG, POG, Leaders Briefings, WMCA Board • PB, BRSG • PB, BRSG • TBC 										

Key

<p>Political</p> <p> Political Oversight Group</p>	<p>Officer</p> <p> Bus Reform Panel</p>	<p>Internal meetings</p> <p> Bus Reform Programme Board</p> <p> Bus Reform Steering Group</p>
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As of January 2026



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