

# Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

## Transport for West Midlands (TfWM)

March 2024

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### 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](https://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 was undertaken on the 6 Big Moves including engagement with underrepresented groups in responses to previous consultations. It is currently proposed that final versions of the Big Moves will be presented to WMCA for agreement at the same time as the Area Strategies and Implementation Plan (see below).

- 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. 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.

Subsequent to the previous update in October and the update to Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board in November there have been substantial national policy developments that have affected progress and timescales. In particular, changes to Government's plans for HS2 and the repurposing of funds for "Network North", the publication of the "Plan for Drivers", and ratification of WMCA's "Deeper Devolution Deal" including maturation of proposals to develop a Single (Funding) Settlement and associated Single Outcomes Framework for the WMCA area.

WMCA's Transport Delivery and Overview Scrutiny (TDOS) Committee also received an update on LTP development on 22 January 2024 providing an update on these factors. Membership of TDOS from Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) includes Cllr Aqeela Choudhry (LAB) and Cllr Steve Melia (LAB).

The TDOS report can be found [here](#), but the most relevant excerpt is as follows:

6.1 *The original programme for the LTP would have seen the draft Area Strategies and Implementation Plan presented to WMCA Board in early 2024. However, following discussions with the WMCA Lead Member for Transport and Strategic Transport Board the Area Strategies are now planned to presented to WMCA Board during the summer of 2024. There are a number of reasons for this:*

- *Government is still yet to publish updated guidance on Local Transport Plans. Based on earlier drafts seen by TfWM we are confident that WM LTP5 is broadly in line with the approach that Government will set out, however, following the publication of 'Plan for Drivers' it is considered sensible to try and wait until the final guidance has been published.*
- *The outputs of the Area Strategy work are demonstrating that whilst there are some positive impacts of the current proposals, there remain some significant gaps and a need to consider how we could improve the impact against outcomes. There are significant questions about how best to respond to the wider challenges facing the transport system including the future shape of the public transport network and how we might tackle the wider issues of behaviour change.*
- *The recent announcements on funding following the cancellation of HS2 north of Birmingham and the Network North announcements mean that there has now been a significant uplift in the amount of funding that will be available as part of the second City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS 2) from 2027 (from £1.3bn to £2.6bn). This now provides the need to revisit the proposed pipeline of schemes as part of the second delivery period and ensure that development can start to allow the region to be ready to deliver from 2027.*
- *Linked to this the region will need to show Government how well it is delivering against outcomes / targets linked to the Single Settlement process and the LTP, as the functional strategy for transport within the Single Settlement, will need to ensure we are*

*achieving the agreed outcomes using the funding being devolved to the region. The workstreams around the Single Settlement, functional and place-based strategies and the single outcomes framework which are linked to the LTP and CRSTS 2 mean that a revised timetable which lands the Area Strategies in Summer 2024 should help ensure improved alignment with these wider policy positions, and in particular the local authority led place-based strategies.*

- 6.2 *To inform the on-going work, informal engagement on the Area Strategy outputs / Investment Strategy options will take place with residents using the Keeping the West Midlands Moving Online Community early in 2024. This will help provide local views on the issues and the options within the Area Strategies that would most likely be supported. This in turn will inform formal consultation and wider engagement later in 2024 which will be undertaken in collaboration with local authorities.*

As a result, drafting and development of the area strategies and implementation plan is still ongoing and plans now mean that the drafts will not be able to be considered by WMCA board until after the Mayoral election. It is currently proposed that WMCA board may consider the drafts in September 2024,

The additional time that it will take to develop and make public the draft area strategies and implementation plans will allow for interim informal engagement with residents which will be valuable information for members performing scrutiny and policymaking functions.

TfWM will arrange furthermore detailed update to SMBC on the development of the Black Country Area Strategy and the Implementation Plan to continue to enable local scrutiny via the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board in due course.

## **2. Bus Network**

### **Background**

Buses in the West Midlands accommodate more than 4.8 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 is a reflection of how travel patterns have changed post pandemic.

Post pandemic there remains significant financial challenges for 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 as 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 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.

At the last significant service change date at the start of November 2023, the network had reduced by just over 12% as a direct result of these challenges of cost increases and reduced revenue. From the start of the pandemic bus operators have been supported by national and local funding grants to minimise the impact for passengers and 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 additional 40% of all bus services.

To secure the existing services with bus operators until December 2024, TfWM has 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.

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 that 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.

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

## **Network Review**

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. 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 undertake a network review to deliver an optimised and sustainable bus network from January 2025. This process will include engagement and input from Local Authority partners to ensure their views are considered in this review process.

## West Midlands Bus Service Improvement Plan

In 2022 the West Midlands Combined Authority secured £87,857,760 of Phase 1 funding to deliver defined projects within the scope of the West Midlands Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).

Initial guidance from the 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 governments National Bus Strategy. The original objectives of the scheme included £39m towards a passenger led recovery program through incentivising new long-term customers through offering initial free or reduced fares, nearly £24m for bus network transformation and £18.5m towards a fares freeze.

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

Delivery of these schemes is underway and 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.

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.

WMCA have provisionally been allocated up to £16,604,000 of revenue funding to support delivery of the West Midlands BSIP in 2024/25. This is additional to the £87.9m Phase 1 funding.

Subject to approval of the DfT and the WMCA Board at its meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> March it is proposed to allocate the funding to the following projects;

- 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.

We are expecting approval to commence delivery of these projects in early April 2024. Delivery and monitoring will be managed through the existing BSIP Governance process.

### **3. Rail Network**

#### **Rail Industrial Action**

Industrial action continues to have a significant impact upon the customer experience, both locally and nationally. The latest round of strike action (called by driver's union ASLEF) occurred between 29 January and 6 February. This action followed the pattern established before Christmas, with a week of an overtime ban (also known as action short of a strike, or ASOS) punctuated by different days of strike action for different train companies.

A route to resolving this national dispute with ASLEF is unclear. An offer linking pay to reform was rejected by the union in 2023, and no new offer has been forthcoming. In more positive news, in late 2023 the RMT union accepted a pay deal worth 5%, bringing their dispute with the rail industry to a close.

#### **Station Retail Reform Consultation**

On 31 October 2023 the government announced that it had asked the 13 train operators who were consulting on changes to railway station booking office opening hours to withdraw their proposals. This followed the decision of passenger watchdogs Transport Focus and London TravelWatch to formally object to all of the proposals put forward by the train operators.

Whilst each set of proposals were slightly different, Transport Focus and London TravelWatch identified a number of overarching issues that applied to most. These were:

- The need for – and absence of - a nationally agreed, and enforceable, queuing time metric for Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs);
- The need for – and absence of - an alternative engagement/consultation mechanism for any future material changes in staffing at a station; and
- The need for greater clarity on how proposed station Welcome Points/Zones would work in practice (these Points/Zones were an idea developed by the rail industry after the consultation period started, and thus customers were unable to comment on them, another point made by the watchdogs).

The outcome of this decision by government is that stations in the West Midlands run by Avanti West Coast, Chiltern Railways, West Midlands Trains and Great Western Railway will continue to operate as they do today.

## **Rail Industry Reform**

The King's Speech in November confirmed the expected lack of legislation for Great British Railways (GBR) in the final session of parliament before the General Election. In a surprising move, it did provide for the pre-legislative scrutiny of a Draft Rail Reform Bill, something which may be helpful in demonstrating continued government commitment to rail reform. It may also support with the Bill's passage once the legislation is laid, however, it still essentially means that there is no firm date for the formation of GBR and that, therefore, the current rail industry structure will remain in place for the foreseeable future.

The Labour Party position on rail reform, important in the context of the upcoming General Election, has been gradually becoming clearer over the last few months. In a recent media interview, shadow Secretary of State Louise Haigh articulated a position of "bring[ing] decisions around the infrastructure...and the operators into one body", which would seem to indicate a similar type of organisation to the proposed GBR. More detail on the Labour policy position is expected shortly.

At a regional level, WMRE's work with the Great British Railways Transition Team (GBRTT) to develop a partnership continues. The first Partnership Oversight Group, the most senior level of governance for the partnership involving WMRE, GBRTT, the Department for Transport and Network Rail, took place in late 2023 and marked the formal start of partnership development. The lack of clarity on the formation of GBR has presented some barriers to developing the long-term shape of a future GBR/WMRE relationship. WMRE remains resolute that, despite these difficulties, the partnership must not lose focus on this longer term aim, which will ultimately deliver the commitments in the Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Deal (DDD) to greater local accountability for the rail network in the region.

The partnership is also being used to investigate how work which GBRTT has already done could be focussed in a more specific way in the West Midlands to help support our ambitions, for example, in helping to generate a regional rail customer experience vision.

## **Midlands Rail Hub**

Work continues on Midlands Rail Hub (MRH) and the Government confirmed its commitment to fund £123M to take the project on to Full Business Case. The Secretary of State launched this stage of the project at Moor Street station on 29 February.

WMRE has secured a formal role in the governance of MRH as a client partner alongside Midlands Connect, and we will be working closely with all partners as the detailed development of the scheme continues.

## **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 cancelled 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 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.

## **Fares and Ticketing**

Significant activity continues on the development of a Pay-As-You-Go (PAYG) ticketing solution for the West Midlands and associated fares reform. WMRE and TfWM officers are engaging with multiple workstreams with the Great British Railways Transition Team (GBRTT), DfT, Rail Delivery Group, operators and other partners and stakeholders.

The PAYG ticketing and fares reform elements are linked but separate workstreams. The PAYG ticketing solution will build on TfWM's existing Swift Go product which already provides best-value capping on the bus and metro network in the TfWM area. Under Swift Go passengers would sign up for an account and be sent a Swiftcard which can be used to touch in/touch out at readers which are being installed at every railway station. The system would then calculate the best value combination of rail fares over a week and debit that amount from the passenger's account.

## **4. Project Delivery Programme**

A headline summary of activity is set out below:

### *Sprint*

Sprint phase 2 (SP2) is split into 5 packages, but only package E will take place in Sandwell. The works for SP2 are to a minimum, with the works mainly consisting of signing, lining, litter bins and construction groundworks for removal of existing bus shelters and installation for the larger required bus shelters for the multi-door articulated vehicles.

Specifically, it will consist of two sets of construction works, mainly within the vicinity of Merrions Close, and will include the installation of the enlarged bus shelters and stopping areas.

We are currently in the Early Contractor Involvement (ECI) period, with Taylor Woodrow who were awarded as the principal contractor through the Midlands Highway Alliance (MHA) and it is anticipated to be completed by mid-April 2024.

### *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 the latter half of 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.

in 2022 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. We have just opened the expanded buildings 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.

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

### *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:

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 subject to value for money checks, WMCA, DfT & DLUHC approval to delivery of the second phase from Dudley town centre to 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 nearly all of the 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, paving and soft landscaping installed. Demolition of King's Parade was completed in June 2023 and we are commencing some works on site in parallel to completing the assurance exercise on the costs and delivery for Section 2 to continue delivering all the work on Section 2, through to the Clayton Hotel. Section 5 works in Digbeth High Street have completed on the North side and the works on the south side will be completed in the coming weeks with a few outstanding commissioning and snagging items to close out.

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 Section 2 is subject to a refresh of the business case and confirmation the full project still offers value for money. In view of this we will be working towards operating to the Clayton Hotel by summer 2025 in advance of the full route being opened.

### *Road Programme*

Hagley Road – Hagley Road Corridor formed part of the CRSTS funding and the Strategic Outline Business Case has recently been submitted to the WMCA assurance process. This includes a request for funding for bus priority measures to be delivered prior to 2027 and a medium term study to consider further option appraisal for rapid transit along the corridor, including Metro.

## **5. Metro Operations - Midland Metro Limited (MML)**

Tranche 2 work to repair the cracking on the 2G fleet has been completed. There is a further tranche of work required but this is currently paused whilst we work with CAF

around assurance of the repair solution and the repair process. As a result of this and CAF findings elsewhere work is expected to start on Tranche 3 later in 2024. Due to these issues CAF will be moving out of the Very Light Rail (VLR) centre in Dudley.

TfWM has worked with the supplier CAF to bring the new 3G fleet into the UK ahead of schedule, and all the new vehicles have been delivered. To date this fleet is performing well. In late 2023 MML added additional services to the morning and evening peak periods.

Patronage levels continue to perform well. Likewise, the number of lost kilometres remains low. Where kilometres have been lost this has been due to 3<sup>rd</sup> party activities (protest marches) and staff availability.

Work continues to plan for the tie in of the Brierley Hill extension to Line One at Wednesbury. This will see significant disruption from the 23<sup>rd</sup> March to the 9<sup>th</sup> April inclusive, 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 which will require early closure of the network overnight and a further blockade over the weekend of the 4<sup>th</sup> May and 5<sup>th</sup> May 2024.

## **6. Active Travel**

### *Active Travel Fund (ATF)*

Sandwell's ATF Tranche 3 programme includes:

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

### *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 completed a series of Dr Bike/Cycle Security Measures in Sandwell over the Autumn and Winter and a further series of Dr Bikes is planned for Spring and Summer 2024. 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 will be returning for a further set of Community Street Audits from April 2024 onwards. The locations are to be agreed with the Local Authority.

### *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.

Data collected from the Autumn Term (September to December 2023) shows that Sandwell had 14 schools involved in the Living Streets 'Walk Once a Week' Programme. There were 5,140 pupils logging their journeys and there had been a decline in car journeys all the way to school by 26%. There are targets to recruit more Sandwell Schools to the programme over the Spring and Summer Terms to intensify progress.

### *West Midlands Cycle Hire (WMCH)*

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

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

- Total rides within Sandwell to-date: Pedal bikes, 7,363 journeys; e-Bikes, 698 journeys
- Average ride time per journey – 32 minutes
- Average distance travelled per journey – 3.19km
- 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.
- 93% of bikes within Sandwell are returned to docking stations, representing positive customer behaviours. This compares favourably to other regions, where additional staff resourcing is required to return informally parked bikes to docking stations.

## **Walking and Cycling Programme**

### *Development Work Stream*

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 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. In 2023 WMCA was awarded a score of 3 overall (out of a maximum of 4) following a submission of evidence. A further self-assessment was carried out in late 2023 and submitted to ATE in December 2023 with the expectation that our self-assessment score of 3 will be retained. A decision from ATE is expected within the next few months. 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 2022. The following schemes are being 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. A further £1.7m of CAF funding was awarded in late 2023 which will enable the development of further schemes in Sandwell.

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 outcome will be known later this financial year.

### *Workwise*

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

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

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

119 applicants in the Sandwell area were helped with travel to work through Workwise in the last seven months<sup>1</sup>.

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.

<sup>1</sup> Figures are from June 2023 to December 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 have joined 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 receiving some new training for Violence Against Women and Girls and linked behaviours.

In the calendar year 2023, the Transport Safety Officers have been on patrol for **10,406** hours, **8,845** of which were directly linked to our Tasking priorities. A milestone figure of **6,052** Verbal warnings were given out, **208,654** interactions with travellers and staff were made and **51,295** 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 high profile 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. Images from Wednesbury Bus Station were circulated on Social Media which allowed Safer Travel to identify two young offenders for a series of criminal damage offences, those involved are proceeding through the criminal justice system.

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 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.

Both teams also liaise closely with the regions 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.

## 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 December 2023 compared to the previous report (August 2023). 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.

All data is annualised	Aug-23	Dec-23	% Change	2021/22	2022/23	% Change
Bus Patronage	217.0m	223.6m	+3.0%	174.7m	210.9m	+20.7%
Rail Patronage	55.9m	55.0m	-1.6%	39.8m	56.6m	+42.0%
Tram Patronage	7.5m	8.4m	+11.2%	4.8m	5.5m	+15.80%
Ring & Ride Patronage	170.5k	193.7k	+13.6%	113.3k	159.3k	+40.6%

### Bus

Since January 2021 bus patronage has started to recover each month with current annualised bus patronage (January 2023 – December 2023) standing at 223.6 million an increase of +7.9% compared to 207.2 million in December 2023 (annualised). Bus patronage in 2022/23 increased by +20.7% compared to 2021/22. Monthly bus patronage (December 2023) is now at 86.9% of pre-covid levels (December 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 –5.8% of pre-covid patronage and stands at approximately 55.0 million per year (an increase of +0.1% compared to December 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)

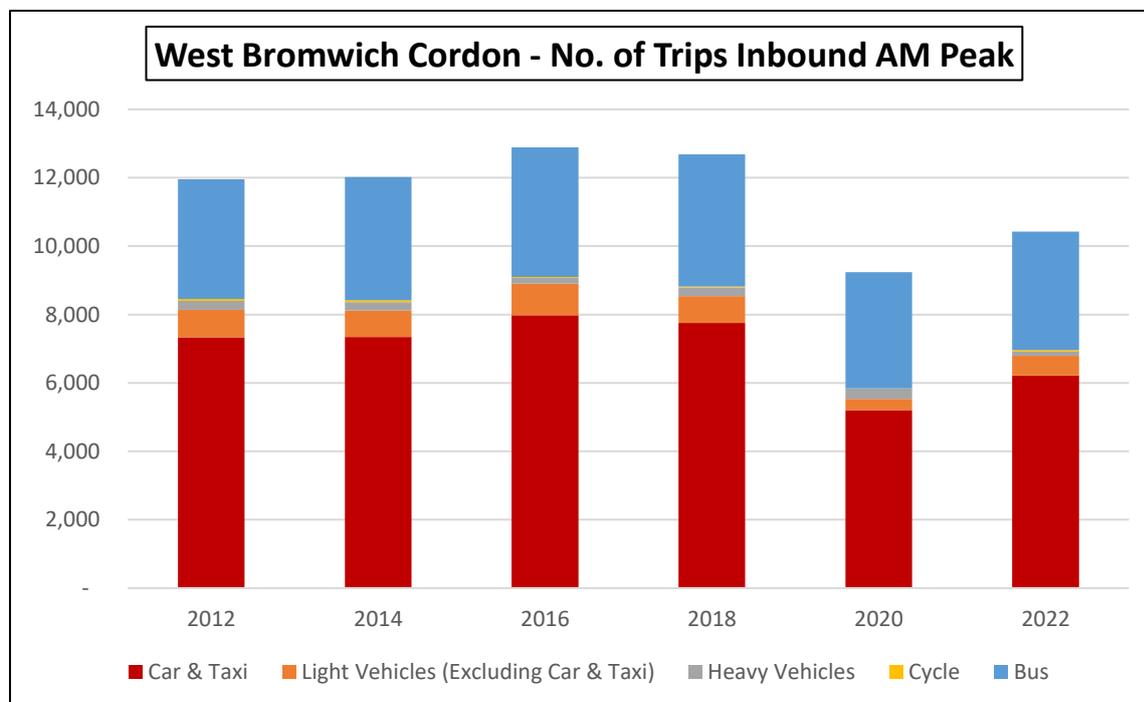
### Tram

Tram patronage is now higher than pre-covid levels at 8.4 million passengers (Annualised December 2023); an increase of +75.4% compared to December 2022 and +6.2% compared to December 2019.

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>

The following table shows data patronage and occupancy data across the West Midlands Combined Authority area.

Patronage/Occupancy	Jan-2023	Dec	% Change (Previous Year)	Jan-Dec 2019	% Change (Pre-Covid)
Swift Commercial Bus/Tram Boardings	41,510,019		-0.5%	Not Available	
Swift Concessionary Bus/Tram Boardings	34,387,999		+7.8%	Not Available	
Bus Boardings	223,623,490		+7.9%	257,456,542	-13.1%
Annualised Rail Boardings	55,028,140		+0.1%	58,398,050	-5.8%
Tram Boardings	8,367,444		+75.4%	7,878,908	+6.2%
Ring & Ride Journeys	193,708		+29.1%	678,477	-71.4%
WMCH Journeys	277,456		-5.6%	Not Applicable	
Cycle Counts at Park & Ride Sites (average weekday usage)	262		+5.3%	522	-49.8%
Park & Ride Occupancy (average weekday usage)	3,779		+3.0%	8,231	-54.1%

The following table shows data patronage and occupancy data for Sandwell.

Patronage/Occupancy - Sandwell	Jan- Dec 2023	% Change (Previous Year)
Swift Commercial Bus/Tram Boardings	3,993,112	-0.04%
Swift Concessionary Bus/Tram Boardings	4,615,982	+7.9%
Ring & Ride Journeys	20,134	+3.5%
WMCH Journeys	1,365	-54.4%
Cycle Counts at Park & Ride Sites (average weekday usage)	12	+4.7%
Park & Ride Occupancy (average weekday usage)	1,200	+4.5%