

**Meeting:** West Midlands Rail Executive Board of Directors

**Subject:** Minutes

**Date:** Tuesday 9 March 2021 at 10.00 hours

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**PRESENT:**

**Partner Authorities:**

Councillor Peter Butlin	- Warwickshire County Council (Chair)
Councillor Jackie Taylor	- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (Vice-Chair)
Hon. Alderman Stewart Stacey	- Birmingham City Council
Councillor Roger Lawrence	- City of Wolverhampton Council
Councillor Pervez Ahktar	- Coventry City Council
Councillor Ian Kettle	- Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Simon Harris	- Shropshire Council
Councillor Ted Richards OBE	- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor David Wright	- Telford and Wrekin Council
Councillor Adrian Andrew	- Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Dr Ken Pollock	- Worcestershire County Council

**OBSERVER:**

Councillor Kath Hartley	- Chair – Transport Delivery Committee
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**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Tim Mitchell	- Birmingham City Council
Marianne Page	- City of Wolverhampton Council
John Seddon	- Coventry City Council
Victoria Hammond	- Herefordshire Council
Andy Miller	- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
David Balme	- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Clare Horton	- Staffordshire County Council
Heather Bolton	- Telford and Wrekin Council
Matt Crowton	- Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Vicky Mumford	- Warwickshire County
Malcolm Holmes	- West Midlands Rail Executive
Peter Sargant	- West Midlands Rail Executive
Tom Painter	- West Midlands Rail Executive
Alison Peckmore	- West Midlands Rail Executive
Toby Rackliff	- West Midlands Rail Executive
Roshida Sanga	- West Midlands Rail Executive
Karen Hanchett	- Worcestershire County Council
Margaret Rogers	- West Midlands Combined Authority
Carl Craney	- West Midlands Combined Authority

**By Invitation:**

Fay Easton - West Midlands Trains  
Julian Edwards - West Midlands Trains

**04/21** Apologies for absence were recorded from Councillor Waseem Zafar (Birmingham City Council), Councillor Glen Williams (Cheshire East Council), Councillor Ian Brookfield (City of Wolverhampton Council), Councillor Jim O'Boyle (Coventry City Council), Councillor Andrea Goddard (Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council), Councillors David Hitchiner and John Harrington (Herefordshire Council), Councillor Jason Smithers (Northamptonshire County Council), Councillor Maria Crompton (Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council), Councillor Daniel Jellyman (Stoke on Trent Council), Councillor Ian Courts (Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council), Councillor Mike Bird (Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council), Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Warwickshire County Council) and Councillor Adrian Hardman (Worcestershire County Council).

**05/21 Declarations of Interest**

Hon. Alderman Stewart Stacey declared an interest inasmuch as he was in receipt of a railway pension.

**06/21 Minutes****AGREED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2020 and the extraordinary meeting held on 19 January 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**07/21 Chair's Opening Remarks**

The Chair reported that this would be the last meeting of the Board to be serviced by Carl Craney, Governance Services Officer, before his forthcoming retirement and on behalf of the Board thanked Carl Craney for his contribution to the work of the Board and wished him a long and happy retirement. Carl Craney thanked the Chair for his good wishes.

**08/21 WMRE Business Update**

Malcolm Holmes presented a general update to the Board which outlined progress against WMRE objectives since the last meeting in December 2020. The report covered the following objectives:

- WMRE Governance Evolution;
- Covid-19 Impact and Recovery;
- West Midlands Franchise;
- West Midlands Trains Annual Business Plan;
- WMRE / DfT Collaboration Agreement;
- Williams' Rail Review / Future Franchising;
- HS2 Update;
- West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy;
- Rail Fares Review;
- West Midlands Stations Alliance;
- West Midlands Rail Programme;

- West Midlands Grand Rail Collaboration;
- Stakeholder Engagement and Media Coverage; and
- Risk Management.

In respect of the WMRE Governance Evolution, Malcolm Holmes reminded the Board that at the extraordinary meeting held on 19 January 2021, the changes to the governance arrangements had been approved. This meant that with effect from the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Board in June 2021, the WMCA Mayor would be the non-Director, non-voting Chair of the Board and would be supported by two Vice-Chairs. In advance of the forthcoming elections, draft arrangements would be made for regular meetings to be held between the Mayor and the two Vice-Chairs. The latter two positions would be filled at the AGM. Dates for meetings of the Board following the elections would be agreed in consultation with the Mayor's office.

With regard to Covid-19 Impact and Recovery, he advised that rail patronage continued to be low and had been hovering at 10% of pre Covid-19 levels. The recent return to school had been handled well by Operators with only one problem being experienced and that had not been school related. Long term plans for timetables were being worked through by the West Midlands Grand Rail Collaboration and this had been a collaborative approach with Operators no longer having to concentrate on revenue generation under the revised management arrangements. The West Midlands Trains Annual Business Plan had been submitted to the DfT and WMRE for evaluation on 15 February 2021 to cover the financial year from 1 April 2021. This was in accordance with the Emergency Recovery Management Agreement. A Briefing Note on the contents would be prepared and circulated to the Board once the document had been approved by the DfT.

In relation to the West Midlands Stations Alliance, he outlined proposals to tackle track side graffiti with funding provided partly by the WMRE. He reported that in January 2021 the Stations Alliance had commenced the delivery of its first scheme, a package of interventions at Cannock station. These had been delivered in partnership with the District and County Councils and the works sought to enhance the station such that it would be a fitting gateway to both the town and the nearby designer outlet. More than 80 murals had been installed on the rear of the railway station platforms and the access walkways leading to and from the stations two platforms. Other interventions included poster frames for local artists and community groups to display information, two new waymarking totems, landscaping and the resurfacing of the station car park. Further works were planned for the Chase Line and in the Stourbridge area.

He reported that the Stourbridge Town Line had been closed with effect from week commencing 8 February 2021 for two weeks as part of a wider upgrade of trains and track. This was the first time the Alliance had engaged in a railway wide programme of works as opposed to just stations. Rail replacement transport was offered to customers to use the service during this time, but as current usage was around one person per journey, the inconvenience was found to be minimal. A further one-week possession had been taken from 8 March 2021 to complete the track works. This coincided with the return to

school under the easing of the lockdown arrangements and WMRE, TfWM and WMT had organised a dedicated bus shuttle service between the two stations, free of charge, to those customers holding valid tickets (£1 each way if not).

He reported that the Rail Programme was progressing well with works having commenced on site at University and Perry Barr stations. Planning approval had also been granted recently for the new Perry Barr station. An allocation of £59 million had been identified in the Chancellor of the Exchequers recent budget for Rail Packages 1 and 2. A huge amount of work had gone into resolving the timetabling issues for the proposed Camp Hill Line services.

Hon. Alderman Stewart Stacey raised concerns regarding University station inasmuch as it would not be completed fully before the Commonwealth Games were staged in Birmingham in 2022 but only functional. He asked what endeavours were being made to ensure that the works were completed before the event. He added that the 'GRIP' methodology had been abandoned and replaced by 'Project Speed'. He suggested that the replacement process be used to ensure the completion of the works before the event. Malcolm Holmes advised that the 'GRIP' process was being replaced by 'PACE' which took its learning from 'GRIP' albeit with a simplified process. He assured the Board that the projects were being managed in accordance with rail industry standards and that it would not be sensible to change mid project. He explained that the University scheme had encountered delays entering the contract stage and whilst he remained hopeful that it would be completed fully before the Commonwealth Games, it would be fully operational and able to cope with the expected increase in passenger numbers. If the scheme was not completed fully it would be in an acceptable condition.

The Chair suggested that early conversations with the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) be held as final sign-off from that organisation could lead to further delays. Councillor Pervez Akhtar expressed concerns in respect of both University and Perry Barr stations and also in relation to the suspension of services between Leamington Spa and Nuneaton and the possible effects on Coventry hosting the City of Culture from May 2021.

Malcolm Holmes advised that dialogue with the ORR had been commenced, as had discussions with various other bodies and agencies. He advised that at the end of the build programme there was a six-week period for 'Entry into Service' and planning was underway to avoid any undue delays. In relation to the suspension of services on the Leamington Spa to Nuneaton, he advised that the decision had not been taken lightly. Prior to the suspension of service, performance had not been good due to absence through illness and/or shielding of rail staff. The interruption of the driver training programme and several vacant posts had added to the situation. The service had, however, only been used by a relatively low number of passengers and a bus replacement service had been provided. The service would be re-instated by May 2021 at the latest. He reminded the Board that this had been the only service in the West Midlands to have been withdrawn. He commented that WMRE was working with the DfT and WMT on recovery plans.

Councillor Pervez Akhtar commented that the reintroduction of the service in May 2021 was too late. Malcolm Holmes commented that the service could only be re-introduced when there were sufficient resources available to operate a reliable service. The Chair added that all parties were working to have the service re-introduced at the earliest practical opportunity.

Malcolm Holmes reported that it was understood that the Williams' Rail Review was being revised to take account of the recent changes to the way that rail contracts were managed under the Emergency Recovery Management Agreements (ERMAs). He advised that a Briefing Note would be prepared and circulated once the report was published.

Similarly, it was expected that the Integrated Rail Plan would be published before the Easter holiday period and, again, a Briefing Note would be prepared and circulated once the report was published.

He reported that work on the revisions to the Rail Investment Strategy continued and engagement with partner local authorities was underway. There were still uncertainties surrounding future demand for rail services.

Bids had been resubmitted to the 'Restoring your Railway' fund together with statements of support in connection with schemes submitted by Birmingham City Council.

A rolling Stock Study was underway to investigate the use of battery powered EMU's on the Camp Hill Line and at Aldridge. Councillor Dr Ken Pollock referred to a discussion at a previous meeting on the efficiency of carrying batteries on diesel powered trains. He asked as to progress on producing a Briefing Note on this matter and other concepts such as Very Light Rail (VLR), bio-methane etc. Malcolm Holmes acknowledged that a Briefing Note on this matter was outstanding. He advised that WMRE had not had a lot of involvement in this matter but had received recently a request for assistance from the University of Birmingham in engaging with rolling stock leasing companies on this subject. The Chair commented that the VLR concept was very exciting and offered a much cheaper solution than trams. The Coventry City Council scheme could be extended into Warwickshire. He asked that a briefing be presented to a future meeting on emerging technologies.

**AGREED:**

1. That the report and update be received and noted;
2. That Briefing Notes be prepared and circulated at the appropriate times in relation to:
  - The Williams' Rail Review;
  - The Integrated Rail Plan; and
  - The efficiency of carrying heavy batteries on diesel powered trains;
  - Very Light Rail, Bio-Methane etc;
3. That a briefing be provided to a future meeting on emerging technologies in the rail industry.

09/21

### **West Midlands Railway Progress Update**

The Board received a PowerPoint presentation from Julian Edwards which covered the following areas:

- Business Update – Patronage still low at 10% of pre Covid-19 levels but showing signs of gradual improvement. 5% of staff had been absent suffering from Covid-19 or shielding in accordance with medical advice. 20,000 driver training days had been lost due to the pandemic with the impact on rail services being experienced. Railway governance, contractual arrangements and industry collaboration was an important element of preparing for the Direct Award which would replace the current franchising arrangements. Some additional services had been provided on the Snow Hill Line to provide the necessary social distancing requirements on the return of children to school as part of the easing of 'Lockdown' arrangements. Work was on-going on a 'Roadmap to Recovery'.
- Performance – 93.7 ppm and on track to meet MMA of 91%. Reforms to the timetable were being prepared in collaboration with other Operators.
- Return to School – WMT had been in regular contact with local schools in order to better understand individual arrangements. Six additional trains had operated in the afternoons each weekday to ensure social distancing requirements were complied with. The Leamington Spa to Nuneaton service had been suspended due to staff shortages, poor performance and low patronage. A bus replacement service had been provided. All other routes had complied with social distancing requirements.
- Looking Forwards – The next step up in rail plans would occur on 12 April 2021 with the further easing of 'Lockdown' arrangements. The direct award was scheduled to come into effect in September 2021. Work was on-going through the West Midlands Grand Rail Collaboration to design the best post-pandemic railway for the region.

Councillor Ted Richards OBE outlined his personal circumstances in relation to being asked to 'shield' and asked as to the steps taken to encourage employees to challenge the need to 'shield' if this was thought unnecessary. He also asked as to the plans to encourage the public to return to using rail services. Julian Edwards advised that WMT had a good understanding of the profile of its staff and referred to the national guidelines which had been extended in the current 'Lockdown' to include asthmatics and diabetics. He assured the Board that staff generally returned to work as quickly as they could following the end of the shielding period. He commented that all transport Operators and businesses need to place a greater emphasis on cleaning and hygiene routines. Maintaining high levels of cleaning had been included in the updated Business Plan and the increased use of 'fogging machines' to sterilise rail carriages was now an integral part of the cleaning routines. He advised that he believed that there was a pent-up demand for rail services including a switch to leisure travel which would compensate for the reduction in commuter journeys. The Grand Rail Collaboration was working on plans for marketing rail services to encourage passengers to return. The Chair suggested that a marketing campaign based on the principles of 'safe, clean and reliable' was required

following the end of the current restrictions. Julian Edwards confirmed that such plans were in hand and would target various groups including promoting 'Staycations'.

Councillor Dr Ken Pollock compared the usage statistics between car and rail with car journeys being at 61% of pre-Covid 19 levels but rail trailing at 15% and asked what steps were proposed to encourage the public to return to using rail services. Julian Edwards commented that the easing of restrictions would contribute and that rail patronage would enjoy a natural bounce back. He acknowledged the need to encourage new users as working from home was likely to continue in some degree with the associated decrease in commuter passengers. The public were also likely to alter their travel patterns with rush hours likely to be less congested. The Chair commented that the public felt safer in travelling alone by car as they felt less exposed to infections. Julian Edwards commented that as congestion increased and with the introduction of the Clean Air Zone in Birmingham, the public would return to using rail for both business and pleasure trips.

Councillor Pervez Akhtar advised that the benefits of rail travel were understood but that there was a need for services to be synchronised with other modes of transport. He asked what steps Operators were taking on this matter. Julian Edwards explained that collaboration was much improved under the revised management arrangements with revenue generation no longer being a key factor. He acknowledged the need to work more closely with the Operators of other modes to improve synchronisation.

Councillor Jackie Taylor asked if WMT experienced any problems with recruitment and retention of staff and whether a robust Equalities Impact Assessment was in place. Julian Edwards advised that there was a lot of interest in working for WMT and that very few staff who left employment moved outside the rail industry. The rail industry would remain a high level of interest for recruitment. He offered to arrange an off-line meeting on the WMT Equality and Diversity Programme for Councillor Taylor and commented that the workforce was diverse but that the company was always seeking to make improvements.

The Board received a PowerPoint from Fay Easton on 'Community and Commerce' which covered the increase in community involvement in rail during the pandemic and the current position with the Customer and Communities Improvement Fund.

**AGREED:**

1. That the presentations and reports be noted;
2. That Julian Edwards make arrangements for Councillor Jackie Taylor to experience the Equality and Diversity Programme of WMT.

**10/21 Direct Award Contract Progress Update**

The Board received a PowerPoint from Tom Painter on the progress with the Direct Award Contract. The presentation addressed the following areas;

- Why a Direct Award (also known as 'National Rail Contract')? – to replace Emergency Recovery Management Agreement (ERMA);

- Direct Award objectives – same for each Direct Award;
- Key features of Direct Award;
- Performance Based Fee (PBF);
- The business planning process; and
- Annual Business Plan components.

He advised that there was an option to extend the ERMA's for a six-month period if the Direct Award was delayed.

The Chair commented that collaboration rather than conflict between Operators was now seen as a key requirement and this had brought about a change in the culture in the rail industry.

**AGREED:**

That the presentation be received and noted.

11/21

**Decarbonisation and Emissions Strategy**

The Board received a PowerPoint presentation from Peter Sargent on the Decarbonisation and Emissions Strategy which outlined the following areas:

- National Strategic Context – Air Quality / Decarbonising Transport;
- Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy (TDNS) – published in Autumn 2020;
- Traction Power Options – battery/electric/hydrogen;
- Electrification in the West Midlands;
- Most West Midlands routes proposed for electrification;
- Diesel / Electric Train Operation in Birmingham;
- Electrification challenges;
- WMRE investigating Bi-Mode rolling stock – study underway, report due shortly;
- Overarching Strategy:
  - Rail Investment Strategy would concentrate on emissions and decarbonisation;
  - Support electrification;
  - Support hydrogen trains;
  - Will take forward BEMU study;
  - Support cleaner trains on the network.

Councillor Dr Ken Pollock welcomed the presentation but reminded the Board that battery/electric/hydrogen provided ways of moving energy around but were not a source of energy in themselves. Councillor David Wright echoed these comments and advised that Telford and Wrekin Council would be keen to engage in the electrification of the line to Shrewsbury and beyond as it would make a considerable difference in terms of air quality and sustainability.

The Chair counselled a degree of caution inasmuch as the costs of achieving zero carbon emissions would need to be met.

**AGREED:**

That the presentation be received and noted.



**12/21 WMRL/DfT Collaboration Agreement**

The Board received a PowerPoint presentation from Malcolm Holmes on the current position with discussions on changes to the Collaboration Agreement between west Midlands Rail Limited and the DfT, with the current Agreement expiring at the end of the current Franchise Agreement.

Councillor Pervez Akhtar commented that the key word was ‘collaboration’ and suggested that the heavy rail network should be included in the discussions and final iteration of the Agreement. He also considered that timing of services to improve synchronisation between modes and the use of rail stations as Transport Hubs should be addressed. Malcolm Holmes reported that integrated travel was covered in the key objectives and that the West Midlands Grand Rail Collaboration was working closely with the Bus Alliance on improving connectivity. The issue of bus/rail synchronisation was also being examined by TfWM.

Councillor Pervez Akhtar lamented that the logo referred to ‘World Class Integrated Transport Systems’ but that action rather than words was required. The Chair reminded the Board that the logo had been coined by John Prescott MP when he was the Secretary of State and that following the end of the franchising arrangements there was an opportunity to improve integrated transport. Councillor Roger Lawrence reminded the Board that it was composed of partner authorities which were Transport Authorities and that they were responsible for improving integration in their own roles. He commented that a lack of investment in public transport over many years had resulted in the current situation and that, also, the organisation of and responsibility for transport was too fragmented. He suggested that the electrification of lines should have been introduced many years previously and that Central Government was responsible for the lack of investment.

**AGREED:**

That the presentation be received and noted.

**13/21 Chair’s Closing Remarks**

The Chair advised that this was the last meeting of the Board during the current Municipal Year and the last meeting he would Chair before the revised governance arrangements came into effect. He offered his thanks to the Members and Officers for their contribution to the work of the Board and gave his personal thanks to the Vice-Chair, Councillor Jackie Taylor for her contributions.

*[The meeting ended at 12:09 hours.]*

**CHAIR**

