

Paper A

Meeting: West Midlands Rail Executive Board of Directors

Venue: West Midlands Combined Authority, 16 Summer Lane, Birmingham / Microsoft Teams

Subject: Minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2023

Present:

Andy Street (Chair)	- West Midlands Combined Authority
Councillor Peter Butlin	- Warwickshire County Council
Councillor Liz Clements	- Birmingham City Council
Councillor Peter Hughes	- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Pervez Akhtar	- Coventry City Council
Councillor Kerrie Carmichael	- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Craig Collingswood	- City of Wolverhampton Council
Councillor Ken Hawkins	- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Simon Phipps	- Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Philip Price	- Herefordshire Council
Councillor David Williams	- Staffordshire County Council

In Attendance:

Max Taylor	- West Midlands Trains
Denise Wetton	- Network Rail
Megan Spencer-Rigby	- Great British Railways Transition Team
Richard Croft	- Great British Railways Transition Team
Mal Drury-Rose	- West Midlands Rail Executive
Tom Painter	- West Midlands Rail Executive
Toby Rackliff	- West Midlands Rail Executive
Peter Sargent	- West Midlands Rail Executive
Andrew Leo	- West Midlands Rail Executive
Dan Essex	- West Midlands Combined Authority
William Dunlop	- West Midlands Combined Authority

Apologies:

Councillor Marc Bayliss	- Worcestershire County Council
Councillor Mike Bird	- Walsall Council
Councillor Dean Carroll	- Shropshire Council
Councillor Ian Courts	- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Steve Evans	- City of Wolverhampton Council
Councillor Phil Larratt	- West Northamptonshire Council
Councillor Danny Millard	- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Jim O'Boyle	- Coventry City Council
Councillor Mike Rouse	- Worcestershire County Council
Councillor Izzi Seccombe	- Warwickshire County Council
Councillor Philip White	- Staffordshire County Council

12. Forward Plan

The plan of items to be reported to future meetings was noted.

13. Minutes - 25 July 2023

The minutes of the meeting of the West Midlands Rail Executive Board of Directors held on 25 July 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

14. Board Appointments

The Chair reported that there were currently vacancies for the positions of Vice-Chair (Metropolitan Authorities) and of Accountable Director for Fares, Ticketing & Growth following the recent appointment of Councillor Stephen Simkins as Leader of the City of Wolverhampton Council and him resigning from this board.

Agreed:

- (1) Councillor Liz Clements be appointed Vice-Chair (Metropolitan Authorities) of the board.
- (2) Councillor Craig Collingswood be appointed Accountable Director for Fares, Ticketing & Growth.

15. Board Leadership Group Progress Summary

The board considered a report from Mal Dury-Rose on the progress made by the Board Leadership Group during the previous quarter. This included an update on the West Midlands Rail Executive Rail Investment Strategy and the latest developments regarding proposals to close rail ticket offices.

Agreed:

The report be noted.

16. West Midlands Trains

The board received a presentation from Max Taylor, Clients & Contracts Director, West Midlands Trains, on recent operating performance, the driver training programme, industrial action, the introduction of new trains, and a look ahead to key activity during the next quarter.

Max Taylor acknowledged that recent reliability performance had been disappointing due to increased sickness levels and industrial action short of a strike that had been undertaken. He was pleased though that the driver training programme remained on track, which would result in a record number of drivers being employed.

Councillor Peter Butlin expressed his concern at reliability issues on the Leamington - Nuneaton line, which he considered to be impacting on the ability to build a sustainable customer base for the service. The Chair requested that a marketing plan for the line be submitted to a future meeting of this board. Councillor Pervez Akhtar noted that one train per hour on this line meant that

any cancelled services resulted in significant passenger delays and inconvenience. Max Taylor explained that the layout at Coventry station meant that it was not currently possible to run two trains an hour.

Councillor Pervez Akhtar also expressed his disappointment at the lack of a direct link between Coventry - Leicester. The Chair requested that the board be updated on the lobbying work that was being undertaken on this issue. Councillor Philip Price sought further information on rail links to Herefordshire. Mal Drury-Rose undertook to provide a separate briefing to Councillor Philip Price on this.

The Chair recognised that a significant number of these issues related to the development of the Midlands Rail Hub project and he suggested the board needed a full update on this at the next meeting.

Agreed:

An update be provided to the next meeting of the board on the provision of two trains per hour on the Leamington - Nuneaton line, the Coventry - Leicester - Nottingham route, and the implications of the Government's recent announcement of the cancellation of the northern leg of HS2 to the Midlands Rail Hub project.

17. Network Rail

The board received a presentation from Denise Wetton, Central Route Managing Director, Network Rail on network asset and performance, accessibility, Birmingham New Street air quality actions, and winter preparedness.

Councillor Liz Clements enquired as to whether the siting of Ozzy the Bull at Birmingham New Street made navigating the station harder for passengers with mobility issues. Denise Wetton reported that consultation had been undertaken with accessibility groups prior to the installation of the bull. She considered that the planned barrier around the bull would also help people navigate around it.

Denise Wetton advised that funding from the DfT's Access for All fund was intended to upgrade seven stations in 2023/24. Councillor Pervez Akhtar stressed the importance of undertaking accessibility works. Denise Wetton confirmed that the plans included a customer hub at the centre of Birmingham New Street station to provide passenger assistance. She undertook to provide further details on the works planned to a future meeting of the board.

Councillor Liz Clements expressed concern at the accessibility of the Adderley Park station and enquired as to whether a second round of Access for All funding could be used at this station. Toby Rackliff explained that Access for All funding was normally aligned to Network Rail's five-year funding strategy. He expected only two bids to be successful in this round, and it was likely that other stations would be considered a greater priority for works than Adderley Park.

Councillor Liz Clements noted concerns regarding air quality at Birmingham New Street station. Denise Wetton acknowledge that a subterranean station provided additional challenges, but a system was being piloted that would recycle air to improve its freshness.

Agreed:

- (1) Updates be provided to future meetings of the board on Access to All funded station accessibility proposals, and the work being done to support vulnerable members of the public contemplating suicide on the rail network.
- (2) Consideration be given to hosting a future meeting of the board at Birmingham New Street.

18. West Midlands Fares Reform and Swift on Rail Update

The board considered a report from Peter Sargant providing an update on fares reform and the Swift on Rail programme, and to seek approval for a package of fare changes planned for implementation in 2024.

West Midlands Rail Executive has been undertaking a review of rail fares since 2018 and had been considering whether the fares structure in the region, which was largely based on the 1994 structure created by Centro, was still fit for purpose. This work had identified issues of complexity, inconsistency and incoherence that rail passengers faced when wishing to purchase rail travel within the region.

Simplifying the current ticket range and creating consistency would be beneficial for current rail users, no matter what retail channel they used. With proposed ticket office reform plans currently under consideration, it was more important than ever that the fares offer was simplified, in particular to make the use of ticket machines more straightforward.

The board recognised that the Department for Transport required the proposals to be revenue neutral in order for it to sign them off as acceptable.

Agreed:

- (1) It be noted that under the Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Deal, there was a commitment for Great British Railways Transition Team, the Department for Transport and the WMCA to agree the scope of a pilot Pay-As-You-Go smart ticketing scheme by the end of 2023.
- (2) It be noted that the West Midlands Rail Executive, Transport for West Midlands, Great British Railways Transition Team, the Department for Transport and the Rail Delivery Group had been undertaking a significant amount of work to confirm the pilot scheme as part of the Swift on Rail programme.

- (3) It be noted that the current rail fare range was not compatible with a Pay-As-You-Go smart ticketing scheme, and it was proposed to implement a two-stage process to reform rail fares to support the Swift on Rail project and deliver a better customer experience.
- (4) In line with the Department for Transport/West Midlands Rail Executive Collaboration Agreement, the initial proposed fares changes that were planned for implementation in March 2024 be approved, subject to West Midlands Rail Executive reaching agreement with Government and industry partners on PM peak restrictions.

Councillor Peter Butlin in the chair

19. West Midlands Rail Executive/Great British Railways Partnership Agreement

The board considered a report from Cllr Simon Phipps seeking approval for the Project Initiation Document covering the plan to enter into a partnership agreement with the Great British Railways Transition Team.

Previous board updates had introduced members to the Project Initiation Document, which set out the formal basis of the governance which would support the development of the West Midlands Rail Executive/Great British Railways Transition Team partnership. It had been approved by senior officers from both organisations at the first Partnership Oversight Group meeting on 4 August.

The governance structure comprised a senior Partnership Oversight Group and a Joint Implementation Management Team, which reported to it. Both of these groups would be led jointly by West Midlands Rail Executive/Great British Railways Transition Team officers, with members from Network Rail and the Department for Transport a part of each meeting. These organisations were important to involve as the likely delay to legislation for Great British Railways meant that the partnership would need to work with current industry accountabilities for longer than had been anticipated.

Agreed:

- (1) The Project Initiation Document be approved.
- (2) The progress being made with the West Midlands Rail Executive/Great British Railways Transition Team partnership be noted.

20. 2024/25 Budget

The board considered a report from Mal Drury-Rose presenting the proposed 2024/25 budget, including partner authority contributions and notification of the appointment of a statutory auditor for West Midlands Rail Ltd for a three-year term.

Due mainly to the pandemic delaying the implementation of a number of planned activities, West Midlands Rail Ltd had started to accumulate a surplus.

It was proposed to utilise this to mitigate to the greatest possible extent the adverse economic headwinds currently facing the region's rail industry. Consequently, the proposed budget for 2024/25 had been rebased to align with spending plans and priorities. These included ambitious further projects planned for 2024/25, which required additional funding through the accumulated earmarked reserves. Early business planning work had indicatively estimated that circa £500,000 from the reserves might be required to be drawn down in addition to the West Midlands Rail Ltd basic cash budget to fund these activities.

Agreed:

- (1) The proposed 2024/25 budget be agreed.
- (2) The appointment of the West Midlands Rail Ltd statutory auditor following a competitive tender process be noted.

21. West Midlands Rail Executive Business Update Report

The board considered a report from Mal Drury-Rose providing a general update on progress against West Midlands Rail Executive objectives since the last meeting of the board in July.

The report provided further details on West Midlands Trains' performance, recent HS2 developments, the Midlands Rail Hub, West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy, future timetable development and the West Midlands Rail Programme.

Councillor Liz Clements enquired about the likely opening of the University station and the stations on the Camp Hill line. Mal Drury-Rose reported that he expected the University station works to be completed in November/December, and that the Camp Hill line stations were still on target for opening towards the end of 2024, although he would bring a more detailed report to a future meeting of the board on this project.

Agreed:

The report be noted.

[The meeting ended at 11.55am]