

## Paper A

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

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

**Subject:** Minutes

**Date:** Tuesday 25 July 2023 at 3.30pm

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### Present:

Andy Street (Chair)	Mayor of the West Midlands
Councillor Liz Clements	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Peter Butlin (Vice Chair – Shire/Unitary authorities)	Warwickshire County Council
Councillor Ken Hawkins	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Simon Phipps	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Adrian Andrew	Walsall Council
Councillor Mike Rouse	Worcestershire County Council
Councillor Pervez Akhtar	Coventry City Council
Councillor Danny Millard	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Craig Browne	Cheshire East Council

### In Attendance:

Eddie Muraszko	Department for Transport
Ian McConnell	West Midlands Trains
Andy Mellors	Avanti West Coast
Anit Chandarana	Great British Railways Transition Team
Jon Fox	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

### Apologies:

Councillor Mike Bird	Walsall Council
Councillor Dean Carroll	Shropshire Council
Councillor Philip Price	Herefordshire Council
Councillor Jonathan Lester	Herefordshire Council
Councillor Richard Marshall	Shropshire Council
Councillor Jim O'Boyle	Coventry City Council
Councillor Lee Carter	Telford & Wrekin Council
Councillor Izzi Seccombe	Warwickshire County Council
Councillor Philip White	Staffordshire County Council
Councillor Stephen Simkins (Vice Chair – WMCA)	City of Wolverhampton Council

**1. Welcome, Apologies & Introductions**

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and apologies were noted.

**2. Forward Plan**

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

**3. Minutes of the WMRL Board meeting on 21 March 2023**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

**4. Department for Transport**

Eddie Muraszko delivered an update on the Department for Transport. He shared a presentation covering the national picture which was dominated by structural reform, workforce reform, fares and ticketing reform and the shortfall in journeys and revenue compared to pre-pandemic levels. He then gave focus to West Midlands Trains; he provided an overall picture and highlighted improvements in delivery in both fleets of new trains and services. He closed by delivering an overview of other West Midlands operators namely Cross Country, Avanti West Coast, Chiltern Railways, and Transport for Wales.

Councillor Liz Clements praised the investment in the region and asked what role DfT played in the industrial dispute, if any. Eddie Muraszko confirmed that DfT had set the aims for the negotiations which has been presented to RMT which included the limit of what could be offered in the Rail Delivery Group negotiations.

The board heard a brief update, at the chair's request, from Ian McConnell on the depot and stabling works that would progress over the next 6 months as a result of the fleet improvements that Eddie Muraszko made reference to. It included the funding requirements and expected challenges that the projects expected to face.

In response to a question from Councillor Pervez Akhtar, Eddie Muraszko provided assurance that DfT were aware of the challenges that the rail system currently faced and its effect on the operators, customers, and region. Ian McConnell then gave Councillor Pervez Akhtar a review from an operator's perspective and detailed that the rail system, as it functioned now, was unaffordable and stated that pay and reform must go hand in hand. In response to a further question, he confirmed that train operators do not lose revenue during rail strikes as since the pandemic the Treasury takes all the revenue generated from rail fares.

The chair closed the item by noting the consequences of the disruption that customers had experienced during the industrial action.

**5. Avanti West Coast**

Andy Mellors gave an update from Avanti West Coast. He shared performance against their plan of recovery, restore, reform, and regrow. He provided figures of TOC on self-cancellations which had been reliable since March despite a

blip in period 3 as a result of trespassing and vandalism. He gave performance figures, highlighting fewer cancellations, and improved punctuality. He shared an update on driver recruitment to diversity in the workforce in both age and gender. Andy Mellors continued with a summary of rail retail reform. He briefly touched on industrial action and highlighted the trade union action that had occurred, for example, not working on rest days. He also referred to legacy annual leave arrangements that had to be honoured, and noted that these were also impacting on driver availability.

He then provided an update on regional activity. He shared an update on the Coventry roundtable event, the HS2 and Birmingham People Mover and the new Hitachi electric trains that had been procured to go into service in Autumn 2023. Andy Mellors ended his update with a segment on the joint industry review conducted on the Coventry City championship play off final. He advised that a number of recommendations were proposed, including more effective engagement with the football authorities.

The chair noted the joint review being conducted from the point of view of being a customer on that day himself. In response to Councillor Liz Clements, Andrew Mellors confirmed that the work on additional transmitters to improve the Wi-Fi service on Avanti trains was ongoing. He also stated that from an air quality perspective, engines had a timer installed that shuts down stationary trains, but should an engine need to be stationary and running it would be for operational purposes. He also confirmed that Avanti's new Hitachi trains would have a significant impact on mitigating against stationary engine emissions. Andy Mellors then shared the details of the 'Every Train Counts' campaign which was designed to make sure that punctuality improves. He also confirmed, for the chair, that he would provide a list of actuals against targets as well as cancellations of the London-West Midlands services against other routes they run. Councillor Liz Clements asked the chair for air quality to be added to the forward plan, to which he agreed.

Councillor Peter Butlin queried the ticket offices closures as he mentioned that while sales through ticket offices have decreased, they are a source of information for customers. He asked that the consultation period to be extended to allow customers more time to respond. Andy Mellors confirmed that while the physical offices would no longer be present, the staff would be, and he used Birmingham International station as an example of where this model is already in use.

As a result of a comment made by Councillor Pervez Akhtar, the chair requested that the reduction to the Avanti timetable in correlation to journey time be provided as he highlighted that the service being provided was not acceptable. The chair also stated that he would be writing a letter to Steve Montgomery, First Group, on behalf of the WMRE Board, in order to escalate the issue. The Board agreed with this proposal.

## **6. West Midlands Trains**

Ian McConnell delivered a presentation; he updated the board on West Midlands Trains activity. He covered the May 2023 timetable and the changes

that had occurred. He talked about its successes which were supported by figures and areas for improvement that had been identified. He then touched on performance, he stated that time to three minutes delay punctuality and cancellations had dropped, but it had been a challenging period due to cable theft and trespass incidents. He reported on the station reform consultation and shared figures on the customer information centres that would replace staffed stations.

Ian McConnell then reported that WMT now have new Class 196 on 3 lines already and they hoped to complete the final stages of driver training for these units soon. New electric trains were being tested and were ready to be rolled out provided an agreement with ASLEF could be reached. He closed his presentation with a forward look including new trains, industrial relations, the stations consultation and a continued focus on operating performance.

The chair made reference to the most improved award that was recently received by WMT at the Golden Whistles and Ian McConnell also mentioned the upcoming nominations at the National Rail Awards.

Councillor Pervez Akhtar commented on the roll out of the 196s on the Leamington Spa-Nuneaton route but raised the cancellations experienced in the area. Ian McConnell stated that they were aware of the issue and the chair asked that they be revisited by the next board meeting.

Councillor Liz Clements asked whether equality impact assessments had been completed for the station retail reform proposals, which Ian responded that they had been published. Councillor Mike Rouse commended the roll out of the new trains in Worcestershire and Herefordshire and also the increased revenue protection on these routes. He asked a question as to the implementation of ticket barriers within Worcester. Ian McConnell took an action to look to implement this as he supported the sentiment.

## **7. Great British Railways Transition Team**

Anit Chandarana provided the board with a verbal update from Great British Railways Transition Team. He stated that while legislation was awaited to formally set up Great British Railways (GBR) work was being done in conjunction with the Department for Transport to implement initiatives and mitigations before then. He then gave a current picture along with proposed pilot programmes to be implemented in the absence of legislation. Anit Chandarana highlighted ticketing reform and touched on the TfWM Swift Go programme and how they could be expanded. He ended his update by reiterating the aims of the transition team, which was the goal of increasing rail usage.

In response to a question from Councillor Simon Phipps, Anit Chandarana stated that the absence of a full suite of legislation should not prevent any improvements from occurring, but for now aim was to do as much as possible without it. Councillor Simon Phipps responded and stressed that the certainty and longevity of the work completed during this time should be assessed and maximised.

**8. Board Leadership Group Progress Summary**

The chair noted the progress summary as read and asked for a specific update on fares reform. Peter Sargant reported that work continued into looking for a simpler approach for customers. He reported that a more details paper on this subject would be brought to the autumn board.

**9. Station Retail Reform**

Tom Painter provided a verbal update on the Station Retail Reform paper. He thanked partners for their feedback on the paper and detailed the asks of the report which were to note it and, subject to amendments, endorse the proposed responses to Transport Focus for current ongoing consultations. He gave a background on the rail retail reform and the key assertions within the paper and stated that so long it is properly thought through and designed with the customer in mind, that WMRE support the modernisation of station retailing.

Tom Painter then detailed the different approaches that were currently being undertaken by each operator before he shared the common themes that would be included in the consultation responses. These included, but were not limited to; level of support for those with accessibility needs; the contractual obligation of staff scheduling arrangements; and staff retention processes. He then discussed the dichotomy of the proposed responses between WMT and Avanti/Chiltern.

Then, before opening the floor for responses, he closed with an overview of the stations within the region and the potential impact of staffing levels at them as a response to the changes.

Councillor Ken Hawkins stated that it might be worth focusing on the fares reform prior to working on the station retail reform, but suggested that should they need to run concurrently, a trial should be run or a phased approach implemented to see how the proposals would work in practise for customers.

Councillor Peter Butlin seconded Councillor Hawkins' comments and added the importance of reliable, accessible ticket machines. He also raised the knowledge that staff have around getting the best fares which discourages the use of machines and increased the use of ticket offices and as a result the retail reform should be delayed until the fares reform was complete.

Councillor Mike Rouse reported that Worcestershire were not in favour of the proposals. He stated that mobile phone signal in rural areas affected the ability of many to buy tickets on their phones. He added that the ticket machines were not accessible and were cashless which was also not acceptable. He continued and stated that based on the WMT proposals the nearest customer information centre to the north Worcestershire area was at University Station which was not appropriate due to the distance needed to travel to reach it. Councillor Rouse also agreed that the ticket machines were not accessible which would add to the issue of people bypassing purchasing a ticket and travelling straight into Birmingham. He closed and said that the age of the

population in these areas and their general aversion to technology would also affect the implementation of the proposals.

Councillor Pervez Akhtar added to say that the WMRE should provide clear opposition to the proposal, he listed the demographic areas it could have a negative impact on and stressed that the proposals under consultation were not written with customers in mind.

Councillor Liz Clements spoke in agreement with previous councillors and added that Birmingham City Council also opposed the proposal. She emphasised that it disproportionately affected the disabled community. She reported that she had viewed the overarching equality impact assessment and stated that they were weak and contradictory, providing quotes from the assessment. She went on to say that the proposals appeared to not have been written the customer in mind, which was supported by the insufficient length and time of consultation which 3 weeks during school summer holidays and the start of the holiday season.

Councillor Daniel Millard from Sandwell MBC also supported statements around the inadequate length of the consultation and stated that Sandwell also opposed the proposals.

Councillor Pervez Akhtar asked if the chair had made representations to government on the proposals, to which the chair responded that as chair of WMRE it would not have been appropriate to do so until he had heard the views of the board. The chair then went on to share his belief that while he supported the modernisation of customer service in principle, the way in which it is proposed to be implemented needs to be reviewed.

Councillor Adrian Andrews from Walsall Council supported the chair's sentiments, echoing the need for reform provided the views of the board were considered.

The chair drew the discussion to a close. The Board unanimously approved the proposed responses. He stated that a formal response to the consultation would be written and submitted 26 July and that he would contact the Rail Minister, Huw Merriman, to convey the sentiments of the Board.

**10. WMRE/GBR Partnership Agreement**

Councillor Simon Phipps referred to the papers as included within the agenda pack, which were taken as read, he opened the floor for comments to which there were none.

**11. WMRE Business Update Report**

The WMRE Business Update Report was taken as read. The chair noted that West Midlands Trains were performing better and encouraged the Board to be diligent when holding the operators to account.

**Meeting Close**

The next meeting would be held 18 October 2023 at Summer Lane.

[The meeting ended at 5.30pm]