

Paper A

Meeting: West Midlands Rail Executive Board of Directors
Venue: Room 109, 16 Summer Lane, Birmingham / Microsoft Teams
Subject: Minutes
Date: Tuesday 19 March 2024 at 2.00pm

Present:

Councillor Liz Clements (Vice-Chair)	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Peter Butlin (Vice Chair – Shire/Unitary authorities)	Warwickshire County Council
Councillor Philip Price	Herefordshire Council
Councillor Ken Hawkins	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Phil Larratt	West Northamptonshire Council
Councillor Danny Millard	Sandwell Council
Councillor Simon Phipps	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Mike Rouse	Worcestershire County Council
Councillor Pervez Akhtar	Coventry City Council

In Attendance:

Denise Wetton	Network Rail
Ian McConnell	West Midlands Trains
Liz Baker	West Midlands Rail Executive
Mal Drury-Rose	West Midlands Rail Executive
Tom Painter	West Midlands Rail Executive
Peter Sargant	West Midlands Rail Executive
Andrew Leo	West Midlands Rail Executive
James Callingham	West Midlands Rail Executive

Apologies:

Andy Street (Chair)	Mayor of the West Midlands
Councillor Mike Bird	Walsall Council
Councillor Dean Carroll	Shropshire Council
Councillor John Cotton	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Craig Collingswood	Wolverhampton City Council
Councillor Jim O'Boyle	Coventry City Council
Councillor Lee Carter	Telford & Wrekin Council
Councillor Izzi Seccombe	Warwickshire County Council
Councillor Amjid Wazir	Stoke-on-Trent
Councillor Philip White	Staffordshire County Council
Councillor David Williams	Staffordshire County Council

1. Welcome, Apologies, Introductions & Declarations of Interest

Mal Drury-Rose welcomed all to the meeting, he gave apologies and invited attendees of the meeting introduced themselves.

No declarations of interest were made.

2. Forward Plan

The Forward Plan was discussed by Mal Drury-Rose. He raised the GBRTT/WMRE partnership update expected at the next meeting in June. He made reference to the draft rail reform bill and informed the Board of Directors that the it would remain an item on the agenda going forwards.

3. Minutes of the WMRL Board meeting on 19 December 2023

The minutes were reviewed and agreed as a correct record.

4. West Midlands Trains (WMT)

Ian McConnell delivered a presentation on West Midlands Trains. He covered general performance and reported that it was generally good with T3 at 87% in the West Midlands. He raised issues that had been faced with regards to infrastructure and landslips. Driver availability was also raised, but he confirmed to the board that WMT had enough drivers when trainees were considered. He stated that the issue with cancelled trains is a result of making sure that drivers are available from the driver pool which is being impacted by sickness, annual leave, restricted duties, and industrial action, the latter of which he said was dependent on government direction. He also touched on fleet performance, which he said had also been improving. He continued and stated that overall cancellation number were just below the national average.

Ian McConnell reported that WMR Passenger Journeys were increasing and detailed rates of recovery between pre-covid journey's and post-covid journey. He also shared the positive impact that revenue protection have had. He shared with the board the progress that has been made with the New Trains Programme and depot enhancement, he detailed key dates for the board to note.

He then promoted WMT's long term vision, called WM10. He closed his presentation by providing the board with a forward look which included, operational performance, implementing new trains, industrial relations, and growth.

In response to the chair Ian McConnell confirmed the issues with train cancellations in the previous month were related to driver sickness and industrial action.

In response to Councillor Pervez Akhtar Ian McConnell confirmed that future presentations would be shared prior to delivering due to volume of information. He also gave the board an updated on the Elephant and Bear Line and committed to sharing further information and promotional details.

It was also confirmed to the board that the mayor had written to the Minister of Rail to express the economic impact of the ongoing strike action, and the impact to the introduction of new trains that the industrial action is having on the region.

Councillor Peter Butlin gave an update on the impact of service cancellations and expressed his dissatisfaction with the level of cancellations. He also

raised WMT's recent timetable proposal for Stratford-upon-Avon and expressed concern that it would have a negative impact on the Warwickshire region. He requested that the proposal be reviewed in addition to consultation. In response Ian McConnell confirmed that no decisions had yet been made, and that the Department for Transport as funder would be the final decision maker.

In response to the Chair, Mal Duruy-Rose addressed the wider question regarding how the WM10 vision aligns with other strategic plans. He acknowledged that while there were aspects of the WM10 document that align well with existing plans, there were also areas that require further discussion and clarification. He emphasised the importance of ensuring alignment across all strategic plans to maximise their effectiveness.

5. Network Rail

Denise Wetton delivered a presentation on Network Rail's performance, highlighting various aspects affecting railway operations. She began by discussing the positive performance recovery, with T3 numbers standing at 84%. However, she underscored the pressing issue of trespassing and fatalities, noting their detrimental impact on society, customers, and staff welfare. In addition, Denise Wetton drew attention to critical infrastructure concerns such as track and point failures and the change in climate and weather patterns.

Denise Wetton provided insights into the complexity of assessing train performance from a Central Route perspective, considering the number of different operators using the network. Despite challenges, she reported reduction in a backlog of maintenance items, which now stood at approximately 9%, down from 50% two years ago. She addressed service-affecting infrastructure failures, attributing a majority of recent incidents to adverse weather conditions reported that 10 storms had occurred since September in addition to frequent rainfall. The urgency of understanding and effectively managing infrastructure hotspots, particularly in addressing drainage issues was emphasised.

Denise Wetton provided an update on mobility services at Birmingham New Street station. She noted the station's impressive performance, operating at above 90% capacity compared to pre-COVID levels and highlighted the evolving passenger dynamics, particularly the increasing demand for mobility assistance a result of a shift towards leisure travel. Additionally, she shared progress on accessibility initiatives, including the installation of tactile paving across Central Route stations.

She ended her presentation on Network Rail's commitment to community rail initiatives. She reported on proactive engagement with local community groups to foster ownership and collaboration in railway projects. The importance of collaboration with local authorities and departments, especially concerning climate change and external factors impacting rail operations, was acknowledged.

Councillor Pervez Akhtar raised queries regarding Network Rail's engagement with local councils and departments. Denise Wetton acknowledged the necessity of enhanced collaboration and highlighted ongoing efforts to work closely with councils, particularly in the wider Midlands region.

Collaboration with Local Authority flood risk managers was encouraged by the chair to bolster infrastructure resilience in the face of adverse weather conditions.

Councillor Butlin expressed concerns about the impact of embankment slips, prompting a discussion on vegetation management strategies and their implications for railway safety and reliability.

Councillor Akhtar inquired about air quality initiatives at New Street, prompting an explanation of the ongoing Plumo technology trial and collaborative efforts with train operators to improve air quality.

6. Board Leadership Group Progress Summary

Peter Sargant, speaking on behalf of Councillor Collingswood raised the endorsement of the letter regarding fares and ticketing reform and highlighted ongoing efforts in fares reform and pay-as-you-go rollout. He referenced an event with the rail minister on February 1st, where the next stage of pay-as-you-go rollout in both the West Midlands and Greater Manchester was launched. While expressing appreciation for the commitment to pay-as-you-go rollout by GDPR and DfT, he noted the necessity of reforming rail fares alongside this rollout. However, he mentioned the challenges faced, particularly in removing evening peak restrictions, which has led to a delay in implementing desired fare changes.

Councillor Akhtar expressed support for officers and emphasized the significance simplifying and reducing fares to foster industry growth. He urged for a strongly worded letter to be sent, emphasizing the importance of these factors.

Councillor Mike Rouse expressed agreement with the letter's content but raised a concern for non-constituent authorities outside of the Combined Authority area, appealing for their consideration.

Mal Drury-Rose provided updates on Rail Infrastructure Investment, highlighting WMRE's role as a client partner in the programme sponsorship of the Midlands Rail Hub (MRH). He announced the release of £123 million from the government for the full design of the programme business case for the Western and Central sections of MRH, expected to be completed by the year's end. Additionally, he mentioned efforts to obtain early deliverables for Kings Norton and Snow Hill platform, with Network Rail procuring an alliance partner for the design. He also confirmed that wider accessibility and infrastructure across the region was to be reviewed and addressed.

Councillor Liz Clements gave an update on passenger experience, providing details on initiatives aimed at enhancing the overall passenger journey.

7. Draft Rail Reform Bill

Councillor Simon Phipps presented updates concerning the work with the Great British Railways Transition Team and the Draft Rail Reform Bill recently published. He sought confirmation the board to submit a written response to the pre-legislative scrutiny process currently underway. He reiterated the board's stance on seeking greater accountability for rail services in the West Midlands, which had been previously endorsed and outlined ongoing negotiations with Great British Railways. He highlighted the need to reinforce this stance in the written response due by March 28th. Brief points outlining the response were provided in the report for board members' consideration.

The report and its recommendations were unanimously agreed upon and noted by the board.

A broader discussion ensued regarding the current state of the Draft Reform Bill. Key points highlighted included aspects of devolution, changes within the Department for Transport (DfT) and the government, the submission and scrutiny process, the proposed operating model, and the security and stability offered by the proposal.

8. 2024/25 WMRE Business Plan

Mal Drury-Rose provided an update on the draft business plan. He stated that that it had been shared with officers for feedback, which had been incorporated into the draft. He emphasised the importance of West Midlands Rail being an intelligent client, ensuring that necessary support is provided to hold operators and Network Rail accountable. He highlighted this theme as central to the business plan, which includes progressing station schemes and advancing the reform agenda, such as the Midlands Rail Hub.

He encouraged attendees to provide any comments or feedback on the business plan and asked that they contact himself or Tom Painter to discuss any thoughts or suggestions they may have.

9. Rolling Stock Leasing Briefing

Tom Painter delivered presentation on how trains are procured in UK rail. He explained that private rolling stock companies own the trains and lease them to train operators. He shared that trains are costly, with prices typically exceeding £1,000,000 per vehicle and cited a recent example of £1.6 million per vehicle. He noted that most leases are operating leases, meaning that the ROSCOs (rolling stock companies) retain the residual value risk on each contract. He mentioned variations in maintenance arrangements and rental charges across leases and shared how William-Shapps' Plan for Rail had fundamentally altered the train procurement model but confirmed that GBR procurement decisions regarding this matter are yet to be finalised.

10. WMRE Business Update Report

Mal Drury-Rose shared key highlights from the Business Update Report. He highlighted significant timetable changes expected on the Shrewsbury line starting from the June timetable change. He reported discussions with

colleagues in Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin regarding these changes and confirmed that West Midlands Trains was enhancing its service between Birmingham and Shrewsbury. He updated the board that the Department for Transport (DfT) has decided to withdraw funding for the Avanti through service from Shrewsbury to London. This change will impact passengers who currently use the through service, although overall, most passengers on the line are expected to benefit as a result of the increased WMT service. He noted both the positive and negative aspects of the changes.

Mal Dury-Rose informed the board about the proposal by the Wrexham, Shropshire and Midlands Railway Company to operate five trains a day between Wrexham and London Euston, passing through Shrewsbury, Wolverhampton, Walsall, and Coleshill. He stated that while WMRE were supportive of the proposal in principle, they have raised objections due to technical concerns. He reported that discussions are ongoing with the operator to address these issues and potentially change the objection to support.

11. Meeting Close

The next meeting would be held 18 June 2024 at Summer Lane.

[The meeting ended at 4.00pm]