

Paper A

Meeting: West Midlands Rail Executive Board of Directors

Venue: Room 102, 16 Summer Lane, Birmingham / Microsoft Teams

Subject: Minutes

Date: Tuesday 10 June 2025 at 11.00am

Present

Richard Parker (Chair)	Mayor of the West Midlands
Councillor Qaiser Azeem	City of Wolverhampton Council
Councillor Ken Hawkins	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Majid Mahmood	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Simon Phipps	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Philip Price	Herefordshire Council
Councillor Pervez Akhtar	Coventry City Council
Councillor Peter Hughes	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Liz Braithwaite	Cheshire East Council
Councillor Chris Robinson	City of Stoke-on-Trent Council

In Attendance

Councillor Tim Huxtable	Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Janna Simpson (Secretary)	West Midlands Combined Authority
Richard Allen	Chiltern Railways
Ian McConnell	West Midlands Trains
Natasha Grice	Transport Focus
Mal Drury-Rose	West Midlands Rail Executive
Adam Harrison	Transport for West Midlands
Andrew Leo	West Midlands Rail Executive
Tom Painter	West Midlands Rail Executive
Toby Rackliff	West Midlands Rail Executive
Peter Sargent	West Midlands Rail Executive
Ahmed Nawaz	West Midlands Rail Executive

1. Welcome and Apologies:

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Andrew (Walsall), Councillor Goldsmith (Cheshire East Council), Councillor Perks (Worcestershire County Council), Councillor Cotton (Birmingham), Councillor O'Boyle (Coventry), Councillor Allcock (Sandwell), Councillor Vickers (Telford and Wrekin), Councillor Sweetman (Wolverhampton), and Councillor Eacock (Worcestershire County Council).

2. Inquorate Meeting

The meeting was inquorate and therefore decisions taken at the meeting would be sought electronically following the meeting for formal approval.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting:

Matters arising including an update of schemes in the regions and a remediation plan for the Snow Hill Line were confirmed to be addressed during the meeting.

Recommended:

The minutes from 3 April 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

4. Election of Board Leadership:

This item was presented by the Chair. He reported that the positions open for election were Portfolio Holder for Rail Infrastructure Investment, Portfolio Holder for Rail Customer Experience and Vice Chair representing the Shire and Unitary Authorities. He confirmed that due to five named directors still outstanding that these appointments would be deferred until the September board.

Recommended:

The proposal for deferring the appointments be approved.

5. Chiltern Railways

Richard Allen, the Managing Director of Chiltern Railways, provided a detailed overview of the operator's recent performance and strategic direction. He shared the operational challenges currently facing Chiltern Railways, in relation to punctuality, service reliability, and customer satisfaction.

He shared with the board details on the train service performance, noting that despite having the oldest trains in the country, their service ranks third or fourth in the National League table. He confirmed that there had been recent challenges with the oldest coaches and mentioned efforts to replace these by March next year, pending government approval and budget considerations. He also proposed running additional services in the West Midlands from the end of next year, subject to government and industry approvals.

He reported that significant upgrades had been made at Stourbridge, including replacing old portacabins with better facilities and discussed ongoing efforts to improve travel experiences for football matches, focusing on securing better kick-off times and preparing for Euro 2028.

Councillor Ken Hawkins asked about the impact of the recent heatwave on train services and the measures being taken to ensure passenger comfort and safety. In response, Richard Allan explained that whilst the recent situation experienced by Councillor Hawkins was unique, it is something that is taken into consideration in operational planning.

Councillor Mahmood then inquired about the specific challenges in accommodating football supporters during the football season. Richard Allan explained the ongoing efforts to improve the travel experience for fans. He highlighted the challenges of securing better kick-off times for football matches and emphasised the importance of enhancing the overall matchday experience. Richard mentioned that they are making representations to the Football Association (FA) over the summer, with support from the British Transport Police, to address these issues.

Recommended:

The update be noted.

West Midlands Trains

Ian McConnell, Managing Director of West Midlands Trains, delivered a comprehensive update on the operator's recent performance and future. His presentation centred on operational performance, with a focus on punctuality, service reliability, and customer satisfaction. He reported some improvements in key metrics but acknowledged ongoing challenges, including service disruptions, rolling stock availability, and staffing pressures. He provided an update on mitigation actions such as timetable adjustments, enhanced maintenance regimes, and increased investment in driver recruitment and training. He also shared future initiatives including the introduction of new rolling stock, upgrades to station facilities, and digital improvements to passenger information systems.

Councillor Philip Price raised questions about the recent spending review and its implications for Hereford, particularly regarding the Midlands Rail Hub. He welcomed progress on service reliability in the area and stressed the importance of sustained investment in signalling and the dualling of the Worcester–Hereford line. He also shared that contractors have now been appointed for the £11 million transport hub project in Hereford, aimed at integrating all modes of transport with the rail station. Ian McConnell confirmed that the spending review provides positive news for Hereford and that funding for signalling and line upgrades remains on the agenda. He recognised the importance of the transport hub and reiterated the need for reliable train services to support its success, committing to continued efforts to improve regional performance.

Councillor Peter Hughes inquired about plans to improve accessibility at Coleshill station. Ian McConnell confirmed that proposals for enhancements were currently under review by the investment board, in line with West Midlands Trains' wider commitment to inclusive and accessible travel across the network.

Recommended:

The update be noted.

6. Transport Focus

Natasha Grice from Transport Focus presented an update on efforts to improve rail passenger satisfaction, highlighting the introduction of a rail scorecard that combines user survey data with industry metrics like complaints, cancellations,

and punctuality. West Midlands Railway was identified as the highest-performing operator in the region. She reported that the scorecard will soon incorporate data from a new, larger Industry Customer Experience Survey, offering real-time insights via dashboards. While the tool has had mixed reactions, Transport Focus continues to work closely with operators and ensures transparency by sharing results with them before government ministers. The new approach aims to provide more detailed, localised insight to support continuous improvement.

Natasha Grice responded to questions regarding the relationship between passenger satisfaction data and operational performance measures. She acknowledged that discrepancies could occur due to factors like service disruptions, rolling stock issues, and staffing pressures, but explained that analysing these gaps helps to identify improvement areas and manage customer expectations. In response to a follow-up from the chair about how actions are taken forward, Natasha clarified that Transport Focus takes a balanced approach and that they sometimes offer direct support and recommendations, as seen with targeted work for Northern, while at other times leaving action to ministers, civil servants, and delivery partners depending on the context.

Recommended:

The update be noted.

7. Board Leadership Group Progress Summary

Councillor Simon Phipps provided an update on rail reform and the recent Railway Bill Consultation. Simon raised concerns that the current national framework could diminish the role of devolved authorities, which would contradict the principles of devolution. He stressed the importance of enhancing, rather than limiting, their influence in shaping regional transport. Mal Drury-Rose added that the framework seems better suited to newer mayoral authorities and does not reflect the complex devolution already in place in areas like the West Midlands. He highlighted the difficulties of achieving a fully integrated transport system while the network remains incomplete.

In the broader discussion, Andrew Leo acknowledged the challenges of aligning with the government's framework and reiterated the need for a more joined-up, locally responsive system. There was a shared view that the long-term goal remains a model akin to London's, a direction echoed in recent discussions between the Chair and the Deputy Prime Minister.

Recommended:

The update be noted.

8. Fares and Ticketing Reform

Councillor Majid Mahmood provided a comprehensive update on the fares reform and the SWIFT on Rail programme. He focused particularly on the proposed removal of PM peak fare restrictions.

He also highlighted the progress made by Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) on the implementation of PAYG ticketing on the rail network and the simplification of rail fares and that the pilot scheme for this initiative had received funding approval from the Department for Transport (DfT) and HM Treasury, following the business case approval late last year.

Additionally, he announced the launch of a new “One Day Any Train” ticket in September, which will offer both peak and off-peak versions and serve as a daily fare cap within the TfWM area. This initiative was expected to encourage rail use by offering predictable, capped fares and would be available via ticket vending machines and booking offices.

Board members discussed the importance of clearly communicating these changes to the public to encourage behavioural change and increase rail usage.

Recommended:

The update be noted.

9. **West Midlands Train Depot and Stabling Challenge**

The board received an update on the Train Depot and Stabling challenges facing the new Class 730 electric trains, which are a key part of the West Midlands fleet, serving routes across Birmingham, Walsall, and Wolverhampton. It was noted that these trains currently lack a dedicated depot, resulting in operational challenges such as trains being stabled at platforms without proper servicing facilities. This had led to issues including uncleaned toilets, graffiti, and trains being taken out of service. Originally, there had been an agreement that the Department for Transport (DfT) would fund a new depot, with a site previously identified. However, progress has stalled, and the region has been left without the necessary infrastructure to support this long-term fleet investment.

The Chair confirmed that officers would return to the board with a detailed proposal once discussions with DfT had progressed.

Recommended:

- (a) The contents of the paper be noted.
- (b) The risks to train service delivery that will arise without any action being taken be noted.
- (c) The decision for the Executive Director of WMRE to engage with DfT to access funds from the Joint Savings Earmarked Reserves to potentially commission the re-design of a servicing and stabling Depot at Bescot, be approved
- (d) The Executive Director of WMRE will come to the next Board with a proposal for endorsement

10. Service Level Agreement Between WMCA and WMRE

Tom Painter presented the Service Level Agreement and emphasised the importance of ensuring that the combined authority has the resources to provide the rail executive with the necessary results. He mentioned that the Service Level Agreement allows flexibility in accessing services and managing costs and explained that due diligence was conducted to ensure value from changing the specification of services.

Councillor Philip Price raised concerns about the risks associated with the announcements that week, particularly regarding the combined authority's resources in areas such as procurement, governance, and legal services. He stressed the need for confidence that the combined authority could deliver the required results.

The board discussed the importance of being flexible and nimble in responding to the changing environment. They agreed that the SLA provides the ability to access necessary services and manage associated costs effectively. The board was asked to support the paper and approve the SLA. However, as the meeting was inquorate, this would need to happen electronically.

Recommended:

- (a) The contents of the paper be noted.
- (b) The Service Level Agreement (SLA) between WMRL and WMCA be approved and signed.

11. WMRE Business Update Report

The paper was taken as read, with the discussion focusing on key developments including Open Access applications, upcoming timetable changes, and station updates. Members were briefed on the rising number of Open Access applications and concerns remained about their impact on performance and local accountability. A notable application from the Wrexham, Shropshire & Midlands Railway Company proposes five daily services between Wrexham and London Euston, passing through key West Midlands locations including Aldridge. The board heard how Network Rail had raised concerns about performance implications on the West Coast Main Line and wider network capacity. Members agreed that the final decision rests with the Office of Rail and Road and confirmed no further board action was required at this stage.

Further updates were provided on timetable planning. While the May 2024 timetable changes were minimal, significant adjustments are anticipated for December 2024, including the expected introduction of the Camp Hill Line service. The board were informed how WMRE continued to work closely with operators such as Avanti and CrossCountry and

Work was underway to restore the full three-trains-per-hour service between Birmingham New Street and London Euston by September.

Recommended:

- (a) The contents of the paper be noted.

12. Forward Plan

The forward plan was discussed. Key dates for upcoming meetings were proposed, along with a draft agenda for the next quarter. Board members contributed suggestions for future topics, including, progress on ticketing reform; updates on new station developments and a review of passenger satisfaction data.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be held 16 September 2025 at 10:00am.

The meeting ended at 12:40.

14. Electronic Approvals

Resolved:

Paper A - Minutes of the WMRL Board meeting on 03 April 2025

The minutes be agreed as a correct record.

Paper D - West Midlands Train Depot and Stabling Challenge

- (a) The contents of the paper be noted.
- (b) The risks to train service delivery that will arise without any action being taken be noted.
- (c) The decision for the Executive Director of WMRE to engage with DfT to access funds from the Joint Savings Earmarked Reserves to potentially commission the re-design of a servicing and stabling Depot at Bescot, be approved
- (d) The Executive Director of WMRE will come to the next Board with a proposal for endorsement

Paper E - WMCA Service Level Agreement (SLA)

- (c) The contents of the paper be noted.
- (d) The Service Level Agreement (SLA) between WMRL and WMCA be approved and signed.

