

Meeting: West Midlands Rail Board of Directors

Subject: Minutes

Date: Tuesday 14 September 2021 at 10.00am

Present:

Andy Street (Chair)	Mayor of the West Midlands
Councillor Pervez Akhtar	Coventry City Council
Councillor Ahmad Bostan	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor John Harrington	Herefordshire Council
Councillor Ken Hawkins	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Simon Phipps	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Stephen Simkins	City of Wolverhampton Council
Councillor Philip White	Staffordshire County Council
Councillor David Wright	Telford & Wrekin Council

In Attendance:

David Balme	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Emily Barker	Worcestershire County Council
Heather Bolton	Telford & Wrekin Council
Hannah Collett	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Matt Crowton	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Julian Edwards	West Midlands Trains
Malcolm Holmes	West Midlands Rail Executive
Claire Horton	Staffordshire County Council
Andy Miller	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Victoria Mumford	Warwickshire County Council
Toby Rackliff	West Midlands Rail Executive
John Seddon	Coventry City Council
Roshida Sangha	West Midlands Rail Executive
Peter Sargent	West Midlands Rail Executive
Councillor Richard Worrall	Transport Delivery Committee

28/21 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Alan Amos (Worcestershire), Councillor Adrian Andrew (Walsall). Councillor David Hitchiner (Herefordshire), Councillor Richard Marshall (Shropshire) and Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Warwickshire).

29/21 Election of Vice-Chair

The Chair reported that Councillor Jackie Taylor was no longer a member of the board, and it was therefore necessary to elect a new vice-chair to replace her.

AGREED:

That Councillor Ahmad Bostan be elected vice-chair from the metropolitan authorities.

30/21 Forward Plan

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

31/21 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2021 were agreed as a correct report.

32/21 Board Leadership Group

The board considered a report from Malcom Homes proposing an approach to increase the role of West Midlands Rail directors in holding the rail industry, government and the West Midlands Rail Executive team to account.

The report proposed that a Board Leadership Group be established, consisting of four members, each with a clearly defined lead accountability area. Two of these members would be the vice-chairs, bolstered by the addition of two further directors selected by the Chair and agreed with both vice-chairs. To preserve balance, it was intended that, where possible, members of the Board Leadership Group were selected to maintain a cross-party and shire/unitary and WMCA constituent authority mix.

Councillor Simon Phipps (Dudley) and Councillor David Wright (Telford & Wrekin) had agreed to sit on the new group.

AGREED:

(1) The creation of Board Leadership Group be agreed.

(2) The Board Leadership Group terms of reference be agreed.

33/21 Union Engagement

The board considered a report from Malcolm Holmes on options for engagement with rail trades unions.

At the last meeting, a question was asked as to how rail unions were engaged in the work of the board and the West Midlands Rail Executive. It was recognised that significant value could be gained by broadening the West Midlands Rail Executive's engagement, including with trades unions, and as such it was agreed to explore options to present to the board for consideration.

It was proposed to establish a new Strategy Development Council that could allow a route for meaningful engagement with all four rail unions and other key stakeholders that were currently unrepresented such as rail passenger groups, Chambers of Commerce, universities, disability groups etc. It was suggested that the council would meet twice a year, chaired by either the West Midlands Rail Chair or one of the vice-chairs, and encourage input to the development of strategy in all areas of the West Midlands Rail Executive's activity.

Councillor Pervez Akhtar supported this proposal, but requested that this board still reserve the right to invite trade union representatives to its meetings if a specific item of business required it. Councillor Stephen Simkins suggested that these proposed arrangements be reviewed after a year. The Chair welcomed both suggestions.

AGREED:

- (1) The report be noted.
- (2) It be agreed that officers should develop detailed terms of reference for the establishment of a Strategy Development Council to include the four rail unions.
- (3) It ne agreed that officers should commence initial engagement with rail unions to gauge interest and to help develop the proposals.

34/21 West Midlands Trains Performance

The board considered a report from Tom Painter providing an update on the principle issues and trends affecting West Midlands Trains' operational performance over the last three months.

Julian Edwards reported that passenger demand was approaching 60% of pre-pandemic levels. The rail industry was expecting passenger numbers to grow to 80% of the levels it was at before March 2020. Earlier in the day, West Midlands Trains had signed a new direct contract with the Department for Transport for three years with a two year extension. Work was continuing with a Driver Recovery Programme to address driver shortages.

Councillor Simon Phipps expressed concern regarding the extent of driver shortages on specific lines, noting that particular problems had occurred for passengers wishing to get to West Bromwich Albion football matches. Councillor Pervez Akhtar noted similar concerns on the Nuneaton - Leamington Spa line. Julian Edwards explained that there was currently a two-hourly service on this line, which was expected to improve to an hourly service for some of the day during the next week.

Councillor Stephen Simkins enquired about plans to more closely integrate rail services with bus and metro. Julian Edwards indicated that the new contract signed with the Department for Transport placed clear requirements for services to integrate with other transport modes. He undertook to provide further details on this.

AGREED:

- The report be noted.

35/21 Commonwealth Games Rail Readiness

The board considered a report from Tom Painter on the preparedness of the rail industry for the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

The overall transport principles for the Commonwealth Games were outlined in the Games Transport Plan. The report set out the activity currently being undertaken to prepare for the events in respect of strategy development, timetabling, transport hub planning, HR and Network Rail. Malcolm Holmes explained that specific work was being undertaken to establish how people intended to travel to event venues. The Chair welcomed this, and asked that the Games Organising Committee look specifically at transport links to the Coventry Building Society Arena given the challenges this might entail.

AGREED:

That the report be noted.

36/21 West Midlands Grand Railway Collaboration Consultation on December 2022 Timetable Proposals

The board considered a report from Peter Sargant on the timetable proposals which had been developed by the West Midlands Grand Railway Collaboration for the December 2022 timetable change and the planned public consultation.

The West Midlands Rail Executive had been closely involved in the development of new timetable proposals for the West Coast Main Line and other routes which were due to come into operation in December 2022. There has been a West Coast Main Line Industry Planning Group process and a parallel West Midlands timetable process overseen by the Grand Railway Collaboration which had developed the plans for December 2022.

Councillor David Wright noted that each council needed to consider the implications of these changes for its residents. Councillor Pervez Akhtar noted the concerns that Coventry had regarding services to and from Tile Hill station. The Chair asked for individual briefings be given to councils and that the matter be reported to the next meeting for the board to take a collective view on the changes.

AGREED:

- (1) It be noted that the West Midlands Rail Executive had worked with the Grand Railway Collaboration partners to develop new timetable proposals for the West Midlands for the December 2022 timetable change.
- (2) It be noted that the proposed timetable changes impacted on virtually all routes and had a mix of impacts on passengers.
- (3) The proposed timetable changes outlined in the draft consultation documents, and the approach being taken to seek the views of the public and stakeholders, be noted.

37/21 West Midlands Rail Ltd/Department for Transport Collaboration Agreement and Approach to Managing the National Rail Contract (Direct Award)

The board considered a report from Tom Painter on progress with approvals for the revised Collaboration Agreement, together with proposals to strengthen the board's role in holding West Midlands operators to account.

At the last meeting the board approved in principle a revised version of the West Midlands Rail Ltd/Department for Transport Collaboration Agreement. This document, which formalised the West Midlands Rail Executive's responsibilities for franchise management and government grant funding, was coterminous with the Franchise Agreement and thus needed to be re-issued to coincide with the commencement of the West Midlands National Rail Contract.

The revised Collaboration Agreement represented an evolution of its predecessor. The principal changes were to update the document to reflect the change from franchising to the new National Rail Contract, strengthening the governance arrangements, and modernising the objectives to reflect contemporary priorities, such as the recovery from COVID-19 and the hosting of the Commonwealth Games.

AGREED:

- (1) It be approved that, subject to WMCA Board approval, West Midlands Rail Ltd enters into the revised Collaboration Agreement between West Midlands Rail Ltd and the Secretary of State for Transport.
- (2) The drafting of a side letter or Memorandum of Understanding relating to the West Midlands Rail Executive's powers in relation to the new National Rail Contract be agreed.
- (3) It be approved that the board enters into the IP Licence Deed of Variation.
- (4) It be approved that the board enter into the Joint Savings Earmarked Reserve side letter.

38/21 West Midlands Rail Infrastructure Priorities

The board considered a report from Peter Sargant on a summary of key rail infrastructure priorities for the region, including supporting evidence.

The West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy, published in January 2019, set out the West Midlands Rail Executive's plans for delivering better rail services across the whole region over the next 30 years. A major review and refresh of this strategy was now underway to reflect the major changes to the external environment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, emerging Government and rail industry decarbonisation proposals, potential implications of the forthcoming Integrated Rail Plan for HS2 and Midlands Rail Hub, and the Williams Shapps Plan for Rail and creation of 'Great British Railways'.

Councillor David Wright expressed concern that the electrification of the Shrewsbury line was not expected until 2040. Councillor Pervez Akhtar enquired as to whether the line between Coventry - Leamington Spa could be electrified at the same time as being double-tracked. Peter Sargant explained that an update on the Rail Investment Strategy would be submitted to a future meeting of the board and that a number of these priorities were dependent on other strategies and plans. Malcolm Holmes noted that the decarbonisation and electrification of the Snow Hill line and upgrade of the Solihull line would be included within the WMCA's Comprehensive Spending Review asks of Government.

AGREED:

The rail infrastructure investment priorities be approved.

39/21 West Midlands Rail Executive Business Update Report

The board considered a report from Malcolm Holmes providing a general update on progress against the West Midlands Rail Executive's objectives since the last board meeting in June.

In respect of the restoration of three trains per hour on Avanti West Coast services to London, Malcolm Holmes indicated that patronage was currently at 46% of pre-pandemic levels and Avanti had indicated that it expected the third hourly service to recommence in May 2022 as patronage continued to rise. The Chair indicated that he would write to Avanti West Coast and the Department for Transport on this issue to urge that the third hourly service be restored as quickly as was possible.

AGREED:

That the report be noted.

[The meeting ended at 12.00pm.]

CHAIR