

Meeting: West Midlands Rail Board of Directors

Subject: Minutes

Date: Tuesday 26 November 2021 at 1.00pm

Present:

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| Andy Street (Chair) | Mayor of the West Midlands |
| Councillor Pervez Akhtar | Coventry City Council |
| Councillor Alan Amos | Worcestershire County Council |
| Councillor Ahmad Bostan | Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council |
| Councillor Peter Butlin | Warwickshire County Council |
| Councillor Ken Hawkins | Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council |
| Councillor Simon Phipps | Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council |

In Attendance:

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| Jack Averty | West Midlands Combined Authority |
| David Balme | Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council |
| Emily Barker | Worcestershire County Council |
| Lawrence Bowman | West Midlands Trains |
| Matt Crowton | Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council |
| Malcolm Holmes | West Midlands Rail Executive |
| Claire Horton | Staffordshire County Council |
| Neil Lissamore | Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council |
| Andy Miller | Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council |
| Tim Mitchell | Birmingham City Council |
| Eddie Muraszko | West Midlands Trains |
| Tom Painter | West Midlands Rail Executive |
| Matt Powell | Telford & Wrekin Council |
| Margaret Rogers | West Midlands Combined Authority |
| Martin Rowe | Birmingham City Council |
| John Seddon | Coventry City Council |
| Peter Sargent | West Midlands Rail Executive |
| Anne Shaw | Transport for West Midlands |
| Darren Ward | West Midlands Trains |
| Jonny Wiseman | West Midlands Trains |

40/21 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Honorary Alderman Stewart Stacey.

41/21 Chair's Remarks

The Chair noted that Julian Edwards from West Midlands Trains was unable to attend the meeting because of a family illness. He also noted that former councillor Roger Horton and Honorary Alderman Stewart Stacey were both unwell, and he offered the board's best wishes to all concerned.

42/21 Drivers and Recent Impact on Snow Hill Line Performance

The board considered a report from Tom Painter providing an update on the issues and trends that had led to the submission of the Snow Hill Lines Route Recovery Programme.

At its meeting held on 14 September, the board was advised that the principle threats to the punctual and reliable delivery of the network came from a lack of available train crew and a shortage of rolling stock. Whilst the latter had now been largely addressed, the former materialised during October, causing widespread disruption across the region, but particularly on the Snow Hill line. The issue was at its most severe during a 21-day period between 17 October and 6 November. During these three weeks, West Midlands Trains suffered 1,597 cancellations, around 6.8% of services advertised to run. Of these, 74% were West Midlands Railway services, broadly 6.7% of all West Midlands Railway trains.

AGREED:

That the report be noted.

43/21 The Driver Recovery Challenge

Lawrence Bowman updated the board on the three key areas currently impacting on West Midlands Trains services: the impact and legacy of the pandemic, local legacy contractual issues, and the wider industry picture.

The pandemic had caused the driver recruitment and training programme to be paused for eight months, leaving 100 drivers in the 'pipeline' but unable to be released into the driver pool. Since the programme had been restarted, 156 drivers were now in the pipeline and it was expected that West Midlands Trains would be fully staffed by next summer. In respect of legacy contractual issues, a number of measures were to be included in the 2022 Business Plan that would seek to address and eliminate these. There was also the wider industrial climate within the rail industry, despite West Midlands Trains having good relations with local trades union councils.

Board members saw, in confidence, the West Midlands Trains' Snow Hill Lines Route Recovery Plan which set out how each of these areas would be addressed.

Councillor Pervez Akhtar highlighted the impact poor services were currently having on Coventry's hosting of the UK City of Culture festivities. The Chair supported these comments, noting that the service cancellations being experienced on the NUCKLE line were unacceptable. He requested West Midlands Trains provide a written response to Councillor Akhtar and himself as to the mitigation measures being taken, and when an acceptable service could be expected.

Councillor Ahmad Bostan expressed his concern over the effect of on services that was likely to occur in the leadup to Christmas. He enquired whether it was possible to move drivers around the network more effectively to preserve services. Lawrence Bowman explained that this was difficult because of the agreements currently in place with trade unions and the need to ensure drivers were fully trained on a route before they were put in charge of services.

Councillor Simon Phipps requested further clarity as to whether structural changes could be agreed with trade unions to bring about the sort of changes that were needed. Lawrence Bowman accepted that this would be a difficult set of negotiations, but stressed that West Midlands Trains employed many drivers who were prepared to agree to the greater flexibility required to operate a modern train operating company.

The Chair thanked West Midlands Trains for attending the meeting, and for accepting that the current level of service was unacceptable. He recognised that long term solutions would require all stakeholders, including drivers, to work together to achieve the right outcomes. He requested that an update on the progress being made on the route recovery plan be considered at the next meeting of the report.

AGREED:

That the update report be noted.

[The meeting ended at 2.00pm]

CHAIR