

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

**Subject:** Minutes

**Date:** Tuesday 14 December 2021 at 10.00am

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**Present:**

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 Ken Hawkins	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Simon Phipps	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Stephen Simkins	City of Wolverhampton 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
Lawrence Bowman	West Midlands Trains
Matt Crowton	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Kath Hartley	West Midlands Combined Authority
Malcolm Holmes	West Midlands Rail Executive
Claire Horton	Staffordshire County Council
Tim Mitchell	Birmingham City Council
Victoria Mumford	Warwickshire County Council
Marianne Page	City of Wolverhampton Council
To Painter	West Midlands Rail Executive
Toby Rackliff	West Midlands Rail Executive
John Seddon	Coventry City Council
Peter Sargent	West Midlands Rail Executive
Margaret Rogers	West Midlands Combined Authority
Jonny Wiseman	West Midlands Trains
Councillor Richard Worrall	Transport Delivery Committee

**44/21 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mike Bird (Walsall), Councillor Ian Courts (Solihull), Councillor David Hitchiner (Herefordshire), Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Warwickshire) and Councillor Waseem Zaffar (Birmingham).

**45/21 Chair's Announcements**

The Chair noted the recent death of former councillor Roger Horton, long time member of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, the former West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority, and more recently the WMCA's Transport Delivery Committee. He paid tribute to Roger Horton's long standing support of the rail sector and his dedication to improving passenger services in the region.

**46/21 Forward Plan**

The forward plan of items to be reported to future board meetings was noted. It was agreed that an item on the Midlands Rail Hub would be submitted to the board's March meeting.

**47/21 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 September and 26 November 2021 were agreed as correct records.

**48/21 Matters Arising**

**(a) West Midlands Grand Railway Collaboration Consultation on December 2022 Timetable Proposals** (minute no. 36/21)

Malcolm Holmes reported that following discussions between the Department for Transport and rail operators, it had been agreed to defer the planned consultation on the proposed December 2022 timetable changes.

**49/21 Board Leadership Group**

The board considered a report from Malcolm Holmes updating it on the progress made by the Board Leadership Group.

The purpose of Board Leadership Group was to strengthen democratic accountability, allow the burden of political leadership to be spread and better hold the rail industry, Government, and the West Midlands Rail Executive team to account. The report set out the recent activity of the group, including discussing a number of the emerging risks and issues facing rail in the West Midlands. Councillor Stephen Simkins enquired as to the term of office of the Lead Directors involved in the group. Malcolm Holmes noted that this detail had not yet been determined, but suggested a two-year appointment to align with the term of office for this board's vice-chairs.

**AGREED:**

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) The terms of reference of the Board Leadership Group be updated to reflect that the appointment of Lead Directors was for a period of two years.

**50/21 Strategy Development Council**

The board considered a report from Malcolm Holmes seeking approval for the proposed terms of reference for the Strategic Development Council and setting out plans for getting the forum established early in 2022.

At the board meeting in September, it had been agreed that a Strategic Development Council would be established to include, amongst other key stakeholders, the main rail unions. The role of the council would be to enhance stakeholder and rail staff engagement in the future development of West Midlands Rail Executive strategy and wider rail industry changes, and to provide the ability for key regional stakeholders, including rail unions, to be meaningfully inform West Midlands Rail Executive strategy.

Councillor Stephen Simkins supported this initiative and requested to become a member of the Strategic Development Council. The Chair supported this request.

**AGREED:**

- (1) The terms of reference for the Strategic Development Council and their adoption by the Council once established be approved.
- (2) The proposed approach for establishing the forum be endorsed.

**51/21 West Midlands Trains**

The board received an update from Lawrence Bowman on the activity of West Midlands Trains in recent months. The update provided further details on the impact of COVID-19 on the rail network, including on driver absences, current footfall at stations, and the progress being made with the driver recovery plan. There was also an update on the rolling out of new trains, initially on the Shrewsbury line services, during Q2 2022.

Councillor Alan Amos noted that a significant minority of service delays were recorded as not being related to the on-going driver shortages. Lawrence Bowman explained that these delays tended to be infrastructure related, such as trees falling on lines. West Midlands Trains was holding Network Rail to account over the impact these delays were causing to passengers. In respect of the cracking recently experienced on metro tram services in the region, Lawrence Bowman confirmed that checks were being undertaken on West Midlands Trains units to provide reassurance that similar problems would not occur. He also confirmed that the new trains would be leased rather than purchased outright. This was because the lifetime of a train unit - typically 30+ years - far exceeded the five year franchises awarded to operators. The Chair suggested that an item could be considered at a future meeting of the board to explore whether this procurement arrangement was the most appropriate, especially after the establishment of Great British Railways to oversee rail transport in the country from 2023.

**AGREED:**

That the report be noted.

**52/21 Commonwealth Games Rail Readiness**

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

At its last meeting, the board was informed that the timetable was the most important aspect of rail planning, as the extent to which additional capacity could be provided on key routes and at key times to cater for additional Commonwealth Games demand would be one of the main measures by which the rail industry would be judged. Since then, the rail industry had made considerable progress to define the core timetable for the duration of the games. The report set out in detail the commitments that each train operator had been able to make, based on incremental improvements on the proposed May 2022 base timetable.

Malcolm Holmes reported that Dave Ward, former Route Director for Network Rail, had been commissioned to undertake a review of the readiness of the rail network for the Commonwealth Games. Tom Painter confirmed that it was not the intention of rail operators to take existing services off other lines in order to meet localised capacity to support Commonwealth Games related events.

**AGREED:**

That the report be noted.

**53/21 Integrated Rail Plan/Union Connectivity Review**

The board considered a report from Peter Sargent on the contents and implications of the Integrated Rail Plan.

The Integrated Rail Plan was published by the Department for Transport in November and was an important document outlining the Government's plans for taking forward HS2, Northern Powerhouse Rail and other associated schemes, including Midlands Rail Hub. It had significant implications for the rail and wider transport network, and development and regeneration policies for authorities across the region. The most significant impact within the plan for the region was the provision of a direct HS2 link between Birmingham and Nottingham, which created significant passenger benefits but also undermined parts of the business case for Midlands Rail Hub as was currently proposed.

Councillor Pervez Akhtar stressed the need for further clarification on the Department for Transport's proposals to improve rail connectivity between Coventry - Leicester.

**AGREED:**

That the report be noted.

**54/21 Rolling Stock Strategy**

The board considered a report from Malcolm Holmes on the issues associated with developing a Rolling Stock Strategy for the West Midlands.

The significant drop in rail demand following COVID-19 had resulted in the Department for Transport reviewing the rolling stock plans for all operators, and there were discussions underway which could see some aspects of previously agreed plans changing. West Midlands Rail Executive had been involved in some of these conversations, and the board would be updated when any changes were agreed. West Midlands Rail Executive was currently updating its wider Rail Investment Strategy, and this would help provide a wider strategic framework for more detailed work on rolling stock. It needed clarity on the agreed fleet plans for West Midlands Trains to form the starting point for any work. There were also further inputs that more information was needed on, such as electrification strategy.

Councillor Stephen Simkins highlighted the importance to seeking to support regional businesses in the procurement of new rolling stock wherever this was possible.

**AGREED:**

That the report be noted.

**55/21 2020/21 Company Accounts and 2022/23 Budget**

The board considered a report from Malcolm Holmes seeking approval for the 2022/23 West Midlands Rail Executive budget and the West Midlands Rail Ltd accounts for 2020/21.

Income of £640,000 was attributable to the 2020/21 financial year, made up of funding contributions of £500,000 from the Department for Transport and £140,000 from the West Midlands Rail partner authorities. A net surplus of £140,000 after tax had been reported for 2020/21, after taking into account expenditure of £460,000 which reflected activities undertaking the core duties of West Midlands Rail Ltd. Corporation Tax of £33,000 was paid as a limited company.

Councillor Stephen Simkins enquired whether West Midlands Rail was being funded at a level that enabled it to meet its ambitions for the region. Malcolm Holmes reported that the direct funding for West Midlands Rail was intended to enable it to undertake high level development work. For scheme specific development, this was mostly funded from the Department for Transport's rail enhancements programme funding.

**AGREED:**

- (1) The West Midlands Rail Ltd accounts for the 2020/21 financial year be approved.
- (2) A director of the company be authorised to sign the 2020/21 West Midlands Rail Ltd accounts prior to filing at Companies House.
- (3) The proposed 2022/23 budget for the West Midlands Rail Executive be approved, noting that it has been endorsed by the West Midlands Rail Executive Officers' Group.

**56/21 West Midlands Rail Executive Business Update Report**

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

Councillor Alan Amos noted that strongest post-pandemic growth had been seen on the Birmingham - Hereford and Birmingham - Worcester routes. He was keen to ensure sufficient capacity was being provided to meet this demand. Malcolm Holmes confirmed that he had been speaking to the train operators to ensure that extra capacity was brought online as demand once again grew.

**AGREED:**

That the report be noted.

[The meeting ended at 11.45 pm.]

**CHAIR**