

Paper A

Meeting: West Midlands Rail Executive Board of Directors

Venue: Room 114, 16 Summer Lane, Birmingham / Microsoft Teams

Subject: Minutes

Date: Tuesday 17 December 2024 at 10.00am

Present

Richard Parker (Chair)	Mayor of the West Midlands
Councillor Pervez Akhtar	Coventry City Council
Councillor Qaiser Azeem	City of Wolverhampton Council
Councillor Adrian Andrew	Walsall Council
Councillor Kerrie Carmichael	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Mark Goldsmith	Cheshire East Council
Councillor Ken Hawkins	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Phillip White	Staffordshire County Council
Councillor Majid Mahmood	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Ian Nellins	Shropshire Council
Councillor Simon Phipps	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Philip Price	Herefordshire Council
Councillor Amjid Wazir	Stoke-on-Trent Council

In Attendance

Cllr Tim Huxtable	TfWM Transport Delivery Overview and
Scrutiny Committee	
Ian McConnell	West Midlands Trains
Richard Allan	Chiltern Railways
Andy Mellors	Avanti West Coast
Jools Townsend	Community Rail Network
Denise Wetton	Network Rail
Janna Simpson (Secretary)	West Midlands Combined Authority
Mal Drury-Rose	West Midlands Rail Executive
Andrew Leo	West Midlands Rail Executive
Tom Painter	West Midlands Rail Executive
Toby Rackliff	West Midlands Rail Executive
Peter Sargent	West Midlands Rail Executive

Item Title

No.

1 Welcome, apologies and introductions

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the Board. It was noted that the meeting was quorate.

Apologies were to be noted from Councillor O'Boyle, Councillor Goddard, Councillor Gordon-McCusker, Councillor Perry, Councillor Courts, Councillor Seccombe, Councillor Sweetman, Councillor Cotton, Councillor Lester, Councillor Crane, Councillor Vickers, Councillor Butlin and Councillor Hughes.

2 Declarations of Interest

None.

3 Minutes of the WMRL Board meeting on 19 September 2024

The minutes of the meeting were approved as a true and accurate record.

4 West Midlands Trains

Ian McConnell, Managing Director for West Midlands Trains (WMT), updated on the company's performance, emphasising cancellations, punctuality, and investments, including a £1bn transformation with new trains and depot upgrades. Immediate challenges include driver availability due to reduced overtime uptake after a recent pay deal. He shared measures to address this which included suspending driver training releases during the holidays and proposing long-term reforms like part-time weekend drivers and incorporating Sundays into the workweek.

He reported that Storm Bert, Storm Darrah, and seasonal events have caused service disruptions. He also discussed station-specific updates, including recruiting 14 drivers for the Hereford and Snow Hill lines by February 2025 and using working groups to improve driver availability. He shared investments with the board which included introducing Class 730 electric trains on the Chase Line, a £70m upgrade at Tyseley Depot, and station enhancements.

WMT launched a graduate program alongside successful apprenticeship schemes, hosting an open day at Tyseley Depot during National Apprenticeship Week. Ian acknowledged lessons from the recent ASLEF pay deal, which reduced voluntary Sunday work and service availability. On fares, he highlighted competitive pricing, and emphasises the need for ongoing engagement with MPs to secure support for the railway.

Infrastructure updates from Denise Wetton noted Storm Darrah's severe damage, mostly from fallen trees. She noted that, despite challenges, infrastructure performance improved by 9% over the previous year. The session concluded with a focus on addressing disruptions, stakeholder engagement, and climate impact.

5 Avanti West Coast

Andy Mellors, the Managing Director of Avanti West Coast (AWC), delivered a presentation to the Board on industrial action, punctuality and reliability, the driver recovery plan, the intention to restore back to three trains per hour between the West Midlands and London, and the introduction of new trains.

He gave an update on performance around T3, T15 and cancellations as well as providing an update on attribution, he stated Avanti was responsible for around a quarter of delays. The Board also received an update on the Net

Advocacy Score which was at its highest level since the easing of Covid restrictions.

Andy Mellors shared the key actions of the AWC driver recovery plan which included driver training, additional depots and the refinement of rosters.

Timetable updates were also received, and it was noted that trains were already back to three trains per hour including morning and evening peak. He also noted that continued progressive recovery to pre-covid West Midlands to London service levels by December 2025.

He reported that Avanti had introduced the Evero fleet, a £350 million investment of 23 trains. He also reported that in Coventry, a £650k enhancement project, part-funded by Network Rail and the Railway Heritage Trust, was replacing 25 skylights to increase natural light and showcase heritage features.

6 Community Rail

The Board received a presentation from Jools Townsend, Chief Executive of the Community Rail Network, on promoting sustainable, inclusive rail travel and enhancing integration across Britain and the West Midlands. She provided an overview of community rail's history, its role in local communities, and its operations. She shared evidence of the positive impact of community rail projects, including increased passenger numbers, social and economic returns, and the engagement of volunteers, schools, and communities. Two successful Community Rail Partnerships in the West Midlands were highlighted, demonstrating their effectiveness in breaking mobility barriers, widening access to opportunities, enabling sustainable travel, and amplifying community voices.

Jools Townsend emphasised the alignment of these initiatives with the West Midlands Local Transport Plan and highlighted the expertise and insights available to support further efforts. She stressed the importance of encouraging younger passengers and improving accessibility, suggesting Ian McConnell's involvement in station projects in disadvantaged areas. She expressed strong support for these initiatives and noted that unanswered questions due to time constraints would be addressed later.

The chair acknowledged the ongoing collaboration with the Community Rail Network team and expressed enthusiasm for continuing to support projects in the West Midlands, reaffirming his commitment to promoting these efforts. Jools Townsend noted the shift in Community Rail Network's focus from rural areas to more diverse and urban locations. She emphasised the importance of reaching historically excluded communities and expressed a willingness to collaborate on a targeted approach.

7 Board Leadership Group Progress Summary

The Portfolio Leads gave brief updates regarding their respective areas as per Paper B within the reports pack.

In response to a question from Councillors it was confirmed that Network Rail will be attending the March Board of Directors meeting.

Resolved:

The paper was noted.

8 Great British Railways Partnership

The board received a high-level update on the formation of Great British Railways (GBR) and the ongoing negotiations for a partnership between GBR and WMRE. Andrew Leo shared the emerging partnership framework developed by GBR Transition Team (GBRTT) and insights from the publication of the English Devolution White Paper. He then gave an overview of train services that start and end in both the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) area and the West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE) area, with the comparison demonstrating that almost all services start or finish outside of the WMCA area. He explained that this was why WMRE was formed as it is, as previous governments had been unwilling to grant devolved powers to Centro (as was) as it did not align with the rail industry geography in the region.

The key points from the presentation included the importance of aligning rail geography with political geography, the fact that most services serving the Combined Authority area also operate into other areas, the importance of a unified regional voice provided by the West Midlands Rail Executive, and the impact of devolution. It was noted that if a future partnership were to be with WMCA only, it would reduce the influence of Shire/Unitary authorities and be a backward step for devolution compared to what is in place today.

The board was asked to decide whether further action is necessary at this stage to make the case for a future partnership with GBR being with the West Midlands Rail Executive, supporting the current approach with a view to having a substantive discussion if it does not provide the desired engagement.

Resolved:

The board endorsed the continuation of the West Midlands Rail Executive model for engagement with Great British Railways to ensure a constructive dialogue across the entire region.

9 2023/24 Audited Annual Accounts for West Midlands Rail Limited

Mal Duruy-Rose gave an overview of the annual accounts. The board was asked to approve the draft accounts for the financial year.

Resolved:

The accounts were approved.

10 2025/26 Budget

Tom Painter presented the budget for 2024-2025, which was included in the meeting pack. The budget outlined a funding contribution of £500,000 from

the Department for Transport (DfT) to jointly manage the West Midlands Trains contract. Tom Painter explained that this was predicated on WMRE raising £140,000 locally. The budget demonstrated that this could be achieved whilst maintaining partner contributions at their current levels. The board approved the budget, including drawing down reserves of £250,000 to tackle rail reform work and other activities.

Resolved:

The paper was noted, and the budget was approved.

11 WMRE Business Update Report

A brief business update was provided, highlighting the successes achieved in the last quarter, such as the recovery plan for the Hereford service. The board was asked to note the contents of the business update paper.

Resolved:

The paper was noted.

12 Forward Plan

The forward plan was reviewed, and the board were invited to suggest any amendments. The plan included discussions on strategic issues, Manchester to Birmingham connectivity, and the rail reform agenda. It was noted that the new Secretary of State for Transport would be visiting in the first quarter of the next year, and efforts would be made to facilitate a roundtable discussion.

It was noted that Councillor Peter Butlin would be stepping down and the chair wished everyone a great Christmas and New Year, looking forward to the next meeting in the spring.

[The meeting ended at 12.00pm]