

Meeting: West Midlands Rail Board of Directors

Subject: Minutes

Date: Tuesday 15 March 2022

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 David Hitchiner	Herefordshire County Council
Councillor Richard Overton	Telford & Wrekin Council
Councillor Simon Phipps	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Stephen Simkins	City of Wolverhampton Council
Councillor Philip White	Staffordshire County Council

In Attendance:

Heather Bolton	Telford & Wrekin Council
Lawrence Bowman	West Midlands Trains
Anit Chandarana	Great British Railways Transition Team
Matt Crowton	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
David Gladwin	Great British Railways Transition Team
Councillor Kath Hartley	Transport Delivery Committee
Malcolm Holmes	West Midlands Rail Executive
Clare Horton	Staffordshire County Council
Tim Mitchell	Birmingham City Council
Victoria Mumford	Warwickshire County Council
Marianne Page	City of Wolverhampton Council
Tom Painter	West Midlands Rail Executive
Toby Rackliff	West Midlands Rail Executive
Margaret Rogers	West Midlands Combined Authority
Peter Sargent	West Midlands Rail Executive
John Seddon	Coventry City Council
Becky Wilson	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Jonny Wiseman	West Midlands Trains
Councillor Richard Worrall	Transport Delivery Committee

1/22 Welcome, apologies and introductions

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Peter Butlin, Councillor Richard Marshall, Councillor Izzi Seccombe and Councillor Waseem Zaffar.

2/22 Forward Plan

The forward plan of items to be reported to future board meetings was noted. Malcolm Holmes also noted that subject to approval of item 7 that a report on the principles with the Great British Railway Transition Team in relation to future partnership working following engagement and negotiation would be added to the June Board meeting, as well as the Avanti West Coast Partnership and Rolling Stock Leasing Briefing being deferred from the June to September Board meeting due to the acceleration of Great British Railways activity.

3/22 Minutes of the WMRL Board meeting on 14 December 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

4/22 Board Leadership Group Progress Summary

The board considered a report from the Chair to update on the progress made by the Board Leadership Group.

Councillor Stephen Simkins noted the position of the Fares, Ticketing and Growth Lead Director remained vacant, following Councillor David Wright's departure and to seek appointment as important for full control in affordability of fares. Councillor Simkins was happy to step forward to fill the vacancy to fulfil the political balance required.

It was noted to the board by Malcolm Holmes the intention to develop a Rail Customer Experience Policy to present to the June Board meeting for approval, following the development in partnership with Great British Railways for the future to outline policy cover on the network for the region's citizens on elements relating to the customer experience at stations, facilities, staffing, service quality, fares and ticketing, as well as train service levels and capacity.

Agreed:

- (1) The report be noted.
- (2) The appointment of Lead Director for Fares, Ticketing and Growth within a fortnight be resolved.
- (3) The Rail Customer Experience Policy report to the June Board meeting was agreed.

5/22 Lawrence Bowman, WMT Deputy Managing Director

The board received a presentation from Lawrence Bowman on the activity of West Midlands Trains in recent months. The update provided statistics following the impact of COVID-19 on the network to show a reduction on driver absences and increases in patronage, overview of performance and the driver recovery plan. There was also a focus on five key priority areas for the next quarter and an overview of the new Class 196 trains, outlining the features, as well as the communication and marketing plan for the trains that was anticipated to be in service over the next few months commencing firstly on the Birmingham to Shrewsbury line, followed by the Birmingham to Hereford line thereafter.

Councillor Richard Overton welcomed the new Class 196 trains and the extra focus on the network from football matches and events, as important to retain the overall customer experience as could impact on people's choices to travel by car rather than rail during busy periods. The Chair explained that extensive work had been undertaken by West Midlands Trains to resolve capacity issues on trains and station platforms in relation to this issue, however also acknowledged redevelopment of some stations would be required such as at Witton and the Hawthorne's as was unsuitable to cope with demand in capacity numbers in relation to stadium volumes.

Councillor Stephen Simkins raised weekend engineering works on the network causing disruption in and around Birmingham to outbound lines and asked what was being done to resolve, as would result in reputational damage such as missed connections for passengers, as well as what was being done to increase patronage in the fares and ticketing system being affordable for people to travel by rail rather than by car to promote public transport. Lawrence Bowman responded to say there was an opportunity to promote this with the difficulties in affordability to fuel cost increases and that marketing throughout the year from West Midlands Trains would focus around 'Car Free Fridays' to target the road market, as well as a current national workstream to look at a total fares reform over the coming years. Lawrence explained that traditionally Network Rail undertook maintenance on the network at weekends and holiday periods, as usually seen as a quieter period and in revenue, however if the market was changing, there would be a question for the industry as to when engineering works would be best to commence.

In response to a question from the Chair requesting an update on the opening of the new Coventry Station, Toby Rackliffe advised the station was complete and ready, however there was no opening announcement as of yet but was expected to open within the next few weeks, subject to entry of service once all formalities were completed.

The Chair thanked Lawrence Bowman for his contributions and work on the board as would be his last meeting due to moving to a new role with Network Rail. The board looked forward in meeting the new Managing Director, Ian McConnell at the June board meeting.

6/22 Great British Railways Transition Team

The board received a presentation from Anit Chandarana, Lead Director from the Great British Railways Transition Team to give an overview of the Transition Team and regional partnerships. Following the William-Shapps review published in May 2021 to set a single accountable body for the industry, outlining the aspects of owning infrastructure, receiving fare revenue, running and planning the network and setting fares and timetables with the purpose to create a simpler, better railway for everyone in Britain. The presentation outlined the four priorities of the Great British Railways Transition Team, overview of the leadership team, the Whole Industry Strategic Plan, focus on current work and other priorities.

Councillor Alan Amos welcomed the new coordinated structure but wanted to seek assurance the structure did not become remote and too centralised from local communities, passengers and organisations, as well as consideration for a coordinated and joined approach with the bus sector on joint ticketing to make public transport more attractive. Anit responded to say early conversations with the West Midlands Rail Executive and similar organisations in the country was to mitigate the risk of centralisation and welcomed a single ticket mechanism to public transport that the Great British Railways Transition Team would aspire to achieve for the future.

Councillor Stephen Simkins also gave his support but queried what funding sources would come with the partnership, what the intention of governance would be for expenditure and how to attract private investors. Anit responded to say the governance structure would be discussed in continuing partnership discussions with the West Midlands Rail Executive. The Chair also emphasised the governance following these discussions would be included within the trailblazer devolution deal for Leaders to approve to ensure an ambitious proposal.

7/22 GBR/WMRE Partnership – mandate for engagement

The board considered a report from Councillor Simon Phipps that built on the previous agenda item to advise of accelerated discussions with Great British Railways over the last few months, where the West Midlands region was one of two areas, along with Manchester to advance it's position for more powers and deliver better services for the region. The report would allow an engagement and negotiating mandate in relation to the future partnership between the West Midlands Rail Executive and Great British Railways Transition Team.

Agreed:

(1) The mandate set out in paragraph 22 of the report was approved.

8/22 Commonwealth Games rail readiness

The board considered a report from Councillor Ahmad Bostan and Tom Painter, Head of Railway Delivery to update the board on the preparedness of the rail industry for the 2022 Commonwealth Games. The report outlined the transport hub planning, contingency planning, command and control and employee engagement. Tom also noted changes to the way governance was being structured in the railway industry for the Commonwealth Games with a new forum to be established, that would report in to the Strategic Board of the Grand Railway Collaboration which would be director-led to ensure plans by the railway industry for the Commonwealth Games were appropriately steered, delivered on time and with risks identified and mitigated to ensure focus and accountability due to transition from planning to implementation stages.

In response to a question from The Chair who queried when the announcement of timetables would be released to enable strengthening of services for the Commonwealth Games and for customers to plan their journeys, Tom responded to say the rail industry was on target to complete and should be

released 12 weeks prior to enable customers to plan their journeys, purchase tickets, as well as proactive communications to the public on how the rail network would operate differently.

In response to a question from Councillor Stephen Simkins for the opening of the Transport Hub and overall connectivity in Wolverhampton for people in the area to use other transport modes to use and enjoy the Commonwealth Games such as the tram network linking to the rail network, The Chair noted this was mission critical and wanted to reassure the board an update was imminent following discussions with Network Rail and Transport for West Midlands and if unresolved, would be escalated with the Director of Network Rail.

Agreed:

(1) The report be noted.

9/22 WMRE Business Plan 2022/23

The board considered a report from Liam Brookes, Programme Sponsor to seek board approval for the annual update of the West Midlands Rail Executive Business Plan.

The Chair requested for future reports that further clarity for work on new stations within the conurbation to be clearer to understand board agreements, with Councillor Stephen Simkins commenting on existing stations such as Tettenhall and Brinsford stations to be built into the business plan for greater connectivity between the Shires and City Centres for the region. Malcolm Holmes responded to say future reports would be clearer, however feasibility work had been commissioned on new and existing stations and would provide outputs for the June Board meeting.

Agreed:

(1) The West Midlands Rail Executive Business Plan 2022/23 was approved.

10/22 WMCA SLA and Governance Note

The board considered a report from Malcolm Holmes to seek approval for two documents governing the formal relationship between West Midlands Rail Limited and the West Midlands Combined Authority following a review in 2019 from the West Midlands Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee in to the governance arrangements existing between the authority and West Midlands Rail Limited as an arms-length organisation.

Agreed:

- (1) The Governance Note included within the report as Appendix A was approved.
- (2) The draft Service Level Agreement between West Midlands Rail Limited and the West Midlands Combined Authority within the report as Appendix B, along with authorisation of a Director to sign the document on behalf of the company was approved.

11/22 WMRE Business Update Report

The board considered a report from Malcolm Holmes on a general update for

Directors to be sited on progress against the West Midlands Rail Executive objectives since the last board meeting in December 2021. Malcolm noted from the report, three key updates relating to the progress made to establish the Strategic Development Council which Councillor Simon Phipps and Councillor Stephen Simkins would lead on, with the first meeting due in May and re-occur six monthly thereafter. The other two key updates was on funding from the joint account with the Department for Transport to undertake a study on a long-standing issue of restoring rail services to Wedgwood and Barlaston stations in Staffordshire since removal of rail services in 2004, or consideration of a new station at Trentham in south Stoke-on-Trent welcomed by Jack Brereton MP for Stoke South, as well as progress of rail programmes and completion and opening of Package 1 Perry Barr station by end of May.

Agreed:

(1) The report be noted.

[The meeting ended at 11.59 am]