

Paper A

Meeting: West Midlands Rail Executive Board of Directors

Venue: 16 Summer Lane, Birmingham / Microsoft Teams

Subject: Minutes

Date: Tuesday 16 September 2025 at 10.00am

Present

Richard Parker (Chair)	- Mayor of the West Midlands
Councillor Pervez Akhtar	- Coventry City Council
Councillor Keith Allcock	- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Adrian Andrew	- Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Qaiser Azeem	- City of Wolverhampton Council
Councillor Robert Butler	- West Northamptonshire Council
Councillor Daniel Cecil	- Staffordshire County Council
Councillor Sue Eacock	- Worcestershire County Council
Councillor Jonathan Lester	- Herefordshire Council
Councillor Majid Mahmood	- Birmingham City Council
Councillor Peter Mason	- Staffordshire County Council
Councillor Karl Perks	- Worcestershire County Council
Councillor Philip Price	- Herefordshire Council
Councillor Ollie Vickers	- Telford & Wrekin Council
Councillor Jennifer Warren	- Warwickshire County Council
Councillor Rob Wilson	- Shropshire Council

In Attendance

Councillor Heather Delaney	- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Mal Drury-Rose	- West Midlands Rail Executive
Councillor Tim Huxtable	- Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Andrew Leo	- West Midlands Rail Executive
Ian McConnell	- West Midlands Trains
Tom Painter	- West Midlands Rail Executive
Paul Plummer	- University of Birmingham
Toby Rackliff	- West Midlands Rail Executive
Roshida Sangha	- West Midlands Rail Executive
Peter Sargent	- West Midlands Rail Executive
Denise Wetton	- Network Rail
Lucy Wootton	- West Midlands Rail Executive

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Liz Braithwaite (Cheshire East), Councillor George Finch (Warwickshire), Councillor Karen Grinsell (Solihull), Councillor Ken Hawkins (Solihull), and Councillor Simon Phipps (Dudley).

2. Minutes - 12 June 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

3. Election of Board Leadership

The board considered nominations from amongst its membership to undertake the roles of Vice-Chair (Shire & Unitary Authorities), Portfolio Lead for Rail Infrastructure Investment and Portfolio Lead for Rail Customer Experience.

Resolved:

- (1) Councillor Karl Perks be appointed Vice-Chair (Shire & Unitary Authorities) for 2025/26.
- (2) Councillor Adrian Andrew be appointed Portfolio Lead for Rail Infrastructure Investment for 2025/26.
- (3) Councillor Ken Hawkins be appointed Portfolio Lead for Rail Customer Experience for 2025/26.

4. Independent Review into Major Disruption on 2 July 2025

The board considered a report from Lucy Wootton, Head of the Grand Railway Collaboration, on the findings of the independent review conducted by Professor Paul Plummer into the major incident that occurred at Birmingham New Street station on 2 July that caused extensive disruption to customers across the wider public transport network.

The dewirement near Birmingham New Street Station on 2 July caused severe disruption to rail and wider transport networks, continuing into the following day and resulting in reputational damage for the industry. WMRE commissioned an independent review to examine the causes and to recommend measures to improve resilience and customer response. The incident occurred when a train pantograph hooked onto and struck overhead line support equipment, damaging the train and approximately 100m of infrastructure at a critical location. Although the industry managed a complex recovery, including evacuating stranded passengers and restoring services, some actions could arguably have been completed more swiftly. The event led to 212 full cancellations, 289 part-cancellations, nearly 12,000 delay minutes, and compensation costs exceeding £1.3m, alongside wider impacts on road transport. The review identified opportunities for improvement, particularly through enhanced co-ordination within rail and across transport modes, to strengthen future readiness and customer experience.

Resolved:

- (1) The report be noted.
- (2) The findings of the independent review be noted.

- (3) Recommendations to be taken forward by the Grand Rail Collaboration (GRC) and reported back to the WMRE Board at a future meeting.

5. West Midlands Trains

The board received an update from Ian McConnell, Managing Director of West Midlands Trains, confirming improved performance, fleet upgrades and ongoing supply chain challenges. Questions were raised regarding investment in staff and whether new trains would remain in the region, with assurances given that they would. It was noted that public ownership would not significantly alter funding arrangements. The development of Bescot depot was reported as paused, and concerns were expressed about interaction between Welsh publicly owned operators and English services, with engagement with Transport for Wales scheduled for discussion at the next meeting.

Resolved:

The update be noted.

6. Network Rail

The board received an update from Denise Wetton, Route Director for Network Rail, who reported that infrastructure performance was ahead of targets despite challenges from trespass, vandalism and adverse weather. She outlined the Midlands Rail Hub project, including new chords at Birmingham Moor Street, reconfiguration at Kings Norton and integration with other transport modes, aiming to create 13,000 jobs, 20,000 homes and 300 extra daily trains. Early deliverables included reinstating Snow Hill Platform 4 and commencing works at King's Norton, with a detailed delivery schedule expected within five weeks. The project was highlighted as a driver of economic growth, improved connectivity and environmental benefits through freight transfer to rail.

Resolved:

The update be noted.

7. Board Leadership Group Progress Summary

The board considered a report from Mal Drury-Rose, Executive Director, West Midlands Rail Executive, on the progress made by the Board Leadership Group during the previous quarter.

On 28 July, it was confirmed that West Midlands Trains would transfer to public ownership on 1 February 2026, as anticipated under the Government's public ownership programme, although the exact date had previously been uncertain. WMRE's Collaboration Agreement with the Department for Transport, which provided its formal powers and funding, was also scheduled to end on the same date. However, the Minister of State for Rail had confirmed that existing devolution arrangements would remain in place until the next phase of rail reform. Work was underway with the

Department for Transport on a new agreement beyond February 2026, while the Comprehensive Spending Review secured funding for the Midlands Rail Hub, with Network Rail appointing alliance partners to progress detailed design for the Central and Western elements and advancing the Eastern elements to Outline Business Case.

WMRE contributed to several workstreams, including upgrades at King's Norton and Snow Hill Platform 4, and the project identified future service changes such as new direct Birmingham - Swindon connections. Despite some high-profile incidents, overall train performance during the summer was stable, with improved punctuality and reliability supported by increased driver availability, reducing cancellations from around 800 per month in late 2024 to approximately 125 per month by summer 2025.

Resolved:

The report be noted.

8. Collaboration Agreement with the Department for Transport

The board considered a report from Tom Painter, WMRE's General Manager, on progress with approvals for the revised Collaboration Agreement between the Department for Transport and WMRE.

The Department for Transport confirmed through letters from the Minister of State for Rail to the Mayor that it intended to enter into a new Collaboration Agreement with WMRE, reaffirming a commitment previously made by the Secretary of State for Transport in July 2024. Initial discussions with Department for Transport officials explored the scope of the agreement, with WMRE seeking greater local oversight as a step towards future partnership arrangements with Great British Railways. However, the Department for Transport advised that only administrative changes could be progressed before February 2026 due to time constraints and an impending internal re-organisation, which included transferring around 300 staff to Department for Transport Operator Ltd by the end of the 2025/26 financial year. Consequently, the next agreement was expected to maintain existing devolved arrangements and grant funding, leaving WMRE and its partner authorities no worse off. Once drafted, the agreement would require approval by WMRE member authorities through a Special Resolution in accordance with its Articles of Association.

Resolved:

- (1) The report be noted.
- (2) The approach to agreeing a new Collaboration Agreement be approved.
- (3) The governance process for agreeing a new Collaboration Agreement be noted.

9. Great British Railway Partnership Framework Positioning

The board considered a report from Andrew Leo, WMRE's Strategic Lead for Rail Reform, on the future role of WMRE in the context of the Government's Mayoral Partnerships Framework, and to remit WMRE to work through partners at the Urban

Transport Group on the shape of a revenue risk framework that could accompany WMRE's ambitions.

The Government's Mayoral Partnerships Framework was introduced to the board in December 2024 and published publicly in February 2025 as part of the Railways Bill consultation. The framework marked a shift away from bespoke Trailblazer Deals towards a standardised approach for mayoral authorities, intended to streamline engagement and avoid multiple individual negotiations. At the Partnership Oversight Group meeting on 10 June, WMRE was asked to define its ambitions under the framework by November to align with the Railways Bill's second reading. WMRE had already outlined its aspirations in the WMRE Blueprint, presented to the board in July 2024, which proposed a future role as Great British Railways' regional client with powers to specify requirements and hold the railway to account for delivery.

The Government stated that both the 'Local Commissioning' and 'Fully Devolved' levels of the Mayoral Partnerships Framework would require the assumption of revenue risk, linking any significant degree of control to its financial consequences. The precise structure of this framework had not yet been defined, though it was expected to involve the £213m annual subsidy for West Midlands Railway operations flowing via WMRE or the WMCA to Great British Railways. This lack of clarity presented an opportunity to collaborate with the Government on developing a workable model. To support this, the Urban Transport Group convened the first meeting of a Policy Reform Group, which WMRE's General Manager was invited to co-chair alongside the Partnerships Team.

The Chair emphasised the need for greater influence over the rail network and acknowledged the importance of reconciling urban and rural challenges, noting that lessons could be learnt from rail provision in the rural areas. While WMRE viewed the proposed approach from government to devolution positively, concerns were raised by Councillor Phillip Price about its applicability to rural authorities, and it was confirmed that the operating model remained under development as part of a transitional agreement.

Resolved:

- (1) The report be noted.
- (2) The ambition for the Commissioning Level of the Partnership Framework be endorsed, subject to an acceptable set of financial conditions being made available.
- (3) A recommendation to work with Government through partners at the Urban Transport Group on a set of financial conditions which would be acceptable to the region be endorsed.

10. Fares and Ticketing Reform

The board considered a report from Peter Sargant, WMRE's Head of Rail Policy & Strategy, on the 'PM peak' restriction situation and the proposed fares from the new stations.

The board noted that a package of fare changes had been developed to support the introduction of Pay-As-You-Go ticketing, including Single Leg Pricing. WMRE consistently supported removing 'PM peak' restrictions to benefit passengers, but this proposal faced opposition from rail operators and the wider industry. At the Rail Minister's request, WMRE submitted a detailed business case to the Department for Transport in April, addressing operator concerns, but received no response until September. The decision was expected to increase complexity for non-Pay-As-You-Go users, create misalignment with bus and metro fares, and require an average fare rise of around 5.1% to maintain revenue neutrality, whereas removing restrictions could have avoided or reduced this increase.

Resolved:

- (1) Concern be expressed that the Department for Transport had rejected WMRE's business case for the removal of 'PM peak' restrictions.
- (2) It be noted that this decision would result in a more complex rail fares structure for many users, which was misaligned with other public transport fares and would require higher peak fare rises to deliver revenue neutrality.
- (3) It be noted that this decision appeared to be driven by concerns from rail operators about managing peak demand, which WMRE believed was misplaced, but which it had not been given the opportunity to challenge.
- (4) It be agreed that the decision should be challenged and that this board would provide political support for the decision to be reversed.
- (5) The introduction of the 'One-Day Any Train' ticket in October be welcomed.
- (6) The proposed pricing for the new stations be noted and supported.

11. WMRE Business Update Report

The board considered a report from Mal Drury-Rose, Executive Director, West Midlands Rail Executive, on progress against WMRE objectives since the last board meeting in June.

Significant progress was achieved on the new stations at Darlaston and Willenhall with the installation of footbridges, stairs and canopy structures, alongside confirmation of funding for the Midlands Rail Hub in the Comprehensive Spending Review. Passenger revenue for West Midlands Trains exceeded expectations, and WMRE secured the restoration of early services from Worcestershire Parkway and enhancements at Water Orton. Chiltern Railways confirmed acquisition of the Mark 5 fleet for timetable improvements in December 2026, whilst the Caledonian Sleeper service announced direct services between Birmingham International and Scotland from January 2026. The Office of Rail & Road rejected Wexham, Shropshire & Midlands Railway's

application for London Euston access rights, prompting consideration of an alternative proposal. Despite infrastructure and external incidents affecting performance, West Midlands Trains reported generally positive contractual results, and additional Avanti West Coast services were introduced from September. Transport for West Midlands also commissioned feasibility studies for step-free access at six stations.

Resolved:

The report be noted.

12. Forward Plan

A plan of items to be discussed at future meetings was considered. Councillor Pervez Akhtar asked the Chair to consider whether the board would benefit from having the perspective of a trade union representative in attendance at meetings. Councillor Rob Wilson suggested it might be useful to consider how best to engage with Transport for Wales on rail services that crossed the English/Welsh border. The Chair undertook to consider both of these requests.

13. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 9 December 2025 at 10.00am.

[The meeting ended at 11.55am]