

## Paper A

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

**Venue:** West Midlands Combined Authority, 16 Summer Lane, Birmingham / Microsoft Teams

**Subject:** Minutes of the meeting held on 19 December 2023

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### Present:

Andy Street (Chair)	– Mayor of the West Midlands
Councillor Adrian Andrew	– Walsall Council
Councillor Amjid Wazir	– Stoke-on-Trent Council
Councillor Craig Collingswood	– City of Wolverhampton Council
Councillor Ken Hawkins	– Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Liz Clements	– Birmingham City Council
Councillor Pervez Akhtar	– Coventry City Council
Councillor Phil Larratt	– West Northamptonshire Council
Councillor Philip Price	– Herefordshire Council
Councillor Simon Phipps	– Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Peter Hughes	– Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

### In Attendance:

Andy Mellors	– Avanti West Coast
Steve Montgomery	– First Group
Ian McConnell	– West Midlands Trains
Tom Joyner	– CrossCountry Trains
Mal Drury-Rose	– West Midlands Rail Executive
Peter Sargent	– West Midlands Rail Executive
Andrew Leo	– West Midlands Rail Executive
Toby Rackliff	– West Midlands Rail Executive
Tom Painter	– West Midlands Rail Executive

### Apologies:

Councillor Craig Browne	– Cheshire East Council
Councillor Ian Courts	– Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Izzi Seccombe	– Warwickshire County Council
Councillor John Cotton	– Birmingham City Council
Councillor Lee Carter	– Telford & Wrekin Council
Councillor Mike Bird	– Walsall Council
Councillor Mike Rouse	– Worcestershire County Council
Councillor Peter Butlin	– Warwickshire County Council
Councillor Philip White	– Staffordshire County Council
Councillor Richard Marshall	– Shropshire Council
Councillor Steve Evans	– City of Wolverhampton Council

1. **Welcome, Apologies & Introductions**  
Andy Street welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. **Declarations of Interest**  
The forward plan of agenda items to be reported to future meetings was approved.
3. **Forward Plan**  
The chair presented the forward plan for the meeting and board agreed it be approved.
4. **Minutes of the WMRL Board meeting 18 October 2023**  
The mayor presented the Minutes of the WMRL Board meeting 18 October 2023, and they were approved by the board.
5. **Board Leadership Group Progress Summary**  
The board reviewed a report presented by the Board Leadership Group. Members provided a concise update, within the report on their respective areas of responsibility. Councillor Simon Phipps reported on Local Accountability, Councillor Liz Clements on Rail Customer Experience, and Councillor Craig Collingswood addressed Fares, Ticketing, and Growth. Councillor Peter Butlin was an apology and thus was not present at the meeting to report on Rail Infrastructure Investment. However, no comments were raised and his written update was taken as read.
6. **West Midlands Trains**  
Ian McConnell presented an overview of recent developments at West Midlands Trains. He updated the board on the growth in WMR passenger journeys. He detailed the company's operating performance, including information on driver availability, time-3 calculations, and cancellations. He addressed the impact of industrial action on operations, providing comparative figures on the Snow Hill lines. He outlined planned actions to enhance performance, such as releasing additional class 172s on to the Snow Hill lines, and working with Network Rail to address the impact of Network Rail performance on WMT services. An update on revenue protection performance was provided with the board hearing that there had been a 300% increase in ticket checks in the last 12 months, with revenue protection staff now checking on average 30k tickets every month. In response to questions from the board, the challenging relationship between WMT and ASLEF was acknowledged. However, Ian McConnell noted that the situation with the RMT had improved, with the union having voted to accept a pay deal. The board heard that WMT were on track to finish driver training for existing drivers on the Elephant and Bear Line in early 2024. Ian McConnell concluded by saying that WMT's focus for 2024 was on operational performance, driver training for the new trains, industrial action, and growing the business.

Councillor Liz Clements praised the marketing strategy and inquired about short-form trains on cross-city lines, seeking clarification on the timeline for returning to normal services. Ian McConnell confirmed that some trains had

had fewer carriages due to defects, but that these had been addressed. In response to the chair, Ian McConnell advised that as part of a planned wider industry fleet cascade, some of the trains used on the CrossCity Line would need to be sent to Northern Rail. This had been delayed as long as possible, but meant that there would be some shortforming of services until the new Class 730 trains were introduced in early 2024. Ian McConnell agreed to share more information with Councillor Clements outside of the meeting.

Councillor Ken Hawkins reminded the board of infrequent train users who may only encounter negative experiences while travelling. He emphasised the need for improved communication when there is disruption, suggesting earlier notifications. Councillor Pervez Akhtar seconded this, and expressed his concern about the number of cancellations on the Elephant and Bear line. Ian McConnell said that he was not satisfied with current performance on this route either, and referred back to comments made earlier in his presentation about the progress of driver training.

Finally, the chair asked Ian McConnell to share patronage by route, which he agreed.

## **7. Cross Country Trains**

Tom Joyner delivered a presentation to the board on CrossCountry. He outlined the company's vision and key details of its new National Rail Contract (NRC). He shared essential terms of the contract, including contract duration, the addition of seven extra voyager trains, timetable enhancements, and fleet refurbishment. Tom Joyner also detailed ongoing developments across eight strategic areas in the NRC annual business plan. He provided information on two specific projects: Project Hydra, aimed at introducing a more flexible travel approach to timetable planning and, Project Devana, focused on ways to better serve local routes that are currently operated by CrossCountry but might have a stronger strategic fit with a different operator.

He presented headlines of operational performance and comparisons, and acknowledged that the impacts of recent positive changes were still to flow through to the customer experience. He shared plans for the next steps, emphasising the need for innovative solutions related to crowding, fleet expansion, and the ongoing projects Hydra and Devana.

The mayor, Andy Street commended CrossCountry's aspiration to make their business more focused on inter-city travel, with local and regional services being provided by local and regional operators. He noted that this would be best for both long-distance and local passengers. Councillor Liz Clements expressed agreement, and both Councillors Phill Larratt and Ken Hawkins concurred. The board indicated its strong support for Project Devana.

In response to Councillor Pervez Akhtar's inquiry, Tom Joyner confirmed that all Voyager trains would undergo rebranding, refurbishment, and the implementation of passenger counting automation.

In response to a question from Councillor Craig Collingswood about the use of local suppliers, Tom Joyner confirmed that maintenance of their Class 170 trains occurred at Tyseley and that future procurement efforts would seek to add investment in the region.

## **8. Avanti West Coast**

Andy Mellors presented an overview of Avanti, highlighting key aspects of the National Rail Contract, which spanned nine years with an initial three-year term, primarily functioning as a management contract. He echoed sentiments similar to those expressed by CrossCountry regarding recent operating performance, he raised issues related to industrial action, terms and conditions, and the impacts of seasonal annual leave on staff availability.

He covered timetable improvements, and advised that the timetable reductions introduced in December would be reversed in the New Year. He reported on unprecedented levels of driver recruitment and efforts to enhance the availability of current drivers. Andy Mellors also raised the challenges faced by Avanti, particularly those beyond their control, such as infrastructure reliability. Steve Montgomery then addressed customer priorities for improvement and outlined how Avanti was engaging with the local community.

In response to a query from Councillor Pervez Akhtar and the chair, Andy Mellors confirmed that improvements to the Avanti fleet were imminent. Councillor Liz Clements expressed anticipation for service changes in 2024.

Steve Montgomery provided a verbal update on industrial action within the company, sharing both challenges and opportunities. He discussed the ongoing negotiations with the RMT and ASLEF, and Councillor Pervez Akhtar and the mayor queried on how the work could be influenced positively. Councillor Liz Clements agreed, and there was a need to build a case for the government, that compiled the impacts of the industry. The mayor stated he would raise the impacts with government and planned to emphasize the effects for the region.

## **9. Midlands Rail Hub**

Toby Rackliff provided the board with an update following the announcement from the Prime Minister. He shared the current outline business case routes. He shared that the DfT had assisted in developing the project, showing commitment to the scheme. He listed the outputs and proposed interventions as a result of the cancelled HS2 project. He shared that the business case didn't include local schemes of the Coventry to Leicester/Nottingham lines, nor did it consider wider network benefits. He then shared the next steps, including the Chief Secretary to the Treasury signing off and the approval for full business case plans. He reported that WMRE had hoped to have a greater role in the Midlands Rail Hub governance to reflect WMCA's deeper devolution deal. He closed by sharing potential risks, including inflation, land availability, unclear rolling stock, and changes in government policy.

Councillor Philip Price commented on the experience of those who lived to the west of the Midlands and the challenges of working with Network Rail. A

discussion was had around local schemes and the realities of scope and timelines around the business case. It was confirmed that the Midlands Rail Hub didn't cover the Black Country area, and Toby Rackliff provided the board with clarity on where it did contribute.

**10. 2022/23 Audited Annual Accounts for West Midlands Rail Limited**

Mal Drury-Rose presented a report on the audited accounts for the year 22/23. He emphasised profit and loss, and recommendations were highlighted. The audited annual accounts were approved, as was the appointment of the two Vice Chairs as signatories of the company bank mandate.

**11. WMRE Business Update Report**

Mal Drury-Rose presented the business update report. He raised key items with the board around the annual business plan process, and the open access application from Wrexham-Shropshire-Midlands-Railway. He stated that WMRE supported the proposals in principle, but that some technical issues still needed to be worked through with the promoters. Consequently, whilst WMRE would be formally objecting to the rail industry consultation, work with WSMR would continue to address the technical issues. The report was agreed by the board.

**Meeting Close**

The next meeting would be held 19 March 2024 in Room 109 at Summer Lane.

[The meeting ended at 4.10pm]