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**To: Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3)**

**Date: 12<sup>th</sup> October 2022**

**Subject: Bus Update**

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## **1 Purpose of the Note**

- 1.1 To brief the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) on issues and projects affecting bus services within Coventry and the West Midlands. This report provides a brief overview of the subjects to be presented, in more detail, to the Board by way of presentation at the meeting. Officers from both Coventry City Council and Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) will be present at the meeting.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) receives this update and provides any comments and recommendations to Council and Transport for West Midlands officers.

## **3 Information/Background**

- 3.1 Bus services within Coventry are operated by private bus companies, with overall policy direction being given by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), which is the Strategic Transport Authority for the West Midlands, including the Coventry area. Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) undertakes this duty for the WMCA, and representatives of TfWM will attend the meeting to provide a briefing to Scrutiny Board 3.
- 3.2 The past two years have been a challenging time for the bus industry, but a number of projects are underway that will support the revitalisation of the bus network within Coventry and the West Midlands. This report, backed by presentations at the meeting, will provide an overview of these projects.

## **4 All Electric Bus City (AEBC)**

- 4.1 The WMCA has been awarded £50 million for the Coventry All Electric Bus City programme, which will see all buses operating public bus services within Coventry become fully electric by the end of 2025. This builds on the Ultra-Low Emission Bus Scheme project which saw the introduction of 10 electric buses into operation within the city in August 2020. Those buses operate primarily on the number 9 service linking the University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire with Finham via the city centre.
- 4.2 TfWM are managing the AEBC programme in partnership with the City Council, Warwickshire County Council (as the programme includes all cross-boundary bus services), and bus companies. National Express, as the main bus company operating services within the city, have ordered the first tranche of 130 electric buses, and the first of these will be introduced into operation from October 2022. In total, around 300 new electric buses will be purchased by National Express and Stagecoach, although the precise

number will be determined following the bus service network review that is referred to later in this report.

- 4.3 Charging infrastructure is also being procured by National Express for installation at the Coventry Bus Depot, and discussions are continuing between the Council and National Express over the potential need for the Cox Street Car Park site to be utilised as a charging facility.

## **5 Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme**

- 5.1 An Enhanced Partnership Plan is in place between the WMCA and bus companies setting out the framework for bus services within the West Midlands, including the commitments made by each party towards improving bus services. This is a statutory requirement and was approved by the WMCA Board in 2020. The EPP Scheme sets out more specific commitments relating to individual projects and schemes, and the latest variant of the EPPS, which is in draft form at present, covers the requirements relating to the AEBC programme that all buses operating public bus services within Coventry will be fully electric from 2025.

## **6 Bus Service Improvement Plan**

- 6.1 TfWM has been awarded £88 million in grant funding from Government for the implementation of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) for the West Midlands. This funding is for three financial years (2022-25) and is intended to support a package of measures that will enhance bus services in the West Midlands and attract more people to use these services.

- 6.2 The BSIP has four key objectives, these being:

- To provide a more sustainable and attractive service offer, including to motorists
- To provide consistent, good delivery of the service offer
- To ensure a good passenger experience for all
- To reduce environmental impacts.

- 6.3 The main elements of the BSIP package are:

- Network design and integration – provide a bus network that meets the needs of the people of the West Midlands, which is better integrated with other modes of transport, and which provides a stable network that performs reliably, and which users can have confidence in. This will include further trials and integration of On Demand Transport services and ring and ride, which is covered in more detail below.
- Increases in bus priority and bus rapid transit – within Coventry, this specifically relates to schemes such as the Foleshill Transport Package, Coventry South Transport Package, and City Centre Traffic Management scheme which include measures that will improve bus service reliability through reducing traffic congestion, including, where appropriate, bus priority in the form of bus gates.
- Lower simpler fares and ticketing – working with bus companies to simplify the fares and ticketing structure, maintain fares at a low level to make bus travel a more attractive option, and facilitate “tap and go” payment options that automatically deliver the best value fare for journeys made by the customer. Government has announced a cap on bus fares nationally of £2 per individual journey for January to March 2023. The current fare for a single journey in Coventry is £2.20, so there will be a 10% saving on fares for passengers travelling during this period.

- Customer information and infrastructure – upgrading passenger information systems, including the Real Time Bus Information system at bus stops, to ensure that passengers can access the most accurate and up to date information on services, and improving bus stop infrastructure, interchanges and bus stations. Within Coventry, of course, there has been recent investment in improvements at Pool Meadow Bus Station, whilst a new Bus Interchange has been constructed at the Railway Station.
- Modern Buses and Decarbonisation – the AEBC programme outlined above achieves this objective within Coventry, but other proposals to upgrade the bus fleet elsewhere in the West Midlands are being delivered.
- Customer experience and passenger safety – a Bus Passenger Charter will be developed for the region, and initiatives such as improved driver training undertaken to enhance the passenger’s experience. In addition, improved security in the form of enhanced CCTV coverage, improved lighting, and increased patrols will be implemented to enhance passenger safety.

## **7 WM On Demand / Ring and Ride**

- 7.1 Over the past two years, the WM On Demand service has been operating within eastern and southern Coventry. Jointly funded by TfWM, the University of Warwick, and the City Council, this service has provided door-to-door journeys for people travelling within the area for whom conventional bus services do not meet their journey requirement.
- 7.2 TfWM propose to expand the WM On-Demand service to serve the full Coventry area, and to incorporate the Ring and Ride service within the operation. All vehicles will be fully accessible, and the aim will be to provide a more attractive and reliable service for Ring and Ride users and, by sharing drivers and vehicles with the On-Demand service, do so in a more cost-effective way.
- 7.3 The new combined service would commence in early 2023 and would operate for a pilot period of one year initially before being reviewed. Measures of success will include increased patronage levels, improved customer satisfaction, and journey reliability. Critically, it is recognised that the existing ring and ride service has low levels of satisfaction amongst users, and the aim will be to improve the customer experience for those users.

## **8 Bus Network Review**

- 8.1 Prior to the pandemic in 2020, the majority of the bus service network within Coventry was operated on a commercial basis by the bus companies, and a relatively small number of bus services were operated under contract to TfWM. Post-pandemic, bus patronage levels have settled at around 80% of pre-pandemic levels, which equates to a reduction in revenue of around 20% for bus companies. This has a consequential impact upon the commercial viability of the bus service network.
- 8.2 During the pandemic, the Government invested heavily in supporting essential public transport services, and this enabled a stable bus network to be provided with service reductions kept to a minimum. That grant support has been extended through to March 2023, but a bus service network review is now urgently required to enable planning to take place for the shape of the new commercial bus network.
- 8.3 TfWM is working with local authorities and bus companies to identify priorities for future bus services, and over the next three months this bus service network review will be completed. TfWM officers will be in attendance to outline the process being undertaken, and to highlight how engagement with bus passengers, local authorities and other stakeholders

will take place. One factor for consideration during this process will be the impact of any service changes upon travel to schools and colleges.

- 8.4 The aim will be to have a fully costed bus service network proposal identified in early 2023 for implementation from April 2023.

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