

8. **Bus Update**

Councillor P Akhtar, Lead Member for the Council on the West Midlands Combined Authority Transport Delivery Committee, introduced the item on Bus Update, saying residents wanted reliable, affordable, accessible buses and that they were key to tackling pollution and congestion.

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) received a Bus Update Briefing Note of the Director of Transportation and Highways and a presentation from the Head of Bus, Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), providing the Board with information on current issues and projects affecting bus services within Coventry and the West Midlands.

The Board were advised:-

- The West Midlands Transport Authority (WMCA) had been awarded £50 million for the Coventry All Electric Bus City; a programme which will see all buses in Coventry fully electric by the end of 2025.
- Charging infrastructure would be procured by National Express for installation at the Coventry Bus Depot.
- An Enhanced Partnership Plan was in place between WMCA and bus companies which set out the framework for bus services within the West Midlands.
- The Bus Service Improvement Plan would support a package of measures to enhance bus services in the West Midlands and attract more people to use them.
- Midlands On-Demand service would be rolled out to serve the full Coventry area and incorporate the Ring and Ride service.
- Bus Network Review:
 - There had been a reduction of 20% in bus patronage post pandemic which was impacting on the commercial viability of the bus service network.
 - Government grant support had been extended through to March 2023.
 - TfWM was working with local authorities and bus companies to identify priorities for future bus services. The impact of any service changes upon travel to schools and colleges would be a factor for consideration during this process.

The presentation highlighted the following:

- Local context:
 - Patronage numbers were back to 85% post pandemic equating to 465,000 passengers each week.
 - ENCTS passengers had recovered less than Commercial.
 - Current network was 93.7% of pre-covid mileage.
 - Buses had slowed down by 3% due to traffic problems.
 - Driver shortages were affecting services.
- Bus Network Funding
 - Government funding had supported operators since April 2020 however this was due to come to an end in October 2020. TfWM had secured additional funding to enable network stability up until March 2023.

- Bus Network Review
 - Operators had confirmed a 90% network from January 2023.
- School services – National Express would be withdrawing 12 school bus routes
- Partnership opportunities
- Tendered Contract Renewals and Service Budget Pressure
- Wider Considerations and Implications
 - Driver shortages
 - Loss of bus operators
 - Poorer customer experience
- Bus Service Implementation Plan
 - Removal of Nbus premium
 - Ticketing incentive programme
 - Improving network management and bus service performance.

The Board questioned officers, received responses and discussed the following issues:

- During the pandemic most subsidies had gone direct to operators.
- TfWM had directed £16.3m of subsidies into bus services.
- There were currently 29 electric buses operating in Coventry.
- Bus covid safety measures and driver training during the pandemic.
- Bus exhaust emissions.
- Unreliable bus services, particularly to the hospital.
- One operator, which had stopped in August 2020 due to the pandemic, had previously provided 12 dedicated school services. Coventry City Council along with TfWM had secured a grant to keep the operator going however, this was only short-term and no further funding was available.
- Council was directly funding 5 of the highest priority routes for schools with commitment until July 2023 at an unbudgeted cost of £200,000.
- TfWM had engaged the police as part of the process of children transferring through the city centre on the way to and from school.
- A full quality impact assessment was being undertaken for a number of vulnerable users transferring through the city centre.
- Removal of services was down to value for money.
- All buses in Coventry would be electric by the end of 2025.
- Ticketing options for children and contactless cards being capped off at best value.
- TfWM work with new housing developments to understand future levels of patronage.
- Encouraging people to use the buses was being rolled out via the Incentive Programme.
- Research had been undertaken around perception and barriers to using buses. Improved ticketing, simplification, better information and nervousness of using the buses for the first time had arisen from the research.
- The service from Coventry to Birmingham airport had direct competition with the train service however, if the service was quick and direct it could be used more.
- It was important to find a balance between fast, direct services and not leaving out rural areas which could be looked at through the Service Review.

- If a service which is operated under contract to TfWM runs late, deductions were added for non-operation.
- For commercial services which were not operated under contract, sanctions included making representation to the Traffic Commissioner, receiving a fine, a penalty, and the licence being taken away.
- Since the pandemic the types of passengers had changed. A stronger weekend recovery had been seen and a slower recovery in the more vulnerable. The cost of living was having an effect and buses were being used more than cars.
- Discussions were ongoing between Council officers and TfWM regarding the impact of the loss of service on school bus routes.
- Ticketing models from other countries were looked at to source concepts and ideas.
- Value for money ticket options for families were available ie. £1 family pass at weekends.
- There had been no recent action taken against local operators by the Traffic Commissioner however, there had been safety and security issues with an operator in Coventry and action had been taken.
- An increase in concessionary passes was being seen however, it was unsure if this was related to the cost-of-living crisis.
- Transport on Demand currently operated on a pilot scheme across half of the city and was hoping to expand and roll out citywide. Instead of using cars, a small fleet of buses amalgamated the rides. Booking was via mobile phone or call centre and expansion would include integrating the Ring n Ride service.
- Ring n Ride was primarily for passengers with mobility constraints, Transport on Demand was for all passengers.
- Transport on Demand could be booked up to 7 days in advance and average wait time for passengers was 13 minutes.
- TfWM was monitored by the Department for Transport. The BSIP contained indicators that TfWM was monitored against.

RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3):

- 1. Note the content of the presentation.**
- 2. Request the following to be circulated to the Board:**
 - a. The total amount of subsidies received for the Bus Service Improvement Plan.**
 - b. The impact of the reduction in bus services.**
 - c. The number of penalties given out by the Transport Commissioner**
 - d. The plans for Coventry to Birmingham airport bus service improvements via the Bus Service Review**
 - e. The profile of vulnerable bus users to monitor the impact of the cost-of living crisis (circulate Spring 2023)**
- 3. Provide a Briefing Note to all Councillors detailing the West Midlands on Demand service.**
- 4. Ensure changes to bus services are communicated in advance.**
- 5. Include the following for consideration on the Work Programme:**

- **Proposed school bus route withdrawal**
- **City Centre South update (November 2022)**

9. **City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement**

The Board received a Briefing Note of the Director of Transport and Highways on the City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement. The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) had submitted a bid to Government's City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) for a £1.05 billion package of transport schemes for the period 2022-2027. The Department for Transport (DfT) had confirmed the CRSTS funding awards for the WMCA.

For Coventry, the CRSTS programme included the following schemes:

- Coventry Very Light Rail (CVLR) - £54 million
- Coventry South Sustainable Transport Package - £17 million
- Foleshill Transport Package - £4.5 million
- Regional Park and Ride including Tile Hill Station - £4.5 million (as part of a TfWM Strategic Park and Ride programme)

The £80 million CRSTS capital investment would be supplemented by up to £23 million match funding, taking the total programme value to £103 million for the 4 schemes.

In addition, £30.6 million funding was allocated to Coventry within the 5-year CRSTS programme for Highway Maintenance and our Local Network Improvement Plan.

The Board questioned officers, received responses and discussed the following issues:

- Some of the Public Realm schemes that had not received funding were not transport related and did not fit the funding criteria.
- Some local schemes were on the reserve list, funding for which may or may not be made available.
- Other routes of funding were being actively explored.
- The DfT retained the right to have a final say on projects over £50 million. TfWM worked closely with a nominated DfT officer on these projects.
- The transport schemes identified and funded had arisen from issues raised by Members and residents.
- The Transport Strategy was a process whereby TfWM could report to Members on an annual basis regarding delivery of programmes.

RESOLVED that the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3):

- 1. Note the content of the Briefing Note.**
- 2. Include the following for consideration on the Work Programme:**
 - **Monitor progress through the annual update on the Transport Strategy.**

10. **Work Programme and Outstanding Issues 2022/23**

The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) noted the work programme 2022-2023 and asked for the inclusion of the following items:

- Proposed school bus route withdrawal
- City Centre South update (November 2022)
- Progress on the City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement to be monitored through the annual update on the Transport Strategy.

11. **Any other items of public business which the Chair decides to take as matters of urgency because of the special circumstances involved**

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.30 pm)