

Bus Franchising update

Coventry Scrutiny Board

February 2026

Note: Attendance at this scrutiny meeting is to provide an update and answer questions about Bus Franchising in the West Midlands,. Formal scrutiny and input on Bus Franchising in the West Midlands will be via councillors at TDOSC and through other formal channels.

Why are buses important?

Buses are crucial to connecting people to work, education, shops and leisure

Buses support objectives to reduce congestion, emissions and ensure transport affordability

2024 study showed bus is worth £4.4bn per year to the West Midlands economy

27% of households in the West Midlands do not have access to a car, rising to 40% in some areas

240 million

bus journeys in the West Midlands in 2024

Why Franchising?

In May 2025, the West Midlands Combined Authority Board approved a transition to a Bus Franchising Operating Model, following Public Consultation that saw 75% support for bringing buses back under public control.

- **Passengers First.** The goal is to shift from a system driven by private profit to one that prioritises passengers by working with local people to ensure services are affordable, reliable, and meet the needs of the community. Longer term, Franchising provides the opportunity to co-ordinate and integrate the bus and wider public transport network to significantly increase the customer experience over time.
- **Cost & Control risks.** The West Midlands bus market is increasingly not commercially viable. Significant public subsidy is currently required to continue to offer our residents a comprehensive bus network. Despite the subsidies paid each year there is currently very limited control over the services, frequencies, fares or routes.
- **Public Control through a Contracting Model.** Unlike the current system where private companies decide routes and fares, under franchising, TfWM will be in control of the network's design, routes and fares. TfWM will put routes and services out to tender, with private companies bidding for the contracts to operate them.

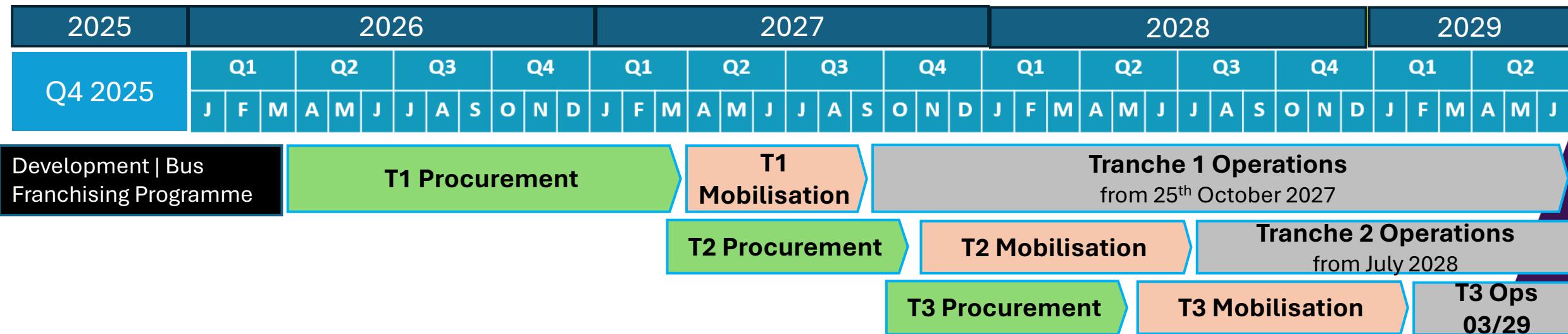
The Model

Under the future Franchising operating model TfWM will design routes, specify hours of operation, set service standards and award Operator contracts following competitive procurement. Operator contracts will be for set periods of time.

- ✓ TfWM will take the revenue risk (i.e. keep/reinvest the fares)
- ✓ TfWM will own the bus fleet and bus depots
- ✓ Operators retain Operational Staff (e.g. Drivers, Engineers)
- ✓ Consolidation of functions currently shared between TfWM and Operators (e.g. Customer Services, marketing, network planning) offering economies of scale
- ✓ TfWM will continue to manage infrastructure (e.g. bus stops, information provision)
- ✓ Local Councils will continue to manage highways



Bus Reform Programme | Status update



Key progress

- Programme Team and key appointments | Sept 25 to Jan 26
- Procurement and Legal Partners onboarded | From November 25
- New Governance stood up | From Dec 25
- Development of Franchising Operating Model | Currently
- Revised Procurement strategy and timeline agreed | Jan 26
- Pre Market engagement with Operators | April 2026

Tranche 1 Key dates

ITT Release | 17 August 26
Final tender submission | 18 Dec 26
Operational | 25 Oct 27

Bus depots acquired

Acocks Green Depot | End Dec 25
West Bromwich Bus park | End Dec 25

Bus Reform Governance Overview

	January				February				March					April				May				June				
Week Beginning	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	2	9	16	23	30	6	13	20	27	4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29
Political meetings (POG)						9																				
Officer meetings (BR Panel)					28				25									22					20			17
Internal Governance		14			28		11		25		11		25		8		22		6		20		3		17	
Key decisions	Decision															Governance route										
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bus depot acquisition WMCA Board Sept 25 Approved Strategic direction on fleet WMCA Board Jan 26 Approved Revised Procurement strategy and timeline BRSG Jan 26 Approved Small operators / contracts strategy BRSG – Feb 26 Branding options Mayor & Met Leaders (TBC) 															<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PB, SG, Leaders Briefings, WMCA Board PB, SG , POG, Leaders Briefings, WMCA Board PB, BRSG PB, BRSG TBC 										

Key	Political	Officer	Internal meetings
	Political Oversight Group	Bus Reform Panel	Bus Reform Programme Board Bus Reform Steering Group

As of January 2026



Please direct questions to
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