

**BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL**

**SUSTAINABILITY AND TRANSPORT O&S COMMITTEE**

**1430 hours on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2020, Online Meeting – Actions**

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**Present:**

Councillor Liz Clements (Chair)

Councillors Muhammad Afzal, Olly Armstrong, Zaker Choudhry, Timothy Huxtable and Julie Johnson

**Also Present:**

Cllr Waseem Zaffar, Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment

Phil Edwards, Assistant Director, Transport & Connectivity

Kevin Hicks, Assistant Director, Highways & Infrastructure

Mel Jones, Head of Transport Planning and Network Strategy

Joe Green, Travel Demand Manager, Transport & Connectivity

Andrew Camp, Commercial Director, West Midlands Trains

Francis Thomas, Head of Corporate Affairs, West Midlands Trains

Jon Hayes, Head of Network Delivery, Transport for West Midlands (TfWM)

Lynda Waltho, Executive Consultant, Transport Travel Tourism

Bob Grubb, UCATT

Rose Kiely, Group Overview & Scrutiny Manager

Baseema Begum, Scrutiny Officer

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**1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST**

The Chair advised those present that the meeting would be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site and that Members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there are confidential or exempt items.

**2. APOLOGIES**

Cllr Eddie Freeman.

An apology was also received from representatives of Unite Union who were called to an urgent meeting and were no longer able to attend.

### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

Standing declarations noted.

### **4. SUSTAINABILITY & TRANSPORT O&S COMMITTEE ACTION NOTES**

The action notes of the meetings held on the 26<sup>th</sup> February were agreed.

### **5. IMPACT OF COVID-19 – UPDATE ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND USE OF THE ROAD NETWORK AND PUBLIC HIGHWAY**

(See document No.1)

The Chair outlined the purpose of the discussion as an opportunity to discuss the transport response to the COVID-19 pandemic following a number of proposals, measures and mitigations being put in place by the Council and partners. The Chair welcomed all attendees and asked Cllr Waseem Zaffar, Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment and supporting officers to speak to the Emergency Birmingham Transport Plan (EBTP) published recently and circulated in the agenda pack.

Cllr Zaffar stated that the EBTP was a direct response to the impact of COVID-19 following changes in travel behaviour with fewer commuters and less road traffic. The benefits in improved air quality and more sustainable ways of travel with people walking and cycling was something that needed to be built upon as the Council and partners work together to ensure that people are able to travel safely on roads and public transport.

The key principles were outlined by officers based on the Draft Birmingham Transport Plan (published in January 2020) with a set of short, medium- and long-term goals and the opportunity to use government funding set out for active travel including making walking and cycling safer.

Officers then explained that: -

- At the current time proposed actions for delivery are currently set out as high-level lists, with more detail to be added following assessments and any prioritisation exercises.
- Further proposals will be brought forward depending on funding, resources, further design work and changes to legislation from the Department for Transport (DFT) including the proposal put forward on a blanket 20mph road speed limit.
- The government has announced a walking and cycling fund and it is important for BCC to outline how it will spend allocated funds. Birmingham is expected to receive approximately £5m once regional activity costs are accounted for.

- Maximising of already planned projects and building on the links made on walking and cycling and social distancing will be prioritised where possible and work will be done to coincide with any highway's maintenance for example road markings. Where temporary projects are put in place work will be done to embed a legacy and convert to permanent status wherever possible
- There are 25 projects that have been identified initially to be implemented in the next 6 weeks. The City Council is working with key partners including TfWM, elected members and stakeholder groups including Sustrans and Living Streets. All implemented projects will be closely monitored with a full review taking place in due course.
- Reallocating road space away from cars to create safe space for walking and cycling and public transport and social distancing is being done including reviewing dual carriageways and bus priority measures where possible.
- Supporting the economic recovery by ensuring safe access to local high streets and centres and supporting people to travel safely by reviewing high streets to help with social distancing.
- Promoting active travel in local neighbourhoods by creating space for exercise and play. 2 low traffic neighbourhoods are being piloted. Also, options such as 20mph, car free school streets, footway widening and parking measures being considered and brought forward where possible.
- Key messages being shared via media and PR to keep people informed.

In response to queries and comments from Members it was confirmed that: -

- The initial projects identified are quick wins and those that can be implemented by September. Further proposals in the plan will take place over the course of 12 months but the emphasis is on providing an emergency response.
- All urban centres will be assessed. Those areas identified as local shopping centres will receive a higher level of priority and where need is greatest (these are included in the initial 25 projects).
- Consultation with residents and businesses on schemes is not taking place in the usual way as many of the schemes are temporary and have been put in to ensure public safety which is a key concern. These schemes are in place for 6 months and the amended traffic regulation orders allow for this. There will be an opportunity for people to provide feedback in due course.
- The role of local members is crucial in understanding the needs of the local area. Members can bring forward local schemes where there is consensus in the community for implementation.
- The e-scooters pilot has been brought forward by the government to July/August this year. Birmingham is likely to run a pilot and is working with other local authorities in the region and TfWM on how it might work. Cabinet approval will be sought in June.

The Chair then asked West Midlands Trains (WMT) representatives to outline to Members the key issues facing train operators and what measures were being put in place to keep people moving safely.

Andrew Camp, Commercial Director and Francis Thomas, Head of Corporate Affairs made the following points: -

- Following lockdown passenger numbers fell by 95% in the West Midlands region. A revised timetable offering a Sunday service was put in place from 1<sup>st</sup> April to support key workers in conjunction with hospitals and TfWM. This was revised again as changes were required and a Saturday service has been in operation during May. A revised timetable is planned for July as lockdown measures are eased. Plans are in place to adjust services to ensure the safety of passengers.
- 1 in 4 employees were in self isolation at the beginning of the pandemic. There are now 1 in 40 members of staff self-isolating. Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) for staff is now at place at all stations and on trains.
- Work has been done to ensure that social distancing measures are in place at stations and on platforms with public service announcements and signage reminding passengers. Online information has also been available so that customers can check how busy services are. Passengers are also being encouraged to buy tickets online and use smart ticketing options. Measures are also being put in place on trains to allow people to adequately distance as well as markings and service announcements.
- Passenger numbers are being monitored twice daily to understand passenger movements and if there are any issues with crowding to allow for adjustments to be made with staffing. This data is shared with partners including TfWM and the Combined Authority so that a unified approach to communications across the region with a single message is given to commuters. A weekly communications groups has also been set up with other train operators, DfT and Network Rail.
- Currently with social distancing guidelines in place 30% of the usual capacity is available on trains.

The following responses were made to points raised by Members: -

- WMT are continuing with the delivery on set programmes such as new stock and new lines as the investment is already in place. From the modelling work done it is envisaged that the commuter base will shrink by 20-25% as more people will continue to work from home in the longer term (as influenced by COVID-19). There is an additional impact on season ticket use as workers may travel fewer days and on a less regular basis. Options are being looked at what can be offered for the long term.
- The West Midlands region did not meet the criteria for Beeching funding for the installation of new lines.
- There is some rolling stock available if required and diesel trains, but these are not yet ready to roll out due to the safety testing that needs to be done

beforehand. However, all new trains ordered will be received by the due date but rolling out of these will be delayed by a few months.

- In terms of managing the flow of people on trains and the potential for overcrowding on trains it was confirmed that risk assessments have been undertaken and plans are in place to manage such situations. As part of this planning, stakeholders are being consulted e.g. universities and a communications process is being worked on that will be in place from July to manage any such situations. WMT are also working with partners including TfWM and Network Rail so that plans are aligned, and alterations can be made as needed to add frequency and extra carriages to busy services.
- Hand sanitiser is currently available on the concourse at hub stations such as B'ham New St for the public to use. This will be rolled out to other stations and should be in place by July.
- Commuters are being asked to use their own face coverings on trains as it is not logistically viable to provide these. WMT is promoting the use of face coverings as it is not always possible to maintain a 2m distance onboard as more people begin to use public transport.
- In addition to signage and on-train announcements reinforcing the social distancing message, the number of people on trains will also be controlled and there is an expectation that passengers will self-police. Information on the best time to travel is available to ensure that train services are not overly busy and delayed as this will create an impact across the network resulting in problems elsewhere.
- Train fares are set nationally, and the annual increase is driven by Retail Price Index (RPI). The DfT has not advised of anything different at the moment. WMT are considering how season ticket holders may be affected with more people likely to work in a different way in the future (with more home-working) and there is an opportunity to offer promotional fares and new products as people may not need to travel every day or the same days every week.

Jon Hayes, TfWM then talked Members through the presentation shared on the bus network and made the following points: -

- A £25m package has been put in place to support operators to maintain contracted services including concessionary travel. Local authorities have also supported bus operators where they provide a specific service for children. DfT are also providing funding with a bus services grant from government. Bus operators are also able to access national and regional support through furlough schemes and business support grants.
- 15% of commuters are using buses compared with pre-COVID-19 levels. A Sunday service has been in place for NHS and key workers.
- There has been an increase in the number of people using the bus. It is now 22% pre-COVID 19 levels as of yesterday. Service levels are being increased in response to the number of passengers however people are being reminded to only travel if necessary and use other modes of travel if possible.

- Buses can only hold a maximum of 35% of passenger capacity due to social distancing rules.
- The Metro saw a 95% drop in usage following lockdown and this is now at 75%. The timetable of service was reduced to every 15 minutes (originally a 6-minute service at peak times) and is now every 12 minutes due to an increase in patronage.
- Social distancing measures have been outlined with information to passengers on travelling safely, allowing more time for travel and acceptable payment methods. Passengers have been informed of these measures through a mix of social media, press and direct contact to stay safe on buses, at bus stops and interchanges. Staff are monitoring compliance and are focussed on positively engaging and educating passengers.
- Drivers have been issued with guidance and have been trained on safety and assessing when a bus is full and identifying vulnerable passengers with social distancing in mind. Feedback from drivers allows for additional capacity to be provided when needed.
- Enhanced cleaning and onboard facilities are available for drivers to use if needed. Bus shelters are cleaned weekly. At busy tier 1 locations bus shelters are cleaned every other day and a reactive team/active crews are available to respond quickly.
- Further changes to services are planned for w/c 15<sup>th</sup> June in response to the loosening of lockdown. The next stage will be looking at increasing services as schools and businesses re-open. Learning is taking place from colleagues around the country in response to the pandemic.
- Working with partners including local authorities on bus priority highway measures such as widening footways and putting in place temporary stops.

In response to queries from Members it was confirmed that: -

- A number of staff were affected by the coronavirus and sadly a small number have passed away.
- The majority of staff on furlough are coming back on a gradual process starting from the 15<sup>th</sup> June. 10% of staff are having to shield.
- Trade unions have supported workers and TfWM are working closely with unions and operators. TfWM are providing a critical friend service to smaller operators, helping with risk assessments and ensuring that correct safety processes are in place for staff and passengers.

**RESOLVED: -**

1. Officers to provide Cllr Huxtable with information on whether any lines within Birmingham qualify for Beeching funding.

## **6. SUSTAINABILITY & TRANSPORT O&S COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

(See document No. 2)

The Chair outlined that the focus of committee work to date was on essential business in relation to COVID-19. The Committee will continue to monitor the procurement of the Waste Disposal Contract (following the informal meeting held for members in May) and how the commitments that the Council agreed in June 2019 on climate change are being implemented as part of this.

In terms of items for discussion at the next meeting the Chair outlined the wish to reschedule items that were postponed from previous meetings including: -

- An update on the Highways PFI contract following the appointment of Kier on a temporary contract from 1<sup>st</sup> April;
- The re-design of the Local Engineering service;
- Climate Change Emergency update

Cllr Armstrong highlighted if any work on the community wealth building ethos could be implemented as part of a future highways contract.

**RESOLVED: -**

1. The work programme was noted with items to be scheduled for the next meeting.
2. Kevin Hicks agreed to speak to Darren Share with regards to the process and regularity on the cutting of grass on verges.
3. Members to send any examples of roads missed as part of resurfacing works to Kevin Hicks.

**7. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS (IF ANY)**

None.

**8. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

**9. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS**

Agreed.

**RESOLVED: -**

That in an urgent situation between meetings the Chair, jointly with the relevant Chief Officer, has authority to act on behalf of the Committee.

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The meeting ended at 16:41 hours.