

# Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel

## Minutes - 16 July 2019

### Attendance

#### Members of the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Philip Bateman MBE  
Cllr Craig Collingswood  
Cllr Claire Darke  
Cllr Val Evans  
Cllr Asha Mattu  
Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN  
Cllr Susan Roberts MBE  
Cllr Udey Singh (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman (Chair)

#### In Attendance

Cllr Harman Banger (Portfolio Holder – City Economy)  
Cllr Mary Bateman  
Cllr Jacqui Coogan  
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal  
Cllr Steve Evans (Portfolio Holder – City Environment)  
Cllr Martin Waite

#### Witnesses

Jon Hayes (Head of Network Delivery - Transport for West Midlands)  
Richard Hardman (Transport for West Midlands – Black Country Area Manager)

#### Employees

Martin Stevens (Scrutiny Officer) (Minutes)  
Richard Lawrence (Director of Regeneration)  
Charlotte Johns (Head of Strategy)  
John Roseblade (Head of City Transport)  
Marianne Page (Service Lead for City Transport)  
Ruth Taylor (Senior Regeneration Officer)  
Heather Clarke (Manager Strategic Project Funding)  
Tim Philpot (Professional Lead – Transport Strategy)

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## Part 1 – items open to the press and public

*Item No.*      *Title*

- 1      **Apologies**  
Apologies for absence were received from the following members of the Stronger City Economy Panel, Councillor Payal Bedi-Chadha and Councillor Jonathan Yardley.

Apologies for absence were received from the following members of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel for the item on the Public Realm, Transport and Linking the City: -

Councillor Paul Birch, Councillor Keith Inston, Councillor Beverley Momenabadi and Councillor Mak Singh.

Councillor Lynne Moran sent her apologies as she had been invited by the Chair because of a specific interest in relation to the item on the Public Realm, Transport and Linking the City.

Apologies were also received from Mr Pete Bond – Director of Integrated Network Services, Transport for West Midlands.

2 **Declarations of interest**

Cllr Philip Bateman declared a non-pecuniary interest on item 5 – Public Realm, Transport and Linking the City as a Board Member of the Canal and River Trust – West Midlands Partnership.

3 **Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 April 2019 were approved as a correct record.

4 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5 **Public Realm, Transport and Linking the City**

The Chair welcomed the members of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel present who had been invited to participate in the item.

There were three presentations given. The first presentation was from the Council's, Head of City Transport and the Council's – Service Lead for City Transport. The Head of City Transport gave some headline transport statistics about the City. The City had an approximate population of 260,000 residents. There were 40,000 daily vehicle trips on the ring road. 28% of all AM trips into the City Centre were by public transport. Across the City there were 480 traffic signals. The Council were optimising the use of traffic signals to improve the flow of traffic and the air quality of the City. Air quality exceedances had improved but were still challenging. DEFRA had identified the air quality in the area around the ring road needed to be addressed. The majority of funding available to the Council's transport department was ringfenced for very specific interventions and often heavily restricted.

The Head of City Transport in the City remarked that there were 3,800 short stay parking spaces and 2,500 long stay parking spaces. The Council operated 42 car parks, which was approximately a quarter of the total car parks within the City. There was an overall vision for City Transport in the City. He summarised this as follows: -

- Providing a reliable, efficient and accessible public transport system that provides connectivity to and from the right locations.

- Providing a safe and green environment for all modes of transport, particularly promoting active travel options.
- Reliable journey times for businesses, residents and visitors using all modes across the network.
- Safe and secure spaces.
- Support the wider priorities and ambitions of the City – Regeneration, Healthy Living, Investment, Prosperity.

The Service Lead for City Transport commented that the Council had to work within the statutory guidance framework on a national, sub regional, regional and local level. On a national policy level, they had to work with the DfT (Department for Transport), DEFRA (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs) and the DHCLG (Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government). The Future of Mobility Urban Strategy (March 2019) was of particular importance. Regionally there was the Midlands Connect and the Midlands Engine – HS2, Major Road Network and Rail Investment, West Midlands Combined Authority, Transport for West Midlands (Movement for Growth), West Midlands Rail, Black Country Core Strategy – Black Country Plan, Strategic Economic Plan and LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership) priorities. Locally they had to work within the Council Plan, Local Plan (AAP's), Neighborhood Plans and Network Development Plans.

The Head of City Transport commented that £33 million had been spent over the last three years as part of the Transport Capital Programme. In 2019 /2020 there would be a total investment of £14 million, plus opportunity funding. Additionally, £3 million would be spent on maintenance. If all the roads within Wolverhampton were to be brought up to a reasonable standard it was estimated the cost would be £24 million and so prioritisation of the funding available for maintenance works was essential. £5 million opportunity funding was available as part of the i54 extension to build an access road, £2.5 million from ERDF Smart Cities and £250,000 development funding from the LEP. In the current Council year there were some major schemes planned in the area of road safety, maintenance, air quality and local transport improvement schemes.

The Service Lead for City Transport referred to the £7 million City North Gateway project which had been funded by the LEP. This had been successfully completed and had improved access to the Strategic Road network and supported major employment sites.

The Head of City Transport stated that the Council were looking to have a clean running bus fleet and they were prioritising the buses using the ring road. They had secured grant funding for the free bus service in Wolverhampton (Number 500) to use an electric bus, thereby operating with zero emissions. There had been successful investment in cycling infrastructure, which included towpath improvements and community funding opportunities through the WMCA. Urban Traffic Control traffic lights were being installed across the Black Country. Average speed enforcement cameras had been installed on Stafford Road and the Council had just commenced a roadwork permit scheme.

The Head of City Transport summarised the departments plans for the City Centre which included: -

- Connected Places
- Great Spaces – Evidence led approach to identifying appropriate future works
- Vissim Model (Traffic Simulation)
- Network Management – Intelligent signage, data led decision making (UTC / RTCC), Metro signals, Bus Lane Enforcement

A Member of the Panel asked about the prospect of planting trees near roads to improve air quality and mitigate the exhaust fumes from petrol and diesel cars. The Head of City Transport responded that it was true that trees could improve air quality. To have a significant impact in cleaning out the Nitrous Oxide near roads, a large amount was required. Trees were not as effective in mitigating the effects of Nitrous Oxide from diesel cars, although they did have some impact. The Council were looking to expand their tree planting targets.

A Panel Member asked for some more background on the figure that 28% of all AM trips into the City Centre were by public transport. A representative from Transport for West Midlands responded that overall across the country there had been general declines in bus use. Whilst there had been a decline in the West Midlands, it had been slower than in other areas. Over the last twelve months the trend was starting to reverse in the West Midlands. What was particularly pleasing was a growth in commercial passengers. He thought one of the main reasons for the trend was the fact that National Express had introduced cheaper fares through their low fare zones, which had encouraged people to travel more by bus. The Service Lead for Transport confirmed that the AM statistic related to trips taking place between 7:30am and 9:30am.

A Panel Member enquired as to the success of the Bike Share Scheme which Wolverhampton was piloting and whether it would be expanded. The Professional Lead for Transport Strategy responded that the ambition was to have a much wider roll out of bikes in Wolverhampton and across the West Midlands, citing a figure of up to 5,000 bikes. There had been some technical issues which the Council was pressing with the contractor. They were currently in intense negotiations to resolve them.

A Member of the Panel asked about the Council's, capital transport plans in the medium to long-term future. The Service Lead for City Transport referred to the core document, "Movement for Growth," on which there would be a public and Councillor consultation within the next twelve months. Members agreed that they wanted the consultation to come before the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel.

A Panel Member commented that he believed Council owned car parks should offer the option of paying on exit, to alleviate the anxiety people feel of the need to return to their car whilst in the City Centre. The Head of City Transport responded that pay on exit was offered at the Civic Centre car park. The Council were also rolling out the pay by mobile phone option. A Member commented that he found paying by mobile phone to be an onerous process and would prefer it if the Council enabled people to pay by card using a contactless system. The Head of City Transport commented that the mobile phone app system was virtually cost free but implementing a card contactless system would result in initial infrastructure costs.

A Member of the Scrutiny Panel stressed that more cycle lanes were needed in Wolverhampton. The Professional Lead for Transport Strategy responded that £23 million worth of investment had been secured for the West Midlands Region. A process was currently ongoing to determine how the money would be spent. The Councillor asked for an update on the subject in the future to be received by the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel.

The Head of Network Delivery for the organisation Transport for West Midlands gave a presentation on bus travel. He explained that following national legislation buses operated in a de-regulated market for commercial gain. Where the market did not fit the profile, Transport for West Midlands could step in. Within the West Midlands, 4 in 5 Public Transport trips were by bus, with 260 million trips every year. Over £80 million had been invested by operators in Euro VI buses since 2015. It was the largest commercially operated bus network in the UK with 75 million vehicle miles. Transport for West Midlands managed 12 bus stations, maintained nearly 12,000 bus stops and 1,750 RTI (Real Time Information) displays. 33% of buses using the network were Euro VI. Funding had been secured for a further 1000 buses to be Euro VI and for 30 Electric and 20 Hydrogen vehicles. There were 2,200 buses operating on the network by 23 different bus companies.

The Head of Network Delivery stated that more people accessed Britain's High Streets by bus than by any other mode of transport. 40% of trips to the High Street were made by bus, while only 30% were made by car. Bus users spent an estimated £27 billion on retail goods and the average shopping trip made by bus generated £55 for the local economy.

The Head of Network Delivery remarked that 14.4 million journeys were made by bus every year to and from Wolverhampton, totalling 277,000 every week. 23% of all bus trips within Wolverhampton were made for shopping purposes, which totalled to 64,000 every week. Bus passengers contributed £1.8 million every week to Wolverhampton's retail economy. Transport for West Midlands were of the view that bus passengers should be at the heart of the vision for the City Centre. The Head of Network Delivery stated that thought there were three main influences on the demand for bus travel: -

- Walking time to the bus stop – origin and destination
- Waiting time for the bus – frequency and reliability
- Time on the bus – length of journey

He commented that time was valuable, for every 1% longer a journey took, patronage could reduce by 2%.

On the specific proposals for the West Side Link scheme, he commented that 6.2 million journeys each year would be affected by a closure of Lichfield Street and Victoria Street. 122,000 passengers each week would be affected by the pedestrianisation proposals. The potential impact was increased walking times, waiting times could increase and the time on the bus would increase. They believed there was a potential that demand for bus travel would reduce and therefore there would be fewer people travelling into Wolverhampton.

A Councillor asked the Transport for West Midlands representatives about the concept of making bus travel free, which was a radical shift but had been implemented in some places. In response, they stated that certain routes in Wales had been made free at weekends and in other cities in Europe at all times. It did have a significant impact on the uptake of the patronage of people using the buses, the real question was over affordability. The Councillor responded that bus fares in Wolverhampton has risen well above the rate of inflation and needed to be more affordable to encourage their use. The Transport for West Midlands representative responded that it was important to correctly translate to people the cost of running a car and offer incentives. Tracking cars through smart cameras could show patterns of use and could help persuade people to use public transport as a viable alternative.

A Councillor asked how Transport for West Midlands were helping to tackle anti-social behaviour on the buses. He was aware there had been a reduction in Officers. In response, The Head of Network Delivery responded that generally using buses was a very safe option. There were only low levels of anti-social behaviour on the bus network. The bus by-laws meant they were able to train their own staff to appropriately use enforcement powers, which was similar to conductors on trains. The Councillor asked for the figures of how much of a reduction in staff there had been in the Safer Travel Partnership Team compared to the year 2015. The Head of Network Delivery undertook to provide the figures to the Councillor.

A Member for the Panel asked for the possibility of plants being placed in bus shelters. The Head of Network Delivery responded that he had in fact received an email earlier in the week on this very point and agreed that it was an initiative they wished to pursue.

A Member of the Panel expressed frustration that the advertised waiting times for buses did not always match reality. The Head of Network Delivery understood their frustration and commented that congestion was often to blame for the delays, which meant consistency throughout the day was hard to achieve.

A Councillor asked if there were any plans for all the buses on the network to offer contactless payment. The Head of Network Delivery responded that two bus companies did offer this method but none of the others. They were in discussion with the other companies about offering a system using a swift card, it was important to remember a large amount of bus users did not have access to debit or credit cards.

The Senior Regeneration Officer who was the Programme Manager for the Connected Places Programme gave a presentation on the programme which included the West Side Link Project. The Connected Places Strategy had been completed in 2017 to address concerns by stakeholders and investors about the poor quality public realm and connectivity within and around the City Centre. The delivery plan had identified a series of priorities which included, Westside Link, Great Spaces, Cleveland Boulevard, Leaves and Light, Springfield Campus Link and the Molineux Quarter. Funding opportunities for the Connected Places Programme were available from, the Future High Street Fund, the Heritage High Street Fund, the Black Country LEP and the West Midlands Combined Authority.

The Senior Regeneration Officer stated that the rationale behind the West Side Link Scheme had been due to the footfall decreasing by 2% against the same time in the

previous year and the vacancy rate being at 14% across the City Centre. “Do nothing” was not an option, the role of the City Centre needed to be re-imagined to ensure a vibrant, busy and successful centre. She described the concept of “Events City.” Limited traffic flow through the core of the City gave the Council a unique opportunity to create a series of spaces in the City Centre that would allow the hosting of events. A refurbished Civic Halls at one side of the City and Westside at the other would provide a focus for a higher quality night time economy.

The Senior Regeneration Officer showed some artist impressions of the three phases of the West Side Link project. Phase 1 was concerning Victoria Street, Skinner Street, Salop Street and School Street. Phase 2 was Queen’s Square and Lichfield Street. Phase 3 was the immediate area outside the Civic Halls. She listed the positive impacts of the West Side Link scheme as being the following: -

- Improved public realm and attractiveness of the City Centre to visitors especially young people
- Increased footfall
- Reduced vacancy rates and increase of business rates
- Create an environment and space to attract major events to the city
- Attract new investment into the Centre
- Increase walking and cycling as part of City’s healthy living agenda

The Senior Regeneration Officer stated that extensive monitoring and modelling had been undertaken to assess the impact of the delivery of each of the three phases on the traffic network. Monitoring showed a high volume of taxis move through Queen Square and Lichfield Street without picking up or dropping off. It showed that 8 bus services currently run along Victoria Street and that all could be accommodated in School Street with minimal disruption to journey time and only a short additional walking distance to destinations. Modelling also showed that affected bus services, that currently ran through Queen Square could be rerouted and stop in adjoining streets.

The Senior Regeneration Officer commented that there would be an impact on the taxi ranks. Victoria Street rank would need to be replaced with a new provision with options being available at School Street and Darlington Street. In achieving the City ambition there would be a high demand for taxi services and it was felt a consolidated rank would be better for users. Car parking would not be reduced by the scheme, with access to two car parks only slightly changing.

The Senior Regeneration Officer referred to the public consultation that had taken place on the Westside Link Scheme. The public consultation had lasted for eight weeks. 240 responses had been received and 2 petitions. The statistics arising from the public consultation were 51% in favour of the scheme with 49% not in favour. The key themes arising from the consultation were, support for the creation of events space in the City, concern over the relocation of bus stops from Darlington Street, Queen’s Square and Lichfield Street. There was also some concerns about a loss of disabled parking. In response to these concerns all bus routes had been modelled to

achieve minimal disruption to journey times and routes. Bus stops would be relocated a maximum of 3 minutes' walk from the existing stops. Any loss to disabled parking would be minimised and re-provided within the City Centre close to current and proposed amenities.

The Senior Regeneration Officer remarked that in response to the business consultation, letters of support had been received from Benson Eliot, Urban and Civic, Hortons Estates, Wolverhampton BID and the Grand Theatre. University of Wolverhampton and Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club had expressed support through the Connected Places Stakeholders Group. Some of the key themes arising from the business consultation, were, that they believed footfall would be increased by an improved City Environment. Some independent businesses in Victoria Street had said they would expand their business if the scheme went ahead. There were some concerns about how servicing would continue and some concerns about how the delivery of the scheme would impact on footfall.

The Senior Regeneration Officer stated that as part of the stakeholders consultation the disabled groups had expressed that they did not wish to see the loss of disabled parking on Cheapside and Exchange Street. The Taxis and Private Hire consultees did not have any concerns about the loss of the taxi rank in Victoria Street. An issue they did raise was the extra journey time from the station to other parts of the City and the cost to customers. There had been a mixed response from the cycle forum. They had indicated that they would prefer cycle lanes to be demarcated to reduce conflict with pedestrians. St. Peter's Church had some concerns about access and parking for volunteers and the congregation both within the church gates and 4 disabled parking bays in Lich Gates. The Council had responded to say that 6 new disabled parking bays would be included in the proposed scheme in Wulfruna Street providing level access to the church. All disabled bays would be retained in Cheapside and permit parking in St Peters car park would be offered for volunteers. Access to formal cars wishing to access the Church would be managed by prior arrangement.

The Senior Regeneration Officer commented that the Youth Council had been consulted as part of their, "Take Over Day Debate". They had been overwhelmingly in support of the scheme with 90% voting in favour. They believed the scheme would bring more people into the City and improve the centre as a place of activity, leisure and entertainment. They had commented that more businesses would locate in the City Centre due to the increased footfall. 90% said that if the scheme went ahead they would come into the City Centre rather than go out of the City for leisure activities as they did currently.

The Senior Regeneration Officer outlined some timescales for delivery of the programme. The technical design stage was in progress for Victoria Street and contractor engagement. Works could potentially commence in October 2019. The Future High Street Fund Phase 2 application had been approved for progression to the next stage. The concept design and stakeholder engagement for the area outside the Civic Halls was being undertaken and the delivery programme would align with the Civic Halls Development Plan. On Queen's Square and Lichfield Street options for the removal of traffic were to be scoped. On Lichfield Street (East) – Extension of the phase 2 scheme through to Interchange, the Heritage High Street Action Zone bid expression of interest had been submitted.

A Panel Member asked for clarity on how many events had been held in the City Centre in the current year and how many were expected in the future. They expressed a concern that in order to progress the “Events City Model,” there could be a detrimental effect on people travelling by bus into the City Centre. The extra walking time would mean that people would be less likely to use the bus. He had particular concerns about the impact on Cleveland Street and the congestion that could occur through the extra buses using the street. Another Member commented that the Mayor of the West Midlands had been clear that City Centres could not stay the same as they would continue to decline if they did so.

The Chair asked for some more information on marketing to be provided in the future. She was particularly interested in who the Council were trying to attract into the City Centre and how they intended to do this. It was important that the City’s Development plans and in particular the Westside Development, linked in with the transport plans to get people across the City.

The Portfolio Holder for City Environment invited Cllr Phil Bateman to be part of the Member Reference Group he was forming on the West Side Link Project. Cllr Bateman accepted the Portfolio Holder’s offer. The Portfolio Holder had already invited Cllr Paul Birch to be a Member of the Group. After a discussion it was agreed that Cllr Martin Waite should also sit on the Group. The Portfolio Holder wanted the Member Group to come up with solutions to the problems being highlighted. One of the areas they would be looking at was where the new bus stops would be located in the City Centre. He believed events were part of the equation for a successful City Centre. Debenhams closing was another warning sign that the Council had to try something different in the City Centre.

The Portfolio Holder for City Economy spoke in favour of the West Side Link Scheme. He believed it was clear that pedestrianisation was fundamental to ensuring a vibrant and sustainable City. The Council also had to take into account its responsibilities in relation to air quality, the green environment and climate change. He fully understood the need to make changes to the design of the scheme to enhance its desirability and tweaks after its implementation but he was overall in favour of the proposals. The Chair commented that there was some serious questions which needed to be comprehensively answered in order to make the scheme work effectively.

**Resolved:**

- A) That Cllr Martin Waite be invited to sit as a Member on the newly formed informal Member Reference Group on the Public Realm / Westside Link and that he report back into the Scrutiny process.
- B) That the Stronger City Economy Panel receive more information at their next meeting in September 2019 on the marketing plans for the Public Realm / Westside Link project.
- C) That the Movement for Growth consultation be received by the Vibrant and Sustainable City Panel in the future.

- D) Information on how the Public Realm /Westside Link scheme will impact Cleveland Street should be received by the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel in the future.
- E) That an update on the £23 million funding secured in the West Midlands Region for cycling investment be received by the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel in the future.

## 6 **Digital Infrastructure Strategy**

The Head of Strategy introduced a report on the draft Digital Infrastructure Strategy, which was before the Panel as a pre-decision item. The report was scheduled to be received by the Cabinet on 11 September 2019. The reason why the Council was developing a Digital Infrastructure Strategy was due to its importance to local businesses and the wider economy; to be able to connect local residents to new opportunities and also the potential for the public sector to redesign and deliver services in new and innovative ways. There were three main pillars to the strategy. The first one was full fibre. Fibre was critical to enabling the system of 5G to work correctly. One of the initiatives the Council was undertaking was the local full fibre network scheme. They had secured nearly £5 million funding from Government to provide full fibre to 196 public sector sites across the City and to Social Housing Sites. The Council were promoting gigabit vouchers, which enabled local businesses to enable full fibre to the premises. A business was able to obtain up to £2,500 from the Government to upgrade their fibre broadband connections.

The Head of Strategy stated that the second pillar to the strategy was regarding wireless connectivity. Wolverhampton was part of the West Midlands Combined Authority Urban Connected Communities 5G Programme. Wolverhampton was to host the Black Country's first 5G testbed focusing initially around construction and potential to develop into public service delivery use cases. She commented that infrastructure was key to the strategy. The Council had secured European funding to upgrade the streetlights in the City. These lights would have a smart network attached to them allowing wireless networks, Wi-Fi meshes, 5G and the ability to plug-in sensors such as air quality and footfall.

The Head of Strategy stated that the cross-cutting pillar of the strategy was acknowledging that rolling out infrastructure could be difficult, such as having to dig up roads and put up masts. They needed to work with the mobile network operators and the public to roll out the infrastructure appropriately and ensure that the general public made best use of it when it had been installed.

The Portfolio Holder for City Economy spoke in support of the draft Digital Infrastructure Strategy. He saw endless opportunities in the potential for 5G connectivity to transform the City. He commended the Officers for their work.

A Member of the Panel praised the exciting developments outlined in the Council's draft Digital Infrastructure Strategy. They believed the new developments arising from the strategy would allow businesses to work smarter and would give more people the opportunity of being able to work at home. They believed a successful implementation of the strategy would bring significant change in the City. They wanted to ensure that the messages of the strategy were communicated effectively.

They did not believe that the good work being done in the City with eBay had been promoted as well as it could have been. Communications needed to be stronger and better.

**Resolved:**

- A) That an update on the Digital Infrastructure Strategy be received by the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel at an appropriate time in the future.
- B) That Officers co-ordinate with the Council's Communication team on an effective communication and engagement plan promoting the benefits that the successful implementation of the Digital Infrastructure Strategy will bring to the City.

**7 Presentation on items on the Council's Forward Plan in the Remit of the Panel**

The Chair commented that she had specifically asked for an item on the Council's forward plan so the Panel could consider items which fell within the remit of the Panel.

The Director for Regeneration stated that the City Learning Quarter and the Grand Theatre expansion plans would be considered by Cabinet on the 31 July 2019. The Civic Halls future operating model whilst currently scheduled to be received by the Council's Cabinet on 31 July 2019, would probably slip to the Cabinet meeting scheduled for September. Other items on the forward plan which fell within the remit of the Panel included, the former Sainsbury's St. George's site, Wolverhampton External Funding Strategy, i54 Western Extension Phase 2 Budget Approval, Southside Regeneration Strategy Update and the Black Country Plan (Draft for Consultation).

**8 Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Review of the Year 2018/19**

The Briefing Note on the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel review of the year 2018 /2019 was agreed.

**9 Scrutiny Work Plan**

The Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel Work Plan was agreed.

The meeting closed at 8:47pm.