

# Briefing Note

**Title: Feedback on Westside Link transportation questions****Date: 24 October 2019****Prepared by: Ruth Taylor****Job Title: Senior Regeneration Officer****Intended Audience:**Internal Partner organisation Public Confidential 

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## Purpose or recommendation

The purpose of this briefing note is to update and feedback to the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel on questions raised at the joint Scrutiny meeting on 16 July and the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel meeting on 2 September.

## Overview

The note seeks to give clarity and update on progress with issues and queries raised at the meetings and to outline a way forward for future communication with the Scrutiny panels.

## Background and context

On 16 July the Stronger City Economy Panel held a joint meeting with the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel in order to receive a series of presentations on the City Transport strategy which included an update on progress with the Westside Link scheme. A number of queries were raised at that meeting and a further presentation was subsequently received by the Stronger City Economy Panel on 2 September with further detail given specifically on the Westside Link phase 1 (Victoria Street) project. The minutes from both meetings can be found on the Council's website.

## Detailed responses

### Member Reference Group

At the 16 July joint Scrutiny meeting Councillor Steve Evans reported that in order to provide a platform for members to raise their detailed queries about the Westside Link scheme he had invited a number of members from both Scrutiny Panels to join an informal member reference group (MRG). The joint Scrutiny Panel endorsed this approach and asked for Councillor M Waite, Councillor P Bateman and Councillor P Birch to be invited to join the group. The members of that group now consist of;

- Cabinet Member for City Environment - Councillor S Evans (chair)

- Council Leader – Councillor I Brookfield
- Cabinet Member for City Economy – Councillor H Banger
- Two Councillors from Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel – Councillor P Bateman and Councillor Dr P Birch
- One Councillor from Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel - Councillor M Waite.

The terms of reference of the group, which have been agreed, are to review progress, provide robust challenge and debate around the design and delivery of the project and provide feedback to the Scrutiny panels.

The group had its inaugural meeting on 3 October and members received detailed progress information on all 3 phases. The next meeting of the Group is on 7 November and it was agreed that the group should meet monthly in the first instance.

### Cleveland Street

At the joint Scrutiny meeting on 16 July a panel member expressed concern about the increased bus movement in Cleveland Street that would be created by the implementation of the Westside Link scheme. Phase 1 of the project, which will see displacement of the existing bus routes from Victoria Street onto School street will not result in any increase in bus movement in Cleveland Street as existing routes will be maintained from the point of exit from Salop Street. In consultation with Transport for the West Midlands (TfWM), a new bus stop is being proposed in Cleveland Street to meet the additional demand by passenger wishing to alight at the new market and the potential additional demand that will be created by the City Learning Quarter.

Bus rerouting and new stops which may need to be created as part of the Phase 2 (Queen Square) proposals will be further scoped with TfWM, National Express and others bus operators, however from the traffic modelling undertaken to date, the options around new routes will mean that Cleveland Street will not necessarily receive a significant increase in routes as this will be spread across other routes being proposed around the city centre.

The MRG have invited National Express to their meeting in December to hear their comments on the proposals for phase 1 and their anticipated challenges in respect of phase 2.

### City Centre churches

At the Stronger City economy Scrutiny Panel on 2 September the panel asked that St Peters Church and St Peter and St Pauls church concerns be discussed in detail and every effort to mitigate issues regarding access be addressed. The MRG have discussed the specific issues relating to the churches for phases 2 and 3 and it was resolved that additional separate meetings will be set up with the leaders of the churches, Councillor Birch and the project team to update on progress and feedback specific concerns to the MRG for detailed discussion and resolution.

### Transport Strategy for the City

Councillor P Bateman expressed concern at the September Panel meeting about the lack of clarity in respect of how the Westside Link scheme met the future needs of the city both in terms of vision and connectivity. Subsequently the MRG discussed this issue in detail and a further clarification

meeting was held with Councillor Bateman where the Service Manager Transport Strategy was able to outline the clear strategic rationale for the scheme in the context of City's transport network, vision for the city and future aspirations for transport growth. Further discussion will continue as part of the MRG remit.

## **Next Steps**

Detailed technical design is continuing on Westside Link phase 1 (Victoria Street). Target costs and final designs will be completed by January 2020, when further consultation will take place. Capital funding for the delivery of the scheme remains the biggest challenge.

Following an invitation to proceed to the second round of bidding for the Future High Street Fund, the West Side Link phase 1 project, which has been identified as an early intervention in the bid, will continue to be presented as a "shovel ready" scheme capable of immediate delivery once funding becomes available. The timeline for funding which was originally identified as November 2019 for first drafts of the Full Business Case, has now been moved to January 2020. This has subsequently meant that the announcement of funding approvals will not now take place until the summer 2020. This is creating an issue with retaining the project at shovel ready status and the project team are working with our contractors who are undertaking the Early Contractor Involvement to try to mitigate the risks to the future delivery of the project. In the meantime, discussions have been ongoing with the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (BCLEP) for options around alternative sources of funding. A full Business case has now been submitted to their Programme Office for discussion and consideration.

Options around the design of Phase 2 of the project are the subject of discussion and consideration at the MRG and consultation with stakeholders as outlined above will continue to seek the best possible options.

Scoping of the phase 3 project around the Civic Halls will also continue in consultation with stakeholders and the project team delivering the Civic Halls development.

Details of the options for phase 2 and progress with phase 3 will be reported back through the MRG in due course.

