

Meeting: West Midlands Rail Board of Directors

Subject: Minutes

Date: Tuesday 20 March 2018 at 09.30am

PRESENT:

Partner Authorities

Councillor Roger Lawrence	- City of Wolverhampton Council (Chair)
Councillor Stewart Stacey	- Birmingham City Council
Councillor Ian Kettle	- Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Barry Durkin	- Herefordshire Council
Councillor Roger Horton	- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Mark Winnington	- Staffordshire County Council
Councillor Ted Richards OBE	- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Adrian Hardman	- Worcestershire County Council

IN ATTENDANCE:

Adam James	- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Matthew Howells	- Shropshire Council
Clare Horton	- Staffordshire County Council
David Balme	- Telford and Wrekin Council
Laura Shoaf	- Transport for West Midlands
Matt Crowton	- Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Vicky Mumford	- Warwickshire County Council
Luke Bodin	- West Midlands Rail
Malcolm Holmes	- West Midlands Rail
Tom Painter	- West Midlands Rail
Toby Rackliff	- West Midlands Rail
Andy Baker	- Worcestershire County Council
Carl Craney	- West Midlands Combined Authority

BY INVITATION

Ian Baxter	- SLC Rail
Andy Clarke	- SLC Rail
Richard Brooks	- West Midlands Trains

Apologies for absence were recorded from Councillor Ian Ward (Birmingham City Council), Councillor Glen Williams (Cheshire East Council), Councillors David Welsh and Jim O'Boyle (Coventry City Council), Councillor Patrick Harley (Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council), Councillor Steve Eling (Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council), Councillors Ian Morris and Andre Gonzalez de Savage (Northamptonshire County Council), Councillors Steve Davenport and Steve Charmley (Shropshire Council), Councillor Bob Sleight (Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council), Councillor Daniel Jellyman (Stoke on Trent

Council), Councillor Philip Atkins (Staffordshire County Council), Councillor Angela McClements (Telford and Wrekin Council), Councillor Sean Coughlan (Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council), Councillor Peter Bilson (City of Wolverhampton Council) and Councillors Izzi Seccombe and Peter Butlin (Warwickshire County Council).

31. Chair's Announcement

The Chair advised that the meeting was not currently quorate but that if necessary, any actions agreed at the meeting would be signed off electronically. (The meeting became quorate before any decisions were made).

He referred to the revised Agenda for the meeting which had been tabled. Malcolm Holmes advised that it had been necessary to revise the Agenda as Karen Letten, Project Director from the Department for Transport was unable to attend the meeting to give an overview on the new Cross Country Franchise due to a conflicting appointment. He reported that the displeasure of West Midlands Rail had been registered with the Department for Transport in relation to the non-attendance of Karen Letten.

32. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made in relation to matters under consideration at the meeting.

33. Minutes of the meeting of the West Midlands Rail Board of Directors – 15 December 2017

The minutes of the meeting of the West Midlands Rail Board of Directors held on 15 December 2017 were agreed as a correct record of the proceedings and signed by the Chair.

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2017.

34. Forward Plan

The Board noted a Forward Plan detailing items to be reported to future meetings.

AGREED:

That the Forward Plan be noted.

35. West Midlands Trains Progress Update

The Board received a verbal report from Richard Brooks, West Midlands Trains, in connection with the performance of that company since the commencement of the Franchise on 10 December 2017. He referred to the recent bouts of inclement weather which had affected performance but advised that West Midlands Trains had performed better than many other public transport providers during the bad weather.

He informed the Board that, with effect from 1 April 2018, West Midlands Trains would be responsible for the operation of Wolverhampton Railway Station and

on the work which was being carried out with the staff at the Station in preparation for the change of management.

He reported that work was on-going in relation to the proposed changes to the timetable with effect from December 2018 and that the new train designs were being progressed with CAF. He commented on the good working relationship which had been formed between West Midlands Trains and West Midlands Rail especially with regard to service quality, branding and the Stations Alliance.

He updated the Board with the current position with the scheduled opening of Kenilworth Station and on crew training at Bromsgrove Station.

Councillor Stewart Stacey queried the problems at Bromsgrove Station. Richard Brooks reported that this related to infrastructure and the need for Network Rail to address the issue. Malcolm Holmes explained that the electrification of the line would enable more frequent services to be run from July 2018 rather than May 2018 as planned originally.

Councillor Ian Kettle commented on a recent experience on using the train service from Stourbridge to Wolverhampton via Smethwick Galton Bridge and that the latter station was poorly lit and with poor signposting. He suggested that measures were required to make the station more user friendly. Richard Brooks acknowledged this point and assured the Board that this matter would be investigated further once the revisions to the December 2018 timetable had been agreed. Councillor Roger Horton commented that this particular station had suffered following the reduction in staffing numbers and suggested that staff on the station or Customer Services Officers were required. Richard Brooks undertook to review staffing at the station.

Councillor Roger Horton referred to West Midlands Trains taking over responsibility for the operation of Wolverhampton Railway Station and sought an assurance that the current provision of timetables from various Operators would continue to be available in the Information Hall. Richard Brooks confirmed that the various timetables would continue to be available as required as part of the Franchise Agreement and also that it was the intention to enhance the services available at this station.

Councillor Mark Winnington enquired whether there was an app available which indicated which platform trains would depart from. Richard Brooks advised that a number of such apps were available including a West Midlands Trains app on which enhancements were being investigated. Such apps did not, however, assist in navigating the actual station.

Councillor Adrian Hardman enquired whether the enhanced services from Bromsgrove would commence on 29 July 2018 as planned. Richard Brooks advised that this was the intention if all necessary works were completed on time.

AGREED:

1. That the report be received and noted;

2. That the lighting and signage at Smethwick Galton Bridge be reviewed by West Midlands Trains.

36. UK Rail Industry Employee Relations Update

Tom Painter presented a report on the latest industrial relations developments affecting the UK rail network and which provided a commentary as to the potential implications for West Midlands Rail. The Chair reminded the Board that industrial relations were a matter for West Midlands Trains and not issues with which the Board should become involved. In response to a comment by Councillor Stewart Stacey, Tom Painter advised that Transport for West Midlands and West Midlands Rail were working with other public transport operators to minimise any disruption to the travelling public in the event of any industrial action.

Councillor Ian Kettle questioned the number of carriages which could be accessed and egressed safely in the event of Driver Only Operation or driver Controlled operation. Richard Brooks explained that new technology was incorporated into new rolling stock to overcome such issues.

Councillor Stewart Stacey enquired whether, in the event that a Guard was not present on a train whether the ticket of a passenger who was not prepared to travel on a driver only train would be honoured.

AGREED:

1. That the report be received and noted;
2. That Tom Painter ascertain the position with regard to the issue raised by Councillor Stewart Stacey.

37. West Midlands Franchise Performance Dashboard

Tom Painter presented a report which updated the Board on the performance of the West Midlands Franchise. He commented that a number of the areas flagged 'red' were weather related but others were performance issues within the control of West Midlands Trains and which were being addressed.

AGREED:

That the report be received and noted.

38. West Midlands Rail Programme Update Report

Malcolm Holmes presented a general update to the Board which outlined progress against WMR objectives since the last meeting in December 2017. The report covered the following objectives:

- Secretary of State Meeting;
- West Midlands Franchise Management;
- West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy;
- West Midlands Stations Alliance;
- Franchise Engagement Strategy;
- New Stations;
- Stations Upgrades Projects;
- Partnership Agreements;
- Stakeholder Engagement and Media Coverage;

- Finance; and
- Risk Management.

Councillor Stewart Stacey referred to paragraph 8 of the report insofar as it referred to a pair of derogations against the Franchise Agreement, both connected to brand and enquired as to the compensatory measures agreed. Malcolm Holmes explained the background to this issue and advised that the compensatory measures included the acceleration of the delivery of the station re-branding plan and the appointment of a separate West Midlands Separable Business Unit Brand Manager.

Councillor Roger Horton referred to the proposals for new stations and, in particular, the proposals for stations at Darlaston and Willenhall. He reminded the Board that the previous Wolverhampton to Walsall service had been connected to Wellington and had often been cancelled if a problem occurred in Wellington. He encouraged the Board to be conscious of this fact and to learn from this lesson.

The Chair requested that a report be submitted to a future meeting on 'Rail Development issues including Prioritisation and Timing'. He took the opportunity to remind the Board that the requisite finance for the new stations and station upgrade projects had yet to be identified. Laura Shoaf reminded the Board that some funding would be available from the HS2 Connectivity Package. She advised that the possibility of a station being provided at Balsall Heath was also being investigated subject to the timetable being able to accommodate such services. Malcolm Holmes reported that there were a number of potential solutions to timetabling issues which were being investigated including maintaining a minimum of a two trains per hour service.

In response to a comment by Councillor Roger Horton, Malcolm Holmes undertook to liaise with West Midlands Trains and Worcestershire County Council with regard to the latest position on the proposed new station at West Midlands Safari Park.

With regard to Finance, Malcolm Holmes reminded the Board that at the December 2017 meeting it had been agreed for the financial year end to be changed to the end of March (previously April) and for this to take effect from the 2018/19 financial year. It was now proposed that this would take effect from 2017/18 so that the financial year could be coterminous with Partner Authorities and the West Midlands Combined Authority accounts from an earlier date.

AGREED:

1. That the report be received and noted;
2. That a report on 'Rail Development issues including 'Prioritisation and Timing' be submitted to a future meeting;
3. That Malcolm Holmes liaise with West Midlands Trains and Worcestershire County Council with regard to the latest position on the proposed new station at West Midlands Safari Park.

4. That a change in the financial year end to the end of March (to take effect from the 2017/18 financial year rather than 2018/19 as agreed previously) be approved.

39. Rail Investment Strategy

Ian Baxter presented a report which detailed the progress made to date in developing the West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy. The Board received a PowerPoint presentation on the purpose and steps taken to develop the Rail Investment Strategy. Laura Shoaf advised that the various schemes would need to be prioritised as the Strategy currently assumed that all the West Midlands Rail Hub schemes would be delivered. Ian Baxter assured the Board that the Strategy would rank schemes in priority order and would also provide a view on economic benefit, social need and deliverability of schemes.

Councillor Mark Winnington enquired when planning for the post HS2 delivery period i.e. 2033 would commence. Ian Baxter responded that it would be for WMR to respond as local authorities would begin to refresh Local plans soon after the adoption of the current iteration. Councillor Mark Winnington commented that at this stage there were too many unknown factors to enable proper planning to be undertaken. Ian Baxter advised that as the economic model was available planning could commence against the 2030 Local Plans. He reminded the Board that railways reacted to and caused development.

Councillor Stewart Stacey queried the accuracy of the Department of Transport's data base given the additional housing numbers proposed by the Ministry of Housing, Local Government and Communities. Ian Baxter assured the Board that the data base was used by all Central Government Departments and that whilst it was not perfect it was better than an unmodelled situation.

AGREED:

That the report and presentation be received and noted.

40. West Midlands Rail Business Plan

Toby Rackliff reported that with the launch of the West midlands Trains franchise in December 2017, WMR's activities had now moved on from franchise preparation and mobilisation to the franchise delivery and management phase. This, coupled with the combining of WMR and Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) rail activity had led to a need to review and reissue the WMR Business Plan. He presented a draft Business Plan for the period from 2018 to 2022.

Councillor Stewart Stacey questioned whether it was the appropriate time to adopt a new Business Plan given the uncertainties surrounding the Cross Country Franchise and track space allocation. Toby Rackliff advised that any issues with the Cross Country Franchise would be addressed via the Franchise Engagement Strategy. Malcolm Holmes commented that the issue of increased capacity would be covered in the Rail Investment Strategy with HM government and rail operators being lobbied at the appropriate time.

AGREED:

That the WMR Business Plan for the period 2018 to 2022 be approved.

41. Chiltern Railways and Virgin Trains Partnership Agreements

Tom Painter presented a report which outlined two rail industry Partnership Agreements for consideration.

AGREED:

That WMR be authorised to enter into the Partnership Agreements with Chiltern Railways and Virgin Trains as appended to the report.

[The meeting ended at 11:24 a.m.]

CHAIR