

18 OCTOBER, 2018

08

Strategic Transport Policy and Delivery in Walsall and the West Midlands

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor A Andrew – Deputy Leader and Regeneration

Executive Summary:

This report gives an overview and update on a wide range of transport-related matters in the Borough. It sets out the Council's approach to ensuring transport policy is integrated with that of our Metropolitan neighbours; presents key travel data for the town centre; gives examples of the approach to regeneration 'investment corridors', including the A34 SPRINT corridor; outlines Council and Transport for West Midlands initiatives to promote sustainable travel; gives information about the emerging approach to promoting low emission vehicles in the Black Country; and outlines initiatives to monitor and encourage better air quality around our schools.

The report is intended to stimulate debate and engage with those professionals within the Council that are responsible for transport policy and strategy, and related matters such as air quality. The scope of the report means that it is primarily an opportunity to update the Committee, and may necessitate other follow-up reports on more tightly focused issues.

Reason for scrutiny:

The Chair of the Committee has requested a meeting to be focused solely on transport, to include: -

- An overview of transport policy across Walsall and the West Midlands;
- Key travel data for the Borough;
- How transport is contributing to the regeneration investment corridors approach across the Black Country;
- An update on the proposals for bus rapid transit between Walsall town centre and Birmingham city centre (A34 SPRINT);
- How the Council is promoting sustainable transport and low-emission vehicles; and
- How the Council is tackling air quality issues around schools.

Recommendations:

- 1 That the Committee note the transport policy context for Walsall and the West Midlands;
- 2 That the Committee note the progress being made on incorporating transport initiatives into a wider corridor-based approach to regeneration;

- 3 That the Committee note the progress on promoting sustainable transport; low emission vehicles, and tackling air quality issues around schools.

Background papers:

- Transport in Walsall: 2017-2022 (Walsall Council, published 2017)
- Movement for Growth: The West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan (West Midlands Combined Authority, published 2016)
- Movement for Growth: 2026 Delivery Plan for Transport (West Midlands Combined Authority, published 2017)
- Black Country Core Strategy (Walsall, Dudley, Sandwell and Wolverhampton Councils, adopted 2011)

Resource and legal considerations:

Walsall Council and its partners, including TfWM, resource activities that promote the objectives of 'Movement for Growth' and 'Transport in Walsall'. Both revenue and capital funding is utilised to support these agendas.

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

'Movement for Growth' and 'Transport in Walsall' support the Council's vision that 'Inequalities are reduced and all potential is maximised' and purpose 'To create an environment that provides opportunities for all individuals and communities to fulfil their potential' as outlined in the Corporate Plan 2018-2021. Further, it underpins delivery against the Council's priorities, including: -

- Economic growth for all people, communities and businesses;
- People have increased independence, improved health, and can positively contribute to their communities;
- Communities are prospering and resilient with all housing needs met in safe and healthy places that build a strong sense of belonging and cohesion.

Citizen impact:

'Movement for Growth' and 'Transport in Walsall' delivery programmes have been tested against the 'Marmot Objectives'. These are:-

- Giving every child the best start in life – *programmes include measures to support travel to school by sustainable modes, which is part of a rolling programme across the Borough;*
- Enabling all children, young people and adults to maximize their capabilities and have control over their lives – *measures to promote sustainable modes help promote healthy and independent travel choices;*
- Creating fair employment and good work for all – *improved transport networks help people access employment and training opportunities;*

- Ensuring a healthy standard of living for all – *access to paid employment is facilitated by improved transport networks;*
- Creating and developing sustainable places and communities – *programmes include active travel, public transport and road safety measures, which all support sustainable places and communities;*
- Strengthening the role and impact of ill-health prevention – *healthy travel choices, such as walking or cycling, can help prevent ill health.*

The programmes described impact by making sustainable travel – cycling, walking and public transport – available to all residents and stakeholders.

Environmental impact:

Environmental and safety factors are considered in the development and delivery of transport schemes. Care will be taken in the detailed design of schemes to minimise direct impacts on the local environment; where appropriate schemes will be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment. The Movement for Growth has been subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Improving the safety of the transport network and the security of people using the network are important considerations in the development and delivery of transport schemes and the overall composition of the transport capital programme. To date the Council has performed well, when compared to others nationally, in reducing the numbers and severity of accidents on the Borough's roads.

As future schemes are progressed, the Council will be identifying good practice for adapting to, and mitigating the effects of, climate change and promoting environmental and economic sustainability.

Performance management:

Scrutiny of the Council's efforts to promote the Movement for Growth and Transport in Walsall agendas will help promote efficiency of service delivery. Transport policy is continually developing and evolving with regard to local issues. Project and programme delivery adapts and responds to current and future challenges.

Reducing inequalities:

As part of the delivery of Movement for Growth and Transport in Walsall consideration has been given to ensuring that the needs of all sections of the community are considered in transport projects. Further, Movement for Growth has been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment.

Delivery programmes will assist in improving facilities for all modes of transport by focusing on improving access to key services and facilities such as education, job opportunities and health care facilities.

Consultation:

Planning, Engineering and Transportation

Council Fleet Services

Black Country Core Strategy – Transport Group

Transport for West Midlands

West Midlands Rail Executive

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Report

1 Integrated Transport Policy

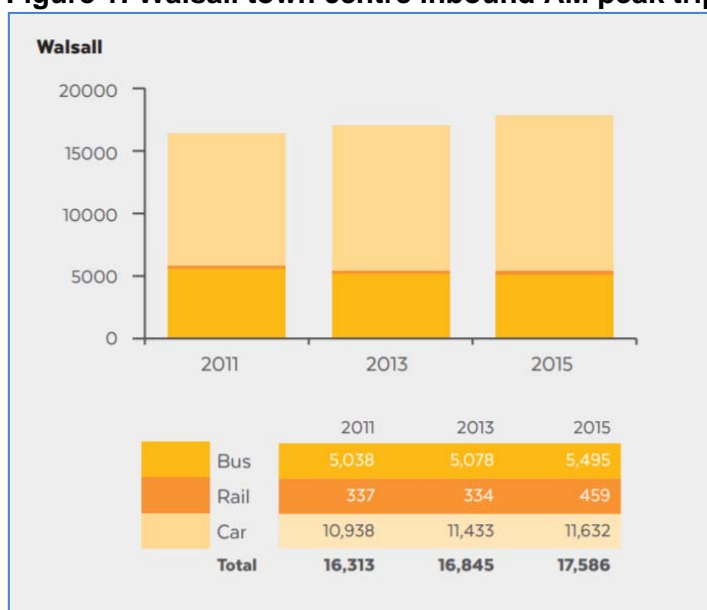
- 1.1 Transport policy development and implementation in Walsall and the West Midlands Metropolitan Area is fully integrated and reflects mature relationships across the sub-region. Walsall Council works with the other Metropolitan Councils (Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull and Wolverhampton) and Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) to produce a strategic transport plan. **‘Movement for Growth: The West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan’** was developed in 2015 and was endorsed by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) in June 2016. The document is a 15-year plan to address the transport challenges in the Metropolitan Area, which is supported by a 10-year delivery plan. The guiding strategy for the WMCA is the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), which sets out the vision for improving the quality of life for everyone in the West Midlands.
- 1.2 Movement for Growth aims to greatly improve the transport system to support economic growth and regeneration, underpin new development and housing, and to improve air quality, the environment and social inclusion. It is based on consistent improvements over the long-term to achieve an integrated transport system and is organised around four tiers of activity: -
- National and Regional
 - Metropolitan (Metropolitan Rail and Rapid Transit Network, Key Route Network, Strategic Cycle Network)
 - Local
 - Smart Mobility
- 1.3 The main thrust of the strategy is to make best use of our highway infrastructure; promote public transport and sustainable transport; and support economic regeneration. It specifically aims to tackle major transport issues, including traffic congestion; poor air quality and noise pollution; and help encourage the switch to low emission vehicles.
- 1.4 In order to make Movement for Growth relevant and accessible for a Walsall audience, the Council has developed a related local strategy – **‘Transport in Walsall: 2017-2022’**. This follows the West Midlands-wide policy approach endorsed by Walsall Council and the other members of the West Midlands Combined Authority, and supplements this approach with details of projects and programmes that are being developed and delivered in the Borough of Walsall in support of this agenda.
- 1.5 Notwithstanding the good collaboration and partnership working that has existed across the West Midlands on transport policy and programmes, the Black Country Councils – Walsall, Dudley, Sandwell and Wolverhampton – also have robust collaboration and partnership working arrangements in place, including for transport policy, planning policy and regeneration. This is expressed in the **‘Black Country Core Strategy’**, which includes a transport plan for the sub-region. The Core Strategy is a statutory land-use plan and a key component of the local development framework in each of the Black Country local authority areas. It was adopted in 2011 and is currently being reviewed.

- 1.6 There are various other supporting policy documents for West Midlands, Black Country and Walsall geographies, some focused on specific transport modes or related issues (e.g. air quality), but they are too numerous to detail here. This report has therefore focused on the overarching transport policy and strategy documents that impact on the Borough.

2 Travel Trends in Walsall

- 2.1 Key travel trends data for Walsall and the wider West Midlands is available from Census data and TfWM's '**West Midlands Travel Trends: 2017**'.
- 2.2 Walsall St. Paul's Bus Station (a managed TfWM facility) is one of the busiest bus stations in the region, accommodating 8.3 million passenger journeys per annum. Bradford Place Bus Interchange (an unmanaged facility on local authority highway) accommodates 4.5 million passenger journeys per annum; and the rail station 1.4 million passenger journeys per annum. Unfortunately the origin and destination of these journeys cannot be plotted at ward level – this information would be extremely expensive and time-consuming to collect.
- 2.3 In 2015, morning peak trips by public transport into Walsall represented a 33.9% share of all trips (bus 31.2%, and rail 2.6%) with car representing the remaining 66.1% share.
- 2.4 The share of public transport has increased since 2013 (by 1.8%). Bus passenger trips have increased by 8.2% whilst rail passenger trips have also increased (by 37.4%).
- 2.5 Car trips have increased by 1.7% since 2013. And car travel remains the dominant mode, despite the rise in the share of trips made by public transport.
- 2.6 Overall, morning peak inbound trips into Walsall have increased by 4.4%.

Figure 1: Walsall town centre inbound AM peak trips, 2011-15



- 2.7 Bus travel is very important within Walsall and is the backbone of the public transport network. Walsall generates almost 13 million bus passenger journeys per annum.

Any increase in this number increases the footfall to local shops, including the Saddlers Centre.

- 2.8 National Express West Midlands (NXWM) has been operating a Low Fare Zone in the Borough. This has proved popular with passengers and NXWM are seeing a small commercial growth in passenger numbers, which is bucking the national trend for bus patronage decline.
- 2.9 Bus operators are seeing a continuing decline in concessionary fare passengers, but are now seeing an increase in young people travelling. The evidence suggests that older people are driving longer, whilst young people are choosing to use public transport and finding the cost of car ownership prohibitive. In response to this, operators now offer a £1 fare for concessionary fare passengers who wish to travel before 9.30AM and this has proved very popular.
- 2.10 TfWM recently removed the need for the £10 fee to purchase the 16 to 18 card and other conditions. The card now offers 50% discounted travel for everyone up to the age of 18. The new arrangement has already seen a 30% increase in the take-up of the cards and this is especially being observed amongst apprentices.
- 2.11 The Bus Alliance is also tackling vehicle emissions and has agreed to deliver 50% Euro V and 50% Euro VI vehicles by the end of 2020. The ambition is to continue to challenge these targets for the entire region and move closer to 100% compliance.
- 2.12 A partnership trial route was implemented in September 2018 on the 31 and 32 services (previously 301 and 302), being the first of its kind between Diamond and NXWM. The operators are providing a new joint timetable, and both Diamond's and NXWM's buses will carry the new West Midlands Bus colour branding.
- 2.13 The combined service means buses up to every 5 minutes between Mossley and Walsall town centre during Monday to Saturday daytimes. Both operators are accepting selected tickets on each other's 31 & 32 service, so that passengers can board the first bus that arrives at their stop. Early evidence suggests that the trial has already increased overall passenger numbers.

3 Bus and Rail Passenger Satisfaction

- 3.1 The autumn 2016 Bus Passenger Survey (conducted by Transport Focus) reports 85% of passengers were either 'fairly satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the overall bus experience on all operators in the West Midlands. This is compared to spring 2016 where the overall satisfaction was at 87%, showing a decrease of 2%.
- 3.2 Building on the importance of bus travel in Walsall, TfWM (the operators of Walsall St. Paul's Bus Station) are currently implementing a £0.7 million mid-life refurbishment of the bus station that will see passenger facilities significantly improved and circulation space expanded. These works have been informed by passenger consultation and engagement, and will build on the success of this busy facility in the heart of the town centre.
- 3.3 The autumn 2016 National (Rail) Passenger Survey (conducted at railway stations by Passenger Focus) reports 86% of passengers were either 'fairly satisfied' or 'very

satisfied' with the overall rail experience on all operators in the Network West Midlands area. This is compared with the same period for autumn 2015 where the overall satisfaction was at 90%, showing a decrease of 4%.

- 3.4 West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE) and TfWM are striving to address these rail performance issues through their 'Single Network Vision', by partnering with Network Rail and the Train Operating Companies (TOCs).

4 Regeneration Investment Corridors

- 4.1 Walsall Council is working with its neighbours to promote cross-boundary investment corridors that will realise significant economic and transport benefits for our residents and businesses.

- 4.2 The Council is promoting a bus rapid transit '**SPRINT**' scheme on the **A34 between Walsall town centre and Birmingham city centre**. This project is being led by TfWM and is being actively developed by an integrated project team to include Walsall, Birmingham, Sandwell and TfWM officers.

- 4.3 SPRINT is a new transport mode for the West Midlands that will see high-quality rapid transit vehicles that operate on our highways – essentially a new type of vehicle that looks and feels like a tram rather than a bus. These services have been pioneered in cities around the world, and TfWM is developing a network of routes for the West Midlands. Three of these routes (A34 to Walsall; A45 to Solihull and Airport; A38 to Sutton Coldfield) are being implemented in advance of the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham and the West Midlands in summer 2022. The intention is that they will be constructed and operating by late-2021.

- 4.4 A public consultation exercise took place from late-August to early-October on the preliminary designs for the A34 scheme in order to inform the ongoing development of the scheme and the detailed design. A public event was held in Walsall and attended by approximately 90 people. Attendants were particularly concerned about the following, but overall there were a lot of positive comments regarding the proposed service and its introduction:-

- Where Sprint stops will be located
- How often the service will operate
- If existing bus services (51 and X51) will still operate
- Why the service is proposed in addition to the X51
- Concerns over loading if the Ablewell Street contra flow bus lane is introduced. (Further engagement with businesses is scheduled to take place.)
- Traffic speed and road safety
- Impact of proposed new housing e.g. Cricket Close
- Park & Ride – if it will be introduced and addressing the informal parking already taking place

- 4.5 These concerns have been fed into the design process and ongoing dialogue is being conducted with these stakeholders and ward councillors.

- 4.6 The integrated project team will work with the contractor (yet to be appointed) to minimise disruption to residents, businesses and other stakeholders during the works. The majority of construction activity will take place at off-peak times; night

working will be strictly limited and controlled by the Council's regulatory functions; and the promoters and contractors will have an accessible and visible presence during the works to enable the quick resolution of any local issues.

4.7 As with all major projects there is a balance to be achieved between the intensity of disruption and the length of the overall construction programme. Ultimately the fast journey times, high-quality passenger experience, environmental benefits of an attractive public transport service will bring significant economic benefits to the Borough, allowing access to employment, education, training, healthcare, shopping and leisure activities for Walsall residents, and also encourage more people to access Walsall town centre.

4.8 The '**Town to City Corridor**' which extends from Walsall town centre to Wolverhampton city centre, and extends across parts of Birchills, Bentley, Darlaston, Willenhall and New Invention, is a focus of regeneration activity for the two local authorities, that will bring transport, housing and employment benefits for local residents and businesses. Key activities include: -

- **M6 Junction 10** – a major highways improvement project to open-up key employment sites and tackle congestion, being developed and delivered in partnership with Highways England;
- **Darlaston (James Bridge) and Willenhall Stations** – new train stations on the soon-to-be reopened Walsall to Wolverhampton passenger rail line, that will be served by new local train services operated by West Midlands Trains, linking our centres together and to Birmingham New Street Station;
- **Black Country Garden Village** – new housing to be constructed that will benefit from the improved transport offer in this part of the Borough, enabling sustainable growth;
- **Black Country Enterprise Zone (Darlaston)** – new employment opportunities centred around key sites that are being opened up by improved highway infrastructure and new rail services, providing significant new job opportunities for local people;
- **Better Air Quality** – a renewed focus on improving air quality across the Borough, but especially on the A454 Black Country Route and the A4148 Walsall Ring Road that, together with the M6 motorway, represent a major 'economic spine' serving the Borough;
- **Wolverhampton City East Gateway and Neachells Lane Junction** – complemented by the regeneration and transport activities of our local authority neighbours in Wolverhampton.

4.9 This unprecedented range of regeneration activity has a significant focus on transport infrastructure and services, and will be a template for regeneration activity across Walsall and the Black Country, maximising our position at the economic heart of the West Midlands.

5 Promoting Sustainable Transport

5.1 In addition to its own sustainable transport activities, Walsall Council works in partnership with TfWM, Canal & Rivers Trust (CRT) and our local authority neighbours to promote sustainable transport (walking and cycling) across the Borough. Key examples include: -

- 5.2 In promoting safe and healthy travel to school the **A*STARS programme** seeks to support schools to embed the principles of sustainable travel, road safety education and physical activity into the culture and mind-set of everyone through encouraging healthy lifestyles. A*STARS is a joint initiative combining the statutory duties associated with Public Health, Children Services and Highway Authority through underpinning the Children and Young People's Plan with the Sustainable Mode of Travel Strategy and supporting the Health and Wellbeing Plan.
- 5.3 The object of the A*STARS programme is to increase the number of pupils using all forms of safer, sustainable travel on the journey to and from schools and provide evidence of modal shift. To increase knowledge and understanding of healthy lifestyles, road safety and sustainable travel by providing education, training and encouragement and to provide a safer, cleaner environment in the vicinity of schools to benefit everyone and enable schools to take ownership of the programme and promote its key messages to parents and the wider community.
- A*STARS current active travel figure (walking scooting & cycling) is 55%, whilst the national average is 53%
 - 53% of A*STARS school surveyed are above the national average for active travel
 - A*STARS primary schools have a lower car use figure than the national average every year
 - A*STARS primary schools have higher cycling figures than the national average for the past 3 years
- 5.4 Transport for West Midlands and the West Midlands local authorities are working together to produce a prioritised list of **cycling and walking infrastructure improvement routes** for the West Midlands to enable our region to be in a strong position to bid for investment funds when money is made available nationally to improve our cycling network.
- 5.5 Early next year a **West Midlands bike hire scheme** will be launched to help support the use of sustainable transport. Nextbike have been appointed by TfWM and are working with local authorities to identify docking locations.
- 5.6 TfWM is leading on a **BikeLife West Midlands** study which will provide a valuable insight into our progress and the views held by our residents on cycling. It will help to understand how we can provide safe, attractive and accessible cycling facilities that will enable the growth in cycling that we want.
- 5.7 TfWM, local authorities and CRT are currently working hard to improve many **off-road routes**, with canal towpath improvements such as resurfacing and lighting improvements across the Black Country. Promotional material and cycling and walking activities are planned in response to customer surveys that will engage and connect citizens to the nearby routes.
- 5.8 A Cycling Development Officer from Cycling UK, dedicated to inspiring citizens to cycle in the Black Country has been actively setting up a network of community cycle clubs to bring cheer and a sense of togetherness, increasing physical activity and promoting wellbeing and good mental health through regular cycling activities strongly linking to Public Health related themes. The **Walsall Arboretum Community Cycle Club** is a wonderful example of partnership working in the

community – sourcing bikes, storage space and volunteers to run the club self sustainably. Attracting groups that have never cycled before, the group get together weekly (meets Tuesdays) to enjoy a ride around the lake, ‘appreciate the seasons’ and socialising. New members are welcomed, and this simple ride gives all those that take part a sense of belonging and purpose whilst exploring cycle routes in the Borough.

6 Low Emission Vehicles and Electric Vehicle Charging

- 6.1 A consultation exercise has recently been conducted to assess the demand for **electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure** in residential areas. Following on from this, the Black Country local authorities are exploring the potential for direct action to facilitate uptake across the Black Country. The partners aim to use the consultation results to build a package of incentives that will encourage prospective EV buyers to make the switch. This will investigate bus lane access for and parking incentives for Ultra-Low Emission Vehicles (ULEVs) while focussing on the most appropriate locations for infrastructure, including exploring the potential for on-street residential charging. Work is also being considered to understand how partners can best use the workplace charging scheme grant to provide charging provision for employees and support the greening of fleet vehicles to minimise our impacts on the environment.
- 6.2 Meanwhile, talks are ongoing with the national Go Ultra Low project to support their 2019/20 promotional campaign and events and promote EVs across the region. This partnership is intended to raise public awareness of electric vehicles and their environmental benefits. Suggestions have also been made to introduce dedicated web pages on each local authority’s website to provide information to residents to improve their perceptions and to break down some of the barriers that currently exist to wide spread adoption, whilst providing a conduit of communication with the council for those who have specific queries.
- 6.3 Whilst these work streams are only in the development stage, the necessary steps are being taken to try fulfil objectives laid out in the Black Country ULEV strategy; firstly, by establishing benchmarks for EV adoption and infrastructure installations that will set out clearly defined local targets.
- 6.4 Walsall Council is considering options for moving towards electric and/or hybrid technologies for its **vehicle fleet**. Whilst the technology is not sufficiently advanced for HGV vehicles, a pilot project for vans and couriers is actively being investigated, and is expected to commence in the next few months, following a procurement exercise. Charging infrastructure will need to be installed at both the depot and Civic Centre to facilitate such a project. In the long-term, if the pilot project is successful, it is expected that vehicle replacement will increasingly be focused on ULEV vehicles.

7 Tackling Air Pollution around Schools

- 7.1 The A*STARS Programme (see above) helps to indirectly address poor air quality around schools by actively promoting sustainable transport for pupils i.e. discourages parents from driving their children to school.
- 7.2 Similar schemes elsewhere in the West Midlands, such as Solihull’s ‘School Streets’

pilot project, aim to create a predominantly car-free zone, with reduced congestion and pollution being amongst the anticipated outcomes. Lessons learned from this and other pilot projects in the West Midlands will be reviewed in order to inform any future policy initiatives in Walsall.

- 7.3 The Council's Pollution Control Team currently has monitoring stations at Rough Hay School, Darlaston, and Woodlands School, Willenhall, both sites being urban background sites. Previously there has also been monitoring undertaken at Alumwell School, Primley Avenue; Queen Mary's High School; and Chuckery Primary School.
- 7.4 Woodlands School has monitors (NO₂ and O₃) within close proximity to the cars that park along Hunts Lane particularly at school drop-off and pick-up times. (Although the monitoring is there primarily as part of DEFRA's Automatic Urban and Rural Network (AURN), which is the UK's largest automatic monitoring network and is used for compliance reporting against the Ambient Air Quality Directives. It is coincidental that it is located adjacent to where care providers park their cars for the 'school run'. And its primary function is to provide an urban background concentration of NO₂ and O₃ within 1 kilometre of the M6 motorway.) Data indicates that this site is considerably below the annual mean for objective levels.
- 7.5 Further, there aren't any schools within areas where the Council is currently monitoring an exceedance of an air quality objective.