

Council – 12 November 2018

Notice of motion – Metro system

A notice of motion has been received from Councillors S. Coughlan, D. Coughlan, Shires, Ward, Jeavons, Jukes, Robertson, Underhill, Nawaz, Burley and Hussain:

That this Council notes the headlines in the Express & Star from 23 October 2015:

“Walsall and Black Country Metro tram link declared dead”

Followed by comments attributed to Councillor Adrian Andrew that stated:

It’s pretty clear we’re not going to get the 5Ws tram link. The Metro scheme was designed more than two decades ago but it’s just too expensive and comes at a time when local authorities and public bodies no longer have access to that level of funding.”

Further, this Council notes that recently the Government have financially supported the Metro extension to Brierley Hill in Dudley.

This Council calls on our Cabinet with their executive powers to use all opportunities at its disposal, such as the Association of Black Country Authorities, the Black Country LEP, WMCA, and the Metro Mayor to secure funding to extend the Metro system from Wolverhampton, via Wednesfield (New Cross Hospital) and Willenhall to Walsall.

Response:

The Black Country Rapid Transit Review (2015) undertaken on behalf of the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority and the Black Country local authorities, concluded that the high capital cost and lack of funding availability for the Wolverhampton – Wednesfield – Willenhall – Walsall – Wednesbury (or 5Ws) Metro made the scheme undeliverable. The study suggested an alternative approach for rapid transit in this corridor: to reinstate heavy rail on the Wolverhampton to Walsall line with new intermediate stations, which could potentially be later converted to tram/train operation to allow services to connect to other key destinations e.g. New Cross Hospital.

The study also concluded that two other rapid transit routes should be prioritised in the Black Country: -

- Wednesbury to Brierley Hill – Metro
- Walsall town centre to Birmingham city centre A34 Sprint – Bus Rapid Transit

The outcomes of the study were endorsed by both the Association of Black Country Authorities (November 2015) and the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority (December 2015).

This policy position was reflected in the long-term transport strategy for the West Midlands 'Movement for Growth' (also approved in December 2015) and endorsed by the West Midlands Combined Authority at its inception in June 2016.

A subsequent study to look at the potential for a more limited extension of Metro from Wolverhampton to Willenhall via New Cross Hospital completed in 2018, concluded that there is insufficient demand at this time in the corridor to generate a positive business case for a Metro extension, especially if the heavy rail passenger service resumes as planned with the intermediate stations and a timetable that includes both local shuttle services and direct connections to Birmingham New Street.

Consequently, with the support of West Midlands Combined Authority, Transport for West Midlands and West Midlands Trains, officers are actively progressing the new station proposals for Willenhall and Darlaston (James Bridge) as part of the 'West Midlands HS2 Connectivity Package'. The train franchise operator – West Midlands Trains – has made a commitment to serve the new stations. Subject to all of the necessary statutory approvals and funding approvals, the earliest the stations could be open and served is December 2021.

The other two rapid transit priorities advocated by the 2015 study are also being actively progressed.

Simon Neilson,
Executive Director, Economy and Environment
2 November 2018