

Cabinet – 10 February 2021

A34 Walsall to Birmingham SPRINT (Bus Rapid Transit) Scheme – Phase 1

Portfolio: Councillor Adrian Andrew, Deputy Leader and Regeneration

Related portfolios: None

Service: Highways & Transport

Wards: St Matthews and Paddock

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

1. Aim

- 1.1 A transformational improvement in bus services on the A34 corridor between Walsall town centre and Birmingham city centre through the phased delivery of a bus rapid transit scheme (known as 'SPRINT'). These services are key to connecting Walsall people to a range of opportunities in the wider-West Midlands, and are central to the regeneration of Walsall town centre.

2. Summary

- 2.1 This report provides details of the proposed Walsall to Birmingham Phase 1 SPRINT scheme on the A34 corridor (see route plan at **Appendix A**), to be delivered by Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) on behalf of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) in line with the programme for the Birmingham Commonwealth Games in 2022. The report seeks authority for the Council to approve Phase 1 highway measures within Walsall in its capacity as Highway Authority. The intention is that the Council and WMCA will enter into a Highways Act 1980 Section 8 / Section 278 agreement to allow WMCA's contractor to implement the scheme on Walsall Council maintained highway. The necessary Traffic Regulation Orders to support the delivery of the scheme will be subject to the statutory consultation and approval process for such orders.
- 2.2 WMCA approved a revised phasing plan (over two phases) for the A34 and A45 SPRINT routes at the WMCA Board meeting on 14 February 2020, and approved the funding for A34 Phase 1 (£32.4m) and A45 Phase 1 (£55.4m). Phase 1 works are to be delivered by June 2022 (just ahead of the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham in July and August 2022), and Phase 2 works are intended to be delivered by December 2024. Phase 2 is currently

unfunded and will subject to a separate funding approval (and any associated highway approvals).

- 2.3 A proposed 'Park and Ride' (P&R) site between Walsall town centre and Junction 7 of the M6 is also proposed by WMCA/TfWM as part of Phase 2 SPRINT delivery in line with aWest Midlands P&R Strategy, which is currently unfunded. This report only deals with SPRINT Phase 1, and a P&R site is therefore outside the scope of this report. Any P&R site proposal will be treated as a separate (but complementary) scheme which will require planning permission and will be subject to a separate funding approval. TfWM have asserted that SPRINT Phase 1 is a viable project in its own right and does not require SPRINT Phase 2 and/or the P&R project to justify its implementation – the SPRINT Phase 1 scheme achieves a 'high' value-for-money assessment, and no amendments are required to Phase 1 infrastructure if SPRINT Phase 2 and/or the P&R site do not go ahead in the future.
- 2.4 The total estimated capital cost of the A34 Phase 1 works is £32.4m, all to be funded by WMCA as per the February 2020 approval. No capital funding is sought from Walsall Council to implement the scheme. Further, the risk of cost and time overruns on Phase 1 works is the responsibility of WMCA/TfWM to manage with its appointed contractor i.e. no cost and time risks are allocated to Walsall Council.
- 2.5 At the time of writing, the exact mix of future strategic and local bus services along the A34 corridor cannot be fully articulated by TfWM and the commercial operator, but Walsall Council endorsement is provided with the expectation that there is no loss of service frequency, capacity or passenger accessibility on or to bus services operating between Walsall town centre and Birmingham city centre along the A34 corridor following the implementation of Phase 1, or any subsequent phase of the scheme. If any bus service proposal (commercial and/or subsidised) should result in a reduced service i.e. lower frequency; reduced capacity (seats and standing room); increased distance to/from bus stops; later start times; earlier finish times, the Council will expect mitigation to be agreed between bus operators, TfWM and the Council in advance of these proposals being implemented.
- 2.6 The Portfolio Holder set out a pre-condition for Walsall Council Cabinet approval of SPRINT Phase 1 highway works that the commercial operator of the SPRINT service and the mix of vehicle types that will operate the SPRINT services in the corridor is publicly announced in advance of Cabinet consideration. This public announcement was made in a press statement by TfWM on 27 January 2021.
- 2.7 In light of the recommendation below, Cabinet is asked to note that this report should be read alongside a separate but related Cabinet report on the Bus Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme, which sets out a West Midlands-wide Plan to improve bus services and establishes a corridor-specific Scheme for the A34(N) and A45 / B425 that requires WMCA/TfWM, local authorities and bus operating companies to undertake specific responsibilities to achieve such an improvement in bus services. This is dealt with as a separate item on

the Cabinet agenda. It should be noted that the SPRINT Phase 1 proposed investment will deliver the infrastructure within Walsall that will allow the Council to fulfil the infrastructure component of its Enhanced Partnership Scheme obligations.

3. Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet: -

3.1.1 Agrees the designs for A34 SPRINT Phase 1 within Walsall Borough as described in Section 4 of the report and incorporating the highway works as set out in Table 2 in this report and as shown in the scheme drawings for the infrastructure works at **Appendix C**;

3.1.2 Delegates authority to the Executive Director for Economy, Environment and Communities, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and the Local Highway Authority, to agree any changes to the detail of the SPRINT Phase 1 scheme designs with West Midlands Combined Authority who are acting in their capacity as project funder.

4. Report detail – know

Context

4.1 SPRINT is a bus rapid transit service that will deliver a reliable and high-frequency service along the A34 between Walsall town centre and Birmingham city centre via Perry Barr. The intention is that these services will ultimately be operated by the next generation of fully electric or hybrid buses (including single-deck articulated vehicles) with multiple doors to aid swift loading/unloading and wheelchair access.

4.2 Data from TfWM demonstrates that annually 4.9 million passengers travelled along the A34 pre-COVID on the existing bus routes, making it one of the most important public transport corridors in the West Midlands. SPRINT will be a transformational high-quality public transport service that builds on this pre-COVID patronage, supported by other conventional bus services that will feed into the route. It is expected that of these 4.9 million passengers per annum, the SPRINT service will ultimately carry some 4.4 million passengers per year, and is key to connecting Walsall to the wider West Midlands.

4.3 SPRINT will help the Council realise its ambition for a regenerated Walsall economy, that will see the town centre redeveloped in line with the adopted Town Centre Area Action Plan and associated Town Centre Masterplan, driving better social, health and economic outcomes for Walsall residents by providing strategic transport connections to and from Walsall town centre and other destinations along the A34, especially for residents of St Matthews ward and Paddock ward.

- 4.4 SPRINT will give local people access to the employment, training, education, healthcare, shopping and leisure opportunities, being created in Birmingham city centre and at HS2 Interchange / NEC / Airport ('UK Central') in Solihull. This will be achieved by SPRINT operating as a genuine cross-conurbation service (Walsall – Birmingham city centre – Solihull / Airport) by linking operation of the A34 and A45 SPRINT schemes. This will apply in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 operation of the SPRINT service, although this report only deals with SPRINT Phase 1.
- 4.5 TfWM have asserted that SPRINT Phase 1 is a viable project in its own right and does not require SPRINT Phase 2 and/or a separate Park & Ride (P&R) project to justify its implementation. The A34 SPRINT Phase 1 scheme achieves a 'high' value-for-money assessment (in line with standard government appraisal of transport schemes) with a benefit to cost ratio in excess of 2.5:1 (in other words the scheme creates over £2.50 of economic benefits over the appraisal period for every £1 invested). No amendments are required to Phase 1 infrastructure if SPRINT Phase 2 and/or a P&R facility do not go ahead in the future.
- 4.6 The SPRINT programme is promoted by WMCA through the HS2 Connectivity Package as part of the West Midlands Devolution Deal. The West Midlands Devolution Deal (published November 2015) saw the subsequent creation of the West Midlands Combined Authority in June 2016. The deal includes devolved responsibility for a consolidated transport budget with a multi-year settlement. Also established was the West Midlands Investment Fund (of which the HS2 Connectivity Package is a part) bringing together resources for economic growth, skills and employability, regeneration, transport and housing, to which central government will allocate funding over a 30-year period. A second devolution deal with the West Midlands was also agreed at the Autumn Budget 2017.
- 4.7 The SPRINT programme focuses on delivering journey time reliability through highway interventions and signal priority, improving boarding times through multiple vehicle entrances and off-board ticketing, and is a corridor-focussed public transport solution. SPRINT performance and service standards were endorsed by the Integrated Transport Authority in March 2016, following approval from Transport Delivery Committee and Bus Alliance Board in January 2016. The standards include minimum and target requirements for vehicles, shelters, fares, priority, intelligent transport systems, branding and environmental credentials.
- 4.8 SPRINT forms part of the West Midlands integrated transport system as promoted in the region's Strategic Transport Plan 'Movement for Growth'. The West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan sits alongside the West Midlands Combined Authority's (WMCA) Strategic Economic Plan as a complementary critical set of policies and plans – providing the overarching approach to the development of a transport system into one which is fit for the challenges of economic and housing growth, social inclusion and environment change.

- 4.9 The A34 SPRINT scheme supports the delivery of the Walsall Transport Strategy 2017-2022 and its objectives to: support economic growth, with a focus on improving access to new and existing employment sites; promote public transport, including the development of rapid transit routes to other parts of the Black Country and Birmingham City Centre; and enhance health and wellbeing within local communities by increasing active travel (walking and cycling to/from stops) and improving air quality.
- 4.10 The SPRINT A34 Walsall to Birmingham Strategic Outline Case was approved by the West Midlands Combined Authority Board in July 2017. This outlined the scheme and established the strategic case for change, as well as providing initial detail on key commercial, management, financial and economic considerations. The scheme is one of two SPRINT schemes proposed for accelerated delivery as part of the transport strategy for the Commonwealth Games in 2022.
- 4.11 WMCA completed preliminary design and public consultation on SPRINT Phases 1 and 2 in autumn 2018 and obtained Outline Business Case (OBC) approval from the WMCA Investment Board on 14 February 2019, allowing progression to the detailed design stage of the project. Full Business Case (FBC) approval was secured from the WMCA Board on 14 February 2020, covering both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of delivery. All funding for A34 Phase 1 was approved at this meeting. The WMCA element of funding for A45 Phase 1 was also approved and a FBC subsequently submitted to the Department for Transport for the remaining A45 Phase 1 funding. The WMCA Board report approving the FBC is available on the WMCA website and the Phase 1 costs and funding are summarized in Table 3 of this report. The A34 full scheme delivers a Benefit Cost Ratio of 3.23:1, and the A45 full scheme delivers a Benefit Cost Ratio of 2.42:1. The overall level of economic benefit of Phase 1 is £201.3m, and TfWM assert that Phase 1 is a viable standalone transport scheme.
- 4.12 WMCA led a public consultation exercise with support from Birmingham, Walsall and Sandwell Councils between 22 August and 5 October 2018. Consultation results were published in December 2018 and a consultation response was issued in March 2019, which informed the scope of detail design. Further to this, another consultation exercise was carried out in July 2019, focused on areas where concerns had been raised in the previous consultation. Details of the main consultation outcomes are provided in **Appendix B**. Additional information events were also held in November 2019 to update stakeholders as to how the scheme had been updated following earlier consultation exercises.

SPRINT Scheme Details

- 4.13 The A34 Walsall to Birmingham SPRINT scheme follows the corridor from Walsall to Birmingham via Scott Arms and Perry Barr – see **Appendix A** for the whole route. The total length of the A34 route (across the Walsall, Sandwell and Birmingham sections) is approximately 14.5km.

- 4.14 Within Walsall, it is proposed, that the route travels along Birmingham Road, Springhill Road and Ablewell Street to Bridge Street where it will terminate (see Scheme Plans / Drawings at **Appendix C**).
- 4.15 The total estimated cost of A34 Phase 1 is £32.4m, with £22.1m from WMCA funding and £10.3m from other central government contributions. (A45 Phase 1 has a cost of £55.4m with £20.2m of WMCA funding and £35.2m of other central government funding.) Phase 2 costs for the combined (A34 and A45) scheme are estimated at £50.3m. Of the £50.3m total, WMCA/TfWM have stated that some £12.6m will be invested in the elements of the Phase 2 scheme that are within Walsall.
- 4.16 Phase 1 works will deliver 70% of the infrastructure, including the delivery of the shelters throughout the whole route. As detailed above, the Phase 1 works are a viable transport scheme in their own right, demonstrating good value for money as assessed by the Department for Transport, and require no modification should Phase 2 works not be implemented.
- 4.17 It is TfWM's clear intention that single-deck articulated vehicles that will ultimately operate the SPRINT service and will be fully electric- or hybrid-powered. Consideration of rapid charging locations and infrastructure in Walsall town centre is being undertaken, with infrastructure expected to be located on the highway. However, the Phase 1 works detailed in this report exclude any rapid charging infrastructure, which will be subject to separate funding and associated approvals, and are required by January 2023 (after Phase 1 is due to complete in June 2022). Also, the necessary charging infrastructure will clearly be determined by the future selection of vehicles by the SPRINT operator.
- 4.18 Key deliverables on the highway include: carriageway widening to provide new bus lanes; junction improvements including SPRINT priority at traffic signals; parking and loading restrictions; and bus lane enforcement. Other deliverables being led by TfWM include new high-quality SPRINT vehicles and improved bus stop shelters, off-board ticketing facilities and real-time information systems.

Table 1: Overall A34 SPRINT Project Benefits

Measure	Impact
Carriageway widening to provide bus lanes, including bus lane enforcement.	Bus lanes will assist in giving priority to SPRINT and other bus services, reducing delay and improving journey time reliability, and so building public confidence in public transport.
Carriageway resurfacing.	Provides a smoother and more comfortable journey for passengers.
Junction improvements and priority at traffic signals.	This will allow SPRINT vehicles pass through junction with minimal delays.

Measure	Impact
New parking and loading restrictions.	Ensures that bus lanes are kept clear, particularly at peak times, to minimise delays and ensure that the multi-door vehicles can 'dock' correctly at bus stops.
Modern, environment-friendly vehicle fleet including level boarding.	This will increase comfort during journeys, particularly benefit elderly and disabled people, and parents with pushchairs. Using modern vehicles will reduce noise and emissions.
New and improved bus stops including modern shelters with lighting, ticketing facilities and real-time information.	This will allow easier boarding, and increase the perception of safety, security and convenience when using the new stops. Off-board ticketing will reduce boarding times compared with conventional buses. The stops will distinguish the SPRINT corridors and give a more positive experience of public transport.

Table 2: A34 SPRINT Phase 1 Works – Walsall Section

Measure	Location	Direction	Description	Scheme Benefits
Bus Lane	Merrions Wood (Skip Lane) to Merrions Close	To Birmingham	Extension of the existing bus lanes towards M6 Junction 7 to provide an additional 380m of priority (260m of bus lane in Walsall and 120m in Sandwell). These lanes will be created by reallocating roadspace for general traffic. There will be no loss of parking.	50 seconds peak journey time saving for buses.
Bus Lane	Beacon Road to Walstead Road (Bell Inn Junction)	To Walsall	Extension of the existing bus lane towards Walsall to provide an additional 200m of priority. There will be no loss in general traffic capacity, and no loss of parking.	1 minute and 16 seconds (average) journey time saving for buses.
Junction Improvement	Bell Inn Junction (B'ham Rd / Walstead Rd)	To Walsall	Signal improvements at the junction that will make the junction operate more efficiently.	Greater junction resilience for general traffic and buses.
Contra-flow Bus Lane	Ablewell St	To Walsall	Contra-flow bus lane from Town Hill to Upper Rushall Street, with loss of one lane for southbound general traffic (offset by the improvement for general traffic in the next row of this table). Parking outside businesses to be retained in line with consultation outcome. Bus gate introduced at entrance to contraflow bus lane at junction of Town Hill/Ablewell Street.	Direct route for SPRINT buses into Walsall town centre providing journey time reliability. 1 minute and 1 second (average) journey time saving for buses.

Measure	Location	Direction	Description	Scheme Benefits
Junction and Link Improvement	Upper Rushall Street	All	Reconfiguration of the junction of Upper Rushall Street/Ablewell Street/Bridge Street/Lower Rushall Street and upgrade of traffic signals. Upper Rushall Street between the junction of Upper Rushall Street/ Ablewell Street/Bridge Street/Lower Rushall Street and the junction of Town Hill/Upper Rushall Street to be made two-way. Upgrade of traffic signals at Town Hill/Upper Rushall Street junction.	Facilitates direct route for SPRINT buses into Walsall town centre providing journey time reliability. Facilitates direct route for general traffic from Lower Rushall Street to Upper Rushall Street.
Speed Cushion	Bridge Street	To Walsall	Reconstruction of speed cushion on Bridge Street near to junction with Freer Street.	Regulates all vehicle speeds.
Bus Terminus	Bridge Street	Terminus	New Sprint Bus Terminus. Necessitates the reorganisation of loading, taxi rank and Ring & Ride facilities.	High-profile Sprint Terminus supporting town centre regeneration.

- 4.19 There are 56 stop/shelter amendments between Walsall and Birmingham (excluding Birmingham Moor Street Bus Interchange). The stops within Walsall are: Bridge St (x1), Walsall Lichfield St (x1), Ablewell Street (x2), Walsall Six Ways (x2), Jesson Road (x2), Broadway (x2), Queens Road (x2), Bell Inn (x2) and Skip Lane (x2). All stops are to be improved in Phase 1, except Lichfield Street and Skip Lane.
- 4.20 Some conventional bus stops, which will not be served by SPRINT, will be moved into lay-bys to avoid SPRINT being delayed by other bus services.
- 4.21 To facilitate the SPRINT terminus in Bridge Street, the proposal is to move the Ring & Ride stop to another accessible location in the town centre. TfWM have been liaising with the Ring & Ride operator and have proposed Station Street, which is being assessed by officers. Taxi rank changes are also necessary and were discussed with the Taxi Liaison Group in December 2020, which involved representatives of the taxi trade. Engagement is ongoing to finalise these plans and statutory consultation will be undertaken to support the necessary Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs).
- 4.22 Like most existing bus services, those which currently operate along the route (namely the 51 and X51 services) are run commercially by a private bus operating company, and at present it is not possible to state the exact configuration of services that will operate alongside SPRINT. However, the overall number of services operating between Birmingham city centre and

Walsall town centre is not expected to change i.e. there is not expected to be any reduction in the overall frequency of bus services to/from Walsall along the A34.

- 4.23 TfWM have been working with the SPRINT operator, National Express West Midlands, to offer an integrated network of bus services in Phase 1. SPRINT bus priority infrastructure will improve journey times for all bus services in the A34 corridor, so it is important a holistic approach is adopted. It is likely that both the current 51 and X51 bus services will have changes to their stopping patterns to make best use of the bus priority measures and cross-city opportunities. For example, direct services will operate from Walsall to Solihull and the Airport/NEC.
- 4.24 The SPRINT Phase 1 works have minimal impacts on trees, with only four trees affected in total: -
- One tree affected on the Birmingham Road (in the highway adjacent to Park Hall Road);
 - Three trees affected on the Birmingham Road in the highway central reserve (adjacent to the junction with Lodge Road and Beacon Road).
- 4.25 None of the four Phase 1 affected trees are subject to a Tree Protection Order.
- 4.26 To support the overall delivery of the scheme a Tree Mitigation Strategy (**Appendix D**) has been developed that will apply for Phase 1 and any subsequent phases of the project that may be approved (Phase 2 works are currently unfunded and outside the scope of this report) to ensure that sufficient trees are ultimately planted to replace those that unfortunately need to be removed plus the planting of additional trees, which is in line with the SPRINT consultation outcomes from 2018 and 2019. Three trees will be planted for each one that has to be removed.
- 4.27 In the medium-term, a P&R site between Walsall town centre and Junction 7 of the M6 is proposed by TfWM. It is the intention that the P&R site would be delivered in line with the second phase of the SPRINT works, with completion by December 2024. Any P&R scheme will be required to obtain planning permission from the relevant local authority, and will require separate funding. SPRINT Phase 2 works also require separate approvals and funding. The details of the P&R site are not covered in this report.
- 4.28 The SPRINT design is being developed by TfWM in conjunction with other schemes, which are along the route in Birmingham, particularly the proposals around Perry Barr for the Commonwealth Games and in the city centre for HS2 and Birmingham Eastside Metro Extension.
- 4.29 It should be noted that this Cabinet report is for SPRINT Phase 1 infrastructure works only. A separate Cabinet report on the Bus Enhanced

Partnership Plan and Scheme, which sets out the detailed plans for the bus service provision and maintenance and management of the infrastructure has been presented to Cabinet in conjunction with this report as a separate agenda item. Existing bus services in the corridor will complement the proposed SPRINT service and will also benefit from the proposed infrastructure improvements, making journey times more consistent and predictable. Walsall residents rely on good public transport for access to jobs, education, training, shopping, healthcare and leisure across the West Midlands.

SPRINT Delivery Strategy

- 4.30 SPRINT Phase 1 infrastructure works on the A34 will be delivered by WMCA as a result of legal agreements with Walsall Council, Birmingham City Council and Sandwell Council under the Highways Act 1980. These agreements will allow WMCA and their contractors to work on the relevant sections of the local authority highway network.
- 4.31 WMCA will have sole responsibility for the procurement of bus shelters; bus stops; bus lane enforcement equipment; traffic signal equipment; ticketing; and passenger information systems; as well as the procurement of an operator for the SPRINT network; and all associated project risk.
- 4.32 WMCA have confirmed that, following a market sounding exercise in 2018, the SPRINT service is capable of being operated commercially i.e. primarily funded from commercial ticket sales. The option for the WMCA to part-purchase the vehicles in a grant scheme arrangement (and take on the commercial risk of contracting the service) was therefore discounted in order to reduce the financial risk to the WMCA and remove £12m of cost to the WMCA.
- 4.33 A private bus operating company, National Express West Midlands, confirmed in February 2020 that they are willing to purchase the vehicles with no funding contribution required from the WMCA, Walsall Council, Birmingham City Council and Sandwell Council. The purchase of the vehicles will however be phased. Whilst there is a full commitment to zero-emission vehicles (which could be single-deck or double-deck), there is no absolute guarantee that the desired fully electric- or hybrid-powered, single-deck articulated tram-style vehicles will be purchased and operated on this route following the infrastructure works in Phase 1 or Phase 2, although this remains the clear intention of WMCA and National Express West Midlands. From May 2022 the services will be operated by a fleet of zero emission double-decker Platinum buses, including 20 environmentally friendly hydrogen-fuelled buses. The earliest that any zero emission, low floor tram-style vehicles could operate is from 2023, although their introduction is expected to be phased over a two-year period.

Council Corporate Plan priorities

4.34 SPRINT Phase 1 supports the Council's vision that '*Inequalities are reduced and all potential is maximised*' as set out in the Corporate Plan 2018-2021. SPRINT Phase 1 will bring better public transport services on the A34, which will help 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.

Risk management

4.35 All project risk, including financial risk and opportunity, is to be held by WMCA.

4.36 Despite project risk being held by WMCA, there are risks that remain the responsibility of Walsall Council and will require appropriate management and mitigation. These include: -

- Reputational Risk (SPRINT Vehicles) – if the Council facilitates the delivery of the SPRINT Phase 1 works but the commercial operation of SPRINT services with fully electric- or hybrid-powered, single-deck articulated vehicles cannot be realised post these works, the Council may attract negative criticism alongside WMCA/TfWM, Birmingham City Council and Sandwell Council. This risk is being actively managed and mitigated through ongoing officer involvement in the SPRINT A34 Project Board, SPRINT Programme Board and the West Midlands Bus Alliance alongside other project stakeholders.
- Reputational Risk (Bus Services) – there remains the risk that the commercial operation of the SPRINT service results in a reduced overall bus service in the A34 corridor between Walsall town centre and Birmingham city centre. Whilst this risk is unlikely to be realised (i.e. lower frequency; reduced capacity (seats and standing room); increased distance to/from bus stops; later start times; and earlier finish times), until such time as the overall bus service pattern is publicly confirmed there can be no absolute guarantee that some element of this risk could be realised with reputational impacts for the Council and its partners. This risk is again being actively managed and mitigated through ongoing officer involvement in the SPRINT A34 Project Board, SPRINT Programme Board and the West Midlands Bus Alliance alongside other project stakeholders, including bus operators.

4.37 Despite these residual risks, as detailed above, the SPRINT Phase 1 infrastructure works are a viable transport scheme in their own right, demonstrating good value for money as assessed by the Department for

Transport by offering tangible transport benefits, and require no modification should Phase 2 works not be implemented.

Financial implications

- 4.38 There are no direct financial (capital) implications for Walsall Council as a result of this report. The delivery and capital funding of the scheme is the responsibility of the WMCA.
- 4.39 There is no land acquisition in the SPRINT Phase 1 infrastructure works within Walsall (all Phase 1 works are within the existing highway network).
- 4.40 The estimated total capital cost of A34 SPRINT Phase 1 infrastructure works (Walsall, Sandwell and Birmingham sections) is £32.4m (including land, development, fees and contingency). Details of the funding can be found in the financial table below. All third-party contributions have been secured by WMCA; there will be no call on Walsall Council funding for this element.
- 4.41 For equipment assets delivered as part of the scheme (e.g. bus lane enforcement cameras, traffic signal equipment), equipment is being purchased by WMCA/TfWM with a maintenance package which will also be paid for by WMCA/TfWM for the upkeep of such assets for a period aligned to the Enhanced Partnership Scheme agreed as part of the Section 8 / Section 278 agreement (see paragraphs 4.44 to 4.54). Any risk to Walsall for the maintenance of this equipment would only arise after the period specified in the agreement has elapsed.

Table 3: Approved Funding – A34 and A45 SPRINT Phase 1

Funding	A34 (£m)	A45 (£m)	Total (£m)
WMCA – SOC Approved	0.3	0	0.3
WMCA – OBC Approved	7.9	8.1	16
WMCA–FBC Approved	13.9	12.1	26
Sub-total – WMCA Funding	22.1	20.2	42.3
MHCLG – external source	3.1	0	3.1
DfT – Integrated Transport Block	0	0.2	0.2
DfT – external source	0	35	35
Transforming Cities Fund (RTCC work stream)	2	0	2
City Centre Bus Fund	5.2	0	5.2
Sub-total – Other Funding	10.3	35.2	45.5
Total Funding	32.4	55.4	87.8

- 4.42 Beyond the provision negotiated in the equipment maintenance package, the annual cost of maintenance of the SPRINT Phase 1 infrastructure works will be as follows: -

- Maintenance of highways will be in line with the Council's current reactive and planning maintenance procedures and will be managed within existing budgets;
- Maintenance of bus lane enforcement cameras post the initial maintenance period will be between £2,500 and £3,500 per year per site for four sites, which has no committed budget at present;
- Maintenance cost of bus priority equipment at traffic signals post the initial maintenance period will be up to £750 per year per site for seven sites, which has no committed budget at present.

4.43 Any rapid electric vehicle re-charging infrastructure subsequently installed as part of the SPRINT scheme will be owned and maintained by WMCA/TfWM, at nil cost (both capital and revenue) to the Council.

Legal implications

4.44 In order to deliver the West Midlands Devolution Deal, the WMCA through powers devolved to the Mayor of the West Midlands, were appointed to take on responsibility for a devolved and consolidated transport budget, and for a Key Route Network of roads.

4.45 Under Phase 1 of SPRINT, West Midland Combined Authority ("WMCA") will carry out the infrastructure works required to deliver the Scheme. The Council will then adopt the highway works.

4.46 The WMCA has agreed with the Council to enter into an agreement under section 8 and 278 of the Highways Act 1980 ("the HA 1980") to enable the WMCA to construct the relevant highway works necessary for the SPRINT Scheme. The Council will remain responsible for all associated traffic regulation orders under the terms of the Section 8/278 Highway Agreement.

4.47 The West Midlands Combined Authority (Functions and Amendment) Order 2017 conferred certain powers on the Combined Authority in respect of highways. In particular, it introduced the concept of "Combined Authority roads". The Combined Authority roads are those listed in Schedule 1 to the 2017 Order, which includes the majority, but importantly not all, of the highways making up the A34 SPRINT scheme.

4.48 Article 4(2) of the 2017 Order provides that:

"The functions of the constituent councils as local highway authorities specified in section 8 of the 1980 Act (power to enter into agreements with local highway authorities and strategic highways companies for the doing of certain works) are exercisable by the Combined Authority in relation to Combined Authority roads."

These powers are exercisable concurrently by both WMCA and the relevant highway authority.

4.49 Section 8 of the Highways Act 1980 provides as follows:

“(1)local highway authorities...may enter into agreements with other authorities and companies for or in relation to the construction, reconstruction, alteration, improvement or maintenance of a highway for which any party to the agreement are highway authority.

(2) An agreement...may provide, in relation to a highway specified in the agreement, being a highway for which one of the parties to the agreement are the highway authority, that any functions specified in the agreement, being functions exercisable as respects that highway by the highway authority therefor, shall be exercisable by some other party to the agreement and on such terms and conditions and subject so such conditions (if any) as may be so specified.

(3) Where under an agreement...any function of the highway authority for a highway is exercisable by another highway authority, then, for the purpose of exercising that function, that other highway authority shall have the same powers under this Act (including highway land acquisition powers) as the highway authority for the highway have for that purpose....

(4) The council of a county... may not enter into an agreement under this section with the council of another county or county borough unless their areas adjoin each other; and the council of a metropolitan district may not enter into an agreement...with another metropolitan district or of a county or county borough unless the districts are in the same county or in counties which adjoin each other or, as the case may be, the county in which the district is situated and the other county or, as the case may be, county borough adjoin each other.

(5) Expenses incurred in pursuance of an agreement made under this section shall be borne by the parties to the agreement in such proportions as may be determined by the agreement.”

4.50 The purpose of Section 8 of the HA 1980 is to allow highway authorities to enter into agreements with their neighbouring councils for the doing a wide range of works to any highway for which a party to the agreement is the highway authority. The effect of article 4(2) of the 2017 Order is to empower the WMCA to enter into agreements with the Council, under Section 8 of the HA1980, that enable the WMCA to carry out highway works for which it would otherwise have no powers **but only** in relation to Combined Authority roads.

4.51 As stated above, the functions of the Council under Section 8 of the HA 1980 are only exercisable by the WMCA in relation to Combined Authority Roads. In relation to highway which is not a CA Road the highway works are to be undertaken by the CA under Section 278 of the Highway Act 1980. In addition, the Council will need to agree WMCA which of its highway improvement xxx it will exercise under the terms of the highway agreement.

- 4.52 Section 278 (agreements as to execution of works) is a funding mechanism that enables a highway authority to enter into agreements with any person, in circumstances where they consider it will be of benefit to the public, for highway works to be carried out at that person's expense. Section 278 of the Highway Act 1980 enables the WMCA to appoint contractors to undertake the highway works.
- 4.53 WMCA will enter into Section 8 Agreements with the Council (as well as Birmingham City Council and Sandwell Council) under Section 8 of the Highways Act.
- 4.54 Under the Council's Constitution the Head of Highways and Transport has delegated authority to enter into highway agreements under Section 8 and Section 278 of the Highways Act 1980 and to agree to their terms.
- 4.55 The proposed electric vehicle charging infrastructure (which is being progressed separately by WMCA) will require relevant planning consents, which will be sought separately as required. The consideration of the electric vehicle charging infrastructure does not form part of this Cabinet report.

Procurement Implications/Social Value

- 4.56 Procurement of contractors for the highway works is being carried out by WMCA. The tender for the Walsall and Sandwell work package (Package A), is due to be issued on 14th January 2021, with the Tender closing on 18th February 2021. The contract is scheduled to be awarded on 23rd March 2021. WMCA are waiting for Walsall Cabinet and Sandwell Cabinet approvals before the contract will be awarded.
- 4.57 The intention is that construction works commence in May 2021, with substantial completion in February 2022, and overall Phase 1 completion no later than June 2022.
- 4.58 WMCA are also responsible for the appointment of an operator; procurement of the vehicles; bus shelters; bus stops; bus lane enforcement equipment; traffic signal equipment; ticketing; and passenger information systems.

Property implications

- 4.59 There are no direct property implications arising from this report, which are not covered through the legislation and permits operated by the Local Highway Authority.

Health and wellbeing implications

4.60 The A34 SPRINT scheme has been tested against the 'Marmot Objectives'. These are:-

- Giving every child the best start in life – *the SPRINT schemes will support travel to school by sustainable modes. The service will also positively improve air quality throughout the borough.*
- Enabling all children, young people and adults to maximize their capabilities and have control over their lives – *the SPRINT scheme encourages sustainable travel to stops and interchanges, which helps promote healthy and independent travel choices;*
- Creating fair employment and good work for all – *improved public 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 public transport networks;*
- Creating and developing sustainable places and communities – *the SPRINT scheme will promote and assist with active travel and travel by public transport, which support sustainable places and communities;*
- Strengthening the role and impact of ill-health prevention – *healthy travel choices, such as walking or cycling to and from the SPRINT route, can help prevent ill health, as well as positively impacting on improving air quality.*

Staffing implications

4.61 There are no direct staffing implications. As part of the review and approval of the SPRINT designs and oversight of scheme delivery, officer time will be required.

Reducing Inequalities

4.62 Access to a wide range of opportunities (such as employment, education, training, healthcare and leisure) are important to all residents. High-quality public transport, such as SPRINT, can help ensure that young people, elderly people, disabled people and non-car drivers/owners, have access to the full range of services available in the Borough and wider West Midlands. SPRINT is part of a wider network of public transport (bus, rail and Metro) across the metropolitan area developed and promoted by TfWM. Whilst this specific scheme is focused on the Walsall to Birmingham corridor along the A34 and will inevitably have the most impact for residents of St Matthews ward and Paddock ward, the importance of good connectivity to the regional centre, Birmingham Airport and the wider West Midlands is important to all residents.

4.63 All vehicles operating SPRINT services will be low-floor and fully accessible for wheelchair users and parents with buggies. Engine standards and the

ambition articulated for 'zero emissions at the point of use' will help promote improved air quality in the corridor.

- 4.64 WMCA have undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment and this has demonstrated that there are no current concerns that the proposal affect, or could affect, people with protected characteristics. WMCA has kept this under review as the detailed design has been undertaken and finalised. The Equality Impact Assessment can be found in **Appendix E**.

Consultation

- 4.65 WMCA led a public consultation exercise with support from Birmingham, Walsall and Sandwell Councils between 22 August and 5 October 2018. This was advertised via social media channels, letter-drops on the route, local authority websites, bus stop posters, and in local media articles. Consultation information was communicated to older / disabled people and other equality groups, as well as through the Talking News. There were also exhibitions at key locations on the route – these were attended by over 600 people.
- 4.66 Five hundred and sixty-nine responses were received on the A34 scheme during the consultation, with 73% fully supporting or partially supporting the scheme and 24% not in support of the proposal. The consultation showed that 81% of responders agreed with the need to provide reliable bus journey times on the route. Details of the outcomes are provided in WMCA's consultation report published in December 2018, which is included at **Appendix B**.
- 4.67 A further update was provided by WMCA in March 2019 to public and stakeholders, informing them of design changes made as a result of feedback from the earlier consultation. This involved further engagement with the public, MPs, local councilors and other key stakeholders along the route who asked to be kept informed. In addition to leaflet drops and on-line publication, additional public meetings were also carried out where required, including some meetings in July 2019.
- 4.68 Additional information events were held in November 2019 to update stakeholders as to how the scheme has been updated following earlier consultation exercises.
- 4.69 Statutory consultation on the initial Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) necessary for the implementation of the scheme commenced on 28 January 2021 and closes on 25 February 2021. The remaining TROs will have their period of statutory consultation commence later this month. The TRO process will be concluded in full by the end of March 2021.

5. Decide

- 5.1 Walsall Council officers have worked with WMCA/TfWM to develop the scheme proposals for SPRINT Phase 1 works and have contributed to the development of the scheme business case.
- 5.2 Public consultation was undertaken for the whole route as detailed in paragraphs 4.65 to 4.68. Statutory consultation on the necessary Traffic Regulation Orders to implement the Phase 1 works is now underway.
- 5.3 The SPRINT Phase 1 works within Walsall Borough will be implemented via a Highways Act 1980 agreement with West Midlands Combined Authority.
- 5.4 Cabinet is asked to agree the designs for A34 SPRINT Phase 1 within Walsall Borough; and delegate authority to the Executive Director for Economy, Environment and Communities, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, to agree any changes to the detail of the SPRINT Phase 1 scheme with West Midlands Combined Authority.
- 5.5 Should any Phase 1 design revisions be proposed that impact directly on residents and businesses along the route, further consultation and engagement will take place with the affected parties.

6. Respond

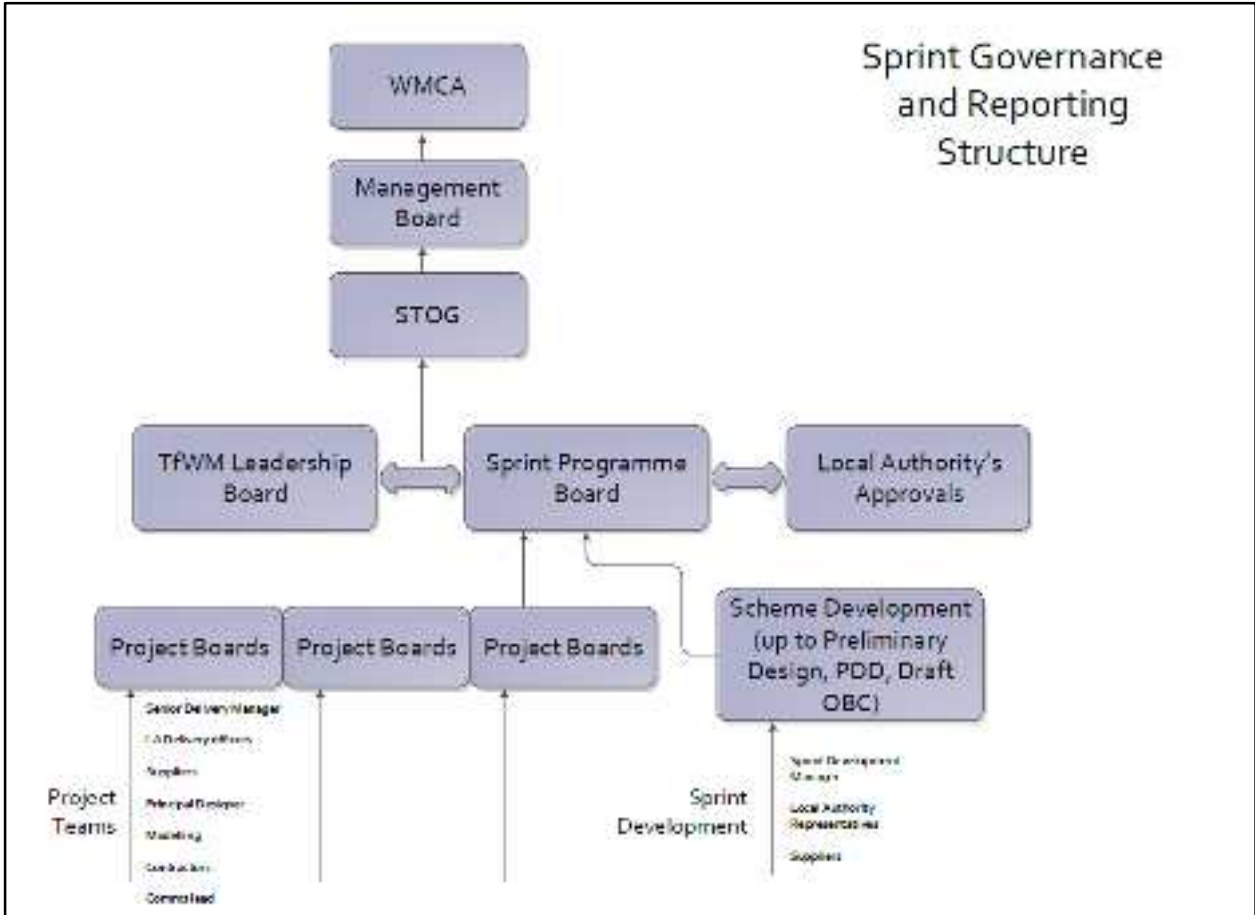
- 6.1 The WMCA Board approved the scheme full business case in February 2020. Workshave already commenced in the Birmingham section and are proposed to commence in the Walsall section in May 2021. Phase 1 will be complete (all the way from Walsall town centre to Birmingham city centre) by June 2022.
- 6.2 **Appendix F** presents the WMCA programme of works for the Walsall element of the scheme.

7. Review

- 7.1 WMCA will continuously monitor the performance and operation of the SPRINT service once in operation. The Enhanced Partnership will provide an agreement between the operator of the SPRINT service, WMCA and the local authorities and sets out standards and service levels, which will be required to be adhered to. Details of the Enhanced Partnership are within a separate Cabinet report being considered at this meeting. All SPRINT schemes are part of the SPRINT governance and reporting structure shown below; ensuring schemes are governed appropriately and proportionately.

7.2 Walsall Council is represented at the A34 Project Board (officers); SPRINT Programme Board (senior officers); Strategic Transport Officers Group (senior officers); and the WMCA (Elected Members) – see Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: SPRINT Scheme Governance and Reporting Structure



Appendices

Appendix A – A34 SPRINT Route Plan with Phasing

Appendix B – A34 SPRINT Consultation Summary Report
Appendix C – A34 SPRINT Phase 1 Scheme Drawings
Appendix D – A34 SPRINT Tree Mitigation Strategy
Appendix E – A34 SPRINT Equality Impact Assessment
Appendix F – A34 SPRINT Programme

Background papers

- The West Midlands Combined Authority (Functions and Amendment) Order 2017
- SPRINT – A34 Walsall to Birmingham and A45 Birmingham to Airport & Solihull Full Business Case Submission, WMCA Board, 14 February 2020

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Simon Neilson
Executive Director

1 February 2021



Councillor Adrian Andrew
Portfolio Holder – Regeneration

1 February 2021