

Meeting date: 4th October 2022

Report to: Environment and Infrastructure Cabinet Member

Subject/report title: West Midlands Bus Enhanced Partnership

Report from: Paul Tovey – Head of Highway Management

Report author/lead contact officer: David Balme, Transport Planner

Wards affected:

- All Wards | Bickenhill | Blythe | Castle Bromwich | Chelmsley Wood |
 Dorridge/Hockley Heath | Elmdon | Kingshurst/Fordbridge | Knowle |
 Lyndon | Meriden | Olton | Shirley East | Shirley South |
 Shirley West | Silhill | Smith's Wood | St Alphege
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Public/private report: Public

Exempt by virtue of paragraph: None

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an update on the West Midlands Bus Enhanced Partnership scheme and as a partner to that scheme, seek support to the proposed variations and funding opportunities.

2. Decision(s) recommended

2.1 Cabinet Member is asked to:

- a) Note the contents of the report and the draft Enhanced Partnership scheme document, as set out in Appendix A.
- b) Support the 3 key changes relating to the revocation of the Solihull Advance Quality Partnership Scheme, Bus Service Improvement Plan funding programme and improved ticketing offer.
- c) Agree to delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Highways and Environment to approve any future minor modifications to the Enhanced Partnership Plan or Scheme, as requested by Transport for West Midlands.

3. Matters for Consideration

- 3.1 The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) propose to update the existing West Midlands Bus Enhanced Partnership (EP), following recommendations made by the Bus Alliance Board and EP Reference Group in November 2021. These followed after the publication of the West Midlands Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) on 5 November 2021, in response to the National Bus Strategy. The process is being led by Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), the delivery body for the WMCA.
- 3.2 An EP is a statutory agreement that enables local transport authorities, working with bus operators, to set shared aims with regard to improving bus services. An EP comes in two parts. Firstly, an EP Plan – a clear high-level vision and objectives for bus services in the area. Secondly, an EP Scheme(s) – sets out the precise detail of standards to be met by bus services in the geographical area defined in the Scheme, and/or commitments from local Authorities.
- 3.3 On the 28th June 2021, the WMCA made only the second EP in England, and the first by a Mayoral Combined Authority. The EP Plan covers the 7 West Midlands constituent Authorities with an associated Scheme for all bus services along the first Sprint corridors of the A34, A45 and B425 across Birmingham, Sandwell and Solihull.
- 3.4 The EP Scheme includes a bespoke variation mechanism to introduce new content, amend existing content or administration of the Scheme.
- 3.5 The following three changes are now being proposed to the EP scheme:
 - i) The geographical area is expanded to match the EP Plan, keeping the operator standards at this time to the A45 and B425 corridor. This will replace the existing Solihull Advanced Quality Partnership Scheme (AQPS).
 - ii) Secure the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding. The EP must contain details of the measures that will be funded through the BSIP funding of £87,858k for the period to March 2025.
 - iii) To simplify bus tickets across the West Midlands, commitments to maximum frequencies on bus corridors, TfWM taking on bus service registration powers and the introduction of a customer charter.
- 3.6 The Solihull AQPS came into operation on 26th November 2017 and is a partnership between Solihull MBC, bus service operators and TfWM. The AQPS only relates to small zone around Solihull town centre and continues until November 2027. For this reason, it needs to be revoked to allow the EP to take on the same function for the Borough and for the same standards to apply across the West Midlands.
- 3.7 The adoption of the Solihull AQPS has led to notable improvements in the quality of bus services operating in central Solihull. The EP will continue to protect these gains and over time, bring similar bus service quality improvements to other areas of the borough.
- 3.8 TfWM have now received confirmation from the Department for Transport (DfT) on the funding allocation of up to £87,858k (revenue) to support delivery of the BSIP programme for 22/23 to 24/25. Before the first year funding allocation will be released,

the second EP scheme variation has to be made. This will lead to bus service and infrastructure improvements across the region, including Solihull.

3.9 The third EP variation involves reducing and simplifying the range of bus tickets, recording bus service frequencies that TfWM and bus operators are seeking to implement from 1 January 2023 and providing a new bus passenger customer charter. There are no additional or changed commitments for Local Authorities, but this variation provides an opportunity to improve bus travel for passengers.

4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?

4.1 Working in partnership with the West Midlands’ constituent Authorities and bus service providers is the preferred option.

4.2 The alternative option of keeping the Solihull AQPS would prevent investment in public transport and mean a continuation of differing standards of service in the area covered by the APQS, compared to the rest of the Borough. It is considered that the APQS is outdated and no longer required. Keeping the Solihull AQPS until November 2027, when it is due for renewal, would mean that the full changes to West Midlands bus tickets could not take place and the proposed customer charter would not apply in the AQPS area.

4.3 The West Midlands BSIP was developed by TfWM with input from the seven Metropolitan Borough Councils and the bus operators. The funding provided from DfT will allow improvements relating to public transport, such as the simplification of bus tickets to be delivered.

5. Reasons for recommending preferred option

5.1 The three proposed changes to the EP scheme, relating to the APQS, BSIP funding and ticketing improvements, from the feedback received, are generally supported across partners.

5.2 TfWM are seeking the Council’s support to these high level changes, that will then lead to more detailed work taking place. It is therefore further recommended that this work should be delegated to officers to progress, in line with the principles outlined in this report.

6. Implications and Considerations

6.1 State how the proposals in this report contribute to the priorities in the [Council Plan](#):

Priority:	Contribution:
People and Communities: 1. Improving outcomes for children and young people in Solihull.	The EP is a step towards extending the bus network so it is more responsive to people’s needs and which will better serve our residents strengthening connectivity and

Priority:	Contribution:
2. Good quality, responsive, and dignified care and support for Adults in Solihull when they need it. 3. Take action to improve life chances and health outcomes in our most disadvantaged communities. 4. Enable communities to thrive.	accessibility in the Solihull Borough area and to surrounding areas. This will enable communities to thrive and allow people without cars or who are unable to drive to better access services and opportunities.
Economy: 5. Develop and promote the borough's economy, with a focus on revitalising our town and local centres. 6. Maximising the opportunities of UK Central and HS2. 7. Increase the supply of affordable and social housing that is environmentally sustainable.	Directly relating to supporting our towns and local centres by improving access to health, education, leisure, employment, retail and tourism sites within the borough. Improved bus services are needed to draw out the opportunities from HS2 and UK Central. Improved bus services needed to support delivery of new homes for all residents.
Environment: 8. Enhance our natural environment, improve air quality and reduce net carbon emissions.	A good bus transport system is needed for us to reduce carbon use and improve air quality through encouraging residents and visitors to travel less or travel by public transport or active travel modes rather than private car.
9. Promote employee wellbeing	A good transport system is essential for a healthy society. The impact of air pollution on health is well-known, but transport affects the health of people across society, in multiple ways. Investing in transport is one way we can help address widening health inequalities and regional disparities in public health.

6.2 Consultation and Scrutiny:

- 6.2.1 No public or stakeholder consultation has been conducted to date. Through the Enhanced Partnership steering group and West Midlands Bus Alliance, the bus operating sector and Transport Focus have been involved in the development of the Enhanced Partnership. Transport for West Midlands will lead on stakeholder consultation later in 2022.
- 6.2.2 The request to approve these changes is being made without consultation as this is essentially an administration process – transferring the AQPS provisions to the EP. No substantive changes are occurring. The AQPS needs to be revoked in order for the EP to take over as they cannot both exist in the same location. Approval from Cabinet is required to enable the revocation process and that is what is being sought

6.3 Financial implications:

6.3.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report. Officers' time involved in the project is funded through their respective staff revenue budgets.

6.4 Legal implications:

6.4.1 There are no legal implications as a direct result of this report.

6.5 Risk implications, including Risk Appetite:

6.5.1 The Corporate Risk Management approach has been complied with, to identify and assess the significant risks associated with this decision. For example, legislation, political and reputational risks. No significant risks have been highlighted at this stage with this partnership arrangement.

6.6 Equality implications:

6.6.1 None as a consequence of this report.

6.7 Linkages to our work with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), Local Enterprise Partnership or the Birmingham & Solihull Integrated Care System (ICS):

6.7.1 The West Midlands Bus Enhanced Partnership has been drawn up through the West Midlands Combined Authority with the support of Transport for West Midlands and the West Midlands Bus Alliance. There are strong links with our Solihull Connected transport strategy work and our key objective to increase use of sustainable travel to access health, employment, leisure, retail, education and tourism destinations.

7. List of appendices referred to

7.1 Appendix A – Draft West Midlands Bus Enhanced Partnership Plan – Version 3.

8. Background papers used to compile this report

8.1 Not applicable.

9. List of other relevant documents

9.1 Not applicable.