

Public Board Meeting

22 May 2024

X+Why, Birmingham



Minutes

Present

Board

Nigel Stevens (Chair)	NS
Rob Wilson	RW
Trisha McAuley OBE	TM
Keith Richards OBE	KR
Cllr William Powell	WP
Tricia Hayes	TH
Sandra Witzel	SW

Senior Leadership Team

Alex Robertson	AR
Nigel Holden	NH
Natasha Grice	NG

Staff

Jon Carter	JC
Natasha Alvarado	NA
Geoff Grant	GG
Linda McCord	LM
Jo Trottman	JT

Guest Speakers

Anne Shaw OBE, Executive Director, Transport for West Midlands	AS
Martin Colmey, Operations Director, Network Rail	MC
Jonny Wiseman, Customer Experience Director, West Midlands Trains	JW
Tori Lazenby, Regional Director, National Highways	TL
Paul Franks, Security and Policing Manager, West Midlands Combined Authority	PF
Matt James, Station Operations Manager, Network Rail	MJ
Christopher Blake, Regional Manager, West Midlands Trains	CB
Adam Rideout, National Express Bus	AR
Anne Grant, Station Manager, Avanti West Coast Chair	AG

Approximately 30 stakeholders / members of the public attended.

Apologies

Kate Denham	KD
David Sidebottom	DS

A Introductory**A1 Chair's welcome and opening remarks**

NS welcomed everyone to the Transport Focus public board meeting and outlined the format for the morning. There were no declarations of interest. NS introduced new Transport Focus board members Sandra Witzel and Tricia Hayes.

Championing the needs of transport users – the strategic context**A2 Transport Focus Business Plan 2024-27**

AR began by highlighting the business plan focus on transport users and the organisation's responsibility for achieving value for money outcomes on their behalf. The priorities within the plan are driven by insight from users. The plan outlines how Transport Focus, by working with partners, and using the broadest data and insight, will have an impact on the user's end-to-end journey. The business plan priorities, and where Transport Focus is committed to making a difference, include minimising travel disruption, a relentless focus on reliability and ensuring that transport is safe and accessible for all.

A3 Keynote address: Transport challenges and opportunities in the West Midlands

Anne Shaw OBE, Executive Director, Transport for West Midlands (AS) began by noting that buses account for 80% of the public journeys in the West Midlands region; they are a critical element of inclusive growth, but the network faces a significant funding challenge. Transport is an enabler for other priorities, including housing, job creation etc. Transport for West Midlands collaborates with the many other transport providers in the region to deliver new services and operational improvements, including best value ticket capping, greater accessibility and decarbonisation initiatives.

Transport investment includes £100 million secured from BSIP to encourage users to travel by bus, investment in zero emission buses, highways infrastructure, franchising opportunities and fare flexibility. City regions are now permitted to plan for longer term sustainable transport investment cycles. The Local Transport Plan for the region sets out to deliver more train stations, an extended tram system, bus rapid transit corridors, ticketing infrastructure and hyper-localised community connectivity. The West Midlands is a diverse region requiring a holistic approach, tailored to take account of different needs across the region. The right infrastructure and a continuous drive towards customer satisfaction improvement will stimulate behaviour change and uptake. The Trailblazer Devolution Deal is changing delivery mechanisms, with the West Midlands increasingly moving towards place-based plans, where transport is an integrated part of an inclusive growth framework.

AS's presentation was followed by discussion, beginning with the issue of barriers to single, integrated, best value ticketing. AS highlighted work that is ongoing between Transport for the West Midlands, Department for Transport and Project Coral (made up of five large bus operators) in developing a solution. The first phase may be in place by next year and learning will be shared with the other regions. On policy and design for accommodating for example, micro-mobility equipment as part of the commitment to making end-to-end journeys accessible

for all, AS referred to ongoing research into user needs which will help to inform expenditure on new infrastructure. AS also explained the interim steps underway in transitioning to a zero-emission public transport network and energy source considerations. AS said that policies to support neuro-diverse passengers need to be further developed; Transport for the West Midlands tries to ensure that it is informed by different passenger voices before introducing new designs for customer information infrastructure. AS added that research indicates that investment in public transport reduces the pull on other public services, but there is a disparity in the local subsidy contribution compared to other regions.

Travel disruption and information management

A4 Introduction

LM began by highlighting that whilst users understand that disruption happens, they don't accept not being kept informed. She gave a positive example of information management from the West Midlands region, when train operators provided very detailed information during a period of disruption that included visuals from drone footage. She highlighted inconsistencies across different regions and the chaos that can result from poor information management, noting that the Bus Alliance and National Highways amongst others, are working on detailed action plans to address planned works and travel disruption information management. LM introduced the three guest speakers on this topic.

A5 How can the user experience be improved among those caught up in the disruption? How can users be better informed?

Martin Colmey, Operations Director, Network Rail (MC) began by explaining the effort that goes into planning for the avoidance of travel disruption. When travel disruption does happen, the situation is managed within control centres with command, control and coordination responses. The communications process from engineers into the control centre is key to managing the user experience. Passengers want to have information on travel options and timescales for fixing problems. The recovery period after disruption is challenging and can impact other regions. The Transport Coordination Centre plays a vital role across the transport network, providing an overview of issues across rail, bus, tram and roads. The Centre's information enables the network to help passengers complete their end-to-end journey.

Jonny Wiseman, Customer Experience Director, West Midlands Trains (JW) talked about the potential role of technology in communicating with impacted customers but noted that there is still some way to go. Technology can't yet replace the role of experienced staff interacting with users on the ground, so there needs to be a balanced approach. The inter-connectedness of the network means that effective solutions and responses must come from collaboration. Transport Focus stakeholders now attend all Customer Experience board meetings at West Midlands Trains, which JW sees as a positive part of holding the company to account on transport user issues.

Tori Lazenby, Regional Director, National Highways (TL) said that National Highways is responsible for over 1,800 miles of road across the Midlands. She said that collective working and collaboration across the whole transport network is needed to facilitate end-to-end journeys. National Highways tries to avoid or minimise disruption by working overnight and during quieter periods. Communications procedures are in place to work with police and other

authorities when incidents occur. Overhead signage is useful for communicating with road users, the National Traffic Control Centre also sends out messages asking people to use alternative routes, via both social media and traditional media. Challenging targets are in place and are consistently met on response times for incidents, despite the millions of journeys on the network each day.

A6 Questions and discussion

Guest speakers then provided several examples of recent information management initiatives. These included more focus on risk management for asset maintenance decision-making, increased investment in and use of technology, creating an “every minute matters” culture, increased focus on quiet time prevention and maintenance, creation of new customer experience standards, planning a regional approach to customer experience and back to basics visibility onboard trains.

Further discussion highlighted the Transport Coordination Centre’s role in data collection across the network, which is key to mitigating disruption. The Centre also acts as a focal point for various organisations during incidents, large public events etc. This ensures that transport users receive consistent and accurate information. Passenger feedback platforms used for collating data on user experiences include insights from Transport Focus, post-travel surveys, surveys undertaken by the Institute of Customer Experience etc. There was some frustration that a single large data set is not available for the entire region. Data sharing across different organisations has been an issue.

Disruption has a disproportionate impact on vulnerable users. MC highlighted that, where there is information about vulnerable passengers onboard during disruption, this can shape decision-making, for example by prioritising one train over another, providing additional support for the next stage of the onward journey etc. Staff training and visibility at stations helps to identify and meet the needs of vulnerable users, but there are not always enough staff on hand.

It was suggested that lack of investment in data collection means that transport lags behind other sectors in its customer experience understanding. Whilst there is no shortage of data, there may be gaps in consistency and data on issues that have the potential to make the most impact on the customer experience. NG referred to the Transport Focus Business Plan, which outlines a plan for a simplified scorecard system on customer experience performance.

Antisocial behaviour and travel safety

A7 Introduction

NG provided some background in respect of her experience of working in customer service in the rail sector before introducing the guest speakers to discuss antisocial behaviour and travel safety.

A8 What are the barriers to the perception and reality of safe travel? How can travel across all modes be made to ensure passengers *feel* safe and *are* safe?

Paul Franks, Security and Policing Manager, West Midlands Combined Authority, said that the region has benefited from the establishment of a Safer Travel Partnership (Transport for West Midlands, British Transport Police, Police Crime Commissioner's Office and transport operators) since 2005, with its own dedicated team. He noted that many incidents of antisocial behaviour involve young people; when these are identified, education officers then work with schools to address and advise on behaviour issues.

The Safer Travel Plan for the next three years will be published shortly. In 2023-24 crime across all transport modes reduced by 11.5%, with offences across the bus network reducing by almost 19%. Offences on trains increased (1,630) compared to 2022-23 (1,445). The PARs tracking survey shows a 68% increase in awareness of "See Something, Say Something" messaging. Twelve Travel Safety Officers provide a visible presence on the network and tackle low level antisocial behaviour. The success of the initiative has led to Travel Safety Officer pilots being undertaken in four other cities. Transport users are encouraged to report incidents; data from these reports and other engagement activity is reviewed weekly, and patrols organised accordingly.

Matt James, Station Operations Manager at New Street, Network Rail provided some insight into frontline operations at the New Street Station in Birmingham. Around one million passengers pass through New Street each week and one train leaves the station every 35 seconds. Much of the focus is on staff training and equipping them with the right skills to do the job effectively and keep passengers safe. Recent training initiatives have included a conflict management course, in conjunction with British Transport Police, facilities management partner Mitie and the Antisocial Behaviour team.

Staff have also recently been provided with Body Worn Video devices; these can be very helpful in de-escalating a situation. The Antisocial Behaviour Officers have specialist training and have special powers, e.g. powers to eject people from the station, issue dispersal orders etc. Since their introduction, antisocial behaviour incidents have reduced. Close stakeholder relationships at New Street and nearby stations mean that information about issues at the station can be passed on very quickly.

An Assisted Travel Lounge, with some 50 designated mobility staff, is open throughout the day for passengers who need support. Staff are very visible on platforms during periods of disruption and are proactive in asking passengers if they need any help. Engaging directly with passengers helps people to feel safe. If passengers wish to complain or provide feedback, they can use the Network Rail Helpline or they can come directly to the station staff.

Anne Grant, Avanti West Coast Chair, (AG) discussed the steps that Avanti takes to mitigate against antisocial behaviour and its impact on passengers. Its Revenue and Welcome Host staff also have Body Worn Video devices; CCTV is in place and Avanti staff have also recently attended conflict management training. Robust national plans are in place for busy events, including football, Christmas markets etc. Joint Safety Committees are in place for staff to raise issues or discuss concerns. Instant Reduction Plans are in place for all stations; these are regularly reviewed, and any recurrent themes highlighted and shared. Avanti's work is

supported by the British Transport Police, the Travel Safety Officer team and the Antisocial Behaviour team. All teams are trained to identify, signpost and support vulnerable people.

Christopher Blake, Regional Manager, West Midlands Trains, highlighted the very negative impact of antisocial behaviour on passengers, which may mean that some choose not to travel by rail again. He and his colleagues encourage passengers to provide feedback on what is happening across the network. Visibility of staff is key to encouraging more reporting of incidents, driving down incidents and acting as a deterrent. Body Worn Video is also important, whether that is to provide assurance to staff, act as a deterrent or provide evidence of an offence.

Adam Rideout, Head of Customer Experience, National Express (ARt) commended the work of the Safe Travel Partnership in the West Midlands. He referred to bus driver feedback from focus groups that highlighted just how much of a difference it has made. He noted that bus drivers are quite isolated in their role, which keeps them safer, but which highlights the challenge of managing antisocial behaviour on buses. Technology is also making a difference e.g. CCTV and audio on buses and it should be possible in the future for bus drivers to alert the Regional Transport Coordination Centre if intervention is needed. ARt highlighted the positive feedback from users on safety highlighted in Transport Focus research, although more needs to be done.

A9 Questions and discussion

The first question related to next steps for improving passenger safety and any best practice learning that may have been identified from other parts of the country. PF said that latest data for the West Midlands indicates that there were 21 offences per 100,000 passenger journeys. Although this is slightly higher than rates reported by Transport for London, they note in their feedback that incidents often go unreported. He said that whilst active reporting is encouraged, victims of incidents also need to feel that their incident has been properly followed up and investigated. The Tactical Delivery Forum is one vehicle for driving fully integrated customer service initiatives across the regional transport network.

The panel was asked to comment on working with British Transport Police and how that might be improved, and secondly, what is being done to coordinate approaches to prevention and response to crime against women and girls. MJ said that Network Rail works very closely with British Transport Police, including them in briefings, stakeholder meetings and receiving regular intelligence from them. The relationship is very good but, with good training in place for transport staff, the ideal outcome is that these staff have the skills to de-escalate most situations themselves. Neither organisation would be as effective without the other, so these good relationships are vital. The British Transport Police's community role also has a positive impact, given that they are out visiting schools and colleges and making young people more aware of the impact of antisocial behaviour.

PF added that three Transport Safety Officers are specifically trained to deal with violence against women and girls. Subjects covered included stalking and harassment training, delivered by the Susie Lamplugh Trust, and virtual reality training, dealing with being in a lone

female situation. He also noted that the British Transport Police's focus is on trains, rather than buses or trams but locally work is being done to overcome this barrier. Including bus data reporting within British Transport Police's figures and then centrally disseminating this across the country would also be welcomed. On the question of gender and diversity analysis within data collected, PF said that data they collect, separately from data received from police or British Transport Police, is self-reported and diversity insights may not be captured.

The next question related to the role of Travel Safety Officers in supporting bus drivers, given the antisocial behaviour that can take place on school bus journeys. ARt said that it is very helpful to be able to pass on information about antisocial behaviour on school bus journeys as the Travel Safety Officers can then raise these directly with local schools. Passengers in the West Midlands can anonymously text details of incidences. Drivers can also record an incident, although this sometimes lacks detail.

An audience member commended Network Rail for the new customer service feedback kiosk that has recently been introduced at New Street station. He suggested that the questions should provide more scope for passengers to provide feedback on safety and asked what data the new system has been able to capture to date. MJ said that the kiosks have been in place for a year. Given that so many passengers pass through the New Street station, they offer an additional opportunity to provide feedback, which is then passed back to the Station Managers.

The next question acknowledged that transport staff receive a significant amount of training but suggested that staff do not always feel safe, leading to retention problems, stress sickness etc. It was noted that few other people come to work having to carry a Spit Kit and fearful of being attacked whilst doing their job. The final question asked about creating more opportunity for under-represented voices, particularly those with invisible special needs. NS addressed both questions, noting that they are very important challenges that Transport Focus recognises as deserving a spotlight. Transport Focus intends to be an influence over policy making and delivery improvement on both issues.

NS concluded this part of the meeting by thanking all those who had attended and those who had contributed to organising the two-day event.

B Corporate affairs

B1 Public Board meeting minutes: July 2023

The minutes from the public board meeting on 18 July 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

B2. Committee reports

B3 Nations and regions update

NS briefly outlined the committee structure and the board's role in reviewing the work of each group at private board meetings. He also referred to the new call centre contract recently in place and the emphasis on performance monitoring for effective complaint handling. This outline captured the following updates:

B2.1 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**B2.2 Statistics Governance Group****B2.3 Passenger Contact Group****B3.1 Transport Focus Scotland****B3.2 Transport Focus Wales****B3.3 English regions****B3.4 London**

TH noted that the recent elections in London have resulted in some changes to the membership of the Assembly. The new Chair of the London Assembly Transport Committee is Elly Baker (Labour).

B4 For noting by the Board:***Items previously discussed and approved in private session were formally noted:***

4.1 BRD2324-006 (Ticket office closures)

4.2 BRD2324-008 (Contact Centre retender and contract award)

4.3 BRD2324-009 (Chair delegated authority)

4.4 BRD2324-010 (MSUS 2024-26)

4.5 BRD2324-011 (SRUS 2024-25)

4.6 BRD2324-012 (Business Plan, Budget and Collaboration Agreement 2024-25)

Pete Bond, from Transport for West Midlands, wished the record to note that the next meeting of the West Midlands Bus Alliance will be the last to be chaired by Linda McCord, Transport Focus. She has ensured that Transport Focus has maintained a strong voice in the region, and he wished to thank Linda for her commitment, dedication, challenge and leadership.

Date of next meeting: **10.00 a.m. 25 June 2024, Broadway House, London**

Signed as an accurate record of the meeting.

Nigel Stevens, Chair

Date