

# First new bridge installed for Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro extension

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Local leaders have celebrated the installation of the first new structure to be installed for the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro extension.

Sections of the Tame Valley, Walsall and Old Main Line Canal were closed periodically in Autumn and Winter to allow for the demolition of aging bridges. Earlier this week the first new bridge was installed over the Walsall Canal in Wednesbury which has been purpose built to meet the needs of a modern tramway.

Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands joined Councillor Jackie Taylor, Sandwell Council Cabinet Member for Sustainable Transport, James Dennison, Enterprise Manager for the Canal & River Trust in the West Midlands and Ian Collins, Midland Metro Alliance Project Director to mark the milestone.

Andy Street said: "For decades the Black Country extension of the metro has been talked about but never delivered. So, in my first term as Mayor I negotiated directly with the then-Chancellor to get the cash we needed to make it happen, and now in my second term the new line is coming to life before residents' eyes. The largest light rail extension being delivered anywhere in the UK, the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro extension will be a complete game-changer for the region. Not only is it providing good quality

construction jobs for local workers at a critical time, but it'll also finally re-connect communities in Dudley and Sandwell that have been cut off from the wider transport network for far too long. This extension is just one part of my wider 2040 transport plan for the West Midlands, and we will continue to press on with more metro extensions, new rail stations, and cleaner, quicker buses."

Councillor Taylor added: "The Metro will boost Sandwell's sustainable public transport options, and as the cabinet member working to deliver those positive outcomes for our citizens I was very pleased to watch this first bridge lowered into place. It's also great to see the towpath and waterways open again for walking and cycling. I was particularly impressed and proud to see and hear about so many women working on this huge project, reflecting the changing face of construction and a positive future for our borough and our whole working society."

The purpose-built structure, made-up of two 54 ton pieces, is one of a number of new bridges which will be installed in coming months for the project and was lowered into place late yesterday evening by a 750 ton-crane. The installation took place at night to minimise disruption to those using the towpath and waterway now that lockdown restrictions are easing, and more people are using the area for leisure and exercise.

Ian Collins, from the Midland Metro Alliance, which is designing, planning and building a number of Metro routes on behalf of Transport for West Midlands, recognised the team's efforts. He explained: "Much of the activity to complete designs, remove the old structure and fabricate a new one has taken place during the pandemic. Some really fantastic work has taken place during some really challenging times. On behalf of the Midland Metro Alliance I would like to thank everyone involved who has helped us safely get to this point, whilst continuing to minimise disruption wherever possible."

Following the installation of this bridge, similar activities will take place later this summer at the Tame Valley Canal and Old Main Line Canal in Tipton with localised overnight closures to the towpath and waterway. Further information will be shared in due course and made available at [www.metroalliance.co.uk](http://www.metroalliance.co.uk).

Adnan Saif, Regional Director for the Canal & River Trust in the West Midlands, said: "I know that many in the local area have found a new appreciation for our amazing and historic canal network when visiting them for daily exercise during lockdown. I have no doubt that the Metro will bring even more visitors to our waterways in a sustainable way and I thank the team at the Midland Metro Alliance for completing the improvement works so swiftly so that people can continue to enjoy these outdoor spaces with summer on the horizon."

The Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro extension will boost public transport in the Black Country, providing much-needed links to the existing heavy and light rail networks, and helping connect people to education, training and career opportunities further afield in the West Midlands.

The extension will also play its part in helping to regenerate the Sandwell, Dudley and Brierley Hill areas, making it more attractive to investors and providing easy access to the region's many and varied attractions via public transport, including Dudley's Canal and Tunnel Trust.

*Photo credit: Midland Metro Alliance*