

# How climate change and innovation will shape West Midlands transport for the next generation

July 23, 2021



A wide-ranging plan is being drawn up to guide and direct investment and development of the West Midlands' transport network to meet the challenges of climate change, population growth and traffic congestion.

Emerging technology and innovation such as new types of bus services and smart travel apps are set to play a major role in the way transport works for areas like the West Midlands.

The plan, in development, will also look to build on changes seen during the coronavirus pandemic – such as the growth in cycling and walking or reduction in peak time five-days a week commuting.

Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), which is part of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), has launched a discussion paper, *Reimagining Transport in the West Midlands*, which sets out the challenges faced by the region and highlights some opportunities for the future of our transport system.

Innovations, such as autonomous vehicles, the growing 5G network, better use of data, drone technology, e-bikes and e-scooters, are also likely to further change the way people live, work and move around the region.

An example of this is the On Demand Bus service currently being trialled on the streets of Coventry and the University of Warwick campus. The aim is to free the bus from set routes and timetables to offer greater flexibility and convenience to passengers while keeping fares low.

Passengers call the bus to a virtual bus stop using a smart phone app and it works out the most efficient route to the destination, accounting for the needs of other passengers.

Within transport it is mainly road transport that is responsible for most of the region's carbon emissions. The paper outlines how a major shift to cleaner technology, more sustainable transport and options and changes in travel behaviour and lifestyles will be needed if the #WM2041 net-zero target is to be met over the next 20 years.

It sets out the case that despite unprecedented investment in public transport, such as through the expansion of tram, rail and bus routes and services or the roll out of cycle hire much more needs to be done to address the challenge and support the economic recovery of the region following COVID.

The plan, which will be developed over the next year, will build on 2016's Movement for Growth plan which looked at how the region could make the most of opportunities presented by the development of HS2.

The new plan sets out five motives for change; sustaining economic success, creating a fairer society, becoming more active, supporting local communities and places and tackling the climate emergency.

Andy Street, the Mayor of the West Midlands, said: "In recent years we have seen unprecedented investment going into our tram, rail, bus and cycling networks. And we are now beginning to see the results on the ground with cycle hire docking stations in our towns and cities, major engineering works on our Black Country, Eastside, and Westside Metro extensions, and the re-opening of the Camp Hill and Walsall to Wolverhampton railway lines. But we have a long way to go to make up for historic under investment.

"This new plan sets out how we're going to do that, whilst also ensuring we make the most of new technologies and the phenomenal innovation that is happening right here in our region. From our 5G testbed to the Future Transport Zone, not only can we continue to invest billions of pounds in public transport, but also help tackle climate change and create jobs in the process.

"We know how critical strong transport links are, and at the heart of our plan is an ambition to continue to provide better connectivity to left-behind communities to help everyone have the same chances in life."

Cllr Ian Ward, WMCA portfolio lead for transport and leader of Birmingham City Council said: "We cannot go on as we have - doing nothing risks increasing traffic congestion, more pollution and higher costs of keeping the region moving. Traffic congestion undermines our productivity and ability to attract investment.

“We need decisive action, like the recent launch of Birmingham’s Clean Air Zone and we also need to play our part in tackling the global climate emergency.

“We all have a part to play on this journey and while at TfWM we can develop new smart technology and cleaner transport, individuals can contribute by changing their behaviour – such as by reducing the 60% of car journeys which are under two miles.”

Cllr Jim O’Boyle, cabinet member for jobs, regeneration and climate change, added: “In Coventry we know the importance of greener transport and we are heavily involved in a wide range of schemes to both apply these – now across all forms of transport – and pilot new technologies.

“The revamped Coventry Railway Station is near completion, we have new cycleways being progressed. We are starting to create the infrastructure to prepare the city to welcome an all-electric bus fleet by 2025, and hundreds of electric charging points are rapidly being installed throughout the city.

“We are working with TfWM on testing out electric scooters, ‘On demand’ bus projects, and are busy working on a Very Light Rail scheme, while also setting out the infrastructure for a new battery plant and a potential new Gigafactory for the city.

“With a location at the heart of the country it’s great that the city is playing such a key role in future transport planning – all with the aim of supporting the local economy, wellbeing of the local community and connecting us effectively within the region and across the nation.”

*Reimagining Transport in the West Midlands* is available for [download here](#) and consultation runs until 27<sup>th</sup> August.

Responses will feed into the development of a draft plan to be issued early in 2022. The WMCA and its partners are required by law to draw up a Local Transport Plan.

*Photo credit: Transport for West Midlands*