

Work underway on £43 million West Midlands Metro depot expansion

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Work is underway on the expansion of the West Midlands Metro depot at Wednesbury to accommodate the increased fleet of trams.

New extensions to the line in Birmingham and Wolverhampton city centres and a new line to Dudley town centre – currently under construction – means that more trams are required to operate on the growing network and more capacity needed to store and maintain them.

So regional transport bosses have launched a £43 million redevelopment of the Metro depot site in Potters Lane.

The on-site capacity will be more than doubled to accommodate the growing fleet of state-of-the-art Metro vehicles and allow them to manoeuvre around the yard.

The development also includes extended and updated workshop and maintenance facilities, a tram wash, a new operations centre and staff facilities to accommodate a growing workforce. An estimated 150 new jobs will be created as a result of the expansion of the network and depot.

In 2019 the WMCA placed an order for 21 new CAF Urbos 3 trams, doubling the fleet. Of these eleven have already been delivered and the remainder are due to arrive later this year ahead of completion of the extension between Wednesbury and Dudley in 2024.

Growing the Metro network will improve access to rapid public transport services, linking more communities to job and leisure opportunities as well as reducing car use and traffic congestion – both helping to drive economic growth and achieve the #WM2041 target of a net-zero region within the next two decades.

The depot development is being led by Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), which is part of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), owner of the Metro system. Construction is being carried out by the Midland Metro Alliance – the consortium responsible for delivering all West Midlands Metro infrastructure. The project is funded from the City Region Sustainable Funding Settlement awarded to the West Midlands last year.

Construction is now underway with space being cleared to expand the yard and track, as well as provide a direct track link to the new extension towards Dudley.

Next to the depot work is well advanced on the construction of the junction which will link the existing line between Birmingham and Wolverhampton to the new line, phase one of which will take services to Dudley town centre. With phase two to Brierley Hill to follow later.

This includes taking the track up a newly built incline to meet the existing raised line next to the depot.

Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands and WMCA Chair, said: “We need more room to accommodate even more trams so this depot extension is very welcome news.

“Construction crews are hard at work right across our region expanding our Metro network in Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Sandwell and Dudley and this depot extension helps us to meet the consequent uptick in demand that will result from the new extended network.

“Once complete, even more local residents and businesses – especially those in Dudley – will be able to benefit from a rapid, convenient and affordable alternative to the car for their journeys around the West Midlands.”

Councillor Peter Hughes, representative for Wednesbury North and cabinet member for regeneration and growth with Sandwell Council, said: “The current and future development of the West Midlands Metro network is playing an integral role to the regeneration of Sandwell, and its six towns, providing increased access for workers, shoppers and visitors to the region.

“With Wednesbury as the major hub to this network, it is pleasing to see the significant investment in the Metro Depot, and I am particularly pleased that the investment will create new employment opportunities. The first phase of the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill line is now taking shape, with both the Wolverhampton and Birmingham extensions coming to fruition, and providing more opportunities for people to leave their car at home and help reduce carbon emissions.”

The new Metro line includes nine stops to Dudley town centre due to open next year, with plans to further extend the route to Brierley Hill.

Councillor Patrick Harley, leader of Dudley council, said: “The expansion of the depot will allow us to store a bigger fleet of trams, and in turn offer more frequent services coming in and out of Dudley and Brierley Hill when the extension is completed.

“It will allow borough residents to easily get to Birmingham, Sandwell and Wolverhampton. Equally importantly, it will make it much more easier for people from outside the borough to get to us and to see what we have to offer, with the economic benefits that will bring.

“I have always said it – the Metro extension is a real game changer for our borough. It will create more opportunities for people in terms of jobs, training and connectivity and today marks another important step in the right direction for the project.”

The Westside extension in Birmingham opened last summer and an extension in Wolverhampton city centre is nearing completion.

Councillor Liz Clements, cabinet member for transport at Birmingham City Council, said: “This investment is needed because the Metro network is growing and will have benefits across the West Midlands.

“We are already benefiting from that investment through the new extension to Edgbaston Village which, having opened last year, is already proving popular with those travelling to and from Broad Street and Brindleyplace – encouraging even more people to leave their cars at home when visiting Birmingham.”

Councillor Carol Hyatt, City of Wolverhampton Council representative on the WMCA’s transport delivery committee, said: “Evidence tells us that a transport hub results in more people being able to use public transport more easily. I am proud that in Wolverhampton we have invested in our public transport creating a transport hub where train, bus and soon Metro will all be available in the same place so people can go from one to the other with ease.

“It’s great to see the work going on behind the scenes at this new depot to support Metro services with space for even more trams and better facilities for staff to keep the network moving.”

Photo credit: Transport for West Midlands