

West Midlands Enhanced Partnership Plan

June 2022



Transport for
West Midlands



West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) seeks to develop and promote a fully integrated transport system, where each public transport mode (rail, Metro, bus and demand responsive transport) contributes towards the overall objective of enabling all residents to have easy access to a range of services and facilities. Bus is central to this and an Enhanced Partnership offers a mechanism to help achieve the objective.

Drawing on the West Midlands Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and Transport for West Midlands' Strategic Vision for Bus, this document fulfils the statutory requirements set out by the Bus Services Act 2017 of an Enhanced Partnership (EP) Plan for the West Midlands. This will facilitate an EP Scheme for the region.

Whilst significant progress in improving bus services is being achieved through the Bus Alliance and the Advanced Quality Partnership Schemes already in place in central Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Solihull, an Enhanced Partnership is considered the best way of ensuring that some of the more ambitious plans to transform bus travel are achieved. Amongst these are the Sprint bus rapid transit corridors, which will rely on investment both in vehicles (by operators) and infrastructure (by local authorities). The EP will place binding commitments on partner organisations to provide the necessary enhancements, as well as ensuring on-going provision of high-quality bus services.

In accordance with statutory requirements for an EP Plan, this document includes:

- Details of the area covered
- Factors affecting the local bus market
- A summary of passengers' experiences of using bus services and the priorities of users and non-users for improvements
- Trends in bus journey speeds and the impact of congestion on bus services
- Objectives that are sought for bus service provision
- Interventions needed to achieve the desired outcomes



Overview

The West Midlands has strong growth ambitions to improve productivity and the quality of life for everyone who lives and works in the region. The development of HS2, 2021 UK City of Culture in Coventry, and the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games will help transform the region and drive investment, offering opportunities for the bus to play an important role in meeting existing and new travel demands.

Transport is key to economic growth, but traffic congestion can constrain this ambition. TfWM is supporting local authority partners and investing to develop a world-class integrated transport system that will allow seamless, convenient travel across the region, thereby reducing the need for journeys to be made by car.

In 2017/18, 71.9¹ million bus service miles were operated in the West Midlands by 26 bus operators. This represents the largest number of bus service miles for a metropolitan area in England (outside of London) and the largest commercially-provided bus network (66.5 million bus service miles). Some 5.4 million bus service miles operate with financial support from TfWM and local authority partners.

With its widespread coverage, bus plays a vital role across the region. The bus accounts for 4 out of 5 public transport journeys and remains the most important, adaptable and flexible mode, serving and supporting a better quality of life for West Midlands residents. The importance of the bus for access to employment is illustrated in Figure 1.

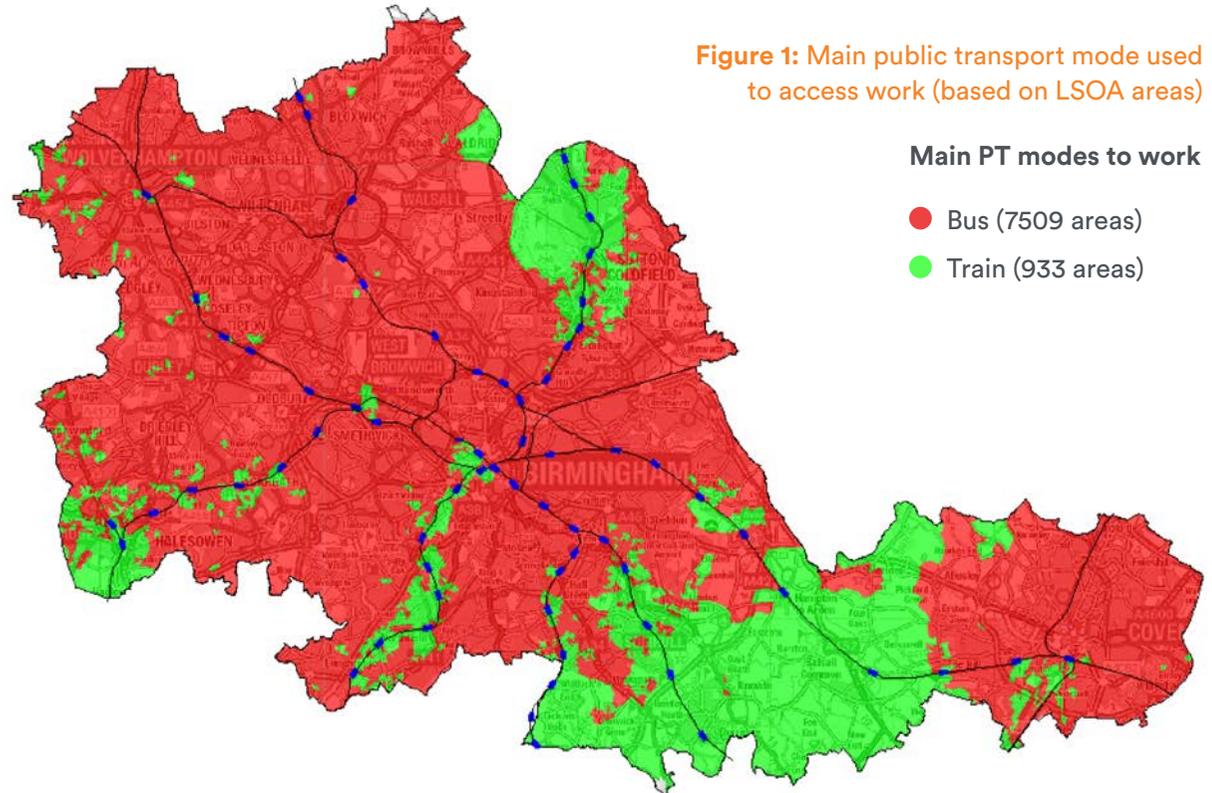


Figure 1: Main public transport mode used to access work (based on LSOA areas)

¹ DfT 2017/18, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/bus02-vehicle-distance-travelled>

Bus passengers' views

The 2018 Bus Passenger Survey, undertaken by Transport Focus, reported that overall satisfaction with bus travel in the West Midlands stood at 84%. While this demonstrates high levels of satisfaction, this was slightly below the levels in the equivalent metropolitan areas of West Yorkshire (85%) and Greater Manchester (87%) and somewhat lower than Merseyside and Tyne & Wear (both 91%).

66%
Bus driver
greeting/welcome



66%
Value for money
fare-payers only

82%
Journey time



84%
Overall journey



71%
Punctuality

84%
Availability of seating
or space to stand



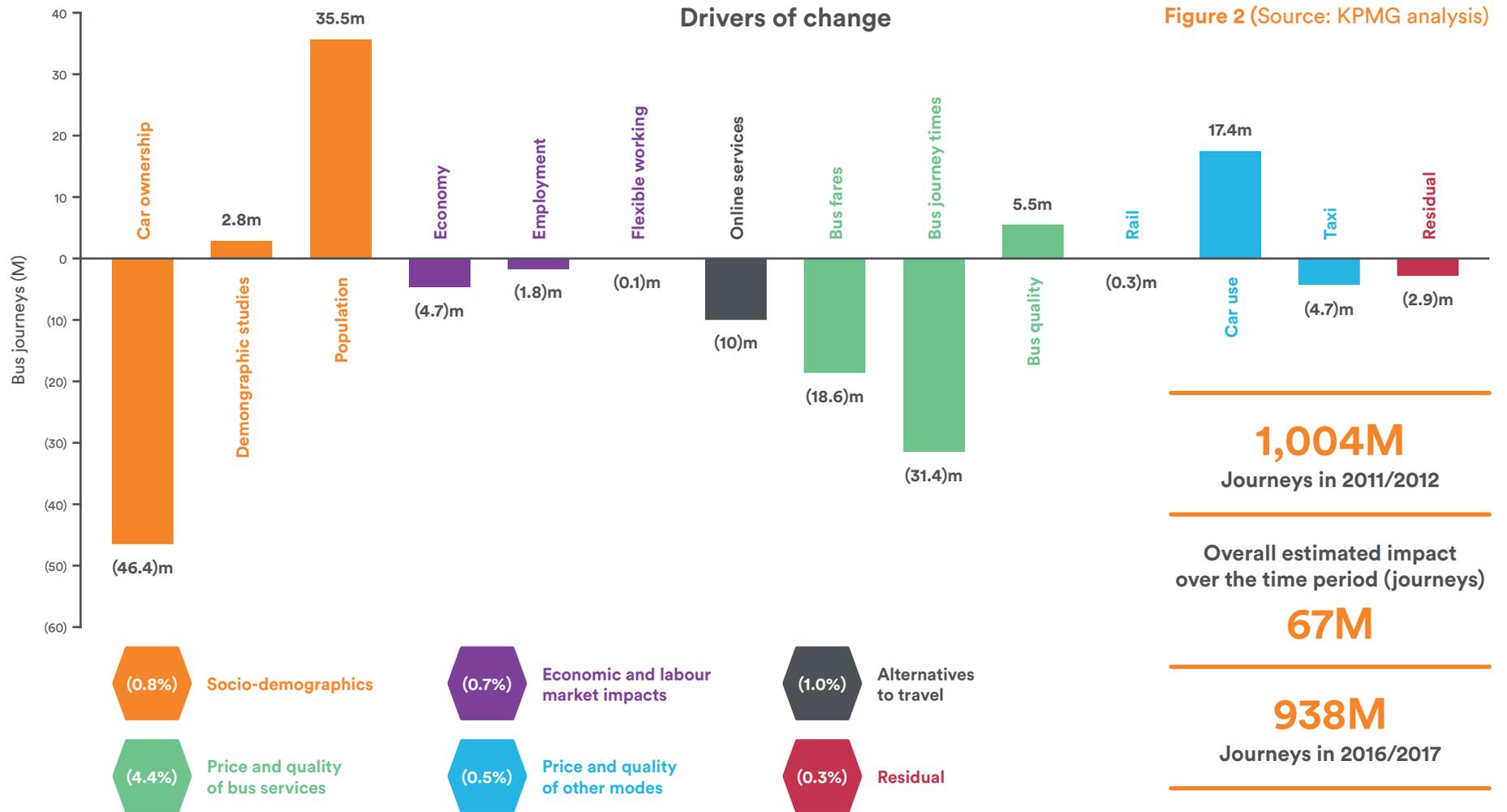
74%
Interior cleanliness
and condition

INFLUENCES ON BUS TRAVEL

Influences on bus travel

Across the UK, bus use has been in general decline, mainly due to growing car ownership and use. However, in recent years, some areas or specific bus routes have seen growth.

Research into changing patterns of bus use (illustrated in Figure 2) suggests that about a half of the reduction in bus patronage can be explained by changing customer needs, particularly due to changes in car ownership and economic circumstances and the availability and acceptability of alternatives to travel, such as online services. Much of the remainder of the reduction in bus patronage is explained by increases in bus journey times (linked to increasing traffic levels) and rises in bus fares. In contrast, there are some factors that have helped to increase bus use, attributable to population growth and reduced car use.



Figures based on UTG member areas

Car ownership

In the West Midlands, over half of bus users have no access to a car and so rely on public transport for their travel needs. Where people have access to a car, their likelihood of using the bus reduces², from on average of 181 bus journeys per year to 55 (part access to a vehicle) and 14 (full access to a vehicle).

Figure 3: Car ownership in the West Midlands

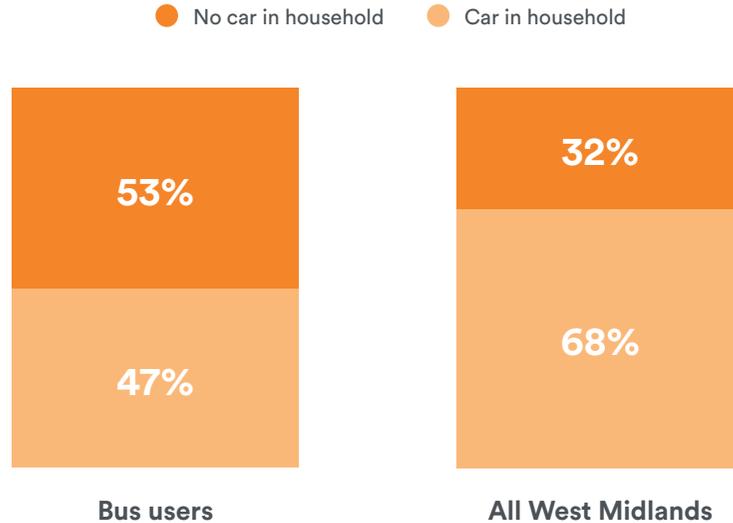


Figure 4: Car ownership usage and characteristics in the West Midlands



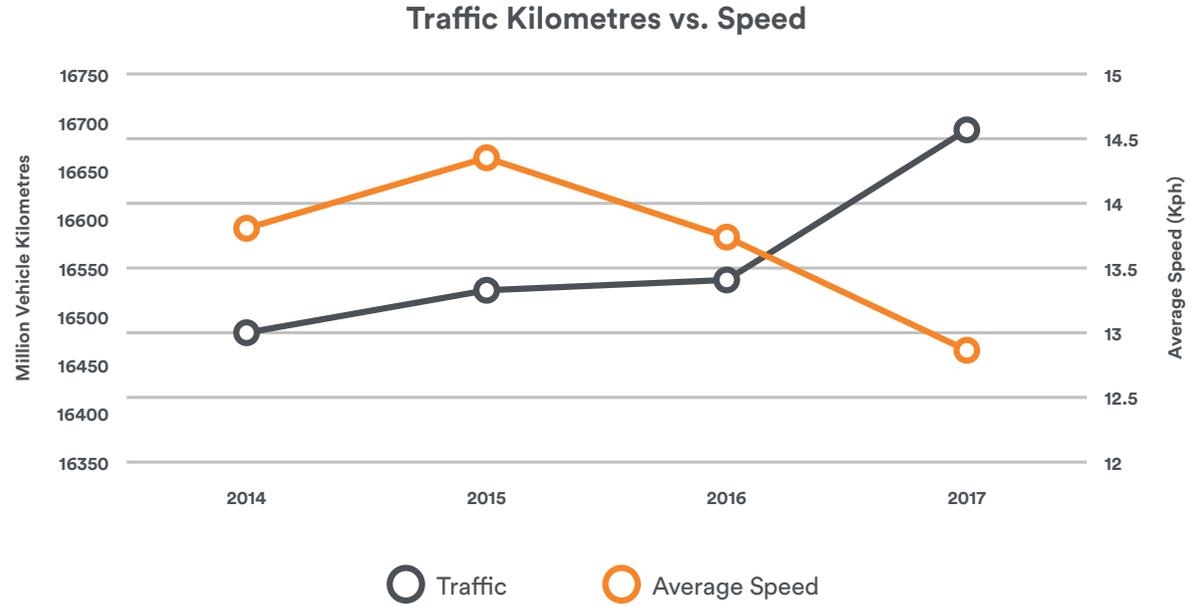
Car parking

In Birmingham city centre, the region's strategic economic centre, there are about 60,000 public and private non-residential car parking spaces available, both on-street and off-street. This is against an average weekday vehicle demand for parking spaces in the city centre of about 45,000 vehicles. This suggests an over-supply of parking, which undermines local and regional policies to see a shift towards reducing private car use and encouraging more sustainable forms of travel.

The high level of parking availability in Birmingham city centre also contributes to peak period traffic congestion and associated travel unreliability, together with problems of poor air quality.

Congestion

Traffic congestion is a significant challenge for buses, restricting their ability to reach their potential by increasing journey times and impacting negatively on service reliability. Since 2015, average traffic speeds have fallen as levels of traffic have increased. If congestion is unmanaged, it will continue to have detrimental impacts on people and businesses, increasing business costs, affecting productivity and reducing accessibility to labour markets, as well as being responsible for harmful emissions. Equally, if unchecked, congestion could worsen from increased travel demand resulting from development and population growth. Also, major infrastructure projects, such as HS2, might have impacts on bus services during their construction period.



Without addressing major sources of congestion, buses will continue to suffer delays, variability and increases in journey times and operating costs, leading to declining attractiveness of the service and thus fewer passengers. Bus operators are forced to respond to congestion in one of two ways – both with a similar outcome in terms of patronage decline. First, to maintain levels of service where congestion worsens, bus operators may need to run more buses, which adds to the costs of providing services. A second response is to operate services less frequently.

Congestion causes:

- **Journey time increases and variability** – whereby bus services become unreliable, with journey times varying from advertised timetables and overall journeys taking longer.

- **Decreasing accessibility** – slower average bus speeds lead to reduced accessibility, as fewer people can access places in a reasonable journey time.
- **Decreasing attractiveness of bus** – greater journey time variability and declining accessibility reduce the appeal of buses, meaning they are at risk of further patronage decline.
- **Higher bus operating costs** – a 10 per cent decrease in operating speeds leads to an 8 per cent increase in operating costs. If this is passed on to passengers through higher fares it results in a 5.6 per cent fall in patronage³.

Reduced use of the bus may lead to greater car use, creating further congestion.

One measure of the passenger experience is the real journey time incurred and the reliability of journey times. A tool to measure this has been devised and is shown in Appendix B, with some example journeys listed to highlight what it shows.

Accessibility analyses are another way of highlighting the relative ability of buses to provide services that people want. Such analysis shows that while 54.5% of residents could access at least three main centres within 45 minutes by public transport in October 2011, this had fallen to 44.8% in October 2017.

The impact of slower average traffic speeds on levels of accessibility is illustrated in Appendix A. For example, in the context of Birmingham between 2008 and 2018 increasing bus journey times resulted in 216,000 fewer people being within a 45-minute bus journey of the city centre.

³ The impact of congestion on bus passengers, Green Journeys, Professor David Begg

Air Quality

Air pollution in the West Midlands affects some 2.8 million people, reducing average life expectancy by up to 6 months, and is responsible for economic costs estimated at £860 million per year. It is estimated that road transport emissions account for around 1,460 premature deaths in the region each year, with 890 in Birmingham alone.

In all seven constituent authorities in the region, nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and/or particulate matter concentration thresholds are currently exceeded (relative to EU limits). The authorities have been instructed by DEFRA to take local action. Birmingham City Council plans to implement a Class D Clean Air Zone, no earlier than July 2020.

Reducing bus emissions is an important vital part of the programme to improve people's health and quality of life by cleaning up the air in the West Midlands. The Mayor of the West Midlands and West Midlands Bus Alliance have committed to create the cleanest bus fleet in the UK, outside London. The aim is for the entire bus fleet in the West Midlands metropolitan area to meet at least Euro VI emissions standards by April 2021⁴, cutting harmful pollution from buses by up to 95 per cent.

Since 2015, over 350 new vehicles have entered service, older vehicles retrofitted to Euro VI standards, supported bus contracts specified as Euro VI standard, and orders placed for zero-emission buses (electric and hydrogen).

⁴ West Midlands Combined Authority Board
28 June 2019 <https://governance.wmca.org.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=137&MIId=221&Ver=4>

“Poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK” [DEFRA, 2017]



This section sets out the policy background to the EP Plan.

Strategic Economic Plan

The bus has a significant role to play in helping overcome the strategic challenges outlined in the SEP, with transport interventions that:



500,000
new jobs



20,000
more businesses



16,000
additional
hectares of
employment land



215,000
additional homes

- **Support an accessible network**
Addressing transport barriers (accessibility, availability and affordability) for excluded groups.
- **Deliver support that connects people to key employment and skills opportunities**
Ensuring growth is inclusive by helping the most vulnerable and isolated groups share in economic prosperity.
- **Ensure alignment with the Public Service Reform agenda and Local Industrial Strategy**
Targeting interventions which secure better for less from public services, improving the life changes and the health and wellbeing of local communities.

Movement for Growth

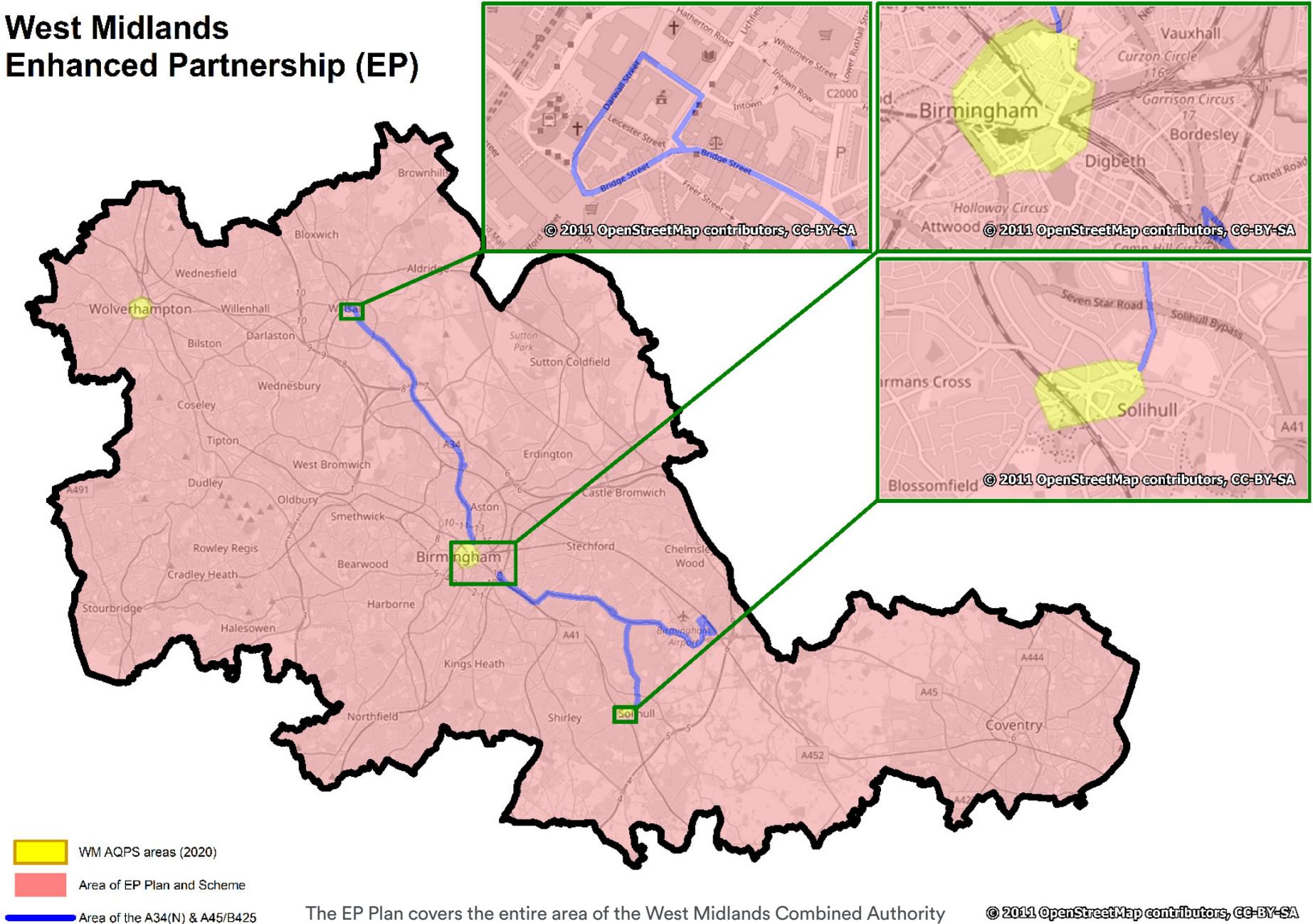
‘Movement for Growth’, the West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan, sets out improvements to the transport system to support the economic growth and regeneration of the region, support new developments and housing and improve air quality, the environment and social inclusion.

West Midlands Bus Service Improvement Plan

Our West Midlands BSIP was published on 5 November 2021. It sets out our ambitions for continued investment in our local bus services to level up the West Midlands through Better Buses, Better Journeys and Better Fares for all our residents and visitors.



West Midlands Enhanced Partnership (EP)



The EP Plan covers the entire area of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), excluding the areas within existing Advanced Quality Partnership Schemes (AQPS) for Birmingham and Wolverhampton city centre and Solihull town centre. The AQPS areas will automatically become part of the Plan area either on expiry or revocation (whichever is earliest).

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Objectives

The EP Plan provides the framework to contribute towards meeting our ambitions for continued investment in our local bus services to level up the West Midlands through Better Buses, Better Journeys and Better Fares for all our residents and visitors; and the 9 objectives set out in the 'Strategic Vision for Bus':

- UK leading low emission bus fleet with zero emission corridors serving the most affected areas of air quality.
- Fully integrated bus network, including demand responsive and rapid transit services supporting interchange with rail, coach and Metro to form one network.
- Simple, convenient and easy to use payment options, including full capping, providing a network which is value for money and affordable for customers.
- Fewer private car journeys by making bus the mode of choice and creating better access to jobs and long-term change.
- Creating a safe, secure and accessible mode for all and tackling long-held barriers and perceptions.
- Accountable network performance management, tackling issues causing congestion and reliability problems.
- World-leading customer information, utilising 5G and all available technologies and platforms.
- All young people under 25 supported by discounted travel, as well as addressing barriers for excluded groups.
- Evolve a network to support a 24/7 thriving economy, connecting people to new and developing destinations and attractions.

The Plan provides the backdrop for specific EP Schemes that will detail actions and developments to be taken jointly by partners to deliver a marked improvement in bus services on certain corridors or in defined areas that will help meet the above objectives, particularly by speeding up bus journeys times and improving journey time reliability. Such schemes may be suggested and promoted by TfWM, constituent local authorities or bus operators.

The first EP Scheme to be introduced will support the implementation of two Sprint corridors, including improved infrastructure and the operation of high-quality buses, as follows:

- Birmingham Airport and Solihull to Birmingham City Centre (A45)
- Walsall to Birmingham City Centre (A34)

Ultimately, a network of Sprint corridors will be established across the West Midlands, as shown in Figure 5.

The Plan supports the key principles underpinning the provision of Sprint corridors, in respect of:

- Providing confidence to operators to invest in high quality vehicles
- Ensuring reliable journey time performance
- Managing access at certain stops
- Enhanced vehicle standards
- Enhanced vehicle environmental standards
- Vehicle, driver and customer service standards are enhanced and maintained
- Infrastructure is maintained and enforced
- Continued availability of inter-operable ticketing

- Ensuring incident conditions are managed effectively on a collaborative basis
- Providing a mechanism for sharing data and reporting on corridor performance

Strategic Vision for Bus

Outlining the role of bus in supporting the overall transport aspirations, 'Strategic Vision for Bus' sets out the following vision:

“A world-class integrated, reliable, zero emission transport system providing inclusive travel for all across the West Midlands, with excellent customer service and simple payment and ticketing options. Customers will be able to make easy and safe door-to-door journeys, benefiting from new innovative transport solutions that meets the needs of a modern and diverse 21st Century economy, reducing the reliance on private single occupancy car journeys.”

Governance

A Reference Group, comprising the following, developed this Plan:

- TfWM
- Constituent local authorities
- Bus operators
- Confederation of Passenger Transport
- Local Enterprise Partnerships
- Bus Users UK
- Transport Focus
- Birmingham Airport
- Neighbouring authorities (as observers)

The Group will be reconvened in the future if variations to the Plan are necessary.

The Enhanced Partnership is overseen by the West Midlands Bus Alliance and WMCA, who will also monitor progress made towards achieving the EP Plan objectives.

An EP Plan can only exist if there is at least one associated EP Scheme in place. Therefore, for as long as an EP Scheme is in place, a Plan must also be in place.



Small and medium-sized operators

The needs of small and medium-sized operators (SMOs) have been considered in the development of the Enhanced Partnership, with opportunities for all bus operators to participate throughout, either through individual discussions or through attendance at the Reference Group meetings. The Plan seeks to support improvements in all aspects of bus provision, regardless of the size of operators providing services. With the Enhanced Partnership Scheme area, smaller operators have been given extended periods to comply with the improved standards.

Competition

The Enhanced Partnership has been subject to the Competition Test as set out in Part 1 of Schedule 10 of the Transport Act 2000. The assessment, undertaken by TfWM and shared with the Competition and Markets Authority, concluded that there will be no adverse impact on competition.

The implementation of an Enhanced Partnership Plan and associated Scheme is aimed at delivering improvements to bus services for passengers in a deregulated environment. In particular, this will include improved quality of vehicles and emission standards (minimum standard of Euro VI). All operators in the Enhanced Partnership Scheme area will be required to make improvements in their fleet, which are considered proportionate in respect of the Climate Emergency declared by the WMCA. The Enhanced Partnership will not impact on competition, as operators will be free to amend and introduce services in the area, provided that the standards that apply to all operators are met.



Variations to the Plan

Consideration will be given to potential EP Plan variations highlighted either by one of the organisations represented on the EP Reference Group or an operator of qualifying local bus services. The proposer of a variation should demonstrate how this might contribute to achieving the objectives set out in the EP Plan and current local transport policies. Such requests should be set out in writing and submitted to busalliance@tfwm.org.uk.

On receipt of a valid request for a variation, TfWM will reconvene the EP Plan Reference Group, giving at least 14 days' notice for the meeting, to consider the proposed variation. If the proposed variation is agreed by all bus operator and local highway authority and TfWM representatives present, TfWM will make the EP Plan variation with the relevant local highway authorities. Stakeholders not represented at the meeting will be deemed to be abstaining from the decision.

If there is not full agreement of all stakeholders present, then the proposed variation will be put to the operator objection mechanism, but with a reduced objection period of 14 days replacing Part 2 of the Transport Act 2000 section 138L (2) (c). The proposed variation will be advertised on the TfWM website and emailed to operators of qualifying local services in the EP Plan area. If the proposed variation passes the operator objection mechanism, TfWM will make the EP Plan variation, subject to the approval of the relevant local highway authorities and TfWM.



Review of the EP Plan

Once the EP Plan is made, it will be reviewed by the EP Plan Reference Group at least annually. TfWM will initiate each review and it will take no longer than 6 months to complete.

As part of the review process, at least every 2nd year consideration will be given to the appropriateness of the milestone dates for the implementation of non-diesel vehicles, which will take into account changes in national and regional guidance and policy.

Depending on the outcome of the Outline Business Case⁵ assessment to consider the best future delivery model for bus services in the West Midlands from the Bus Services Act 2017, due to be completed in 2021, it may be necessary to review the EP Plan.

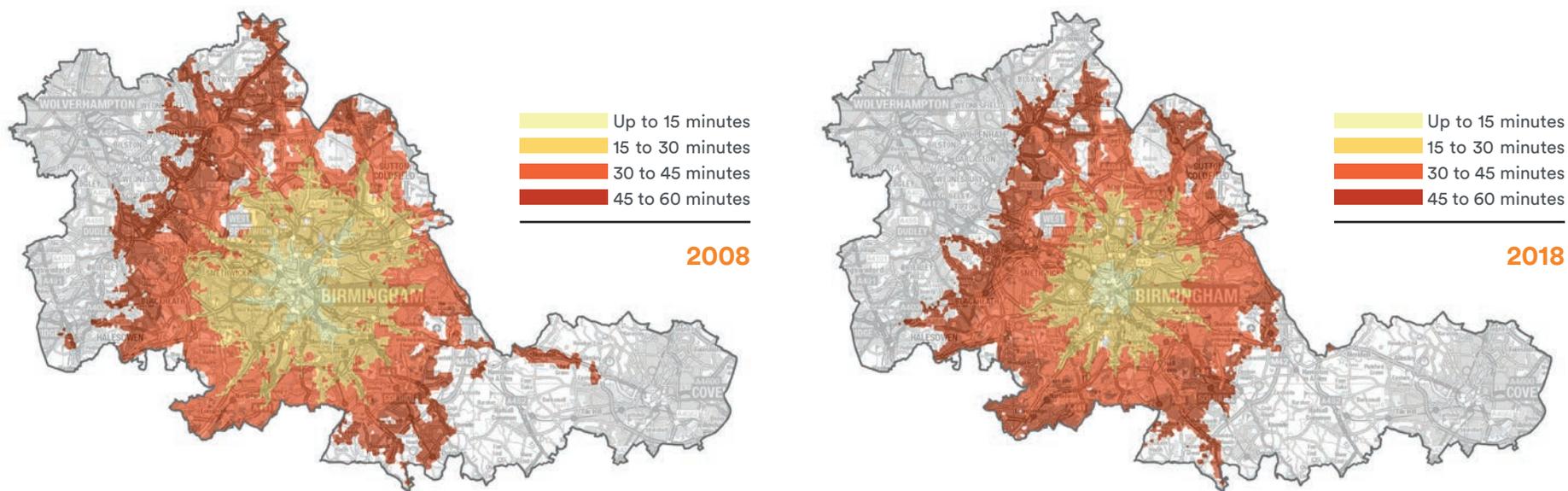
Revocation of the EP Plan

If, for some reason, it becomes necessary for the EP Plan to be revoked, the EP Plan Reference Group will be reconvened and follow the same process as outlined in the section 'Variations to the Scheme' (noting that the agreement will be for revocation and not variation).

If at any point in the future the EP Plan area is included in a Bus Franchising Area, the relevant requirements set out in this EP Plan document will cease to apply from the commencement date of the Franchising Scheme.

⁵ As approved by the WMCA Board at its meeting on the 28 June 2019: <https://governance.wmca.org.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=137&MIId=221&Ver=4>

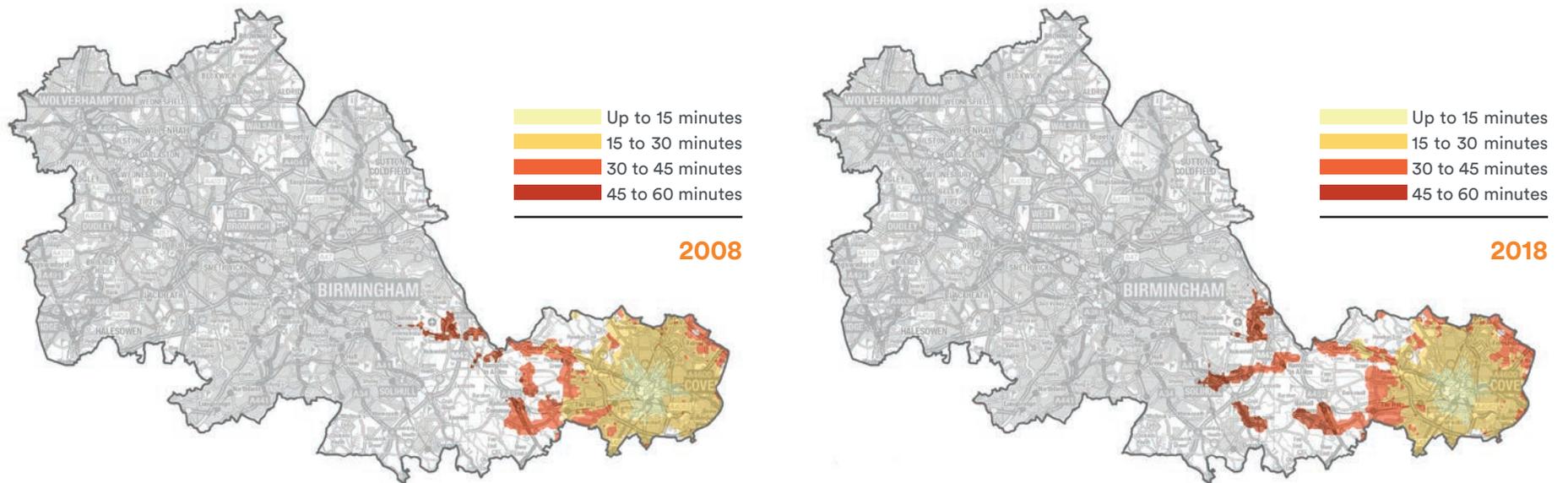
Figure A1: AM Peak Journey Times to Birmingham City Centre by Bus (2008 and 2018)



Population living within 60 minutes by bus from Birmingham: 1,511,350 in 2008, 1,287,810 in 2018.

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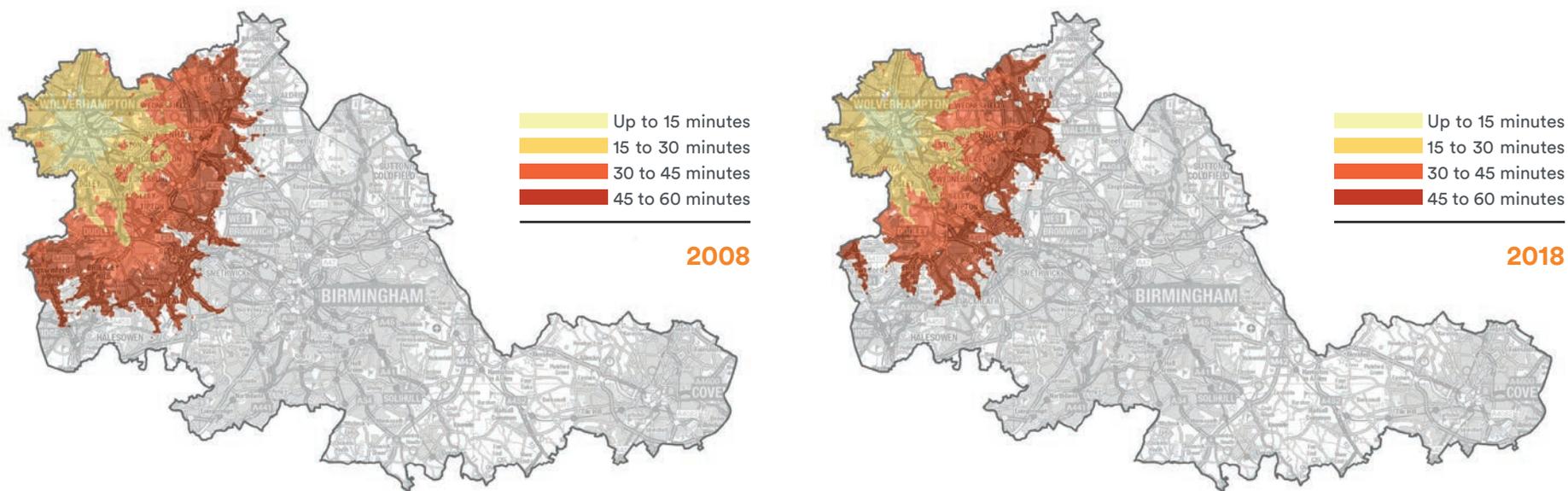
Figure A2: AM Peak Journey Times to Coventry City Centre by Bus (2008 and 2018)



Population living within 60 minutes by bus from Coventry: 288,603 in 2008, 295,594 in 2018. The increase is due to improved service provision to Solihull.

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Figure A3: AM Peak Journey Times to Wolverhampton City Centre by Bus (2008 and 2018)



Population living within 60 minutes by bus from Wolverhampton: 712,552 in 2008, 569,458 in 2018.

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APPENDIX B: MEASURE OF BUS JOURNEY TIME (actual and scheduled)

Real Journey Time (RJT) is a measure of how long passengers allow for a bus journey. This is not just a slowly-extending timetabled journey time, but also the contingency they add for delay, as passengers seek to reduce the risk of significant lateness more than to minimising their total travel time. Research suggests the contingency typically added to make up the RJT is that needed to cover the 95th percentile journey time.

An online tool (www.realjourneytime.co.uk) can be used to measure RJT for many services in the West Midlands. The output of the RJT for a selection of routes (April 2019) highlights some of the poorest passenger experiences of RJT compared with timetabled journey speed (TJS).

Journey from >to	Service	AM Peak journey times (mins)			Performance measures	
		Timetable	Real journey time	Must add	Current (all day) % service punctual	Additional (AM peak) RJ Speed /TJ Speed
Bloxwich > Walsall	31/32	12	21	9	65%	57%
Cape Hill > Birmingham	82/87	21	25	4	76%	84%
Foleshill > Coventry	20	13	21	8	69%	62%
Great Bridge > Birmingham	74	59	68	9	63%	87%
Halesowen > Birmingham	9	63	73	10	74%	86%
Harborne > Birmingham	23/24	25	41	16	80%	61%
Keresley > Coventry	16/A	31	47	16	77%	66%
Maypole > Birmingham	50	31	46	15	58%	67%
Solihull > Birmingham	4	45	55	10	63%	82%
Walsall > Oldbury	4	41	50	9	76%	82%
Wednesfield > Wolverhampton	59	14	22	8	82%	64%
Willenhall > Walsall	529	19	27	8	61%	70%
Wolverhampton > Dudley	1	47	51	4	69%	92%

One approach to improving network performance is to reduce the amount of contingency that passengers need to allow for their journeys, particularly targeting the worst ones first.

THIS DEED IS DATED:

PARTY SEALS

(1) THE WEST MIDLANDS
COMBINED AUTHORITY
(WMCA) of 16 Summer Lane,
Birmingham, B19 3SD affixed
hereto in the presence of its
duly Authorised Officer

(2) BIRMINGHAM CITY
COUNCIL of The Council
House, Victoria Square,
Birmingham B1 1BB affixed
hereto in the presence of its
duly Authorised Officer

(3) COVENTRY CITY
COUNCIL of Council House,
Earl Street, Coventry, CV1 5RR
affixed hereto in the presence
of its duly Authorised Officer

(4) DUDLEY METROPOLITAIN
BOROUGH COUNCIL of
Council House,
Priory Road, Dudley, DY1 1HF
affixed hereto in the presence
of its duly Authorised Officer

.....

(5) SANDWELL
METROPOLITAN BOROUGH
COUNCIL of Sandwell Council
House, Freeth Street, Oldbury,
B69 3DE affixed hereto in
the presence of its duly
Authorised Officer

.....

(6) SOLIHULL
METROPOLITAN BOROUGH
COUNCIL of Council House,
Manor Square, Solihull, West
Midlands, B91 3QB affixed
hereto in the presence of its
duly Authorised Officer

.....

(7) WALSALL
METROPOLITAN BOROUGH
COUNCIL of Civic Centre,
Darwall Street, Walsall,
WS1 1TP affixed hereto in
the presence of its duly
Authorised Officer

.....

(8) CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL of Civic
Centre, St. Peter's Square,
Wolverhampton, WV1 1SH
affixed hereto in the presence
of its duly Authorised Officer



Transport for West Midlands

Building a healthier, happier, better connected and more prosperous West Midlands.

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