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# Sprint Update Report - Walsall to Birmingham (A34)

March 2019



Transport for  
West Midlands

# Foreword



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**I'd like to thank everyone who has taken the time to engage with Transport for West Midlands on our Sprint proposals.**

Whether gathered during our consultation, or since, through letters, emails, phone calls and meetings, your input so far has been invaluable to our work and has been gratefully received.

This Update Report represents the latest outcome from this feedback, detailing what we committed to review in our Public Consultation report, while touching on wider topics from each scheme, and the Sprint programme as a whole.

We recognise the importance of an effective transport system for the creation of new jobs, economic growth which benefits all, new housing, clean air and improved health in the West Midlands. Therefore, delivering the first Sprint routes will be part of a wider investment in road, rail, bus, tram and cycling infrastructure designed to deliver an integrated transport system to ease congestion, and keep the region moving.

As you will see, there have been some significant changes to the Sprint proposals, and it demonstrates that we are listening to all our stakeholders. We are committed to keeping you informed and engaged as plans develop further, and will be issuing regular newsletters with updates on Sprint.

In the meantime, please read and consider the latest progress in this report and, as always, feel free to get in touch if you have any comments or questions.

# Introduction

Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) launched a public consultation on 22 August 2018 for three proposed Sprint schemes: A34 Walsall to Birmingham, A45 Birmingham City Centre to Birmingham Airport and Solihull, and Sutton Coldfield to Birmingham via Langley.

Members of the public were invited to review the proposals for all three schemes and to submit their responses by 5 October 2018. Submissions were made via:

- An online questionnaire, hosted on [birminghambeheard.org.uk](http://birminghambeheard.org.uk)
- On-street interviews, led by the TfWM Customer Intelligence Team
- Self-completion paper surveys, made available at public events and at 10 local libraries
- (Comments were also made by letter, email, telephone hotline and social media)

The results were published in the Sprint Route Public Consultation report in December 2018, in which we committed to provide stakeholders – that’s those who have an interest in the Sprint proposals – with updates on the latest developments.

The Sprint Route Public Consultation report can be found at [www.tfwm.org.uk/sprint](http://www.tfwm.org.uk/sprint)

## What’s happened since December?

The December report detailed the results from the Sprint consultation, while identifying key issues on which we committed to respond. Since this report was published, we have also analysed each one of the comments gathered as part of the consultation, and used them to inform updates to the proposals.

We have also continued to engage with all key stakeholders during this period to ensure they are aware of Sprint’s progress. This has included meetings with the A34 Safety Action Group, businesses affected on Ablewell Street, directly impacted landowners, and local councillors. We have a strong obligation to all our stakeholders and value feedback highly, and have tried to provide you with as much information as possible. It is important to note that the latest proposals are subject to revision as plans progress and further engagement takes place.



# Main Scheme Feedback

The public consultation report identified key issues in relation to the A34 Sprint scheme proposals and what we committed to do in response.

Route-specific 'Issues Identified' in public consultation report:	What we committed to
1. Parking and property access for residents and businesses.	Review parking and access issues for businesses and residents along the route, and where possible make alternative parking provision available. Consider alternative designs that may not require some or all of the parking to be removed.
2. Safety concerns for residents whose driveways are adjacent to the route.	Undertake a Road Safety Audit as part of the detailed design phase and use the findings to review the design. This would happen as a standard practice.
3. Environmental impact of changes to the use of highway space as a result of creating a dedicated BRT lane alongside properties	Undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment as part of the detailed design. This would happen as a standard practice.
4. Potential congestion at pinch-points such as the Scott Arms.	Investigate options to provide enhanced bus reliability at all junctions. At Scott Arms we will look for a solution that does not adversely impact traffic north to south or east to west.
5. Need for Park and ride facilities for Sprint users.	Identify possible sites for park and ride facilities along the Sprint route and develop business cases for these sites.

## Update

### 1. Parking and property access for residents and businesses:

We will be amending the design to retain the majority of parking between Perry Barr and Scott Arms, and are in the process of developing options to achieve this. There are two options under consideration:

- **Option 1:** Highway widening into verges and central reserve to allow for retention of most parking, while still providing bus priority.
- **Option 2:** Reallocate a general traffic lane to provide bus priority between Perry Barr and Scott Arms in order to retain more parking. We have reviewed this proposal and will undertake traffic modelling to understand the impact. This will then be discussed with Birmingham City Council, Highways

England, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, and Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council. It is anticipated that this initial feasibility work will be completed in spring 2019.

If the preferred option includes significant changes, as expected, there will be additional targeted engagement on this section of the route (between Perry Barr and Scott Arms) starting in May 2019. We will work with local stakeholders to ensure that affected residents, businesses and road users are involved in the engagement exercise.

### 2. Safety concerns for residents whose driveways are on the Sprint scheme route:

An official Road Safety Audit will highlight any safety issues to be addressed. It will consider various aspects of the proposals, including

junction layouts, visibility, pedestrians, cyclists, emergency vehicles, signage, road markings, access, and lighting. This will not be undertaken until a preferred design has been identified, and is therefore likely to be undertaken in spring 2019.

There are similar schemes where a bus lane already exists in front of properties, such as sections of the A34 near Perry Avenue and Beeches Road. Additional examples within the West Midlands include Bordesley Green East and the A38 Bristol Road in Selly Oak.

### **3. Environmental impact of changes to the use of highway space as a result of creating a dedicated BRT lane alongside properties:**

This work is intended to be undertaken during the detailed design process in summer 2019. The Environmental Impact Assessment will consider the impact of the project across various assessment areas, including noise, greenhouse gases, landscape, townscape, historic environment, biodiversity and water environment. The work will also include an assessment of the impact on air quality.

### **4. Potential congestion at pinch-points, such as at Scott Arms:**

We have prepared three options to address capacity and congestion issues at the Scott Arms junction. This includes minor signal phasing improvements, localised capacity improvements, and major road widening. In order to further inform the impact of these proposals, we have shared the draft design to seek views of key stakeholders, including Birmingham City Council, Highways England, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council. The next stage of the works will be to undertake traffic modelling to assess the impacts and benefits of each of the options. It is not expected that these options will impact east-west traffic movement. Following identification of a preferred option, we will seek approval to develop this proposal. This will be decided in summer 2019.

### **5. Need for Park and ride facilities for Sprint users to park at:**

Park and ride facilities will encourage more people to choose Sprint over car and may also support the reduction of traffic on routes. We have made significant progress with plans to deliver a strategic park and ride site on the A34 Walsall to Birmingham Sprint route. A concept design proposal has been produced and we are now in positive dialogue with landowners of a preferred location.

# Other Themes

**Other themes identified during the public consultation have been used to inform A34 scheme progress. These include:**

## Tower Hill junction

There were a number of comments regarding the proposals at Tower Hill, with some suggestions for improvements.

**Update:** The proposed Tower Hill designs are intended to discourage traffic turning left into Tower Hill to undertake a U-turn and then travel through the junction to access Beeches Road. This proposal is being discussed with Birmingham City Council to determine if this work is included as part of the A34 Sprint proposals. We aim to confirm the preferred design in spring 2019.

## Walstead Road/Bell Lane junction

There were comments relating to improving bus priority at the Walstead Road/Bell Lane junction.

**Update:** An additional Sprint option has been developed to provide improved bus priority on the approaches to this junction, and is being discussed with Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council. We aim to confirm the preferred design by summer 2019.

## Ablewell Street

There were some comments regarding the bus lane on Ablewell Street, which will reduce the level of parking available.

**Update:** After having met with local businesses, we have reviewed the bus lane proposal on Ablewell Street with a view to keeping more parking, while retaining bus priority. A revised design proposal has been produced and shared with Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council. The next stage is to undertake traffic modelling to assess the impact of the proposal on local traffic. It is envisaged that this work will be completed, and that further engagement will take place with local businesses, in spring 2019.

If the preferred option includes significant changes, as expected, there will be additional targeted engagement on this section of the route in May 2019. We will work with local stakeholders to ensure that affected residents, businesses and road users are involved in the engagement exercise.

## A34 cycling proposals

There were a number of requests for cycling improvements alongside Sprint, notably for an extension to the Birmingham Cycle Revolution scheme.

**Update:** The A34 has been identified as a priority cycling corridor within the West Midlands Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and we are actively seeking funding to deliver our cycling aspirations on this route. We are working with Birmingham City Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council to develop a preliminary design to extend the Birmingham Cycle Revolution scheme from Perry Barr to Walsall. Initial feedback has been received from local authorities, although a further review of this may be required once the preferred Sprint design for the Perry Barr to Scott Arms section is defined. The Sprint scheme is not dependent on a segregated cycle route being developed, although there would be benefits from delivering this at the same time.

## Walsall town centre - Darwall Street

The consultation proposed two options for a stop in Walsall town centre. Most respondents favoured the one suggested for Darwall Street.

**Update:** Darwall Street has been confirmed as our preferred location of a Sprint stop in Walsall town centre. We are in the process of undertaking a preliminary design for this proposal to share with Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, and will seek approval to develop it. The proposal will be confirmed in summer 2019.

## Aston Six Ways

The consultation proposed a stop at Six Ways Aston. Most respondents were not in favour.

**Update:** The final decision on Sprint's stopping pattern will be taken with the operator and Birmingham City Council in summer 2019. The detailed design for bus priority at Aston Six Ways will continue to be developed, as this will benefit existing bus services.

## Loading

There were some concerns regarding changes to loading arrangements and timings, particularly between Perry Barr and Scott Arms.

**Update:** We are reviewing loading arrangements for businesses and residents along the route, and will make alternative or off-peak provisions where possible. The decision on this is likely to be confirmed in spring 2019.

## Existing services

There were a number of comments regarding the impact of the proposals on the existing X51 and 51 bus services, with some enquiring as to why Sprint's proposed changes are needed.

**Update:** The A34 provides an important connection between Birmingham City Centre and Walsall, serving residents and businesses in Great Barr, Perry Barr, and Newtown that currently do not have access to reliable forms of public transport. In addition to this, existing bus services on the route, including the X51 and 51, suffer from journey time variability, while population growth in the region is expected to exacerbate the issue. Average journey times on the X51 currently vary by up to 20 minutes throughout the day, with the worst journey times sometimes being twice as long as that which is stated in the timetable.

Sprint aims to address this journey time variability while reducing the overall length of time it takes to travel between key areas. Connectivity will thereby be improved along this route, supporting the expected growth in Birmingham city centre and Perry Barr, while linking local people to new jobs, homes, facilities, and onward connections.

We will also work with existing bus operators to optimise the services that use the route.

## Existing service improvements

There were a number of comments requesting improvements to existing services and other locations.

**Update:** Sprint's proposed highway changes will improve the reliability and speed of other bus services that use the route, including those that serve Perry Beeches, Streetly, Kingstanding, Aldridge, and Pheasey. As stated above, we will work with existing bus operators to optimise the services that use the route, thereby realising maximum benefit from the investment.

## Commonwealth Games

There were a number of comments during the consultation which questioned the relationship between Sprint and the Commonwealth Games.

**Update:** The Sprint programme is not being delivered solely for the Commonwealth Games (CWG). It was in fact identified in West Midlands Combined Authority's (WMCA) strategic transport plan, Movement for Growth (2016), which in turn supports the Strategic Economic Plan for the region. The Sprint programme was also included in the Birmingham City Council's transport vision, Birmingham Connected (2014).

The A34 scheme, as a constituent part of the Sprint programme, is described in the HS2 Connectivity Package, approved by the WMCA Board in February 2017.

Following the region's successful bid for the Commonwealth Games, the A34 scheme was prioritised in December 2017 so that it is in place to meet increased transport requirements in the area.

## Perry Barr flyover

There have been a number of comments related to potential changes to the Perry Barr flyover.

**Update:** Any changes associated with the flyover in Perry Barr are part of the Birmingham City Council highway scheme and are not being delivered by TfWM. It is expected that bus priority will be included within Birmingham City Council's highway scheme.

# General Programme Themes

Some themes related to the wider Sprint programme but were not specific to any scheme; these are described below.

All Routes - Issues Identified in December report	What we committed to
1. Need for cycle lanes and other cycling infrastructure alongside Sprint schemes.	Including the integration of cycling infrastructure and facilities on all routes and along the corridors as part of the detailed design subject to business case appraisal, deliverability and necessary road safety audits.
2. Disruption to residents and businesses during the construction period.	Develop comprehensive construction management plans for each route with councils and construction companies, and develop travel alternatives to make sure people who use this route will still be able to travel during the construction.

## Update

1. Transport for West Midlands has ambitious plans to increase cycling and walking across the West Midlands, especially providing an integrated solution (the linking-up of multiple modes of transport) for all passengers. We have assessed each location on its individual merits to ensure other modes are considered and that future cycle routes are not ruled out. The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) is also seeking funding for future cycling enhancements, with both the A34 and A45 corridor having been identified as priority routes. Cycling provision will be improved on these routes when funding is available.
2. Disruption is a significant concern for those who live by, or regularly travel along, the proposed Sprint corridors. We are working with our Local Authority partners to understand and coordinate construction works planned over the coming years to ensure that we coordinate and keep disruption to a minimum. We will also be working with communities affected to highlight alternative travel options as a result of any disruption caused.

There were other key programme themes identified during the public consultation which we have used to inform progress. The other key programme themes include:

## Vehicles

The consultation gathered a variety of comments on the proposed Sprint vehicle. Many expressed approval for its new look and modern facilities, while others stated concerns about its impact

on other road users and the need for adequate seating.

**Update:** The single-deck 18-metre vehicle which Sprint proposes to use is the standard vehicle for this type of service. Like them, it will offer:

- A spacious and up-to-date passenger environment, attracting more people to use public transport
- Multi-door boarding, which will reduce stop times and make for quicker and more predictable journeys
- Increased capacity, which will exceed that of premium double-decker buses, while allowing for better on-board mobility due to the absence of stairs
- Better accessibility for all users compared to double-decker buses.

The vehicles will also be climate-controlled and will offer free Wi-Fi, next stop announcements, and information about ongoing travel; all of which will provide a high quality passenger experience that makes public transport a compelling alternative to the private car.

There are various enhancements that can be explored as part of vehicle specification, all of which TfWM will consider closely prior to procurement. We will also continue to monitor other UK bus rapid transit systems, such as Glider in Belfast, particularly in relation to safety, pollution and performance



## Emissions

The vehicle specified in the Sprint proposal will have a better than Euro VI engine as a minimum standard. Consultation feedback, however, showed enthusiasm for zero-emission vehicles.

**Update:** We will be evaluating zero-emission vehicles (in accordance with delivery timescales) against other types of propulsion system, as part of the vehicle procurement process. We will keep partners and stakeholders updated as this progresses.

## Stopping locations

The consultation saw several questions about the stops served by Sprint, with some requests for additional stops and some requests for fewer.

**Update:** The stopping pattern will be reviewed with prospective operators and local authorities to ensure appropriate coverage of the corridors. The final decision on stopping locations will be agreed in summer 2019.

## Shelters

There were some comments related to the shelter design.

**Update:** We are planning to install a prototype shelter in spring 2019 to assess its suitability and robustness. We will be engaging with representative groups to ensure it is appropriate for all users.

## Ticketing and method of payment

There were several questions related to the price of tickets and payment methods.

**Update:** We are working with prospective operators to review the fare payment and revenue protection strategy. Concessionary pass holders will be able to use their pass on Sprint. It is anticipated that nBus card holders will be able to also.

## Funding and costs

A common question arising from the consultation related to how the schemes are being funded and how much they will cost.

**Update:** As described above, there is a significant need to invest in transport infrastructure in our region. A Sprint scheme can be provided for less than 25% of the capital cost of Metro and, using existing highway powers, can be delivered in less time.

The schemes are predominantly funded through the HS2 Connectivity Package which is ring-fenced for transport projects as part of the investment portfolio for the West Midlands. The funding is allocated to enhance connectivity for the region and also to maximise the benefits of HS2 in the future.

## Congestion

Some participants of the consultation raised concerns that newly-installed bus lanes will be detrimental to other road users.

**Update:** A commitment to bus priority is required for Sprint to achieve its primary aim of increased journey reliability. In some cases, re-allocation of road space has been considered so that Sprint and other bus services can avoid long delays as a result of congestion, with minimum impact to local residents. At the same time, it is intended that Sprint will increase the amount of capacity on the road network, which, in turn, may help to relieve pressure at major pinch points.

## Tree loss

Some participants raised concerns that loss of trees will have a negative impact on local residents.

**Update:** The importance of green space is recognised by WMCA as a promoter of good physical and mental health, which is why Environmental Impact Assessments will be carried out for every Sprint scheme to ensure appropriate mitigation. The local highway authority tree replacement policy will also be applied to Sprint schemes.

# What is Sprint?

**Sprint is a bus rapid transit (BRT) service that delivers predictable journey times and high frequency, dependable timetables.**

Bus rapid transit is used as part of integrated transport systems across the world.

BRT is used across the world as part of an integrated transport system and the standard vehicle for this type of service is an articulated bus.

BRT replicates the spacious feel and speed of tram, whilst maintaining the flexibility, lower cost and simplicity of a bus system.

BRT offers a similar journey experience to a light rail or tram system and uses low floor, multi door vehicles. Serving fewer stops and with passengers using off-board ticketing or contactless payment, this reduces the dwell times at stops and helps reduce minimise the delays often experienced with regular bus services.

BRT runs on existing roads enhanced by a range of measures to ensure journey time reliability and an enhanced customer experience including high priority lanes, signal controlled priority at traffic lights and new improved shelters.

Sprint will have on board Wi-Fi, next stop announcements and CCTV security all part of ensuring a safe and enjoyable experience to encourage more people to switch from using their car.

## Why does the West Midlands need Sprint?

Our region is growing. By 2035, the population of the West Midlands is set to increase by up to 444,000 (100 people every day) and we expect 215,000 new homes to be built across the region by 2030. In the same period, we anticipate that business investment will generate an additional 50,000 jobs, while the introduction of HS2 will open our connections to a wider area.

We also want growth to be inclusive and sustainable so that everyone can benefit from the opportunities it will bring. Investment in our passenger transport network will help provide the capacity and quality of service we need, while helping to keep our region moving.

**Did you know, based on current travel habits, expected growth could add 1.2 million trips to our network each weekday, increasing car kilometres by 34% across the region?**

# Ongoing Engagement

Working in partnership with the local authorities, TfWM brought Sprint's schemes to the preliminary design stage, at which we released the preferred options for public review and comment.

The public consultation was our first opportunity to engage widely on the initial proposals. Where there were concerns, we have been engaging with resident groups, businesses, schools and communities, to fully understand the issues, and to ensure we can minimise any impact.

We understand that there may still be some concerns regarding the proposals, however, and therefore intend to engage in a meaningful way that will allow us to support in these instances.

We will continue to work with all stakeholders, while using the feedback from our consultation to inform the next stages of Sprint, throughout which there will be rigorous assurance reviews. Ultimately, decisions to proceed are made by the local highway authorities and the WMCA Board, including the leaders of the seven Local Authorities and the Mayor of the West Midlands.

## Staying in Touch

We will continue to update our website ([www.tfwm.org.uk /sprint](http://www.tfwm.org.uk/sprint)) with Frequently Asked Questions, future engagement activities and the latest information.

We will also be issuing quarterly Sprint newsletters, which will be made available to all our stakeholders and the general public. Sign up through our website by entering your email address in the 'Stay up to date' box.

Alternatively, get in touch using the contact details below.

Phone:

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16 Summer Lane, Birmingham, B19 3SD**

You can request hard copies of any of our three Sprint Update Reports (A34, A45 or SBL) by using the contact details shown.

If you've received this report, you will have either expressed an interest in being kept up-to-date on Sprint, or we will have identified you as benefiting from it. If you no longer wish to receive Sprint-related correspondence such as this, or would like to request the reports from our other two Sprint schemes, please get in touch.



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and more prosperous West Midlands.

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