

9 Summary

Conclusions

- 9.1 'Tackling Congestion, Delivering Growth' sets out the findings of the Studies which provide detailed evidence of the nature and scale of congestion in the West Midlands, both now and in the future. There have been two previous reports:
- 9.2 'Choices and Challenges for the Future' which provided an initial analysis of congestion and options to tackle it including road pricing and;
- 9.3 'Towards an Integrated Transport Strategy' when identified the transport investments required and broad priorities in terms of the West Midlands growth and regeneration aspirations.
- 9.4 The Draft Regional Economic Strategy and the Regional Spatial Strategy focus on the framework for regional competitiveness, sustainable development and recognise the key role for transport. From 2001 to 2021 there are projected increase of 20% in employment and a 5% increase in population.
- 9.5 Whilst congestion is set to grow and journey times to increase, the pattern is not uniform across the region, with levels of congestion and travel patterns varying across the conurbation. The Black Country, Birmingham/Solihull and Coventry all have different geography and traffic patterns and growth opportunities.
- 9.6 The report is clear that significant investment in public transport is required to provide additional capacity and better connectivity across the Metropolitan Area and wider region, as well as to encourage people to change travel behaviour. There is broad consensus on this amongst business, other stakeholders, and the general public, and of the need to put these improvements in place before any road pricing scheme is implemented.
- 9.7 The answer to the question of whether to take forward a road pricing scheme as part of an integrated transport strategy for the West Midlands is complex and multifaceted. The region's growth ambitions demand a transport strategy which will guarantee the future prosperity and competitiveness of the West Midlands through improved connectivity. However any package needs to work for the entire region. A number of alternative road pricing options were considered across the West Midlands addressing peak period journeys following the debate on 'Choices and Challenges for the Future'. In the absence of the technology to enable charging by distance, time and place of travel the Study concludes that road pricing is not suitable at this point in time for the Black Country, given the nature of traffic in that area. Modelling work also showed that road pricing is not suitable for Coventry, Solihull or Wolverhampton at this time.

- 9.8 The road pricing scheme modelled for the radial routes into Birmingham and key motorway junctions was designed to tackle the worst areas of traffic congestion. The model showed that this option would raise revenues of £190m gross (i.e. before taking into running costs) per annum and together with an assumed £1.3m of TIF grant from Government, would support £2.7bn of transport improvements. That includes all the Integrated Transport Strategy Priority 1 schemes and £700m worth of Priority 2 schemes. The model also showed significant reductions in traffic volumes on the charged motorway network.
- 9.9 This option shows some benefits. In particular, it could help hold journey times at their current levels and provide better access to jobs in the future, but crucially, the evidence of the report suggests that there would be no competitive advantage to Birmingham arising from the scheme, and that the business benefits are marginal (only just exceeding costs). The study also concludes that inward investment in Birmingham is growing and congestion is not so serious as to be a constraint to that growth. In short Birmingham has not yet reached a “Tipping Point”
- 9.10 In addition, the modelled scheme offers very little benefit for the rest of the Metropolitan Area and the wider region in terms of tackling congestion. For most urban conurbations there would be at best a marginal improvement in congestion, while in the cases of Dudley and Solihull congestion would actually get worse with the modelled scheme.
- 9.11 Surveys of consumers and business in the West Midlands were undertaken to assess the impact of road pricing. With the modelling showing no reductions from current congestion levels consumers cannot easily recognise the decongestion benefits and potential time savings but they do recognise the costs of £5 per day. Importantly, business and the public remain to be convinced about the merits of local road pricing in the absence of a national scheme.
- 9.12 In the light of this evidence, road pricing is not considered the right solution for the West Midlands at this point in time. However the Study does show that a technical case in the future might be feasible, Finally, reference to the key conditions for a TIF bid set by West Midlands Leaders at the outset of this work show that these would not all be met and that in some parts of the region competitiveness might be damaged.

The Way Forward

- 9.13 The report and study findings do however point to a way forward which will support the Region’s growth, housing and regeneration agenda over the next decade. It is accepted that, unconstrained, congestion will grow and action is needed.
- 9.14 There are three important issues highlighted by the Study which will form the three point plan to discuss with government

- The need to encourage changes in travel behaviour
- The need to manage traffic congestion more effectively
- The need to deliver transport investment in the region

Changing Travel Behaviour

- 9.15 The Study shows that a programme of ‘Smarter Choices’ (or lifestyle choice measures) with workplace travel and school travel plans at their heart can deliver significant mode shift from private car. Travel Plans work by communicating and raising the awareness of the alternative travel options available. For public transport options this could include discount public transport tickets. For walking and cycling this will include working with health authorities to demonstrate the health benefits. Other important elements are home working, tele-working and focussed marketing and publicity.
- 9.16 Lifestyle choice measures are relatively new to the United Kingdom, but the evidence base of their success has been growing in recent years. Evidence supports that Lifestyle Choices can deliver the following important impacts:
- Transfer of travel mode from car to public transport, walking, cycling and car sharing;
 - Plays a role in addressing the ‘School Run’
 - Reduction in the overall number of car trips; and
 - Change in the timing of travel, in particular a reduction in car travel during periods of peak traffic volumes.
- 9.17 It is recognised that in addition to these direct ‘congestion busting’ impacts, lifestyle choice measures can also deliver wider environmental, economic and societal benefits.

Effective Congestion Management

- 9.18 The West Midlands authorities have plans in place to meet stretching Local Transport Plan congestion targets through the Congestion Delivery Plan. Existing major scheme initiatives include the Red Routes programme and developing a West Midlands wide Urban Traffic Control System. Traffic Managers are now deployed in all authorities to improve day to day management of traffic movement through traffic signals and other traffic management measures, including improving information and management of road works. In addition West Midlands authorities are progressively deploying traffic wardens to manage on street parking. A current joint initiative with business involves developing a ‘Quick Wins’ programme to identify traffic bottlenecks and implement early mitigation. On the West Midlands motorways the Highways Agency has successfully piloted Active Traffic Management on the M42 and there are proposals to extend this progressively around the whole motorway box. All these initiatives are being reviewed to provide an integrated programme on interventions to tackle congestion.

Delivering the Integrated Transport Strategy

- 9.19 'Towards an Integrated Transport Strategy' was published in July 2007 setting out the step change in transport investment required for the West Midlands to realise its full potential growth and regeneration. This was taken forward through the "Regional Transport Challenge" report in December 2007 which identified 9 strategic transport priorities for the whole region and supported by local authorities, the transport industry, business, and environmental groups. The economic benefits of these schemes are currently being quantified and a phased implementation programme is being developed.
- 9.20 It is recognised that the full level of investment needed to deliver these priorities will not all be provided by Central Government and there will need to be a mix of private and public sources of funding. These include private finance initiative (PFI), planning gain, developer funding through Section 106 and Section 278 contributions, and more recent government proposals such as the supplementary business rate (SBR).
- 9.21 The West Midlands authorities wish to work with Government and regional stakeholders to explore the potential of alternative sources of funding as well as reviewing Regional Funding Allocations to more effectively tackle