

WMRE Business Plan 2026/27



West
Midlands
Rail Executive

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Foreword from Chair of WMRE, Richard Parker

As Chair of the West Midlands Rail Executive Board, I know that all our local authority members, both within the West Midlands Combined Authority and across the wider West Midlands region, share a belief in the power of rail to transform lives.

Above all, from West Northamptonshire to the Welsh borders, we share a belief in the opportunity that good rail connectivity can provide for our communities and businesses.

Across the region, WMRE member authorities have a strong track is improving access to opportunity through local rail investment, whether that be championing the electrification of the Chase line in Staffordshire, major station enhancements such as at University or delivery of new stations such as Kenilworth, Coventry Arena and Worcestershire Parkway.

This year in the WMCA area we have seen the unprecedented opening of five new stations in communities that have been cut off from the rail network for generations.

These stations at Moseley, Kings Heath and Pineapple Road on the Camp Hill line, and at Willenhall and Darlaston in the Black Country, have allowed the return of train services to these areas for the first time in over sixty, or in the case of Camp Hill, eighty years.

This opens the door to opportunity in its purest form, especially for those who have never had it before. When a community receives its first station in more than half a century, life changes.

People can move more easily, spend more freely, and access more choices of education, training and employment than ever before, and improved connectivity for our businesses is a gateway to economic renewal.

In 2026 we also celebrate 10 years of the West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE) and a decade of devolved influence over our regional rail network which has delivered:

Capacity for growth provided by new, electric trains now in service on routes including:

- Cross-City line from Lichfield to Bromsgrove and Redditch
- Birmingham International / Birmingham – Walsall – Cannock – Rugeley
- Birmingham – Sandwell & Dudley – Wolverhampton
- Crewe – Stafford – Lichfield – Tamworth – Nuneaton – Rugby - London

and by modern, lower-emission diesel trains between:

- Hereford – Malvern – Worcester – Birmingham
- Shrewsbury – Telford – Wolverhampton - Birmingham
- more frequent services between Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Telford and Shrewsbury
- the new cross-Warwickshire “Elephant and Bear” service between Leamington Spa, Kenilworth, Coventry and Nuneaton

When difficult choices have had to be made to reflect changing travel patterns following the COVID pandemic, the West Midlands Rail Executive has worked closely in partnership with the Department for Transport and train operators to protect the interests of our local communities and businesses and still deliver tangible improvements to passengers in the face of wider rail industry budgetary pressures, including:

- more regular service patterns on Snow Hill line routes between Worcestershire, the Black Country, Birmingham, Solihull and Warwickshire
- improved local service patterns at stations such as Canley and Berkswell, alongside improvements to Avanti services to deliver the faster ever, regular service between the West Midlands and London

These benefits have only been possible because WMRE’s Collaboration Agreement with the Secretary of State for Transport has given us the ability to influence key decisions from “inside-the-tent” rather than as a mere stakeholder.

I am therefore delighted that with our regional train services having now returned to public ownership for the first time in nearly thirty years, we have now signed a new Collaboration Agreement with the Secretary of State for Transport – an agreement which guarantees WMRE oversight of our West Midlands Railway services until their formal transfer to the future Great British Railways organisation

Through the West Midlands Rail Executive, we have spent the last decade building strong local accountability over our rail network. We have proven that decisions made close to communities lead to better results for those communities.

As the national system transitions towards Great British Railways, we need to ensure that our region continues to shape the services our passengers rely on.

Public ownership must not mean central control. It must mean shared responsibility, regional leadership and a continued commitment to opportunity for everyone.

As we continue to press ahead on key rail investment schemes such as Midlands Rail Hub, for which key development funding was secured from government last year, we now need a partnership with Great British Railways that gives regions like ours the ability to co design services, deliver simpler and fairer ticketing, and ensure that rail works alongside bus and tram rather than in competition with them.

We also need partners such as Network Rail to maintain urgency on key short term priorities like the proposed direct service between Birmingham, the Black Country, Staffordshire and Manchester Airport, which would bring new opportunities to the communities and businesses along its route, as well as on more local requirements such as for connectivity between Walsall and Wolverhampton.

The opportunity afforded by our regional rail network does not happen by accident. It only thrives when rail transport is affordable, reliable and accessible and closely aligned with our wider regional objectives for training, job creation, housing provision and economic renewal.

As we return to a fully public sector railway, we need to create national rail system that values the regional leadership and local accountability required to ensure that the West Midlands should be a place where anyone, from any background, can succeed.

Richard Parker
Mayor of the West Midlands and Chair of WMRE





2. Introduction

Our achievements

It is not hyperbolic to state that 2025/26 was one of the most significant years in the recent history of the railway. In the same year that the industry looked back and celebrated the 200th anniversary of the world's first passenger railway, the legislation that “will fundamentally alter the rail landscape in Great Britain”¹ was placed before Parliament.

The Railways Bill will enable the creation of Great British Railways (GBR), a new publicly owned body which will be the directing mind taking responsibility for the railway infrastructure (e.g. tracks, bridges, tunnels and stations) and most passenger train services. In this way, the Bill aims to bring “track and train” together for the first time since the 1990s.

To enable this objective, the government is transferring control of train companies its own holding company, the Department for Transport Operator (DfTO). In February 2026 West Midlands Railway and London Northwestern Railway made the switch to DfTO, ending nine years of operation by West Midlands Trains. But it has not curtailed WMRE's involvement in rail service specification, planning, and oversight. WMRE and DfT have agreed a new Collaboration Agreement. This will last until the region enters the formal Partnership Agreement with GBR promised under the new legislation. Together, the Collaboration Agreement and Partnership Agreement will provide the region with the control needed to ensure that our local railways meet the needs of the communities that they serve, and drive forward economic growth across our region as part of the wider integrated transport network.

This section provides a selection of highlights from across the Business in 2025/26, grouped by the three themes that WMRE has framed its work around:-

- Leading Today's Railway
- Planning Tomorrow's Railway
- Building Tomorrow's Railway

¹ Railways Bill Explanatory Notes, p.2

Leading Today's Railway

New Depot Facilities

In October, West Midlands Railway (WMR) completed the upgrade of its train maintenance depot at Tyseley in south Birmingham. Being the base for WMR's diesel fleet means customers from across the region rely on Tyseley to connect them to friends, family, jobs and leisure. Therefore, the £70m improvements will mean fewer cancellations and delays due to train faults. The works were funded by Angel Trains and the Department for Transport. Building work was carried out by Spencer Rail Engineering, part of Spencer Group. The commitment to develop the depot was secured back in 2017 as a result of WMRE's involvement in the specification and procurement of the West Midlands rail franchise.

Better Services for West Midlanders

WMRE has acted as the champion of the customer, both working with the rail industry to come up with better ways to meet their needs, and holding the industry to account when it has fallen short of what they should expect. In spring 2025 customers on the Snow Hill Line started to experience overcrowding as a result of a shortage of carriages. The cause was the performance of WMR's supply chain. WMRE and DfT challenged the industry to improve, leading to the implementation of an action plan. The supply challenges improved over the course of the year, leading to more comfortable journeys for people in Worcestershire, Dudley, Sandwell, Birmingham, and Warwickshire.

Improved Information for Customers

WMRE has worked with WMR to install extra Digital Customer Information Screens (DCIS) across the network. WMRE identified three stations where customers did not have access to a screen on every platform. By adding these extra locations on to WMR's existing DCIS programme, WMRE was able to find an affordable and timely way to deliver these customer improvements.

Grand Railway Collaboration

Throughout 2025/26 WMRE actively supported the GRC – the virtual, vertically integrated body designed to take collegiate responsibility for the delivery of the rail network to customers. This included the continuation of the highly successful joint revenue protection exercises, whereby colleagues from across the different train companies combine resources to maximise their effectiveness. This year they were joined by colleagues from National Express Bus, in the first multi-modal revenue protection exercises in the region.

Railway 200 and Jewellery Line 30th Anniversary

WMRE partnered with industry colleagues to deliver the Railway 200 celebrations in the West Midlands. The event began with a visit by the Inspiration Train to Kidderminster's Severn Valley Railway, with the moving museum making a further stop at Birmingham Moor Street. WMRE staff volunteered on the train at both locations, hosting school visits and helping to inspire young people to travel by train. WMRE and Transport for West Midlands also marked the 30th anniversary of the opening of the Jewellery Line, with community focused events at The Hawthorns and in the Jewellery Quarter.

Planning Tomorrow's Railway

Great British Railway Partnership

During 2025 the Great British Railways Transition team (GBRTT) was wound up and replaced by Shadow Great British Railways (SGBR), chaired by former WMCA Chief Executive Laura Shoaf. Happily, this change did not diminish the Government's commitment to future partnerships, with WMRE switching its discussions about the creation of a more locally accountable railway to the new SGBR team.

Railways Bill

Partnerships, and devolution more generally, were featured in the Railways Bill. The Bill provides a statutory framework for devolving power and responsibility to local authorities. Backed up by the emerging 'right to request' process in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, local authorities will be able to take greater control of local rail services and infrastructure. WMRE has been active in trying to shape the Bill to help the government strengthen the broader narrative that GBR will work in close partnership with strategic authorities.

Aldridge station

Good progress has been made on the development work for Aldridge station, with two of the three phases of the Outline Business Case now completed. The final phase, which involves intrusive surveys, land assembly, and the production of the final OBC itself, will occur in 2026/27. This work will ensure that the project is 'shovel ready' for when funding for delivery becomes available.

Dudley Port

In 2025 the Business Justification Case was submitted into the WMCA Single Assurance Framework. Once approved, this will enable money to be drawn-down and delivery of the first phase of the project can get underway. This will include essential interventions required as a result of the construction of the adjacent Metro stop.

Witton and Aston

WMRE is continuing to work with West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), Aston Villa Football Club, Birmingham City Council, Network Rail and West Midlands Railway on plans to improve the passenger experience at Witton and Aston stations. In 2025/26 important progress was made, with the project identified as a priority in the WMCA's Rosewell Review, which will mean that it has an excellent chance of securing funding from the Transport for City Regions fund. All partners are targeting delivering interventions by the 2028 UEFA European Football Championships.

Midlands Rail Hub (MRH)

A major milestone was met in late 2025, when the Midlands Rail Hub Alliance was announced. Formed of VolkerRail, Laing O'Rourke, AtkinsRéalis and Siemens Mobility, the Alliance will work with the sponsoring partner team of Department for Transport, Network Rail, WMRE to design and develop the core elements of the project including both Bordesley Chords, support production of the Full Business Case and Transport and Works Act Order, and support the

construction phase. Alongside this, work is also being prioritised to progress the reopening platform 4 at Snow Hill station - allowing extra services between Colmore business district and London - and re-develop Kings Norton station to support restoration of 6 Cross City trains per hour. To enable the chords to be built, Bordesley station will need to close. The formal consultation on the closure of Bordesley Station commenced in February 2026 and will run until May 2026 with an anticipated closure date, if approved by the Secretary of State, of no earlier than 4 June 2029.

Pay-As-You-Go on Rail (PAYG)

A great deal of work has taken place on the PAYG scheme. This is a complex programme of activities being delivered by multiple rail industry organisations. After a detailed review it is currently anticipated that the passenger introduction will be Spring 2027, covering all stations in the TfWM area. To make this work effectively for customers, a new fares structure is being developed. WMRE is working hard to make sure that this simplifies things for customers.



Building Tomorrow's Railway

Darlaston, Willenhall and Camp Hill Line New Stations

On 19 March 2026 the new stations at Willenhall and Darlaston opened their doors to customers, connecting these communities to the rail network for the first time since 1965. These stations will offer quicker, greener, and more reliable links to the wider region, helping to reduce congestion and creating new opportunities for work, education, and leisure across Walsall. This is a major milestone for our communities and a real boost for the borough's future.

On 07 April 2026 the brand-new stations of Moseley Village, Kings Heath, and Pineapple Road opened – giving locals easy access to rail services for the first time since the Second World War.

All five stations are part of the West Midlands Rail Programme. This major construction project has seen all five stations built to modern standards with sheltered platforms, accessible lifts, ticket machines, and secure cycle racks. Darlaston Station also includes a car park with 300-spaces for park and ride commuters, while Willenhall includes an additional 33 parking spaces.



Our mission

West Midlands Rail Executive is a Movement for Change, driving a Revolution in Rail services for West Midlanders

West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE) is a not-for-profit company which is fully owned by the regions’ local authorities and chaired by the Mayor of the West Midlands. Together, they provide local democratic accountability for decision-making on the development, specification and delivery of our rail network across the economic geography of the wider West Midlands region.

WMRE’s overarching strategic aim is:

to maximise the potential benefits of the West Midlands rail network for local passengers, stakeholders and businesses in a way that supports the region’s social, economic, environmental and connectivity objectives.

To deliver this WMRE’s focus is on 3 Key Areas of responsibility

- Leading Today’s Railway
- Planning Tomorrow’s Railway
- Building Tomorrow’s Railway

Our regional train services support our regional economy and provide convenient access to employment, education, healthcare, retail outlets, leisure facilities and numerous other services for hundreds of thousands of West Midlanders every day. They also provide commuters and leisure travellers with a sustainable alternative to the private car and reduce the region’s transport carbon-footprint.

The creation of the WMRE has enabled local authorities from across the wider West Midlands region to have a significant influence on the specification and delivery of these local rail services.

3. Who we are

Board and organisational structure

Board of Directors

West Midlands Rail Executive (legally established as West Midlands Rail Ltd) is governed by a Board of Directors who provide policy guidance and local democratic oversight of the workstreams set out in this business plan.

A senior elected representative from each of West Midlands Shire and Unitary authorities is a voting member of the Board of Directors. For Metropolitan Districts, the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) is represented on the WMRE Board by an elected representative from each of its constituent authorities, each of whom has full voting rights.

Stoke-on-Trent and Cheshire East are non-voting affiliate members of WMRE in recognition of the fact that West Midlands Railway specified services extend into these local authority areas.

The Board meets at least quarterly and is supported by a Board Leadership Group and an Officers Group.

Our partner authorities

West Midlands Combined Authority Constituent Authorities	Shire and Unitary Authorities
Birmingham City Council	Herefordshire Council
Coventry City Council	Shropshire Council
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council	Staffordshire County Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council	Telford & Wrekin Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	Warwickshire County Council
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council	West Northamptonshire Council
City of Wolverhampton Council	Worcestershire County Council
	Cheshire East Council (Affiliate)
	Stoke-on-Trent City Council (Affiliate)

Officers Group

Supporting the WMRE Board and providing tactical direction to WMRE is the Officers Group, which meets every 4 weeks and has representation from each partner authority.

Chair

The Chair of WMRE is the incumbent Mayor of the West Midlands. Richard Parker was elected through the Mayoral Election in May 2024 and is therefore the current Chair of WMRE.

Board Leadership Group

The Chair is supported in their role by a Board Leadership Group taken from WMRE Board members, who assume specific areas of accountability.

WMRE and Transport for West Midlands

Transport within the West Midlands Combined Authority area is the overall responsibility of Transport for the West Midlands (TfWM). Within this area, WMRE is integrated with TfWM to provide specialist rail functions and to provide the link between TfWM and the rail industry.

The WMRE team

The WMRE Team is led by Mal Drury-Rose, who has the dual title of Executive Director WMRE, and Director of Rail TfWM.



4. Our Work in 2026/27

Our main priorities for the coming year will reflect our desire to:

- Lead Today's Railway
- Plan Tomorrow's Railway; and
- Build Tomorrow's Railway

To effectively **Lead Today's Railway**, we will with DfT **jointly manage the West Midlands Services Agreement (SA)**, using our formal devolved powers to help our local publicly owned operator with their plans to make services better – and holding them to account when things go wrong.

Through our participation in **West Midlands Railway's annual delivery plan development process**, we will ensure that the current and future needs of the region are at the centre of decision making.

We will continue to explore our **partnership with the future Great British Railways (GBR)** organisation, which will supersede our existing devolved arrangements once GBR is legally established through the Railways Bill.

In partnership with the Urban Transport Group, we will work to improve the Bill, identifying areas of drafting that could be amended to **strengthen the broader narrative that GBR will work in close partnership with strategic authorities and their nominated bodies.**

The Bill is the most significant piece of railway legislation for a generation, and will touch every aspect of the industry. We will strengthen our capability by **creating a procurement framework for rail reform** to enable us to easily access the specialist support we need in a timely fashion, whilst offering value for money.

We will also **examine options for future rail industry operating and financial models**, identifying where WMRE would sit in each scenario to maximise local accountability.

GBR will integrate track and train for the first time in 30 years. We will go one better by **integrating track and train with local government through our ambitious new governance arrangements** for the industry.

Budget and funding

The 2026/27 WMRE budget is funded by a £500K annual DfT grant, with the remainder to be provided locally. The Collaboration Agreement between DfT and WMRE specifies that a minimum of £140K is provided by WMRE Partner Authorities each year.

The 2026/27 budget outlined assumes expenditure above this aggregate value, with the WMRE Partner Authority contributions proposed to be at the same levels as 2025/26 where this equates to:

- A West Midlands Districts contribution of £40.6K which is funded by TfWM Transport Levy; and
- A Shire/Unitary contribution of £99.4K which equates to £14,200 per each Shire/Unitary WMRE Partner Authority.

This will improve the outcomes delivered by the industry to region by aligning incentives and focusing objectives on how the railway can help connect people to each other, businesses to markets, and job seekers to opportunities.

As part of this new governance, we will evolve the innovative and successful West Midlands Grand Railway Collaboration, breathing new life into it and empowering it to **identify ways to improve industry integration in advance of future legislation**. We will ensure that the needs of local people and their elected representatives are front and centre of the industry's integration plans, by seconding a colleague of the team into the Network Rail team tasked with bringing together track and train in the West Midlands.

One early opportunity is the Invictus Games, which will be hosted in Birmingham in July 2027. In partnership with Transport for West Midlands, we will coordinate rail's response to the transport needs of the Games, implementing the best practice and lessons learned from the 2022 Commonwealth Games. This will include **digital wayfinding** for the railway stations that will serve the Games, and completing our collaboration with West Midlands Railway to **install Digital Customer Information Screens** at



the small number of stations where there are gaps in provision.

We usually find out what our customers want by asking them through surveys. However, these are often based on small sample sizes and are not representative. We will address this and improve our understanding of customers' priorities by **increasing the sample size of the new Rail Customer Experience Survey**.

We will also partner with West Midlands Railway to **upgrade on-board passenger counting technology** to ensure that we have an accurate understanding of how many people are using services and when.

Creating new journey opportunities is another common request from customers and communities. In 2026 we will partner with the Severn Valley Railway to **trial a regular commuter service between Bewdley and Kidderminster**, connecting into West Midlands Railway services to Birmingham and Worcester.

Kidderminster is home to one of the region's thriving station adoption groups. We will continue to **fund our local Community Rail Partnerships**, and create a provision to enable us to support community rail activity across the region.

Subject to the success of a free trial, we will invest in software to **improve our train planning capabilities**, for both our strategic plans and to scrutinise the benefits of others.

Future rail reform provides opportunities for local input into a national long-term strategy for rail, and the prospect of promoting enhancements to the network. This will enable us to build on our existing role as the **Planners of Tomorrow's Railway**.

In 2026/27 we will **simplify and standardise rail fares across the West Midlands**.

This is a critical component of the wider **best-value, multi-modal, capped fares proposition** that has been developed in partnership with TfWM and the rail industry. We will continue to make the case that a better fares package for customers can be achieved by **abolishing evening peak restrictions** that only apply to Birmingham stations.

We will continue to **undertake studies into concepts and proposals for new stations, services and wider network improvements**, identifying the case for developing schemes further and securing future resources that can move proposals forward into further development or delivery.

These will include the potential further new stations including **Coventry East, Castle Bromwich, and Tettenhall, future options for the Stourbridge Town to Junction corridor**, and how best to serve the Potteries communities of **Wedgwood, Barlaston and Trentham**.

We will **support our partner authorities with their own ambitious development agendas**, such as improving connectivity between Coventry and Leicester, and developing the case for Shrewsbury Parkway.



We will continue our work to **identify solutions for the few remaining non-accessible stations** in the region. These include Adderley Park, which will be the closest station to Sports Quarter development, including the new home of Birmingham City Football Club. We will work with colleagues in Transport for West Midlands to **develop plans for how best to serve the Sports Quarter by rail**.

These studies will be consistent with the priorities identified in our 30 year **West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy, which will be updated** to take into account the previous government's decisions on HS2 Phase 2. We will continue to engage in discussions regarding any deliverable alternative proposals for improved long-distance links between the West Midlands, the North West, and Yorkshire.

Some of these proposals are being developed by Midlands Connect. Their funding has been reduced in 2026/27 ahead of the abolition of all sub-national transport bodies. We will hold a **provision to enable us to top up funding of any Midlands Connect work that is meaningful to WMRE and its members** that Midlands Connect would otherwise be unable to afford.



We will continue our **joint client sponsor role in the Midlands Rail Hub**, the transformational project confirmed at the latest Spending Review that will provide much needed additional capacity in central Birmingham and facilitate new journey opportunities across the region.

Midlands Rail Hub will provide new journey opportunities on the CrossCity Line, including the restoration of the pre-pandemic six trains an hour frequency. The trains for these services already exist, but West Midlands Railways have a shortage of places to store and maintain them. Therefore, WMRE will **work with Network Rail and West Midlands Railway on a depot and stabling strategy**.

Equally transformational will be the **improvements that we are sponsoring at Witton and Aston stations** as part of our commitment to **Building Tomorrow's Railway**. These stations serve Villa Park, which will be a host venue for the 2028 UEFA European Football Championships, as well as a growing leisure destination in its own right. The improvements will enhance the match and event day experience, as well

as contributing to the wider regeneration of this part of the region.

Another station with a growing role is Dudley Port. It will become the only interchange with rail on the new Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Line. However, it offers a poor customer experience and is the busiest non-accessible station in the region. We are **leading a three phased project to improve Dudley Port station**, with the goal being the redevelopment of the site to create a modern, accessible, fully integrated facility.

We will **complete the Outline Business Case for a new station at Aldridge**, so that we have a shovel ready scheme for when funding for delivery can be secured.

Finally, the achievement of these priorities for the business and the region depends on the people delivering them. We will **invest in our workforce**, providing them with an environment that enables them to maximise their potential and thrive. We will **promote our standing within the rail industry**, and grow our reputation for thought leadership and collaboration.



