

Midland Metro

4.4 Regional Planning Policy

4.4.1 Introduction

Regional planning policy provides the strategic context within which development plan policy is drafted and implemented.

Current regional planning guidance is contained in Draft Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands (RPG 11, November 2001) and in the current RPG 11 (April 1998). A Public Examination on the draft was held in June 2002 and a Panel Report was submitted to the Secretary of State in October 2002.

4.4.2 Draft Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands, November 2001

Draft Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands (RPG 11, November 2001) sets out a regional vision and guiding principles for the Region, which are to be achieved by satisfying the objectives of the Spatial Strategy described in the RPG. The RPG is particularly concerned with:

- promoting economic growth;
- maximising economic potential within the Regional Sustainable Development Framework;
- encouraging the use of energy efficient modes of transport; and
- maintaining and improving those inter and intra-regional communications.

By developing this longer term spatial policy perspective, Draft RPG 11 aims to complement and give further direction to a number of other strategies, including the West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy, the Regional Cultural Strategy and the Regional Sustainable Development Framework.

Discussing guiding principles, Draft RPG 11 seeks to develop the transport systems to ensure that the Region's economic and social potential can be realised (para 2.14).

The Spatial Strategy contains ten objectives. Objective One aims to *"make the Major Urban Areas increasingly attractive places where more people will choose to live, work and invest"*. Under this objective, Policy SS1 seeks to develop sustainable communities through the creation of, amongst other things, *"modern urban transport networks, with an emphasis on public transport provision"*.

Objective Four of the Spatial Strategy is *"to improve significantly the Region's transport systems to a quality comparable to that of competitor regions"*. The Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Extension scheme is set to make a significant contribution to this objective.

Policy SS4 under this objective seeks to, amongst other things, *"improve significantly accessibility and mobility within the Major Urban Areas, including the development of high quality public transport so that they can accommodate greater levels of development, retain population and attract new jobs"*. The development of high quality public transport in these areas is thus vital to accommodate greater levels of development, retain population and attract new jobs.

The guidance also contains a number of policies on environmental protection and stresses the need to maintain and enhance the environment in order to achieve the aims of the Spatial Strategy, which also forms part of the draft RPG 11. Policy QE2 states that Development Plans and other strategies should, amongst other things, *"aim to provide measures which reduce the impact of the environmental problems associated with transport growth and bring forward environmental improvements particularly along major transport routes"*.

Draft RPG 11 incorporates a Regional Transport Strategy (RTS). The aim of the RTS is to *"create a region with an efficient network of integrated transport facilities and services which fully supports the RPG spatial Strategy, reduces the impact of transport on the environment and meets the needs of both individuals and the business community in the most sustainable way"* (para 9.15).

The overall Transport and Mobility Vision is of a region with *"an efficient network of integrated transport facilities and services, which meet the needs of both individuals and the business community in the most sustainable way"* (para 2.6). The transport system should also incorporate a fully integrated quality public transport network. The Regional Vision sub category for Transport and Mobility reflects this aim and will be achieved by, amongst other things, improved transport choices and improved transport capacity and accessibility (para 9.17). Transport networks should be maintained, safe and secure, and provide improved access to high quality and affordable public transport (para 9.18).

Policy T2 states that emphasis in policy packages for Major Urban Areas (MUAs), including the Birmingham/Solihull Conurbation, will be given to, amongst other things, *"major investment in public transport infrastructure in order to provide high quality, accessible and affordable integrated services across all areas, including the provision of increased opportunities for park and ride to provide an attractive alternative to car and combat social exclusion"*. Supporting text for Policy T2 states that emphasis will also be placed on the use of LRT where urban densities are high and where it can support the Spatial Strategy.

Policy T7 stresses the importance of minimising transport related environmental impacts and the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill scheme will help in this respect by reducing the reliance on car journeys and queuing.

Draft RPG 11 states that there are particular opportunities for local rail networks and Light Rapid Transit in the Birmingham/Solihull Conurbation as part of the public transport network. It states that Light Rapid Transit is often seen as a more attractive mode of public transport than the bus. Expansion of the existing successful Light Rapid Transit network is seen as a key element of the Regional Transport Strategy in improving the attractiveness of the Birmingham/Solihull Major Urban Area (para 9.64). Policy T8 states that an integrated hierarchy of public transport services will be developed and investment will be made in, amongst other things, *"the development of light rail, and other high quality public transport systems, including within Birmingham, Solihull and the Black Country, the development of a comprehensive Metro network"*.

A sub policy for the Birmingham, Solihull and the Black Country states that the development of local rail and LRT on high volume corridors will form a

major element of public transport in this area (para 9.71).

Policy T16 sets out priorities for investment. Under the measures for the Major Urban Areas, extensions to the existing Midland Metro route are proposed to Brierley Hill and Birmingham city centre.

4.4.3 Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands (RPG 11), April 1998

Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands was last published as Regional Planning Guidance Note 11 in 1998. The guidance is based within an overall framework of sustainable development and aims to promote economic growth, support urban and rural regeneration, a sustainable pattern of development and maintain and enhance the environment. Its main purpose is to set up a framework for developing plans in the region, as laid out in Development (Structure and Local) Plans.

The RPG contains the Regional Transport Strategy for the West Midlands - An Integrated Transport Action Plan for the West Midlands - Access and Mobility.

4.4.4 The West Midlands Area Multi Modal Study Final Report, November 2001

This document reports on the findings on the West Midlands Area Multi Modal Study (WMAMMS).

The study describes a Transport Strategy and Plan for the Birmingham, Black Country and Solihull Conurbation, as defined in Draft RPG 11. The study's strategy considers five transport drivers for achieving the objectives of the Study. Specific improvements are also identified to achieve the strategy objectives. Included in these improvements is a new network of Metro lines.

4.4.5 Quality of Life - the Future Starts Here – a Sustainability Strategy for the West Midlands (West Midlands Round Table for Sustainable Development, February 2000)

This document, produced in February 2000, represents the Regional Sustainable Development Framework for the West Midlands. It is a key tool in the decision making process for the West Midlands Regional Assembly and represents a delivery plan for sustainable development in the region. It sets out the long term strategic priorities for sustainability in the region over the next twenty years, key priorities for the region, and provides short term goals and measures. In the Strategy, current dependence on the car is stressed. The long term regional transport objective is to reduce car dependence and specifically to ensure that on average only half of journeys made each week are by car, by 2010.

The section on communities states that the West Midlands needs *"an efficient, integrated public transport network which is easy to use and understand, to solve the traffic congestion problems"*. The Strategy also describes the need to reduce air pollution, improve water quality and protect wildlife. It emphasises the need to reduce dependency on the car and the pollution caused by cars on the region's roads.

4.4.6 Transport Priorities for the West Midlands (West Midlands Regional Policy Transport Forum), May 2002

This document, produced by the West Midlands Regional Policy Transport Forum for the West Midlands Regional Assembly, sets out the West Midlands Region's leading transport priorities and is complementary to the new West Midlands Regional Transport Strategy currently being developed as part of the RPG 11 review. The overall goal is to provide a choice of means of easing movement within, through, from and to the West Midlands. The vision is of a world-class transport system in the West Midlands.

The priorities are underlined by a variety of goals, which mirror those in the Government's 10 Year Plan. These include the desire to have:

- a transport system that has a reduced environmental impact;
- more light rail systems and attractive bus services that are fully accessible and integrated with other types of transport;
- improved transport links to regeneration areas;
- a modern, high quality public transport system with integrated information, booking and ticketing systems; and
- behavioural changes in the way we make transport choices.

These goals will improve the existing transport system and are a key element of achieving the vision set out in the West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy. The document notes that public transport systems need to be regular, reliable, clean and secure if they are to provide attractive travel options. It also identifies the need for significant investment in light rail and public transport to solve local transport problems in the West Midlands.

One of the Transport Priorities for the Region is to provide a comprehensive public transport system in major urban areas. Enhancements to the urban network include extending the Midland Metro light rail system to a network of 12 lines.

4.4.7 20 Year Public Transport Strategy (West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority/Centro), January 2000

Following on from the objectives within the current West Midlands Regional Transport Strategy and fitting into the overall framework for Local Transport Plans, the West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority and Centro adopted its 20 Year Strategy in January 2000. Its aim is to help provide high quality local public transport, as part of, but not pre-empting the development of an overall transportation strategy for the West Midlands Metropolitan Area. The starting point for the 20 year strategy is the Mission Statement which reflects the strategic direction of the PTA/Centro, and its partners:

"To increase the use of public transport, through partnership, to improve the economic, environmental, and social well being of the West Midlands".

This statement is supported by three objectives. These are to provide people with the opportunity to use public transport, to continually improve the quality of public transport services and facilities, and to communicate the availability and benefits of using public transport and its importance to the development of the West Midlands.

The Strategy promotes the concept of Network West Midlands which is a core network made up of strategic rail, Metro and bus corridors. The concept seeks to provide a 'turn up and go' network with Midland Metro forming a major part of the core network. The development of the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Extension scheme and other Midland Metro routes will make a major contribution towards delivering a high quality turn

up and go network.

The strategy notes that buses have a role to play in tackling transport problems. However, the West Midlands is the biggest conurbation outside London and has a high level of transport demand. Some of the demand forecasts in the West Midlands cannot be met by a bus-based solution. Further development of Midland Metro, or other suitable rapid transit systems, will be required to meet demand in selected transport corridors.

Importantly, the 'turn up and go' Network West Midlands is complemented and underpinned by the denser local public transport networks. The most essential feature of public transport is that it must be available at the place from which you start your journey and at all the places you wish to go to when you want to travel. A full network of local routes is the basic requirement with absolute reliability and acceptable levels of personal comfort and security.

The Wednesbury to Brierley Hill scheme is proposed to be a high quality LRT system designed to integrate with existing/proposed land uses and other forms of transport along its route. As a result, the scheme is an important component of the transport strategy in the West Midlands.

4.4.8 West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy – Creating Advantage (Advantage West Midlands), October 1999

The West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy presents a regional strategy for economic development within the West Midlands. It aims to create wealth through enterprise and provide access to opportunities for all. It is based on four components:

- developing a diverse and dynamic business case;
- promoting a learning and skilful region;
- creating the conditions for growth; and
- regenerating communities in the West Midlands.

A key aspect of the Strategy is to establish Regeneration Zones as a way of targeting resources geographically. The document acknowledges the fact that the cities in the West Midlands do not have public transport systems of a comparable standard to other European cities. It also notes the need to encourage public transport use and to minimise noise and pollution.

In relation to "Improving the movement of people, goods and services inside and outside the region", the Strategy accepts the need for local transport improvements and an increase in the use of public transport. The Strategy also states that the region will need more investment in infrastructure to provide the conditions for developing business and improving access to important sites and employment areas both for businesses and employees. Investment should focus on transport, and sites and premises.

The Strategy notes that the current transport system in the region does not promote economic development and that there is a need to improve it. The real alternatives to using private cars are seen to be limited at present. One of the main issues to address is local rail and rapid transit alternatives to private transport. The West Midlands falls behind many other regions in this respect and without more investment, the Strategy notes that it will be very difficult to encourage those who use cars to use public transport.

In relation to "Movement around the region", the Strategy states that transport and movement are main concerns to the whole region. In towns and cities, the main concern is perceived to be the difficulties relating to

traffic problems caused by people travelling to and from work.

Current plans to deal with these issues include the development of light rail transport as a way of connecting urban areas and the reuse of disused rail lines to provide new public transport routes, especially in urban areas.

4.4.9 Regional Transport Strategy for the West Midlands - An Integrated Transport Action Plan for the West Midlands - Access and Mobility, March 1998

The West Midlands Regional Transport Strategy was produced in 1998 by the West Midlands Regional Forum of Local Authorities (now the West Midlands Local Government Association) for the current RPG 11 (April 1998). The document views public transport investment as being vital if public transport networks are to become more attractive than the private car.

In the Strategy, light rail is seen as contributing towards improving the image of public transport, by providing a high quality, readily accessible form of public transport. Midland Metro is viewed as being a means of helping to improve the image of public transport by providing a high quality, readily accessible form of transport. The Strategy also identifies Midland Metro as a project that can make a substantial contribution to the regeneration of the region. The Strategy aims to develop transport corridors linking key centres of social, commercial and leisure provision.

Within the context of the West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority/Centro Public Transport 20 Year Strategy, further extensions to Midland Metro are seen as part of an integrated approach towards transport corridors with very high demand. The Wednesbury to Brierley Hill scheme is identified as an appropriate route for an LRT extension.

The Wednesbury to Brierley Hill scheme, together with the existing Midland Metro Line 1 will help to reduce reliance on the private car for journeys between Brierley Hill, Dudley, Wolverhampton and Birmingham.

The proposed alignment is included in the Midland Metro Future Routes Project which is a key part of the current West Midlands Regional Transport Strategy and this is reflected in the West Midlands Balanced Package bid. It will remain key to the delivery of the West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority/Centro's 20 Year Public Transport Strategy.

A new Regional Transport Strategy is being prepared as part of the RPG 11 review process.

4.4.10 Regional Development Programme for the West Midlands Assisted Area, 1986

The 1986 Regional Development Programme for the West Midlands Assisted Area identifies the need to improve public transport accessibility to help foster economic growth and employment opportunities in the area.

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