

Midland Metro

6.2 Socio-Economic Impacts

6.2.1 Introduction

This section of the ES considers the socio-economic impact of the proposed scheme during its operational life. The potential for impacts to occur is considered in qualitative and quantitative terms as appropriate.

Socio-economic effects during the construction of the scheme are described in *Section 7.2*.

6.2.2 Assessment Methodology

The economic impacts relating to employment generated during the operation and maintenance of the scheme have been considered in relation to direct employment resulting from the proposals. In addition, the potential for the following socio-economic impacts to occur have been considered:

- synergy with, and contribution to, property development impacts;
- social and community benefits arising from improved access to services and facilities; and
- regeneration and economic development, including important but unquantifiable image and catalytic effects.

6.2.3 Characteristics of the Boroughs of Sandwell and Dudley

Population

Both Sandwell and Dudley are relatively large in population terms. After Birmingham, Dudley has the largest population in the West Midlands, with some 312 000 people resident. Next in size is Coventry, with a population of around 302 000 people, and then Sandwell, with 288 000. Around 15 percent of those living in Sandwell are from ethnic minorities (1991 Census data) ⁽²⁾. The comparable figure for Dudley is around four percent.

Data from National Statistics ⁽³⁾ shows that between 1991 and 2000 the population of Sandwell fell by 2.2 percent, whilst the population of Dudley rose by 0.8 percent. Sandwell has the highest birth rate in the West Midlands region at 13 per 1 000, which is also high compared to the UK figure of 11.4 per 1 000. However, Sandwell also has relatively high mortality rates, which are 20 percent above the UK average.

Employment

At the end of 2000, Dudley had some 7 750 businesses registered for VAT and Sandwell had around 6 500, putting them second and third after Birmingham in terms of businesses registered, respectively. Relative to 1999, the previous year, the stock of businesses in both boroughs has increased. These businesses generated 116 100 employee jobs in Dudley, and 127 400 in Sandwell. In May 2002 the official unemployment rate in Dudley was 4.1 percent, and in Sandwell the corresponding figure was 5.3 percent ⁽⁴⁾. This compares to a UK (unadjusted) figure of 3.2 percent.

Residential Accommodation

Table 6.1 below shows the number of houses and type of housing in Sandwell and Dudley in June 2000. Figures are also shown for the West Midlands as a whole and for Great Britain.

Table 6.1 Number and Type of Dwellings

Area	Total	% of unshared dwellings detached	% of unshared dwellings semi-detached	% of unshared dwellings terraced	% of unshared dwellings purpose built flat	% of unshared dwellings converted flat	% of dwellings shared
Dudley	122 570	20	49.2	17.7	12.1	0.9	0.1
Sandwell	119 467	7.1	39.3	32.1	20.3	1	0
West Mids	1 034 446	12	35.4	32.9	17.7	1.9	0.2
GB		20.2	29.1	29.2	17.2	4	0.3

Source: National Statistics based on 1991 census, www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase, GB figures from *Region in Figures, 2002*.

Table 6.1 shows that Dudley has a higher proportion of detached and semi-detached houses, with fewer flats relative to the West Midlands and GB average. Sandwell has fewer detached properties than regional and national averages, and more terraced properties and flats, which reflects its urban position.

Deprivation Ranking

Sandwell and Dudley together had a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of £10,428 per head in 1998, the latest year for which figures are available (5). This is 91 percent of the West Midlands average and 83 percent of the UK average. Examination of figures for the three previous years shows that as a proportion of the UK figure, GDP in Sandwell and Dudley had been on a downward trend, falling from 87 percent of the UK total in 1995 to 84 percent in 1996 and 1997. The fact that GDP per head is lower than the regional average, significantly lower than the national average, and on a declining trend, is a cause for concern.

On the 2000 Index of Deprivation, Sandwell is ranked 24th for employment deprivation of the 354 local authorities in England (a ranking of one signifies that a local authority has the most employment deprived people) (6) while Dudley is ranked 47th. For income deprivation, Sandwell is ranked ninth of the 354 districts in England, while Dudley is ranked 34th.

6.2.4 Baseline Economic Assessment

Introduction

Any meaningful assessment of the socio-economic impact of the scheme must be undertaken with a proper understanding of the socio-economic setting in which the development is to take place. The economic impact of the new alignment will be shaped by the existing social and economic characteristics of the area it will serve. The proposed scheme will serve three wards in Sandwell and seven in Dudley. In Sandwell, the wards are:

- Wednesbury South;
- Tipton ; and
- Great Bridge.

In Dudley the wards are:

- Castle and Priory;
- St Thomas's;
- Netherton and Woodside;
- St Andrews;
- St James's;
- Brockmoor and Pensnett; and
- Brierley Hill.

Details of the characteristics of these wards, including demography, employment and local economic activity, are provided below.

Demographic Characteristics

Table 6.2 below illustrates population estimates in the wards in the immediate catchment area of the alignment. The number of people living in the wards directly served by the proposed scheme is approximately 125 000.

The table shows that demographic characteristics at the level of the local authority (ie Sandwell and Dudley) are broadly consistent with those of the UK as a whole. At ward level, Wednesbury South has a lower proportion of its population in the working population and more over 60s. Conversely, the population of Tipton Green is skewed towards younger people. Although the proportion of people within the 16-59 age bracket is consistent with national figures, the proportion of younger people is three percent higher than the national figure and the proportion of over 60s two percent lower.

In Dudley, St James's ward stands out as having an older population relative to national and regional averages, while St Thomas's, because of its lower proportion of older 60s and higher proportion of under 16s, stands out as having a younger population. Castle and Priory has about a quarter as many more under 16s than the national average.

Table 6.2 Resident Population Estimates

Ward	Under 16	Percent	16-59	Percent	Over 60	Percent	Total
Sandwell							
Wednesbury South	2600	21	6700	55	2900	24	12 200
Tipton Green	3700	23	9500	59	2800	18	16 000
Great Bridge	2700	22	7200	58	2600	21	12 500
<i>Sub-total, Sandwell wards</i>	<i>9000</i>		<i>23 400</i>		<i>8300</i>		<i>40 700</i>

Sandwell district	62 496	22	165 888	58	59 616	21	288 000
Dudley							
Brierley Hill	2200	21	6200	60	1900	19	10 300
Brockmoor and Pensnett	3400	24	8300	57	2800	19	14 500
Castle & Priory	3000	25	6500	55	2300	20	11 800
Netherton & Woodside	2100	22	5600	59	1800	19	9500
St Andrews	2800	22	7400	58	2600	20	12 800
St James's	2100	17	7200	59	3000	24	12 300
St Thomas's	3300	25	7500	57	2500	19	13 300
<i>Sub-total, Dudley wards</i>	<i>18 900</i>		<i>48 700</i>		<i>16 900</i>		<i>84 500</i>
Dudley district	61 776	19.8	182 520	59	67 392	22	312 000
UK	11.7 million	20	35.5 m	59	12.2 m	20	59.7 m

Source: Ward figures (for mid 1998) are from Oxford University Population Estimates for Wards in England, National Statistics, www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk. Other figures are for 2000 and are from *Region in Figures, West Midlands, Summer 2002*, National Statistics.

Car ownership figures for the Sandwell wards (taken from the 1991 census) are low. They show that the ward with the lowest proportion of households having access to a car was Great Bridge, where 51 percent of households had no access to a car. In Tipton Green 49 percent had no access, while in Wednesbury South 46 percent had no access to a car. Statistics for Dudley are not available at ward level. However, figures for the borough (taken from the 1991 census) show that around 31% of households have no access to a car.

According to National Statistics, the corresponding figure for households in Great Britain in 1991 was 32 percent.

Labour Force

For the Dudley wards, local estimates of economic activity have been identified from two sources: the 1991 Census and a more recent survey carried out in 1996 by Dudley MBC. Despite the relatively elderly nature of the Census data, at the time of writing, it is still the most up to date data available nationally, and therefore provides a basis of comparison with wards in other local authority areas. This is illustrated below in *Table 6.3*.

Table 6.3 Economic Activity Rates in Dudley, by Ward, 1996 and 1991

Ward	1996 Dudley MBC Population Survey	1991 Census
Brierley Hill	63.3	58.9
Brookmoor and Pensnett	67.7	61.7
Castle & Priory	61.3	57.8

Netherton & Woodside	65.2	61.3
St Andrews	67.0	62.4
St James's	61.0	58.5
St Thomas's	62.1	55.7
Source: 1996 Dudley MBC Population Survey, Dudley MBC, 1991 Census.		
Note: Proportions of economically active people aged 16 to retirement age.		

The two surveys show that participation rates between 1991 and 1996 appear to have risen in all the wards concerned. For the relevant Sandwell wards, no recent estimates of economic activity have been undertaken locally. However, Census data consistent with that available for Dudley has been identified and is presented below in *Table 6.4*.

Table 6.4 Levels of Economic Activity by Residents for Sandwell, 1991

	Great Bridge	Tipton Green	Wednesbury South	Sandwell
	Percent of residents	Percent of residents	Percent of residents	Percent of residents
Economically active	74.6¹	77.0¹	78.4¹	77.0¹
of which:				
Working full time	62.3	63.7	64.9	64.6
Working part time	12.2	13.7	14.5	13.7
Self employed	5.5	6.5	5.3	6.5
Unemployed	17.7	13.5	13.3	13.5
On government scheme	2.3	1.7	2	1.7
Economically inactive	25.5¹	23¹	21.6¹	23¹
of which:				
Students	12.5	15.3	16.1	16.7
Permanently sick	26.9	20.3	23.8	22
Retired	5	5.1	5.6	5.7
Other inactive residents	55.6	59.3	54.4	55.5
Note: Percentages show residents as a proportion of economically active or economically inactive totals, except ¹ , which shows economically active/inactive residents as a proportion of all residents aged 16 to retirement age.				

Table 6.4 shows that at the time of the survey, rates of economic activity varied between 75 and 78 percent – consistent with the average for Sandwell, and significantly higher than the comparable figures for Dudley. The data also indicates that between 13 and 18 percent of those economically active in the three Sandwell wards at the time were unemployed.

Sectoral Composition of Local Economy

The sectoral composition of the local economy is addressed here in relation to business activity and employment.

Focusing first on the sectoral composition by business activity, only limited data are available at ward level. This is based on VAT registered enterprises by industry group. Latest figures are for March 2000 and are presented in Table 6.5 below. The data includes agricultural activity, which due to the urban nature of the wards, is limited.

Table 6.5 VAT Registered Enterprises in Manufacturing and other Sectors

	Production	Percent of total	Construction and other	Percent of total	Total enterprises
Great Bridge	110	29	270	71	380
Tipton Green	95	25	290	75	385
Wednesbury South	100	29	245	71	345
Brierley Hill	130	30	310	70	440
Brookmoor and Pensnett	100	27	265	73	365
Castle & Priory	5	4	110	96	115
Netherton & Woodside	125	34	245	66	370
St Andrews	55	26	155	74	210
St James's	40	15	220	85	260
St Thomas's	65	20	260	80	325
Source: Inter-Departmental Business Register, National Statistics www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk					

The data presented in Table 6.5 distinguishes only between production (manufacturing) and other activities. It shows that in the three Sandwell wards served by the proposed scheme, manufacturing comprises between 25 and 29 percent of total economic activity. Although this is higher than the UK average of around 20 percent, it is consistent with figures for the West Midlands region as a whole, which show that in 1998 (the latest year for which details are available) 29 percent of economic activity (by GDP) was attributable to manufacturing (17).

For Dudley there is greater variety between wards, with the central Castle and Priory ward having only four percent of registered enterprises active in manufacturing, while Netherton and Woodside has 34 percent of its enterprises focusing on production.

More detailed data is available showing sectoral composition of the local economy by employment numbers. These data are available for both Sandwell and Dudley. Table 6.6 below shows the findings for the wards in Sandwell, and indicates that each of the wards of interest had relatively high rates of manufacturing and low rates of services - especially for public administration, health and education, where only Wednesbury South has more than half the national average.

Table 6.6 Employment by Sector and Ward, for Sandwell

1992 Standard	Great	% of	Tipton	% of	Wednesbury	% of total
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Industrial Classification	Bridge	total jobs in ward	Green	total jobs in ward	South	jobs in ward
Agriculture and fishing	Confidential data					
Energy and water	Confidential data					
Manufacturing	3945	45	4823	54	3461	42
Construction	156	2	187	2	217	3
Distribution, hotels and restaurants	2893	33	1638	18	1515	19
Transport and communications	674	8	605	7	1426	17
Banking, finance and insurance etc	269	3	827	9	490	6
Public administration, health, education	707	8	487	5	819	10
Other services	101	1	342	4	227	3
Total	8745	100	8909	100	8155	100
Note: Percentage of total jobs is as a proportion of total non-confidential data. Percentages may not add due to rounding. Source: NOMIS, Annual Business Enquiry						

Data for the relevant Dudley wards is presented in *Table 6.7*. It shows a relatively high dependency on manufacturing in Netherton and Woodside (53 percent of jobs there depended on it) while in Brierley Hill, which is the location of the Merry Hill centre, there is a greater emphasis on service, and in particular on distribution, hotels and restaurants.

Table 6.7 Employment by Sector and Town and Local Centre, for Dudley

1992 Standard Industrial Classification	Brierley Hill Town Centre	% of total ward jobs	Dudley Town Centre	% of total ward jobs	Netherton and Woodside	% of total ward jobs	St Andrews ward	% of total ward jobs
Agriculture & fishing	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-
Energy & water	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-
Manufacturing	3251	16	2503	10	4796	47	1715	46
Construction	305	2	2459	9	731	7	257	7
Distribution, hotels & restaurants	8603	43	4265	16	2529	25	948	26
Transport & communications	1770	9	564	2	353	3	34	1

Banking, finance, insurance etc	2152	11	5379	21	578	6	251	7
Public admin, education & health	3323	17	9694	37	1029	10	427	11
Other services	477	2	1227	5	191	2	73	2
Total	19 881		26 091		10 207		3705	
Total manufacturing	3251	16	2503	10	4796	47	1715	46
Total services, excluding construction, agriculture & fishing, energy & water	16 325	82	21 129	81	4680	46	1733	47

Source: Dudley MBC, Annual Business Enquiry, 2000.

Note: Brierley Hill Town Centre comprises Brierley Hill and Brockmoor and Pensnett wards. Dudley Town Centre comprises Castle and Priory, St James's, St Thomas's. Netherton local centre comprises Netherton & Woodside ward. Percentages may not add exactly due to rounding.

Unemployment

Table 6.8 below illustrates the number of people unemployed by ward.

Table 6.8 Unadjusted Unemployment in Sandwell and Dudley, by Ward, May 2002

Ward	Number Unemployed	Unemployment Rate
Sandwell		
Great Bridge	391	8.5
Tipton Green	464	7.6
Wednesbury South	296	5.3
Sandwell district	7793	5.3
Dudley		
Brierley Hill	348	8.3
Brookmoor and Pensnett	314	5.3
Castle & Priory	344	7.2
Netherton & Woodside	334	8.1
St Andrews	285	5.1

St James's	345	6.6
St Thomas's	504	10.2
Dudley district	5915	4.1
Source: NOMIS/National Statistics & Joint Data Team, Birmingham		

Unadjusted unemployment rates are significantly higher than those for the UK as a whole (3.2 percent) and in the case of two of the three Sandwell wards, and five of the seven Dudley wards, are over double the national average.

6.2.5 Economic Development Impacts

Introduction

Transport links are frequently cited as one of the most important considerations for businesses and individuals when making decisions about where to locate. Investment and other decisions by independent businesses and individuals are not likely to have a significant effect on the future growth and development of the area, but collectively these decisions will have major consequences. The advantages associated with a transport system of the type proposed will not be the principal determinant in a company's decision making process because other issues such as labour, wages, tax advantages and the (usually ill defined) 'business climate' will all play a part. Because of the many other issues that need to be present to ensure economic and social development, consensus does not exist among planners, economists and public officials regarding the exact role played by infrastructure in encouraging development. However, it is accepted that poor infrastructure can drive potential businesses and home owners away from a region.

There is also evidence to suggest that new public transport developments, such as light rail systems, can influence property and land values in areas served by them. A study recently commissioned by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister ⁽¹⁸⁾ on the influence of public transport on land values, which looked at international research on the subject, indicates that the "expected effect [of public transport] on both residential and commercial property markets is positive", although the range of impacts can be highly variable. In the UK, the impact is generally seen as being positive, particularly with regard to capital uplift in residential areas. However, it is noted that public transport infrastructure can have substantially different impacts depending on a range of local factors. Impacts are highest in areas that are lacking in transport infrastructure, or where there is a significant step change in accessibility, for instance, where there are bottlenecks. The research also notes that transport infrastructure development must be accompanied by appropriate planning policy, which encourages development in specific areas, if the positive effects on land values are to be realised.

The proposed corridor of the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill scheme is located entirely within the South Black Country/West Birmingham Regeneration Zone and forms part of the Arc of Opportunity - one of six Regeneration Zones in the West Midlands targeted at sustainable economic, environmental and social development. This predominately urban area is the historic heart of invention, innovation and enterprise within the West Midlands, though the industrial legacy of the area is such that new investment is now needed to maintain a level of economic and social performance consistent with the region as a whole.

The aim of the Arc of Opportunity is to address the need for economic revival by providing regeneration and opportunity to the areas of greatest need and the proposed scheme will make a key contribution to this goal. In particular, the scheme will help to bring new opportunities and development to Hill Top, Wednesbury South in Sandwell, and the Central Employment Area between Dudley and Brierley Hill. Some of these opportunities are discussed in more detail below.

Hill Top

At the most northern part of the Arc of Opportunity lies Hill Top, a significant area of derelict and underused industrial land previously in the ownership of the Black Country Development Corporation. The regeneration of the land is provided for under Sandwell's UDP. The area comprises some fairly old industrial estates where light industrial activity continues as well as derelict buildings (some of which have been flattened to concrete bases), derelict industrial land and residential space. A planning brief has been issued. It is expected that a phased programme of development will be implemented, to include employment creating buildings suitable for general industrial uses, warehousing and distribution, as well as some office and/or research uses and development activity.

Harvills Hawthorn

West of Hill Top towards the proposed alignment is Harvills Hawthorn, a part residential, part employment area that includes industrial estates with newly built developments where some 350 people are employed. Parts of this area also offer development opportunities, including the site of the electricity generating station to the north west of Gold's Hill Bridge. Centro, backed by Sandwell MBC, are proposing a provisional stop at Gold's Hill to serve these areas. The stop would be located close to the Tame Valley Canal and would improve public transport access for staff and visitors to the existing and proposed employment areas. The existing Line one serves the area parallel to Hill Top and Black Lake and the proposed extension would enable travel from Brierley Hill and Dudley.

Castle Gate

Castle Gate is a business and leisure park on a remediated site of approximately 47 acres, developed by AMEC in partnership with Dudley MBC and Advantage West Midlands/English Partnerships. The site is located to the north of the A461 between Burnt Tree and Tipton Road. Work began on the scheme at the end of 1998 and the 160 000 square feet of leisure facilities are nearly complete. A 14-screen, 55 000 square feet cinema anchors the project with ancillary restaurants, bars, a 98 bed three star hotel, ten pin bowling facility and a leisure/fitness club are operating on site.

Income from the leisure park was used to fund infrastructure for the site. Following this, the first element of the 260 000 square feet business park was established, with a 10 000 square feet office opening in October 2002. This will be followed by some 46 500 square feet of office and call centre space let to Initial Contracts Services and Travelodge respectively. With the developments so far on the leisure and business sites, some 1 000 full time equivalent jobs have been either created or sustained. Once the site is fully developed this number is expected to double.

The proposed Tipton Road stop is to be sited at a location close to this development and the arrival of Midland Metro is keenly anticipated by the and occupiers and tenants of the site. The existence of public transport provision at the site allows the developers of the site to fulfil planning requirements aimed at reducing the use of private cars. This is of special interest to business tenants, whose workers and visitors have historically arrived as non-sharing car drivers.

Flood Street

The proposed masterplan ⁽⁹⁾ for this development includes a food retail store and customer parking, and a number of smaller retail units. The development site is served by a provisional stop, the construction of which will be subject to financial contributions from the developer of the site. The provision of Midland Metro in this area, in addition to the pedestrian priority treatment of King Street, is seen as a major opportunity for integration of the new development and the established retail core with public transport facilities.

Dudley and Brierley Hill Town Centres

One of the area's greatest assets is its network of diverse town and local centres, each with its own distinctive character and range of attractions. Over the last 20 years many of these centres have responded to far reaching changes in lifestyle and shopping/leisure patterns. Overcoming the problems that have resulted in the loss of traditional town centres and promoting long term regeneration is a major objective of the Dudley UDP. According to the revised Dudley deposit UDP, Halesowen and Stourbridge will remain as town centres, but Brierley Hill and Dudley are to become *Strategic Centres* at the top of the hierarchy in line with emerging Regional Planning Guidance. Brierley Hill and Dudley will therefore be the focus for retail and other new development.

The Council's vision for Dudley is as a prosperous and attractive market town providing services for the local community and people visiting the town, together with nearby tourist attractions. The town centre will be an important focus for a wide variety of shopping, leisure, community, cultural, housing and administrative activity. Included in proposals for the centre are the:

- construction of some 600 dwellings within the town centre;
- development of the Tipton Road area including land off Castle Hill and the Dudley Guest Hospital site - the area is expected to provide 350 houses as well as leisure uses and visitor attractions;
- provision and enhancement of public space;
- a partial or comprehensive redevelopment of the area between Castle Street and Tower Street; and
- public transport improvements at the bus station and via the implementation of the proposed Midland Metro scheme.

A key development project is the Castle Gate initiative, as described above.

The vision for Brierley Hill is as a new sub-regional town centre for businesses, commerce, retail, leisure, culture, public services and urban living.

The Dudley UDP designates a number of development opportunity areas including Brierley Hill and Merry Hill, which are zoned for housing, community facilities and institutions, theatre, business and leisure and recreational facilities. The aim is to encourage a diverse and fine grained mix of land uses, which is considered to be essential to the creation of a *"vibrant, attractive and successful town centre that offers residents and visitors a range of services and activities within close proximity"*. The intention is to establish the triangle of Brierley Hill, Merry Hill and Waterfront as a united town centre. One of the objectives of the strategy for Brierley Hill is to relieve traffic congestion and barrier to pedestrian movement by providing better public transport. Midland Metro will therefore play an important role in achieving the vision for this area.

In addition, close to Waterfront and the Pensnett Canal is the Harts Hill regeneration and development area, an industrial area proposed for comprehensive redevelopment, which will be facilitated by the scheme.

6.2.6 Direct Employment Impacts

It is anticipated that the operation and maintenance of the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill scheme will require additional staff and therefore, permanent jobs will be created. Data from Centro suggest that around 104 permanent additional staff will be needed for the operation of the scheme. This includes drivers, conductors and maintenance staff. In turn, this will create induced and indirect permanent employment of another 19 people, with new jobs created totalling up to 123 (see *Table 6.9* below).

Table 6.9 Gross Permanent Employment Created (Number of employees)

Direct employment	Indirect employment [direct x 0.08]	Induced person years [(direct + indirect) x 0.1]	Permanent full time equivalent
104	8	11	123

Source: Centro.

6.2.7 Supporting the Wider Economy

Overview

A widely held hypothesis is that the establishment of improved transport links, which allows better accessibility, will increase the overall level of economic activity in the areas along the transport corridor. Benefits may accrue to the existing labour force (ie those already working and those unemployed), to local firms and to those who are economically inactive.

The expectation is that the investment in transport infrastructure can be the catalyst which is able to lever additional private sector investment into an area. Employers are attracted by better transport links, particularly if land costs in the corridor are lower than those elsewhere in the region. Existing firms may also expand as access to the labour market improves. There is also an expectation that as access improves, the potential number of jobs (or the quality of the jobs on offer) will increase. If new firms are attracted to the area, or existing firms expand, they are likely to need more labour. From this, employment opportunities for local residents may arise (even though some of the new jobs may be taken by people from outside of the immediate area or ward). Residents may also have more success in finding work in other areas, because jobs previously out of range, due to long travel times or lack of access to a car, become potentially attainable. This is the expectation in the case of the proposed Wednesbury to Brierley Hill scheme.

In addition, if there are more companies in the area, there may be positive benefits for other companies. Suppliers of raw materials such as inputs to production processes, and support services like law, IT, printing and training may find their market has expanded. Finally, where additional residential development is proposed, the potential higher local populations that result will affect patterns of demand – again having an impact on existing firms and new business formation.

Since the proposed scheme is an extension of a service between Birmingham Snow Hill and Wolverhampton, accessibility to these areas from the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill corridor will be improved. With the addition of the proposed Birmingham City Centre scheme, integration with the city centre will also be improved. Birmingham city centre is currently subject to a number of major development projects, generating significant employment in the area. Most of these jobs are likely to be in professional services and retailing, in addition to hotels and catering. With improved transport links and appropriate training where necessary, there is a real opportunity that some of the socio-economic problems in the areas served by the proposed Wednesbury to Brierley Hill scheme could be alleviated as a result of jobs created through regeneration in Birmingham. This is because the establishment of a much higher standard of provision of public transport will improve access to jobs elsewhere on the Midland Metro Network, where previously these would have been difficult to reach.

Furthermore, the economic structure of Birmingham faces a key strategic challenge. Birmingham has serious, long established deficiencies in its manufacturing sector and overcoming them will be a complex task. There is a need to modernise the manufacturing base into high technology, high value fields. The issue of suitable land and premises continues to be problematic as the city expands, but Dudley and Sandwell have good development sites and a history of manufacturing. With the opening of the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill scheme, the two boroughs will be well placed to capitalise on this.

The Two-way Road

Improvements to transport reduce the cost of labour travelling to a region or sub-region but also reduce the costs of labour travelling in the opposite direction. The net effect on employment and activity in a region or sub-region depends on the balance between inflows and outflows of labour. It is possible for example that the proposed alignment could open up access and lead to large numbers of people travelling into an employment area for work, spending little in the area itself and then returning to their homes elsewhere, limiting income and employment effects in the target area.

It is reasonable to expect that with the development of the scheme, some labour from outside the immediate wards served will be attracted, but to avoid under-representation of local people in the new jobs created, it will be important that the skills of local residents and the needs of existing and new employers are matched. This can be done through exercising control over the type of employment developments that are given planning permission and seeking to provide training to local people, to ensure that they are able to apply for and secure a proportion of the jobs created.

6.2.8 Accessibility

Overview

Light rail can attain good service speeds partly because the vehicles used are capable of accelerating quickly. With effective design features, such as priority at traffic lights and crossings, vehicles are capable of achieving reliable journey times that compare favourably to road based transport modes. A comparison of the journey times by car and bus is provided in *Table 2.1* in *Section 2.6.3*.

The new line will increase accessibility within the Dudley Central Employment Area, through Sandwell and into Hill Top. It will provide a quick and convenient link to a number of employment areas, including the following:

- the Waterfront in Merry Hill, which has already attracted blue chip tenants to its high quality waterside office space, and has additional space to let;
- a 12 acre site on Blowers Green Road, Dudley, identified by Dudley MBC and Advantage West Midlands as being suitable for a business park providing manufacturing and/or call centre based employment;
- the Castle Gate and Castle Hill business developments in Dudley town centre;
- the existing Harvills Hawthorn/Great Bridge industrial areas, including newly built industrial space and potential for further development; and
- the Hill Top district of Wednesbury, identified as a major future regeneration area.

As well as linking employment areas, the scheme will also link key town centres, each offering leisure and retail opportunities. Merry Hill and Dudley town centre will be served by dedicated stops allowing easy access by Midland Metro from West Bromwich, Wolverhampton and Dudley, while the stop at Great Bridge will provide access to the food store on Brickhouse Lane. The scheme will also help link the three disparate centres of Brierley Hill, Merry Hill and the Waterfront, the latter including cafe bars and restaurants, with established centres in Dudley and Wednesbury.

In wards with below average car ownership, improved public transport will offer people the opportunity to look further afield for employment and allow them to go about their everyday business of shopping and visiting health and educational establishments with greater ease. Beyond the Black

Country, the scheme will contribute to the development of a sub-regional rapid transit network and allow for greater and easier access from local wards to Birmingham city centre, with all of the city's associated leisure and employment opportunities.

Improving Access for the Mobility Impaired

The scheme is fully compliant with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) and offers level boarding for mobility impaired passengers. The improved accessibility provided by the scheme will therefore play a positive role in tackling social exclusion.

Research comparing disabled people's travel behaviour with that of able-bodied passengers has concluded that on average, including all modes of transport, people who are transport handicapped make half the number of trips of able-bodied people ⁽¹⁰⁾. With the establishment of the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill scheme, which is fully compliant with the DDA, access to transport will be significantly improved for the mobility impaired. If such individuals take advantage of the proposed scheme in greater numbers than those who travel by public transport at the moment, additional trips will be generated. Reference to the Health Deprivation and Disability index reveals that of the 10 wards served by the proposed new line, seven are in the bottom 20 percent of English wards for poor health, and all but one are in the bottom quarter ⁽¹¹⁾.

6.2.9 Summary

There are a number of potential socio-economic benefits arising from the proposed development of the scheme. Among the principal benefits to users is expected to be improved accessibility and ease of movement, which in turn is expected to have positive impacts on employment levels for local residents. This positive impact will take place by enabling non-car owning residents to consider applying for jobs outside of their locality (for example, in Birmingham) and by providing a stimulant to the central employment zone in Dudley and to the areas of development opportunity in Sandwell.

The scheme will also facilitate travel for those people living within the vicinity of a stop, giving them better access to shopping facilities, cultural and historic sites such as museums, and educational and health care facilities. The scheme will also improve the level of provision of transport suitable for disabled passengers, presently restricted to using buses. On a wider level, the scheme will aid urban regeneration in the area it serves, by encouraging investment, raising the image of the area and boosting civic pride.

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