

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2000 the Local Authorities of the West Midlands submitted their first full Local Transport Plan (LTP). This set out the approach that we wished to adopt to begin to tackle the ever-increasing transportation problems of the conurbation. The plan set out a five-year agenda involving a series of major schemes designed to address the regeneration needs of a number of our centres, more Showcase routes, more expenditure on cycling, pedestrian and local safety schemes and an increase on what we believed was necessary to tackle the increasing backlog of highway and bridge maintenance.

The plan set demanding, but hopefully realistic, targets on what we hoped to achieve over the five-year period if the funding was forthcoming and set out a five-year implementation programme for how the projects in the conurbation are to be delivered.

Following the publication of both the West Midlands Area Multi-Modal Study (WMAMMS) and the Coventry Area Network Study (CANS) as well as work undertaken for the preparation of new Regional Planning Guidance (RPG), it was recognised that the changes needed to our programme were so substantial that a new LTP was required. We have now submitted a new Local Transport Plan (LTP).

However, this APR, of necessity, is a review of year two of the 2000 LTP programme and is designed to illustrate the progress that we have made to date on that programme. The settlement letter from the Government of December 2002 was encouraging, providing much of the funding we were seeking in respect of our integrated transport bid, the major schemes and special funding to enable a start to be made on delivering the West Midlands Multi-Modal Study (WMAMMS). However, the settlement, on both bridge and carriageway maintenance, despite the increase in the allocation, was beneath what had been asked for. There was disappointment that the major scheme bid for the Coventry Quality Bus Network was unsuccessful, being a focussed response to one of the targets we were finding challenging to achieve. This scheme is being resubmitted this year.

The improved rating (to 'above average') of the APR 2002 was a welcome endorsement of our efforts.

This Annual Progress Report (APR) sets out how we are implementing the existing plan and how we are progressing against the targets that we set ourselves. It also looks forward to the new challenges outlined in the new LTP. This report illustrates that we are making good or very good progress against a majority (28) of the targets, but that on nine we are currently faced with a challenge. The major targets where we are not progressing as we hoped are those relating to cycling, bus patronage, mode choice in Coventry, Sutton Coldfield and Dudley, slight casualty rates and casualty rates for powered two wheelers. New targets have been established for the new LTP, reflecting the different timescale and resource level. Milestones against which to measure progress have also been set.

2002/03 has been a challenging time for the West Midlands Authorities. However we have continued to make good progress in delivering the LTP schemes. We have tackled organisational issues and now have a central team established which has co-ordinated the LTP delivery work and compiled this APR as well as the new LTP. In order to enhance our delivery abilities, a Central Implementation Team has also been established. This has a key role in progressing joint initiatives. However, the limited availability of suitably trained and experienced staff continues to be a major barrier to future implementation. The authorities, in partnership with the private sector, academia and other public bodies are actively supporting the Transport Planning Skills Initiative in the West Midlands and this has included a 'job fair' in 2003.

Consultation on the APR and future transport policy and schemes has been ongoing and this year has included an expanded consultation for the new LTP. This builds on the extensive consultation undertaken as part of the WMAMMS study and the many local initiatives e.g. the preparation of the new Walsall Transport Strategy. The consultation was launched with a 'webcast', which was followed, by three seminars, one based in the Black Country, one in Birmingham and one for Coventry and Solihull. Additionally an exhibition bus was based in several locations over several days and newspaper supplements were used, to explain the strategy and seek views on priorities. Two editions of an occasional newsletter have been circulated to over 1700 people. An independent consultancy was employed to analyse and report on the consultation to ensure that groups who are often excluded from such procedures were directly targeted and engaged in the process. A Steering Group reflecting key interests was also set up to assist in the development of the new LTP and individual authorities have developed their own, complementary, approach, for example, The Birmingham Transport Forum. We have also made a real effort to learn from those authorities that scored well in their LTP assessments and also to pass on our experience to others.

In conjunction with this APR and the new LTP programme, we are submitting four Annex E – Major scheme bids. These are a resubmission of the Coventry Quality Bus Network, The West Midlands Red Route Network, the Brierley Hill Access Network and the Darlaston SDA Access.

The new LTP proposes a significantly increased programme and seeks to deliver the local authority elements of the WMAMMS and CANS.

An important feature of the year has been the active management of resources to ensure we are able to continue to deliver the improvements demanded by our citizens in accordance with our overall strategy. This has required careful co-ordination across authorities.

Preparing the new LTP placed increased demands on officers, many of whom are charged with delivering the existing programme. A particular challenge this year has been to ensure that the momentum of the delivery programme has been maintained whilst the LTP preparation work has been underway. This has not been easy, but as this progress report will show, has been achieved.

The ability to manage the programme across the West Midlands and deliver a new LTP without impacting on delivery was greatly helped by the Core Support Team established in 2002.

A new dimension to our work this year, arising from the WMAMMS recommendations has been engaging specialist communication consultants to both help in the publicity and consultation on the new LTP and with the development of a longer term strategy to influence travel behaviour.

In summary, 2002/03 has been another challenging year. Our ability to deliver a metropolitan wide programme is growing, following important reviews of our working and management arrangements. There is growing evidence that our strategy is beginning to bite across a range of policy objectives and that, with support from the government, we will be able to deliver on both the national and local targets.

