



Transport for
West Midlands



Midland
Metro Alliance

Connecting SANDWELL & DUDLEY

ISSUE 17 DECEMBER 2022



Welcome

Welcome to 'Connecting Sandwell & Dudley', a regular publication designed to keep those working and living in the area up-to-date on the progress of the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro extension which we're building on behalf of Transport for West Midlands (TfWM).

This highly-anticipated project will be delivered in two phases. The first will see trams travel 6.5km through Sandwell to Dudley town centre serving a new terminus at Flood Street, providing convenient interchanges with local bus and rail services. In the second phase, the tramway will extend a further 4.4km to Brierley Hill with funding solutions currently being sought to allow construction to begin at the earliest opportunity.



Getting Around

For the latest information, advice and live info on the region's roads follow the @wmroads Twitter feed and for wider transport updates follow @transportforwm.

In brief: Progress highlights in 2022

A selection of the key works undertaken on the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro extension so far in 2022.

Jan - Feb: A shipment of track arrives in Dudley, 300metres of which is later laid along Castle Hill.

March - April: A new purpose-built bridge installed over the Tame Valley Canal and concrete pours take place for the delta junction at Wednesbury.

May - June: Works to strengthen historic Parkhead Viaduct are now underway and new track is installed near former site of Round Oak Steel works. Following road layout changes, Bourne Street car park is reopened and excavation works begin on The Minories, where archaeological finds were uncovered.

July - August: Construction activity is completed on one side of Castle Hill, with activity switched to the opposite side of the street shortly afterwards. In Sandwell, concrete pours take place and works continue to progress for the Sedgley Road tram stop.

September - November: Along with activity in Castle Hill, work continued in Flood Street to create a new carriageway with a new asphalt surface laid during the period. Elsewhere, a localised road closure began in Tipton, as the construction team began to install the penultimate bridge for phase one of the route.

① What you need to know...

With construction for this route taking place across both Sandwell and Dudley, and the ever-changing pace of it, here's a snapshot of the information we think you need to know this period (some of which is covered in more detail for you throughout the newsletter).

Wednesbury area

Construction has continued to build the structure which will allow track from the existing line to spur off through Tipton towards Dudley. You can read more about recent progress, including how drones are being used to assist construction, on **page four**.

Tipton area

Work will shortly complete on the installation of a new purpose-built bridge across Sedgley Road East and the localised road closure, which began earlier in the autumn, will end with four-way traffic signals in place. You can read more about this on **page two**.

Dudley town centre

The final piece of track has been installed and welded into place along Castle Hill. This activity is chronicled on **page two** and signals this activity in the town centre entering the final stages. Although the recent cold snap has had an impact on some of the work we could undertake in the last week or so, the final road surface is due to be laid shortly and the busy thoroughfare is set to reopen in early 2023.

Drop-in sessions

I will be continuing to hold drop-in sessions at Dudley Library and Tipton Muslim Community Centre, which launched recently, into 2023. These are an opportunity to come and speak to me and members of the project team with any burning questions you might have about the Metro route.

Between the hours of **9am and 12pm**, I'll be at:

- Tipton Muslim Community Centre on the **second Monday** of each month; and
- Dudley Library on the **fourth Monday** of each month.

The fastest way to learn about changes to any events, including when we're hosting new ones, is to follow us on the social media channels listed below.

All that's left to say is to wish you all a happy festive season and all the best for 2023.

Tom Bissell,

Your dedicated Stakeholder Liaison Officer



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Castle Hill to re-open to two-way traffic in early 2023 following completion of works for Metro extension

A major milestone for the project was celebrated recently as the last piece of track was welded into place on Castle Hill.

The team has been carrying out work on Castle Hill since early 2019; first to upgrade and divert buried utilities in the area, which was completed in summer 2019, before returning in the spring of 2020 to construct track bed, lay tram tracks, and improve the street scene with a refreshed look and feel for the area. Throughout the complex construction programme traffic has flowed in one direction to Castlegate island.

It is expected that Castle Hill will re-open in both directions to vehicular traffic in early 2023.

Tom Maplethorpe, Project Director at Midland Metro Alliance, said: "Our team have been working hard in the area for sometime and, despite the impact of the recent cold weather, we are still pushing hard to achieve this important milestone for our works in Dudley Town Centre."

Speaking about the activity along Castle Hill, Councillor Simon Phipps, Dudley Council Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Enterprise, added: "We recognise this work has caused disruption for some of our residents and local businesses in the area. I would like to thank them for their patience while this essential work has been completed. In just a few weeks both lanes of traffic will reopen for road users and this will have a positive impact on peoples day-to-day journeys in the borough."



Penultimate new structure for phase one of Metro extension almost complete in another step forward for Metro route

Work which has been ongoing since late October to install the penultimate new structure for phase one of the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro extension is set to move to a new stage next week (week commencing 18 December).

A small section of Sedgley Road East has been temporarily closed for the installation of the new structure, which has been purpose built to meet the needs of a modern tramway, and will be the site of a future tram stop on the route.

During the week commencing 18 December, the closure will be lifted with pedestrians able to pass under the bridge once more. Vehicular traffic will be managed with four-way traffic signals until the end of January to allow the team installing the bridge deck to work safely.

As works progresses here there will be some very localised activity, and a short, two-day closure, of a small portion of Coneygree Road and Victoria Road on Wednesday 21 and Thursday 22 December as footpath widening works are to be undertaken.

And then in the new year, there will be activity in the Park Lane East area, again in Tipton. In order for this work to be carried out safely, the road will be closed to both pedestrian and vehicular traffic at either side of the bridge from Tuesday 17 January until early March, (anticipated to wrap-up on Monday 6 March 2023). A clearly signed diversion route will be in place.

Please note, to support nearby Truflo Air Movement due to the nature of their business and difficulties with alternate access, we will be allowing heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) to cross the bridge at specific times. No other vehicular traffic will be allowed to cross.

Our dedicated Stakeholder Liaison Team can be contacted on the details at the bottom of this page should you have any questions about any of the activities detailed above.



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Local Business Showcase

Kings Court Industrial Estate

Sedgley Road East, Tipton



ALL BUSINESSES OPEN AS USUAL



Section Roll & Tools LTD

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Project bridge designs commended by industry body

Designers working on phase two of the scheme are celebrating after their designs for three structures in the second phase of the Metro scheme were recognised at a recent awards ceremony.

The designs for three new bridges, which are planned to be constructed to guide the tram from the Waterfront businesses to the disused rail corridor, were commended in the infrastructure category of The Institution of Structural Engineers annual awards ceremony for the Midland Counties which took place in Birmingham on 17 November.

Judges were impressed with early engagement with construction partners in the design of the structures, ongoing maintenance considerations as well as with liaison with other key stakeholders such as the Canal and River Trust.

Andrew Kenchington, Technical Lead for Structures, said: "It's great that these designs and all the work that went into them were recognised by our industry body. It's often the finished product which gets the recognition, but there's a lot of work which goes into a project even before a spade hits the ground"



'Excellent' rating for scheme by Considerate Constructors Scheme

The project team are celebrating after receiving an 'excellent' rating in the Considerate Constructors Scheme for the second year in a row.

Following a recent inspection, the project was rated excellent for its respect to the community, care for the environment and for the workforce training and career opportunities available, allowing the team to pick up a top score of 44 out of 45.

The inspectors were particularly impressed with how social media and community updates are shared to highlight project progress along with the use of an app to keep staff safe. The report also commended the carbon reduction construction methods including initiatives to reduce plastic as well as the actions taken and planned for the natural environment.

The report said: "The nature of the works means some disruption to local communities and they have tackled this head-on, with blanket social media coverage and updates, open days, community support and open information sharing within the team that address the expectations of the scheme. Likewise, workforce training and career development complements the delivery of the works to a high standard. Outreach to local colleges and schools continues with a clear plan in place."

Tom Maplethorpe, Project Director, said: "We are delighted to have received an excellent rating for the second year running. It's really important to us to be 'good neighbours' to those living in Sandwell and Dudley and we work really hard to ensure this high standard"



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Artificial intelligence and drone flights used to track construction progress for route

Along with tried and tested methods of design and construction, the project team often trial and turn to cutting-edge innovations to assist with progress on delivering the largest light rail project currently underway in the UK.

One of the most technical, but game-changing innovations introduced recently involves drone surveys. Whether used for conducting surveys, mapping sites, identifying safety risks, or even transporting materials, drones can offer multiple benefits to contractors.

They are especially good at gathering and documenting routine site data to track project progress. Equipped with the latest in photogrammetry, drones are being used on this project to survey an entire site on a regular basis. Where the difficult part comes in however, is using this data in a constructive manner using a mix of artificial intelligence and geospatial analytics to calculate progress and compare construction to design.

Jacob Hodson, Innovation Lead, said: "This has the possibility of being a game-changer for the delivery of this scheme and we're working to get great use out of the technology with the aim to implement on our other projects across the West Midlands, too."



Work continues at delta junction and in railway corridor

A considerable segment of phase one of the tramway is taking place in Sandwell within the former site of the South Staffordshire Railway Corridor and close to the Wednesbury Metro depot and is less visible to those in the two boroughs which will be linked by the scheme.

Since the last issue of Connecting Sandwell & Dudley ground levelling and excavation has continued with the team beginning to install the steelwork ahead of concrete pours which will begin to give shape to the spur which will join the existing line to the new route currently under construction.



Construction Corner – What is involved in mineshaft remediation activity?

Construction can sometimes be a bit complex, and recognising this, we're introducing a new feature in this edition of Connecting Sandwell & Dudley where we take the time to explain a system or concept which is being used on the project to better help understanding of the work.

For this issue, recognising activity that's been underway in the railway corridor during the year, and with additional activity planned in 2023, we wanted to touch upon mineshaft remediation activity.

As part of any construction project, a Coal Authority search is undertaken before any work begins. This is particularly important recognising our region's industrial heritage. If the search reveals there is a mineshaft in the vicinity, then certain steps have to be taken to ensure there is no risk to the general public or workers on the project.

Mineshafts have what is known as a collapse radius, which indicates the area that would be impacted if they were to collapse. If a construction project impinges on the potential collapse radius of a mineshaft, then it has to be treated before work can commence.

Upon receiving a general location from the Coal Authority, Ground Penetrating Radar surveys are carried out to ensure the location of all utilities in the area are known. Once those locations are clear, probing can begin to find the entrance to the mine without fear of damaging the utility services.

The entrance to a mine can vary in depth. A grid method is used, with systematic probing taking place at regular intervals. Typically in this area, you would expect to find 6m or 7m of material under the highway before the level where the entrance to the mine shaft would be. However, there is no guarantee this is the case, so every point on the grid has to be probed to a sufficient level before it can be ruled out.

By employing the grid method, if the entrance to the mineshaft isn't found, then it can be assured that the work intended to be carried out won't impact the mine as the area has been adequately surveyed. If you do locate the entrance then you can determine its depth and calculate the size of the shaft itself, including how much material, and time, it will take to fill it to ensure the area is safe before main construction begins.



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Students Ben and Charanjeet mark T-Levels Week

Earlier in the autumn, to mark T-Levels week, we caught up with students Ben Hawkins and Charanjeet Singh who have been working on our live projects, including the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro extension.

The pair helped the MMA mark T-Levels Week by going back to their school, Thomas Telford University Technical College (TTUTC), for a careers event. They informed prospective students and parents about the benefits of these qualifications, which combine study with real-life work experience.

Since joining the MMA earlier in the spring, Ben has been learning the ropes within our commercial team working specifically on the route to Dudley town centre whilst Charanjeet developed his skills on one of our Birmingham projects before settling in to support our sustainability team working across the West Midlands.

Laura Fletcher, Director of Careers at TTUTC, said: "Rose and the team at Midland Metro Alliance go above and beyond to support our students here at Thomas Telford UTC. Our partnership over the years has grown to include opportunities for our students. This includes student mentoring, work experience, guest lectures and now our T Levels placements. This support is invaluable for our students development, social and employability skills. We hope that this partnership will continue to grow and our students will become part of the MMA alumni team."



Connecting Sandwell and Dudley will be back in 2023

This is the final issue of our stakeholder newsletter for 2022. Thank you to all who have read, commented and shared our updates within their communities this year.

We look forward to keeping you updated on the progress of the Metro extension in 2023.

Wishing you all a happy festive season and all the best for the new year ahead.



News from TfWM:

Retrofit skills bootcamps launched to help develop energy saving technologies and skills in the West Midlands

Hundreds of people are to undergo free specialist training so they have the skills needed to retrofit the latest energy saving technologies to upgrade thousands of homes across the region.

A number of Retrofit Bootcamps are being funded by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to help equip existing engineers and others with the skills and knowledge to install green technologies such as heat pumps, solar panels and super-efficient insulation.

Not only will the bootcamps help people find work in the green industries of the future but the installation of retrofit products will help the West Midlands in its ambitious #WM2041 target to be a net zero region with the next two decades.

The first bootcamp, which has launched at Teach A Trade in partnership with Telford College, provides gas engineers heating engineers and plumbers the chance upskill and gain the essential qualification required to install, service and maintain air source heat pumps. Alongside the heat pump qualification participants will complete a level 2 mental health awareness course to raise awareness and provide the increase in mental health issues within the construction industry.

Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands, said: "As the home of Britain's Green Industrial Revolution, the West Midlands is set to create tens of thousands of jobs in the coming years as we work towards our #WM2041 plan to tackle the climate emergency. It is therefore absolutely critical that we get local people the skills they need to develop energy saving technologies as we move towards upgrading more and more homes across the region."

The fully accredited course is delivered at Teach A Trades' Halesfield-based training centre by industry experts with vast practical and theoretical knowledge. Successful completion of the course leads to an LCL awards level 3 in the installation and maintenance of heat pump systems.



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