

OPERATING MIDLAND METRO

Midland Metro has 49 regular drivers. They are very interesting people. Previous occupations include police and prison officers, a milkman, a qualified jeweller, a washing machine designer, a Polish Army Captain and a vicar! With some shifts starting very early and some ending very late, it might be expected that they will live close to Wednesbury Depot. Some, however, commute from as far as Crewe, Stafford and Telford to the north, Bridgnorth and Much Wenlock to the west and Kidderminster and Stourport to the south. Training takes up to eight weeks, including the use of three simulators at Wednesbury. Their use meant that drivers only needed two or three trips along the new section from Bull Street to Grand Central before feeling confident to sign for it. Drivers work an average of 39 hours a week, with a break of 7 - 9 days after seven weeks.

From end to end, the route takes 40 minutes for the 21 km. Top speed is 70 kph for the off road section [18.6 km of former Great Western Railway alignment] but along Bilston Road from Priestfield into Wolverhampton and from the Wolverhampton side of the new Snow Hill tram stop into Birmingham City Centre the limit is 50 kph. In reality, drivers operate on the 'line of sight' principle, ensuring the route is clear ahead and that they can stop safely within that distance. Trams are signalled by a line of white dots on the street running sections at traffic light controlled junctions and at Black Lake level crossing. There are also point end indicators and it's the driver's responsibility to check the lay of any points.

On weekdays, the first tram comes into service at 04.43 and the day ends at 00.28. Before 06.30 and after 19.00, there is a 15 minute headway. For most of the day it's an 8 minute interval, but in the peaks [07.28 - 09.19 and 16.52 - 19.34], it's every 6 minutes. Saturday is the longest day of the week, with trams running from 04.40 to 00.59. The frequencies are similar to weekdays, but without the peak time extras. Sundays are normally every 15 minutes from 07.30, finishing at 00.07.

How well do you know the 26 tram stops? All have low platforms, 300 mm above the top of the rail. Which stop has only a single platform and which has three platforms? Which three stops have only an island platform? And which tram stop has no canopy over one of its platforms?

[Answers are at the foot of page 9.]



The Control Room at Wednesbury is staffed 24/7.

Photo: Keith Flinders

The route's black spots are:

- * the long straight in Bilston from The Crescent to Priestfield. It's a dark corridor at night, and prone in school holidays to attract bottle and stone throwers.
- * Bradley Locks, near Wednesbury Parkway. There's a quiet, secluded area near the canal.
- * the section from The Hawthorns to Jewellery Quarter shared with heavy rail is the worst for trespass and graffiti.
- * the road junction at New Inns on Bilston Road is a five way traffic light junction, with pedestrians to add to the challenge!

When single line working is needed, such as past a blockage, two of the nine emergency crossovers are used. Wrong direction moves are not a problem, except on the street sections. They are possible there, but rare as they require a police escort. There was one unforgettable afternoon when it was necessary to get a football supporters' tram back to Priestfield before it met up with Wolves fans who were waiting for them at St. George's!

ANSWERS: Wolverhampton St. George's / Wednesbury Parkway / Bull Street, Winson Green Outer Circle, Bradley Lane / Corporation Street]

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