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1. Introduction

- 1.1 My name is Jonathan Parker (BSc, FCHIT, MTPS, TPP). I am the Managing Director of Integrated Transport Planning Ltd (ITP), a consultancy specialising in planning and implementing multi-modal transport strategies, preparing Travel Plans and Transport Assessments, and designing integrated transport systems that support residential, commercial and industrial developments in the UK and overseas.
- 1.2 I have worked across the West Midlands; having advised the Black Country local authorities on their adopted Joint Core Strategy. I have also worked with Merry Hill Shopping Centre’s current owners, intu, over a long period of time. I have been involved with the Midland Metro Brierley Hill extension for the past three years; providing transport advice to the scheme for our client, Intu, and I’m therefore familiar with the area and transport networks serving the appeal site.

Context

- 1.3 My Proof of Evidence (PoE) has been prepared on behalf on intu (the Appellant). It relates to the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Land Acquisition Order for the proposed Midland Metro Extension between Wednesbury and Brierley Hill – herein referred to as the Brierley Hill extension.
- 1.4 I understand intu does not object in principal to the Brierley Hill extension. It recognises the potential connectivity and accessibility benefits the metro will deliver for iMH visitors and residents who live in the local area. However, intu is concerned by the lack of assurance I can currently provide as to the extent of construction and operational impacts the Brierley Hill extension will have upon local highway networks and bus services critical to the operation of iMH.
- 1.5 ITP was commissioned by intu in 2015 to advise on both the strategic and localised impact that the proposed Brierley Hill extension could have on their key asset – Intu

Merry Hill (iMH). Since then I have been party to consultation with the MMA and its term consultants Mott MacDonald. This has also involved Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council (DMBC), who similarly requested that MMA demonstrates that severe adverse impacts on the operation and safety of the local highway and public transport networks will not result from the Brierley Hill extension.

2. Key issues identified

2.1 Based on the information provided by MMA to date, the transport issues relate to:

- Pre-opening of the Brierley Hill extension
- Post-opening of the Brierley Hill extension

Pre-opening of the Brierley Hill extension

Traffic Management

2.2 There has been insufficient detail regarding the construction phase impacts of the Brierley Hill extension upon local highway and public transport networks. Specifically, this includes information about:

- The duration and phasing of proposed highway works.
- Steps proposed to minimise impacts on highway/bus users, and iMH customers.
- The modelled impact of any construction period

2.3 An agreed strategy of highway works/mitigation package required to deliver the Brierley Hill extension has not been provided.

Post opening of the Brierley Hill extension

Modelling of forecast traffic impacts

2.4 The original traffic modelling work completed by Mott MacDonald (presented within the Merry Hill Local Modal Report – 3838708/01/A – November 2017) confirmed that a number of local junctions would experience significant capacity issues in the future assessment year (2031) with the addition of the Brierley Hill extension.

2.5 The most significant concern I have repeatedly identified relates to future operation of the Level Street / The Embankment roundabout. It is directly affected by the route of the Brierley Hill extension and serves as a key point of access into iMH.

2.6 The original Merry Hill Local Modal Report – 3838708/01/A (from November 2017) proposed that, due to the Brierley Hill extension running through the centre of the

Level Street / The Embankment roundabout, the whole junction would need to be signalised. This presented a fundamental issue for users of iMH, because:

- The Embankment would be required to operate as one-way road (southbound).
- In doing so it would remove northbound access to the junction for vehicles exiting iMH, as currently provided.

2.7 This proposal was later revoked by MMA, with a new arrangement presented on 8th February 2019. The Embankment now remains as a two-way road, suggesting it will continue to function adequately - despite a change in junction form and arrangement to accommodate the Metro route. Based on available evidence:

- It is not clear how the signalised junction could perform as effectively as the current roundabout does, with no loss of capacity for vehicle movements.
- This uncertainty is a concern given the junction will also need to accommodate the additional through movement of metro services, which we anticipate taking priority over highway movements on all arms of the revised junction.
- The reasoning, or rationale behind this fundamental and critical change in supporting infrastructure has not been communicated by the MMA.
- Such a fundamental, and unexplained, late change raises questions about the underlying traffic modelling.

2.8 Partially in response to concerns that intu and Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council have previously expressed, MMA commissioned Mott MacDonald to develop detailed microsimulation models of the three main highway corridors to iMH using PTV's VISSIM software. I understand this work has been completed and requested access to the model output files, which has not been permitted by the MMA.

Potential Park and Ride

2.9 The MMA has not provided a clear strategy for preventing Metro passengers using the Brierley Hill extension from choosing to use free car parking available at iMH. This risks significant financial and operational harm to intu and its tenants, as car parking spaces close to the Metro route could be occupied by Metro users - thereby reducing available parking capacity for iMH customers.

2.10 I have raised this issue with MMA on behalf of intu, which has been largely dismissed with little evidence that it will not become a significant operational issue post-opening.

Pedestrian access

2.11 The MMA has not provided any detailed plans or assessment of how potential customers for iMH would access the site from the proposed Metro stop. The considerable difference in topographical levels between iMH and the proposed Metro

stop location means this is a significant issue; particularly for those who experience mobility impairments.

- 2.12 Without the MMA presenting a coherent and comprehensive pedestrian access strategy it is difficult for intu to support the forecast patronage scenarios being attributed to the Brierley Hill extension in respect of people using the Metro to travel to iMH. I have received limited detail, or clarification, on assumptions underpinning forecast passenger and pedestrian flows into iMH following the Brierley Hill extension. In addition, no impact on bus users or operation has been provided.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 From my Proof of Evidence, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Substantive and robust information regarding the construction impacts of the Brierley Hill extension has not been provided by the MMA.
- The likely post-opening impact of the Metro on existing key junctions and public transport services, which iMH users currently rely upon to access the site, is unclear and has not been fully explained through the MMA's transport modelling work.
- No clear strategy appears to have been considered for preventing iMH car parking capacity from being used as an informal Metro Park & Ride.
- The MMA has not demonstrated that pedestrians, especially those who experience mobility impairments, will be able to access iMH from the proposed metro stop on The Embankment, or that connectivity between the Waterfront and iMH will be maintained without detriment to intu and iMH users.

- 3.2 At the time of preparing this proof of evidence, I am consequently unable to assure intu that the Brierley Hill extension would not, through its construction and operation:

- Severely, and adversely, disrupt and delay journeys on the immediate highway network, and by existing public transport services, during and after construction.
- Reduce the available parking capacity at iMH in areas of the car park close to the Metro stop on The Embankment.
- Provide an inaccessible or inappropriate pedestrian access route into the iMH site from the proposed Metro stop on the Embankment.
- Negatively impact the retail experience and operation of the site.
- Cause protracted financial harm to the retail interests of intu and its tenants.