

*Statement from South West Transport Network for
BaNES Cabinet on 12 Feb, full Council on 18 Feb;
Bristol full Council on 18 Feb;
South Gloucestershire full Council on 19 Feb;
Gloucestershire County Council full Council on 26 Feb;
West of England Partnership Joint Scrutiny (date not known)
and Joint Transport Board (date not known)*

MetroWest, Economic Strategy for Transport and Rail Resilience in the South West of England

The final plans for Phase One of MetroWest are due to be completed later this year and concurrently to work their way through the Network Rail GRIP stages 1 to 9. As of writing, there remain serious questions about some elements of the plan. In particular, the retrenchment over the siting of Portishead station is very concerning as this will undoubtedly have a serious negative impact on future take-up of rail services. We need to know if pressure has been brought to bear on Network Rail and the ORR to look at a "Stop and Proceed" arrangement into the station, similar to the Barnstaple branch. The rail authorities need to be made aware of the detrimental effect of applying over-rigid safety protocol. We understand that £7m for a bridge is unaffordable in the current climate, but we equally need to be assured that the economic and social success of the Portishead project is not jeopardized by "red tape". In addition to optimum siting, the plan must include bus-rail interchange facilities and become the focus for transport in the town.

We have not yet seen evidence of a realistic MetroBus/MetroRail interchange at the proposed Ashton Gate station or integration with the Stadium, though we understand that this is currently out for consultation with the MetroBus plans.

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The current proposed service pattern for the Portishead line still does not include stops at Bedminster or Parson Street which for a headway of 17 minutes end-to-end as against 22 minutes does not seem to be especially critical, especially when set against bus timings and rush-hour car journey timings of an hour or more. There is also the question of integration with the Weston and Taunton line which the current service plan ignores. And finally, it should be pointed out that stopping trains in Bedminster and Parson Street provides gateway access from otherwise ill-served areas of South Bristol.

With the final adoption of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan, it is essential that a clear and defined provision is made for station sites on the Henbury Loop around Henbury, Filton (at North Platform) and Charlton Halt, and protect sites at Hallen and Chittening for future halt/s — which may not be required in the first two phases of the Metro. Park-and-Ride and Bus-Rail interchanges must also be built into the plans to ensure the maximum benefit to the local populace and the greatest uptake of services. In the case of Charlton Hayes, it would be highly beneficial to the development of the emergent community if the building of the station and transport interchanges preceded the construction of the area (in very much the opposite way to how Bradley Stoke was allowed to develop without any public services).

It is also imperative that work is commissioned with Network Rail for extra holding sidings for freight trains around Hallen/Chittening, and to the north of Bristol Parkway.

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The signalling on the Henbury line also needs to be upgraded as part of the Thames Valley Signaling Centre when Bristol signal box is transferred to Didcot.

We welcome the local electrification study of the Greater Bristol Metro and Filton Bank and the proposed new stations at Ashley Down and Horfield/Lockleaze, but this needs to be broadened to ensure that the study encompasses not only EMUs but tram-train operation for Henbury, the Severn Beach Line and Portishead once the 165 units are cascaded.

For future transport strategy, extensions to Taunton, Frome, Westbury, Warminster, Swindon and Gloucester/Cheltenham should be put on the agenda.

Within BaNES the emphasis needs to be on ramps and CCTV at Keynsham, a new station at Saltford, CCTV at Oldfield Park and new stations at Bathampton and Corsham with appropriate bus-rail interchanges and onward links (for instance from Keynsham to Whitchurch, South Bristol Hospital and the proposed Whitchurch Park-and-Ride)

The inclusion of stations at Charfield (for Wotton-under-Edge), Stonehouse Bristol Road (Bristol-Gloucester line) and Royal Wootton Bassett need to be built into neighbouring local authority and LEP economic plans. To this end, we would like to see evidence of this joint working in progress.

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A clear plan for the delivery of new stations and lines needs to be drawn up. With the IEP being constructed through the Bristol area (on a timeplan driven by the DfT and the Welsh Government), timescales for construction or passive provision of local stations and related infrastructure need to be clear and coordinated with the IEP. If this is not done, the local rail project is likely to be marginalized, and therefore difficult and increasingly expensive to achieve.

Intermodal interchanges need to be prioritised at Bristol Temple Meads, Bristol Parkway, Filton Abbey Wood, Lawrence Hill, Clifton Down, Weston-super-Mare, Yatton, Nailsea and Backwell, Bath Spa and Oldfield Park. In the case of Temple Meads, "Intermodal" should include ferry services as well as local and Metro buses. Any new ferry services at Bath or along the Bristol Channel should also be dovetailed into the MetroWest system.

Beyond the major projects, the economic plan needs to take account of the specific requirements of several local areas.

The rural hinterland to Bristol and Bath and within the counties of Somerset and Gloucestershire has transport networks and requirements which are significantly different from the urban areas, and need to be recognized and protected as such to allow access to jobs and services. Two examples would be maintaining bus services south to Wells, Street and Shepton Mallet and north to Dursely and Gloucester because these supply long-distance commuter and leisure services into and out of the city.

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Tourism is a major determinant in the economic survival of the West Somerset coast and the Quantocks. The West Somerset Railway is an iconic tourist attraction which is currently owned and underwritten by Somerset County Council. In a cost-cutting measure, the Council is proposing to transfer the ownership of the infrastructure to a Railway Society. However, in light of the devastation which recent weather conditions have wrought on virtually every line in the South West (from Reading to Cheltenham to Penzance), there must be serious questions about how a private railway company could manage such an economically unpredictable and uninsurable piece of major infrastructure. This is a coastal line in part and has been washed away in the past. Other parts of the route are also liable to landslip, and there are numerous bridges, any of which is liable to bridge strikes or water damage.

We believe that, if Somerset wishes not to manage this asset, and given the fact we are almost certainly heading into a period of increasingly extreme and unpredictable weather due to climate change, the permanent way and associated infrastructure would be better protected by transferring the assets to Network Rail (who have both the wherewithal and the experience to deal with contingency and emergency planning) with a long-term lease back to the West Somerset PLC.

It should also be pointed out that Somerset County Council have themselves supported a bid through the Heart of the South West Transport Board and LEP to reopen the route to network trains along with the Okehampton line. This would allow for a year-round seven-day a week

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*service to run through from Bristol/Taunton to Minehead, opening up the
line to serve other economic drivers beyond pure tourism.*

*South Bristol has traditionally been the poor relation in local planning and it
would benefit the area enormously to create a local enterprise zone
centered on Hartcliffe and Filwood hopefully including MetroBus/MetroRail
links to Parson Street, Ashton Gate and Keynsham. A future option which
would also benefit the area would be a Park and Ride facility at Flax
Bourton on the Weston rail line.*

*On the overall strategy we are very concerned that the current plan
displays an over-emphasis on aerospace and related industries, which
may well not remain as major employers in the Greater Bristol city region.
At the same time there appears to be a lack of focus on tourism which is
not only one of the largest employers but also likely to see growth in the
coming decades.*

*Finally, the lack of a combined transport authority for the city region is a
severe hindrance to the delivery of high quality public services and also to
giving local projects the clout and authority they need in the face of
competition from treasury-driven planning and national strategies. When
projects are brought to completion, the lack of an ITA means that
maintenance is not necessarily followed through. Bristol Bus Station, Bath
Bus Station and Cribbs Causeway are all good examples, where the
fracturing of responsibility means that information services, toilets and
cafés tend to be discoordinated rather than integral to the running of the*

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facility. In all of the transport planning for our region, the lack of a transport authority with real powers is probably the greatest barrier to delivery.

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and Transport for Greater Bristol Alliance*