

*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)
South West Councils (next meeting for information)
Heart of the South West LEP (next meeting for information)*

South West Regional Rail Resilience and Economic Investment Strategy

The recent unprecedented weather patterns in the South West of England, which are the latest manifestation of climate change in Western Europe, have caused considerable, unbudgeted problems for the regional rail network. As of writing, Exeter and the whole of the South West peninsula are completely cut off from the UK rail network. Bristol Temple Meads has become the largest bus station in the region and the Met Office is predicting worse weather to come.

Clearly, these events are unprecedented, but we much accept that such weather patterns will become more frequent, along with other kinds of extreme weather. The problem faced by the rail network in this region is that investment and planning have been given unduly low priorities in comparison to other English regions and that we are now reaping the rewards of underinvestment in any major projects since the Cornish Main Line project, the Falmouth branch improvements and the Exeter to Waterloo upgrade.

The current Intercity Express Project is at heart an upgrade for the London to South Wales main line. Bristol happens to fall along the edge of the route as a major junction and as such will benefit from the works.

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However, Bristol is in reality a South West railway hub and electrification of the local network, as well as the main line to Exeter, Plymouth, Penzance, Gloucester and Cheltenham should be seen as an essential part of the South West Region's economic development.

The lack of investment in the following sections of line is causing major concern and represents a real worry for future development:

- Dawlish sea wall (which needs £100m of new build and was scheduled for Network Rail control period 6 — 2019-24)
- Cowley Bridge near Exeter (raising the track to avoid flooding)
- the Exeter to Cullompton stretch through Hale (again flood prevention)
- Exeter to Yeovil section (needs to be double-tracked as a diversionary route for London and Bristol trains)
- Yeovil to Castle Cary on Weymouth line (needs to be double-tracked for diversionary options)
- Taunton to Bridgwater, Highbridge and Weston-super-Mare over the low-lying western edge of the Somerset Levels (track needs to be raised)
- Taunton to Castle Cary line near Athelney and Currymoor (track needs to be raised above flooding levels)
- Flax Bourton where flood prevention measures need to be undertaken in the cutting
- Chipping Sodbury tunnel (which requires a more effective pumping solution)
- Bristol to Gloucester line around Wickwar and Charfield (needs

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upgrading for floodwater resilience)

- Severn Tunnel Junction to Gloucester via Lydney route (line needs to be raised above normal flood levels)
- diversionary route between Exeter and Plymouth via Tavistock and Okehampton (needs to be rebuilt and brought into use)
- Chippenham to Bath via Bradford Junction diversionary route need a new chord at Bradford (-on-Avon) Junction

These works need to be programmed into a South West Rail Resilience Plan along with the mainline electrification and the Greater Bristol and Devon Metros. Without commitment to significant investment in the South West region's rail network, we are in danger of an endless patch-up and mend approach to regional transport which will further serve to detach the South West economically and socially from the rest of the country.

At the same time, there is a grave danger that budgets for project work such as MetroWest or the Devon Metro, or even the electrification of local services will be diverted into the maintenance of regional infrastructure. We must ensure that the budgets for forthcoming development is not subsumed into crisis management.

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