

West of England Partnership Scrutiny Commission Wed 5 March

West of England Partnership Board Thurs 13 March

Bristol City Council Transport Committee Wed 19 March

Bristol City Council Full Council Tues 18 March

South Gloucestershire Council Full Council Wed 19 March

South Gloucestershire Council Transport Scrutiny Wed 26 March

BaNES Transport Committee next meeting

The South West Rail Plan— an Opportunity for the West

In view of the continuing dislocation of the main rail artery to the South West of England, we need to know if the WEP and the Bristol Mayor are directly involved in pushing the Secretary of State and the Department for Transport along with the Prime Minister for the speedy reopening of the railway between Bridgwater and Penzance, without long-term line speed restrictions or other kinds of austerity planning. Are WEP working with the South West Councils, Cornwall LEP, Dorset and Somerset LEP, the Heart of the West LEP, Network Rail and the train operating companies as part of the South West Peninsula Rail Task Force?

We would also like to know how active the WEP have been in promoting the current and future infrastructure requirements of the local rail network as part of the plans for resilience and redesigning of the route with the South West Peninsula Rail Task Force. We need to ensure that suitable turnbacks, signalling options, track and station layout are included to ensure the speedy and straightforward implementation of the MetroWest plans.

Whilst, on the face of it, the majority of the Task Force's brief lies outside the WEP boundaries, the rebuilding of this line is nonetheless of vital and pressing concern to the economy of the local area, both in terms of the mainline access and the tourism which this generates, and of local rail

South West Transport Network **Statement** for

West of England Partnership Scrutiny Commission Wed 5 March

West of England Partnership Board Thurs 13 March

Bristol City Council Transport Committee Wed 19 March

Bristol City Council Full Council Tues 18 March

South Gloucestershire Council Full Council Wed 19 March

South Gloucestershire Council Transport Scrutiny Wed 26 March

BaNES Transport Committee next meeting

services across the Bristol conurbation which provides access to employment and social mobility.

There are significant issues about planning the MetroWest project into the redesign of the South West Mainline as track layout and signalling systems cannot be easily adapted once the plans are approved by the Secretary of State.

This may well be the best opportunity the WEP and the Mayor will get to see electrification extended to Weston, Taunton, Exeter and Plymouth, with the obvious implications for local services in the future, such as an electrified operation between Taunton and Swindon or Weston-super-Mare to Bristol Parkway. Indeed, electrification of the route between Parkway and Gloucester/Cheltenham is already built into the 2019-2024 Network Rail Control Period.

To date, there has not been the same kind of impetus to electrify the local rail network in the Bristol travel-to-work area as we have seen in the South Wales Valley Lines. This is an example of how the West and the South West Region are not being taken seriously in terms of major infrastructure development and in building a coherent local transport network. Ironically the current crisis may provide a little leverage to help redress this apparently endemic imbalance.

Electrification of local services between Portishead, Taunton, Weston-super-Mare, Severn Beach, Henbury, Gloucester/Cheltenham, Yate,

South West Transport Network **Statement** for

West of England Partnership Scrutiny Commission Wed 5 March

West of England Partnership Board Thurs 13 March

Bristol City Council Transport Committee Wed 19 March

Bristol City Council Full Council Tues 18 March

South Gloucestershire Council Full Council Wed 19 March

South Gloucestershire Council Transport Scrutiny Wed 26 March

BaNES Transport Committee next meeting

Bath, Westbury, Frome, Warminster and Bristol, along with the rest of the MetroWest project would bring enormous economic benefit to the Greater Bristol area. The infrastructure project itself would create a significant employment boost, and the provision of a fast, efficient local rail network would not only improve journey to work times and the journey to work experience, but would of course attract new investment by employers to whom the quality and scope of local commuter access is often a deciding factor.

If the DfT and the Secretary of State are making a decision about the potential electrification of the South West Mainline as a core element in the upgrade, this will mean that the issue of electrified rolling stock for local services will certainly need to be addressed and it is very important that WEP and the Mayor are prepared for this eventuality. The local services on the Swindon—Bath—Bristol—Newport—Cardiff route are already being proposed for electrified operation using cascaded 319 units from ThamesLink. This will have implications for Chippenham, Corsham, Bathampton, Bath, Oldfield Park, Saltford, Keynsham, Bristol Temple Meads, Lawrence Hill, Stapleton Road, Ashley Hill, Horfield, Filton Abbey Wood, Patchway and Pilning stations in terms of remodelling the platforms and other facilities to meet the requirements of electrified stock.

As a final caveat, WEP and the Mayor need to be very clear that funding for restoration and remodelling of rail services to the South West must not be done at the expense of the existing plans for MetroWest and other aspects of the Greater Bristol rail network. We need to be very vigilant

South West Transport Network **Statement** for

West of England Partnership Scrutiny Commission Wed 5 March

West of England Partnership Board Thurs 13 March

Bristol City Council Transport Committee Wed 19 March

Bristol City Council Full Council Tues 18 March

South Gloucestershire Council Full Council Wed 19 March

South Gloucestershire Council Transport Scrutiny Wed 26 March

BaNES Transport Committee next meeting

that funding for these measures involves new money and not diverted capital from currently programmed projects within the region.

David Redgewell

South West Transport Network – Tel 07814 794953