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# South West Transport Network **Statement** for

*West of England Partnership Planning Housing & Communities Board  
on 25 July at City Hall*

*BaNES Housing and Major Projects Board on 29 July*

*Bristol City Council People and Places Committee on 31 July*

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## MetroWest, Economic Strategy for Transport and the Duty to Co-Operate in the South West of England

Under the Duty to Co-operate we are concerned that the Secretary of State is imposing a large number of new homes and a quantity of employment land in the Greater Bristol and Bath city region and the adjoining areas, Wiltshire, Swindon, Somerset and Gloucestershire. This is being done without reference to public transport infrastructure and improvements across the sub-region. We already lag well behind such centres as Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire and Newcastle/Gateshead, (the last of which includes large rural areas, like our own region). We are looking to the local authorities to ensure that realistic, future-proof public transport strategies are put in place in advance of the large increase in population. Any other option will lead to gridlock and economic and social damage.

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. If the ORR is not prepared to see sense in this, we must at least

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ensure that the station is both as close as possible to the town centre and as user-friendly as can be afforded. In addition to optimum siting, the plan must include bus-rail interchange facilities and become the focus for transport in the town. The station site adjoining the Lidl car park provides easy pedestrian access to the town centre and shopping facilities, as well as the opportunity for convenient and visible bus/rail/taxi integration.

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. Under the duty to co-operate between North Somerset and Bristol City Council, we need clear planning around the Portishead railway line and associated infrastructure.

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. In addition this helps towards the City Council's regeneration planning of South Bristol as per their core strategy and BaNES core strategy.

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

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Loop around Henbury, Filton (at North Platform) and Charlton Halt, and protect sites at Hallen and Chittening for future halt/s — which are likely to be required in the next phase of the Metro to meet huge future development in housing and employment (Sevenside Plan). A bus network solution alone to this access issue will not do and will end up trapped in yet more gridlock. 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.

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

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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.

Under the duty to co-operate and the SHMA which would include BaNES, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Bristol, Mendip and western Wiltshire, the various transport boards which cover the Bristol and Bath travel to work area need to work together and dovetail their planning on transport and land use in the way that Newcastle and Gateshead work together or the various authorities in Greater Manchester. Using these examples, the way forward for this area would be a Combined Authority and Transport Board.

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 to serve the new development areas within the core strategy (for instance from Keynsham to Whitchurch, South Bristol Hospital and the proposed Whitchurch Park-and-Ride).

The Somer Valley development which will see a large increase in residential and employment provision within Radstock, Midsomer Norton and Chilcompton, means that there is increasing pressure to provide a rail link to Radstock along the existing trackbed with a station in the town centre linking to a high quality bus/rail interchange within the NRR land. This is subject to

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discussion between Norton-Radstock Regeneration Ltd, BaNES, the North Somerset Railway Ltd and the Somer Valley Trust. There is a clear duty of co-operation between BaNES, Mendip and Somerset County Council over the planning of this area. There is some urgency here to protect the Radstock line and the Frome to Wells and Shepton Mallet rail corridor as consultation on the Mendip Core Strategy, which includes public transport as well as housing and economic development, finishes on 4 August.

The inclusion of stations at Charfield (for Wotton-under-Edge), Stonehouse Bristol Road (Bristol-Gloucester line) and Royal Wootten 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 under the duty to co-operate.

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. Even with Network Rail's confirmation of four-tracking at Filton Bank and the extra platforms at Bristol Parkway and Temple Meads and East Bristol Junction, the rest of the Metro is not included beyond Phase One.

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

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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 duty to co-operate 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.

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, currently owned and underwritten by Somerset County Council.

We believe that one future option for this asset, given the fact we are almost certainly heading into a period of increasingly extreme and unpredictable weather due to climate change, would be to transfer ownership of the permanent way and associated infrastructure 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.

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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 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. As the government inspector has directed North Somerset to include a great deal more new homes in its Core Strategy, we would support allocations along the rail corridor at Yatton, Nailsea and Backwell, Flax Bourton and Pill.

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

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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 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.

David Redgewell

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