

## **Rail Transport within Bath & North East Somerset Unitary Authority and the Impact beyond**

George Bailey to Cabinet, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2009

The Regional Spatial Strategy may have only a limited life ahead of it, but the problems identified by the draft are still true. The main challenges are:

1. To connect planned areas of housing growth with the available jobs
2. To slow the growth of traffic congestion and increase the competitiveness of the economy
3. To tackle poor quality of public transport connections to reduce car usage regenerate disadvantaged communities, improve access to jobs and tackle climate change.

The strategy is attempting to:

1. Connect the areas where there is a substantial growth in homes and jobs
2. Regenerate disadvantaged communities
3. Encourage reduced use of the car by making quality public transport available
4. Improve transport connections

The only scheme under construction is the Greater Bristol Bus Network.

Commitments include the Bath Public Transport Package, while there are no projects mentioned under Longer Term Priorities.

However, the Association of Train Operation Companies (ATOC) only a month ago published a report entitled "Connecting Communities, Expanding Access to the Rail Network". This document acknowledges that a record number of passengers used the network in 2008, but that still greater capacity is required. This can be met in part by re-opening closed stations and, where practical, reopening closed lines. Both options will help at least help some of the aims mentioned above. The study looks at where the people live (i.e. the market) and where they want to get to: by facilitating this and subsequently looking at interchanges, vast improvements could be made.

As you will read in the Report, there are 14 instances where there is a positive Business Case and a further six where if the benefits of economic regeneration are included, the case also becomes positive. The report also emphasises the

importance of safeguarding former rail routes, since what may not be viable now can change with future developments.

According to the Report, the Frome to Radstock branch falls within the latter group, but with Radstock being equally the most deprived ward in B&NES (equal to Twerton), there is little doubt there is room for regeneration. The capital appears high but could be reduced by further local studies. The report highlights pinch-point at Bath would be considerably alleviated: thus benefitting air quality in Bath, traffic congestion on the A367 as well as offering more options for travelling from Radstock. Estimates have shown that driving time from Radstock to Bath will approximately equate to that of a train during the peak periods. Similarly, there could be a reduction in car usage for commuters to Frome, Westbury, Trowbridge, etc. This route would also benefit travellers to / from London: no longer would cars or buses be essential, merely a change at Westbury. The line would be especially helpful at the time of the Pilton music festival.

At a local level, traffic could be eased by judicious encouragement to cycle to the Radstock station: relatively level from Midsomer Norton and much more practical than cycling all the way to Bath!

The Report can be viewed at [www.atoc.co.uk](http://www.atoc.co.uk). I also have a petition of some 2,200 (being checked) persons in support of reinstatement, which can be viewed on another website, <http://www.northsomersetrailway.com/>

Thank you for your attention