

*Statement from South West Transport Network for
Bristol City Council Cabinet on 5 September and full Council on 10
September, Sustainable Transport Commission on 19 September,
West of England Partnership Scrutiny Commission on 6 September,
Transport Board and Transport Executive on 11 September
South Gloucestershire Planning, Transport and Environment
Committee on 3 September
BANES full Council on 12 September
Sedgemoor District Council Bus Scrutiny Panel on 3 September*

Bus Service Alterations and Progress on MetroWest

We are concerned that the bus service alterations from a number of operators on 29 July and 1 September, particularly those affecting Bridgwater, Weston-super-Mare and North Somerset, have caused real passenger concern. The loss of almost all evening services in the Taunton Wellington, Bridgwater, Burnham and Weston-super-Mare corridor and the Taunton-Minehead corridor is especially damaging to the quality of life, rural economy and access to Healthcare in the major centres. This is despite the fact that there are “Quality Partnerships” between operators and the local authorities — i.e. Somerset County Council in this instance — on these routes.

On 1 September the situation has been exacerbated by the closure of all bus operations from Baker Dolphin (Weston to the Hospital, Weston to Worle on W5 and W14, the 121 to Banwell, Winscombe and Wrington via the town centre, although for the time being daytime services are being maintained on route 121, 66 (Congresbury to Portishead) and the 668/669 Lower Langford, to Cheddar, Street and Shepton Mallett.

Following the cutbacks on the Bridgwater town services, some of which are now being restored by Webberbus and First (rerouting the 1 and the 14),

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the deepest concern here is the issue of continuity of public subsidy. Unless this can be addressed with central government and resources put into protecting the rural bus network (with rural proofing), the operators will never be able to make these services commercially viable. Whilst we hope that some of these services will be restored in November, this will not take place without an injection of public finance.

It is very important that the West of England Partnership, Wiltshire, Somerset and Gloucestershire County Councils work together to protect the bus network across their boundaries and this issue of rural proofing is raised with the Secretary of State, the buses Minister Norman Baker and the Department for Transport. A similar situation arises with bus services between South Gloucestershire and Gloucester where the Bristol—Dursley—Gloucester corridor only has funding for a single year.

It is also very important the Bus Priority measures between Bristol and Thornbury go ahead along the showcase route, and the issue of Highworth Road in Patchway is addressed within this corridor.

Night-time Bus Services

We are pleased with the success of the extension of Greater Bristol daytime services to create the innovative night bus service. We would however urge the Mayor of Bristol, BANES Council, South Gloucestershire and North

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Somerset Councils to retain and improve on the current network. Routes 1, 2, 40A, 43, 44, 48, 49, 70, 73, 75, 76, 90, 339 and N50 all need to be retained with affordable fares and the following routes should be considered for addition to the night network:

- 6 and 7 between Bristol and Kingswood via Staple Hill
- 376 Bristol to Whitchurch, Wells, Glastonbury and Street
- Bristol to Weston-super-Mare
- Bristol to Portishead (with possible extension to Clevedon)
- Bristol to Thornbury
- Bristol to Yate and Chipping Sodbury (replacing the N50 with the 342 running six nights per week).

We are pleased to see that Police and Crime Commissioner, Avon and Somerset, BTP, the Bristol Port Police and the Universities have worked so well together in creating an environment where access to the night-time economy in Bristol, Bath with its links to the Airport is available to so many people.

The recent route changes on Services 40, 40A and 41 in Bristol have left both night-time users and day-time users with an impaired level of service. Whilst we understand that these changes are primarily pragmatic rather than ideological on the part of First Group (reflecting traffic management problems in Sneyd Park and Broadmead/Old Market crew changes). In view of the strong local opposition to these changes in the Sneyd Park/Stoke Bishop area and the effect the cutback of the route from Old

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Market to Union Street is having on the night-time economy in Old Market, we would urge the Mayor and South Gloucestershire Council to use the opportunity of the forthcoming review to consider ways of restoring these services and deal with the traffic management issues in more appropriate ways. It is regrettable that there are no statutory quality partnerships on the routes signed with First or Wessex to deal with the issues of frequency, routing, vehicle quality and ticketing.

This group of routes has seen no investment in vehicles and consequently little growth in its market appeal over recent years. Whilst we welcome the planned investment in vehicles for routes 6, 7, 24 and 25, we do believe that the 40 group needs to be included in the next round of improvements.

MetroWest bus and train services

We would like to see details of progress on the Portishead line reopening (including the station sites at Portishead and Ashton Gate), the Interchange at Temple Meads with MetroWest Buses and works to finish the embarrassingly protracted Interchange at Bath Spa (including the disabled toilets and signage). We also think it is vital that studies between the West of England Partnership and BANES include the reopening of Bathampton, Corsham and Salford stations as well as the provision of disabled facilities and access at existing stations (Oldfield Park and Keynsham in particular).

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We welcome the appointment of an officer from Centro to South Gloucestershire Council to coordinate the reopening of the Henbury Loop and integration of bus and rail services with the re-opened line including disabled facilities (for which specific funding is available). We are looking forward to seeing a proper delivery plan for MetroWest and in particular the Henbury line.

From a passenger perspective the widespread closure of public toilets at Bus Terminals (including disabled facilities) is very much regretted (The prime examples are Bath, Weston-super-Mare and Clevedon but the same proposals are now on the table for Portishead, Twerton, Larkhall, Midsomer Norton, Peasedown St John, Combe Down and Keynsham).

In Conclusion

It is good to see the working relationship which is developing between the Mayor of Bristol, the West of England Partnership and the bus and rail operators. Encouraging events have been the special train on the Henbury loop, the electric buses and the high-quality commuter coach on display at the Make Sunday Special event, and the new buses in Bath and South Gloucestershire. We welcome the setting up of a Public Transport Forum for the Greater Bristol area by the West of England Partnership, along the lines of the successful forum partnership in South Gloucestershire and the sadly cash-strapped Somerset County Council Transport Forum.

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