

Councillor Neil Butters – statement at the Special Cabinet on 25th Jan 2017

As the Liberal Democrats Transport spokesman I would like to offer a way forward that does not involve building on the Meadows. The nature of the problem has changed over the last few years and we need to look at it with fresh eyes.

Two immediate new positives are: first the current drive to upgrade the A350 through the western outskirts of Chippenham, including improving Junction 17 on the motorway and a bypass for Westbury. I know Cllr Tony Clarke has been avidly pursuing this and I thank him for it. That should take some of the north-south traffic away.

But also, a new Junction 18A is to be built – which will take some of the east-west traffic away. That too is good news.

We can make a further dent in the traffic coming down the A46 by greatly improving the signage to Lansdown Park & Ride – with repeater signs leading up to the roundabout at Cold Ashton, and perhaps providing a further roundabout at Tog Hill.

However, my main suggestion comes in the wake of Bristol City's recent announcement for a major rail inquiry – officially known as the 'Bristol Rail Enhancements Feasibility Study' – to examine the potential for extending MetroWest; as far as we are concerned currently due to run from Bath Spa station empty to, and terminate in, the freight loop at Bathampton.

Up until very recently, the main problem with expanding rail provision has been an acute shortage of rolling stock. With the Crossrail project and GWR electrification however that is set to change radically.

Large numbers of Turbo diesel multiple units for example will become available from the Thames Valley.

We need to be looking seriously at reopening not only Corsham station but perhaps also one of the former stations at Box, and running MetroWest on at least to Chippenham – where there is an unused main platform; but probably further to Oxford.

On the Trowbridge line, there should be longer, faster trains – some perhaps running non-stop to Westbury, on to Frome – and indeed Radstock via the new, private North Somerset Railway.

In short, rail travel could easily become a great deal more attractive locally, and in a fairly short space of time. We need to seize the opportunities in front of us.

I am therefore calling for a moratorium on the East of Bath Park & Ride issue until such time as a thorough rail inquiry is held within Bath & North East Somerset and neighbouring areas – to run concurrently with the inquiry in Bristol.

It could be concluded by the end of the year and we could move on from there.

A final thought: just two of the new 10-car InterCity trains will hold some 1,400 passengers. About the same capacity, you will note, as the whole of the envisaged Meadows Park & Ride. [END]

