

The West of England Combined Authority City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (WECA CRSTS) includes a £434M construction programme that must be completed by March 2027. BaNES Council, working in partnership with WECA, is responsible for delivery of £82M of that programme.

As part of this, the A4 Bath to Bristol Strategic Corridor programme is an ambitious £125M programme, of which BaNES is responsible for delivering £42M. We would all like to see this happen if it is feasible.

However, the 917 page Outline Business Case published in February of this year, contains a most important statement on page 239, paragraph 5.10.3, which I would like to read to you:

“Construction is expected to commence in winter 2025 and is expected to be complete by spring 2027. The conditions of the CRSTS grant from central government advises that any spend must be complete by March 2027, therefore any spend incurred after this **will be covered by the local authority contribution.**”

As demonstrated by the Somer Valley Links Outline Business Case and the Low Traffic Neighbourhood program, the council is separating clearly identifiable schemes into their own program of work and getting them done before the March 2027 financing cliff edge.

However a £125 MILLION nine mile long construction programme, at a scale never attempted before, coordinated across two councils, with highly complex and sometimes controversial issues, with a strict 18 month construction window over two hard wet winters is not realistic. Any delay results in the bankruptcy of Bristol and BaNES councils.

It is suggested, therefore, that to deliver the A4 Corridor programme:

- The size and scope of the project should be reviewed to identify what is realistically achievable by March 2027 and to ensure those elements are separated out into their own schemes (e.g. the Keynsham Bypass cycle track).

and

- Central Government should be lobbied as a matter of urgency, by all interested parties, to extend the current March 2027 spending deadline to at least March 2029. This financial cliff edge will be affecting all Metro Combined Authority CRSTS programmes.

“The Emperor's New Clothes” folk tale is very relevant here. Ambition takes time and we need to be honest about that. BaNES and many other councils across England will be left holding very very expensive babies just for being ambitious.