

Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways (FOSBR)

Statement on Devolution to WEP SLB; BCC Cabinet and Full Council;
BANES Full Council and S Glos Full Council, all on Weds 29 June 2016



- 1. Governance:** FOSBR cautiously welcomes the newly published Devolution Governance Scheme of June 2016 with respect to the more democratic and regionally representative structure and voting arrangements it proposes for the Combined Authority, as compared to the original WEP Devolution Deal published March 2016. FOSBR is concerned that this document was not published in time for (nor prepared in consultation with) either the North Somerset for their vote of Tuesday 7 June, nor WEP Scrutiny on Friday 24 June. FOSBR suggests that the outcome of the N Somerset vote on Tuesday 7 June may well have been different if the Governance Scheme been drafted earlier and in a more transparent way, and calls on the three unitary authorities to keep open the door to N Somerset, and that a written undertaking is made that N Somerset can freely enter the proposed WEP devolution deal whatever the outcome of the Wed 29 June vote.
- 2. Rail powers:** FOSBR is alarmed that the already sketchy reference to a working relationship with Network Rail specified in the March 2016 Devolution Deal as well as the possibility of managing local rail stations has been removed in the new Governance Scheme. FOSBR demands that a requirement is made formal for Network Rail to consult with, and implement proposals from, the proposed Combined Authority. Otherwise, FOSBR fears that Network Rail will continue to carry out drastic network changes such as the proposed permanent removal of the Pilning footbridge and down platform without any consultation with WEP, local Neighbourhood Partnerships or other stakeholders. FOSBR notes the continued economic development of Severnside with attendant increase in rail ridership; the continued opposition of the Port of Bristol to any improvement in the Severn Beach Station service frequency beyond hourly; the 21 minute journey time from Pilning to Temple Meads as compared with the 37 minute journey from Severn Beach; the quarter-hour frequency of trains through Pilning giving the possibility of the half-hour services to Severn Tunnel Junction also stopping at Pilning; and the existing passing loop at Pilning Station allowing slow trains to be overtaken by fast ones.
- 3. Road schemes:** FOSBR welcomes the proposals in the Governance Scheme for the Combined Authority to enter into bus contracts and implement bus lanes, but is alarmed that not only is WEP continuing to bid for even more road schemes (such as A38 road widening to the Airport concurrent with the Airport parking extension and the extension of the South Bristol Link to Hicks Gate) but that the new WEP Governance Scheme allows for unlimited road building of any kind of road. FOSBR notes that road widening and bypass schemes are known to act as an incentive for more car travel and therefore further road congestion, and asserts that the only way to persuade commuters to use rail or bus is to provide a public integrated transport network with assured journey travel times, and that this can only be provided by a combination of local rail, continuous bus lanes, and good rail-bus interchange as well as a cycle strategy. FOSBR notes that following the withdrawal of the unadvertised A2 bus link from the Airport to Nailsea and Backwell Station that there is now no public transport link for this 11-minute journey, and demands that provision is made for at least a half-hourly minibus shuttle service to this well-served station. Nailsea and Backwell enjoys a direct service from Gloucester, Cardiff and Taunton as well as occasional London trains, has an identical rail service to Weston super Mare or Worle, and is for FOSBR one more argument for retaining N Somerset as part of the proposed Devolution Deal.