

11 ways to save MetroBus (or at least stop it being a total disaster) 3rd September 2016

Some of these suggestions might sound a bit tongue in cheek, but they are probably more practical than the proposals they seek to replace.

Realistically, any replacement scheme would take pages of complex planning, and have to describe how WEP can adapt their scheme and wriggle out of the unrealistic undertakings given to government, by showing that this is the most effective way to make the best of a bad job.

Last week it emerged that the future of MetroBus was in peril after talks with a prospective operator – who would actually run the bus services – had collapsed, meaning we may now face the absurd situation where three councils will pay a company to run the services rather than the other way round (as well as users coughing up expensive fares). Bristolians are a canny bunch on the whole, and it wasn't just transport experts that have been questioning the reasoning behind this bizarre project from the start. But despite passionate campaigning, it went ahead, and we've all witnessed the construction around town this summer – and heard of the astronomical costs involved. So, how can we prevent MetroBus going down as the greatest infrastructure folly since the Trojans installed their trial giant horse-friendly sidegate? Martin Garrett, Chair of the campaign group Transport For Greater Bristol, gives us their top eleven improvements.

- 1) In the south of Bristol, existing bus services should be reorganised to use the route and gain fast access along Hartcliffe Way to Bedminster and central Bristol.
- 2) In Bedminster itself the route should be part of a bus-rail interchange at Bedminster Station as part of the St Catherine's Place redevelopment. Currently north-bound express buses are planned to go through the semi-pedestrianised East Street, when it would be much safer and quicker to use the same Dalby Avenue route past the station as the southbound MetroBus.
- 3) Across the Northern Fringe, the MetroBus route from Emerson's Green via Parkway to Cribbs Causeway will be positive for the region, but the present plan needs to be changed to go via UWE to integrate with the bus interchange there.
- 4) From Parkway MetroBus should take the direct route along Hayes Way to Cribbs, creating a fast service that might encourage motorists out of their cars. The current plan is for it to take an off-putting, round the houses route through the Filton Airfield development, which would be better served by local bus services. On top of this, these routes should be paid for by the airfield's developer – who is set to make a pretty penny from the project - rather than by the taxpayer.
- 5) This new direct route from Parkway to Cribbs would also remove the need for the other round the houses MetroBus via Aztec West to Cribbs Causeway. It largely duplicated the 73 bus service anyway, which could now make good use of some of the new bus lanes so they don't go to waste.
- 6) Nobody can really explain why park and ride services are being shifted away from Hotwell Road and the city centre, particularly at such huge cost. A bus lane along Brunel Way and Hotwells Road would have been vastly cheaper, and also rebalanced road space away from car use to public transport, which would have actually incentivised use of park and ride (and brought with it the consequent benefit of cleaner air). Sadly, though this may be one of the areas where MetroBus is already too far gone to modify.

7) Ashton Avenue Bridge is about to be totally refurbished. However, the clearance on the bridge is insufficient for safe running of double decker buses by 8cms. This rather limits the possibility of integration with other bus routes to say the least. It might however work as a cycle superhighway, helping Bristol catch up with other cities on other forms of transport, at least.

8) Abandon the dafter aspects of the operation. Let existing bus operators use those parts of the route that may be useful. Use their opening as a chance finally to launch integrated ticketing and interchangeability.

9) The M32 part of the route may be more difficult to save. The bus bridge is now well on the way to completion, even though it's totally unnecessary. Highways experts at UWE came up with plans to do without a new bus bridge and have direct slip road access onto Stoke Lane from the M32, but they were ignored. So, motorists stuck on the M32 can look forward to the ludicrous sight of watching MetroBuses bound for UWE leaving the motorway, crossing the new bridge eastwards, before returning a minute or so later across the current Stoke Lane bridge. Perhaps there's a case to use it as another cycle bridge.

10) A far better plan would be to open the abandoned Romney Avenue bus link from Lockleaze to UWE, which was largely built but never used, curiously. This would also have provided good bus services to employment and shopping in the Northern fringes of the city, and we know that the bus operators want to use it.

11) This would also enable a MetroBus route to come off the M32 through a new bus interchange near Eastville shopping centre and create new bus lanes on Muller Road. This would also promote orbital services, which would help deter congestion in the city centre – and open up bus use to those currently excluded.

TFGB