

Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways (FOSBR)

PRESS RELEASE

Tina Biggs 0117 9735000 / 07906041439

Julie Boston 0117 9428637 / 07791867512



The new West of England Combined Authority ("WECA") led by the new Metro Mayor (Tim Bowles) is starting business soon - and will have its first meeting on Wednesday 28th June. They will have responsibility for funds worth some £30M per year under the recent 'devolution deal', to be divided between a remit of transport, planning, infrastructure and skills.

One possible way in which these funds could be spent is on public transport – and the Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways is getting organised to make the case to WECA for starting their work by investing in the existing “backbone” of a cross-regional rail network, connected to the bus network by rail-bus interchange hubs and a cross-regional plan for Park and Ride. The group have therefore prepared the FOSBR Rail Manifesto 2017 and are gathering allies to support their plans to convince WECA to start with rail as first priority, before the funds are frittered away on disconnected schemes.

FOSBR's first act has been to organise a Rally for Rail on Friday 23 June at Temple Meads – twenty people came, five of whom were Bristol City councillors, from the three main parties, to demonstrate cross-party support for FOSBR's proposals.

[Tony Lloyd of FOSBR explained that the Rally was to gather public and political support for investment in rail by WECA. Bernard Kennedy of Aslef spoke about the case for rail across the UK. The FOSBR Rail Manifesto 2017 was introduced by Tina Biggs (FOSBR), the story of the victorious Severn Beach Line 2008 campaign was related by Julie Boston, Teresa McGill gave a rousing speech on passenger power and Terry Miller (FOSBR) showed some of the data on Severn Beach line trains that he has been monitoring. The councillors spoke next (Labour represented by Jo Sargeant and Mark Bradshaw, Lib Dem represented by Anthony Negus and Gary Hopkins, and Conservatives represented by Mark Weston) and then Andy Newman from Corsham and Roger English from Portishead spoke about the need for reopening new rail stations across the region]

FOSBR is also encouraging other public interest groups to bid for the devolution funds. Merche Clark of Save the Libraries suggested that the Skills component of the devolution deal could usefully be spent on local libraries which are under threat from cuts.

FOSBR is directing interested parties to send statements to the first West of England Combined Authority meeting on Weds 28 June, starting at 9.30am, at BAWA sports centre, 589 Southmead Rd, Filton, Bristol BS34 7RG. The public forum will be first on the agenda and members of the public are being encouraged to stay on and learn about what WECA can offer.

Readers of the Post are welcome to comment on the FOSBR Rail Manifesto 2017 and to make known their views on what the new West of England Combined Authority and its new Metro Mayor, Tim Bowles, should be spending the promised devolution deal budget of £30 million per year for 30 years.

Tina Biggs
Julie Boston
www.fosbr.org.uk