



## 1. The case for rail

- a. FOSBR notes that in the newly published December 2016 Joint Transport Study consultation, the 700 respondents to this consultation overwhelmingly favoured rail improvements over road. This is confirmed by our own January 2016 rail map survey (attached) to which we had 800 respondents.
- b. The merits of a region-wide local rail network, properly resourced and maintained, should be obvious, both from the point of view of short and reliable transit times, connectivity, independence of the rail network from road congestion and air quality improvements from electrification of rail lines. The benefits to social mobility and physical and mental health of an easy commute to work are well known. As evidence of the scale of the problem, the Mayor of Bristol has recently launched a Congestion Task force and Sustrans are leading a Clean Air campaign.
- c. FOSBR notes that the recently completed South Bristol Link Road, hailed as necessary to reduce congestion in the South Bristol area, is already heavily congested in rush hour. This has long been predicted in our statements over the years.
- d. FOSBR notes that in the Joint Transport Study it was stated by Network Rail that the local rail network is congested and does not have capacity to take many more passengers. However, FOSBR argues that, with suitable investment in schemes such as Filton Bank four-tracking, Bristol East Junction remodelling and redoubling of the Severn Beach Line, the capacity for local rail services will be much enhanced, especially with the double capacity Class 165/6 trains on the Severn Beach Line and the new smartcard scheme. FOSBR notes that the Severn Beach Line currently carries more than a million journeys a year.
- e. FOSBR has invited other rail groups and private citizens across the West of England area to submit statements to WECA to illustrate the public and political support for investment in cross-regional rail. We have also drafted the attached FOSBR Rail Manifesto 2017 which summarises the different rail projects that are currently being considered.
- f. FOSBR therefore requests WECA to make rail, with effective rail-bus interchange and a Park and Ride network, the first priority for the transport component of the devolution deal as this is the only truly cross-regional network that can reduce road congestion and improve air quality.

## 2. One example of what FOSBR can offer: data challenging the Port of Bristol's use of freight

- a. FOSBR understands that a major component of the £100m over-run in costs on the Portishead line is due to the 50 weekend closures necessary for the works to take place concurrently with the freight trains that are supposed to be running on the Portbury Line during every week day.
- b. Subsequent to this FOSBR has been monitoring the use of the Portbury freight line every day over four months. The attached table shows that only 5% of the purchased freight paths have been used over this period, and also shows that the freight paths are usually used on a Tuesday and Thursday. This means that at the very least, the line possessions for the Portishead line works could take place over a 4-day weekend, from Thursday to Monday inclusive. This will less than halve the 50 weekend possessions deemed to be necessary, as more work can be done in between moving machinery in and out.

- c. In our statement to JTB in March, FOSBR suggested that savings on construction costs could be made by challenging the Port of Bristol on their use of the freight line to Portbury. Therefore it should be possible to negotiate full possession of the line in order to carry out rail construction work for longer periods of time without excessive charges. We suggest that WECA should urgently hold talks with the Port and Network Rail to facilitate the detailed re-scoping of the Portishead Line.

### 3. The future of MetroWest – Phase 3

- a. FOSBR supports the existing MetroWest Phase 1 and 2 schemes, but urges WECA to plan now for an ambitious cross-regional scheme that benefits the whole West of England area. This is why we have invited residents of Thornbury, Corsham and Pilning to make representations today. We have visited each of the stations on our Phase 3 map and commend these three stations in particular. We would suggest that WECA initiates an in-house study of our Phase 3 station reopening plan, together with our suggestions for rail services and rail-bus interchange that would fit into the existing timetable.
- b. The largest component of Phase 3 would be the reopening of the Thornbury Line. We consider that this will not have the complications that have been encountered by the Portishead line with the Avon Gorge. For the Thornbury Line, both rail tunnels under the A38 and M5 still exist (see photos). There are two level crossings on the Thornbury Line which might at first glance appear to be a major problem - as has been found with Severn Beach Line (with the conveyor belt at St Andrew's Level Crossing) and the Portishead Line (with the Winterstoke industrial estate next to the Cumberland Basin flyover). However because these crossings on the Thornbury line are in the open country they could be replaced by road or rail bridges much more easily. We are confident that the MetroWest team will soon have the experience to overcome these challenges.

### 4. FOSBR Requests:

- a. FOSBR has one immediate request to make of WECA. We have noticed that at every meeting of the Joint Transport Board, the road and MetroBus schemes are first on the agenda and the MetroWest rail schemes are always last on the agenda. FOSBR and our allies here today therefore request WECA to, as evidence of willingness to put rail as their immediate top priority for this first term of the devolution deal, **to put rail as the first item on the agenda of each WECA meeting, and to include on the agenda the details of the nearest rail and bus service to all WECA meetings which are open to the public.** For example the public need to know the nearest bus to BAWA Filton, 589 Southmead Road, Filton, Bristol BS34 7RG for the meeting on 28 June at 9.30am.
- b. Finally FOSBR has a suggestion for WECA governance. We have over the years witnessed the endless difficulties of hiring consultants for every aspect of rail planning and the resulting lack of expertise and dependence on Network Rail dictats. We would much rather that WECA had its own in-house rail planning team, headed up by a rail industry professional, and a formal relationship with Network Rail as contractor. Please consider this as an important investment and expression of serious intent that the devolution deal will be a real game-changer for public transport in the West of England region.

NB - We realise that rail is not the only part of the WECA remit, and accordingly we commend to WECA the Good Transport Plan produced by Sustrans for the Green Capital year, the TfGB Mini-Manifesto, and the appeal from the Save the Libraries campaign to use some of the 19+ Adult Skills devolution fund to save local libraries in Bristol, S Glos and BANES from closure.