

Statement about the Final version of the West of England Joint Transport Study Sept 2017



A) Overall issues with the transport study -

1) **Transport and the Spatial Plan:**

In our response to the consultation for the Joint Spatial Plan, FOSBR stressed the importance and role of public transport in sustainable development. There are already high levels of congestion with a major impact on the environment and quality of life. We advocate a transport-focused approach to planning and development.

We strongly oppose any such new road building to open up development sites. This encourages car use and is against the spirit of the Joint Local Transport Plan, which prioritises public transport and sustainable transport modes.

We reiterate our concerns about the extension of the urban area around South Bristol. The area around Whitchurch should not be developed further. It suffers from considerable congestion. Further development is being used as an excuse to extend South Bristol Link Road and build the Whitchurch bypass. However the provision of a public transport alternative could enable some sustainable development to take place in the Whitchurch area.

While we would prefer not to see development in other areas to the south west of Bristol in the Green Belt, we would be more supportive of this due to the proximity of existing public transport routes and the potential for new ones.

We support development in the other settlements and locations identified in the spatial plan: Portishead and Pill; Yatton, Nailsea and Backwell; Avonmouth and Severnside; Keynsham and Saltford; Yate/Chipping Sodbury; Charfield. These locations are close to or on railway lines and have good bus services. We would also support development in Clevedon and Thornbury because they have potential for improved public transport links.

2) **Public transport proposals are less well developed than road schemes**

We welcome the extent of public transport proposals but are concerned that many, in particular the rapid transit proposals, are as yet undeveloped and vague. We are also concerned that the only schemes that appear to have been worked on at present are road schemes, many of which are long-standing ones, and some of which (such as the resurrected South Bristol Ring Road) have previously been rejected.

We continue to oppose road improvements except in order to improve public transport e.g. widening bus lanes, and *not* to increase capacity for private vehicles, since numerous studies show that this ultimately increases car use and congestion. The Transport Strategy must focus on providing alternatives to the private car instead. Many recent public transport grants, such as for MetroBus, have been used to increase general highway capacity: a strategy that simply encourages more car traffic with limited modal shift and no reduction in delays to bus services.

There is too much of a focus on MetroBus and road schemes. With the exception of improved facilities and six new stations, rail has largely been ignored. While we support the premise of the light rail schemes we remain to be convinced that the authorities will have persistence to

pursue this and the funding required.

3) Carbon Reductions:

It was noted during the consultation that the plan makes the assumption that car journeys will reduce as a proportion of journeys but will stay broadly the same. It is disingenuously argued that there is a modal shift but it appears highly unlikely that there would be a significant reduction in carbon emissions.

Rather than taking the action required, the report makes the assumption that new technologies will ride to the rescue like the proverbial knight in shining armour. We have known of the need to reduce carbon emissions for 30 years but this has failed to happen as yet. To ensure reductions we should pursue public transport options that are known to have a positive impact, rather than placing hope in technologies that may never deliver.

Categories on which schemes are judged: It should be noted that the items associated with economic growth are ones that are associated with road access and more likely to give positive results to such schemes.

Roads as promoting carbon reductions?!

While we acknowledge the possibility that, in the short term, new roads may reduce congestion on existing streets, it is generally recognised that road construction leads to more traffic, increasing carbon emissions and reducing air quality. However the report states (Appendix A, p.A2) that each road scheme has either a neutral or positive (!) impact. The idea that new roads will play a positive role in reducing carbon emissions and enable modal shift by creating space for public transport is fantasy and would be laughable if it was not so serious. All they will do is create more space for more traffic.

B) Rail Proposals:

While we welcome the proposals as far as they go, six new stations and new facilities is insufficient and derisory. The proposals fail to recognise the fact that the existing rail lines are the only method of truly rapid transit that avoids road congestion and is currently available. They fail to use the network to its potential. Rail and public transport should be given more priority at the expense of new road schemes.

In addition to new stations on existing lines our priority is the Henbury Loop - MetroWest Phase 3. Unsurprisingly the Loop is dismissed as a result of the earlier flawed study by CH2MHill - see below.

New stations on existing lines:

We support the six stations proposed by the West of England authorities (Ashley Hill, Ashton Gate, Charfield, Constable Road (Horfield), Saltford and St Annes). We also recommend stations at Chittening on the Henbury Loop (for Severnside); Coalpit Heath (for Winterbourne and Emerson's Green); Corsham; Long Ashton / Flax Bourton; Uphill (Weston-super-Mare). We would urge that these reopenings are considered as a package rather than individually.

We urge that Pilning's service be increased (as previously supported by the West of England authorities) to provide a commuter service and Park and Ride site for access from Thornbury, South Gloucestershire and South Wales.

Cost:

The cost of a station is small when compared to the proposed road schemes (7-14 stations for the price of *East of Bath Link*) and has the result of reducing reliance on the private car rather than maintaining it. For example, a station at Coalpit Heath with an estimated cost of £5-10 million, would not only serve the proposed development area, it would provide opportunities for interchange with MetroBus and standard bus services, providing a link to the Science Park and housing at Emerson's Green and reducing congestion on the ring road.

Congestion: a problem that *can* be resolved:

The argument that rail lines are congested is true. However this should not be used as an excuse not to make further improvements. Rather government should be pressed to provide funding for schemes such as the remodelling of East Bristol junction.

Creative ways can be also found to avoid congestion. Examples include running from Weston-super-Mare to Chippenham and Portishead to Yate and Gloucester or Cheltenham; Henbury Loop services could run from Bristol Temple Meads via Henbury to Clifton Down.

A station at Coalpit Heath would provide an opportunity to reduce congestion between Bristol Parkway and Westerleigh Junction by building the station on passing loops, as was the case in the past.

Access to Severnside has not been considered:

We are also concerned at the lack of support within the document for rail freight, in particular action to support a terminal at Avonmouth and road access to the Port of Bristol. Access to the port at Avonmouth is via level crossings over the Henbury Loop and Severn Beach rail lines. This restricts access. Increased passenger services have understandably proved to be of concern to the port.

FOSBR support the proposed expansion of the Port of Bristol and want to ensure that road access is adequate and does not restrict their business or rail improvements. We urge the West of England to press government to fund improved access and a new rail freight terminal.

Henbury Loop:

We are not surprised to see that the Henbury Loop has been dismissed as poor value for money in view of the previous study by CH2M Hill. We would remind WECA that this was widely condemned as flawed at the time and subject to a call-in by Bristol City councillors, who voted to reject its findings and to support the Loop rather than the spur. At the time the Department for Transport recommended to Charlotte Leslie (MP at the time) that the Loop be reviewed by an independent consultant.

Reasons for the Loop -

Henbury Loop is needed to enable **access to Severnside**, which is due to expand considerably (25,000 jobs) and can only be reached by public transport with great difficulty. It is a social equity measure as well as a transport proposal. The Loop would provide improved access for those in Henbury, Filton, Patchway, Horfield, Lockleaze, Easton, Lawrence Hill, and other areas that would connect well with the loop by bus.

We also need this to enable a modal shift. The WECA Spatial Plan / Transport Study assumes that car use stays static - that isn't good enough. Without significant modal shift we will not

meet carbon targets because transport is such a large proportion of CO2.

Issues with the CH2M Hill Report about Henbury Loop & Spur -

1. **how best to provide access to Severnside was not even considered** - it wasn't an objective of Phase Two as it was considered that it had been dealt with by improving the service on the Severn Beach line! This needs to be taken into consideration.
2. **Forecast figures are low** - based on outdated Network Rail figures - by using updated figures passenger numbers would be 19% higher for 2023 and 24.5% for 2031; these figures had already been exceeded at most regional stations by 2013-14. This weakened the benefit-cost ratio.
3. **Unrealistically low predicted passenger numbers** that compare badly to existing stations; when comparing them to stations the report says are similar we thought they would be 30-40% higher
4. **Unrealistically low growth predicted at existing stations** - only an extra 2-3% was predicted; since the improved service on the Severn Beach Line resulted in a 37% increase this seems ridiculous.
5. **Unrealistically low differences predicted between Loop and Spur** - unlikely in view of easier access to Severnside, which is inaccessible by bus. This will have weakened the benefit-cost ratio.
6. **Comparison timings for bus and train are wildly inaccurate or simply impossibly inconvenient**; it fails to mention that most of the industrial sites are not served by bus; car journey times are not given.
7. The cumulative effect of this is that **the study expects the local authorities to pay to run the service for 30 years and includes this cost accordingly.**
8. **The argument that WoE can only approve schemes with a benefit-cost ratio exceeding 2:1 is false.** Other authorities, such as Manchester and Birmingham, allow the building of strategically important schemes (e.g. Docklands Light Railway) that do not meet this requirement. The assumptions of revenue support are also likely to be incorrect due to inaccurate predictions and lack of strategic thinking about access to Severnside.

C) RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

- **Increased emphasis on rail and other public transport schemes and the removal of road schemes** to ensure a significant modal shift and reduction of carbon emissions without relying on dubious future technological improvements
- **That WECA commission a review of Henbury Loop by an independent consultant.** This was recommended by DfT to Charlotte Leslie (MP at the time). This would include the factors not considered by CH2M Hill's report such as the impact on access to Severnside, realistic passenger growth figures (rather than the Network Rail's disputed figures that had already been exceeded on local lines), realistic passenger demand figures (new ones were *much* lower than existing stations and the impact on existing stations was a handful of new passengers), consultation with business and stakeholders (not carried out by CH2M Hill), etc.
- **lobby government** (and Network Rail) to pay for public transport measures, improved road access to the Port of Bristol, resignalling, East Bristol junction and improvements at Temple Meads station
- **Inclusion of FOSBR's MetroWest Phase 3** package of stations
- **Safeguarding the rail line to Thornbury** to enable future development
- Continuing and **ongoing review** of opportunities for rail & integration with other modes

- Rob Dixon, Chair of Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways