

## **Response to CH2M Hill's MetroWest Phase Two report**

**Statement to West of England Joint Transport Board, July 17<sup>th</sup> 2015, together with additional information for the Bristol City Council West of England Scrutiny (Call-in) meeting, 7<sup>th</sup> August 2015:**

- Rob Dixon, FOSBR/TFGB transport campaigner

### **PART ONE: Original Statement to West of England Joint Transport Board, July 17<sup>th</sup> 2015**

#### **Summary:**

Many things have been ignored or not considered in the MetroWest Phase 2 report: access to/from Severnside is not considered or even an objective of the scheme, despite the councils saying how important this area is for our economy and the fact that public transport in that area is very limited. We find this astonishing. We also find it hard to believe that only four extra journeys would be made each day from Henbury station on a loop service in view of the comparative ease of travelling to the Severnside employment area on that service. Related to these issues the report fails to acknowledge the impact of poor public transport journey times and their improvement (particularly by Henbury Loop) on attractiveness and patronage.

The demand forecasts are inadequate. They do not consider the impact on the network as a whole and demand that will be created by improved services, only the number of journeys from new stations. Worryingly the forecasts are calculated using incorrect and outdated Network Rail figures. This is an obvious example of the poor standard of analysis shown throughout the report. Having failed to consider key issues at all we believe the report is fatally flawed and wholly inadequate and does not provide an effective basis for good decision making.

This report illustrates the total lack of ambition of our local authorities. The most important objective appears to be to provide a rail scheme within the existing funding rather than creating an integrated and attractive network. Having carried out their analysis, under instruction from the councils, an option has been adjusted to make it cheaper with minimal further analysis.

Additionally the report has been produced ten days before the decision will be made and without any scrutiny whatsoever. This is poor practice and indicates the councils do not believe in what they are doing or have confidence in the consultants report. We certainly do not have confidence in the report.

**1) Despite saying that the Severnside and Northern Fringe would be the area that would benefit most from rail improvements, access to Avonmouth - Severnside enterprise zone has not been considered and is not even one of the objectives of the MetroWest Phase Two!**

The report lists objectives including access to areas of economic growth (section 2.4). However access to Avonmouth-Severnside is not listed as one of them. In addition to the 14,200 people employed in Avonmouth-Severnside in 2010, the LEP estimates there will be 6,000 to 12,000 additional jobs by 2026. The report notes that local employers are already concerned about the lack of public transport to serve their employees who travel to work from a wide area. Much of Severnside is not currently

served by any public transport and journey times to Avonmouth can be poor.

The report refers repeatedly to the need to promote economic growth and for rail improvements to avoid constraining growth and talks of the need for regeneration. However nowhere does it mention the need or desire to improve access Severnside and it is clear that this has not been considered.

The report draws on Atkins' *GVA Impacts of Major Transport Schemes*. However, Atkins also failed to consider the potential for improved access to Severnside. (The working assumption was of a Henbury spur). Atkins stated that "the impacts of rail schemes are likely to be concentrated on Temple Quarter and Bath." They considered that phase 1 (the Severn Beach line) was the relevant scheme for Severnside and ignored the potential for accessing Severnside via Henbury Loop. This historic ignorance of the line's potential is why access to Severnside has also not been considered in the current report.

We believe the potential impact of the Henbury Loop on access to employment around the network would be considerable. As well as the line enabling direct travel from elsewhere, the Park and Ride rail station at Portway could act as a park and ride for the North Fringe, while a park and ride at North Filton station (on the A38) would serve Severnside.

## **2) Accessing Severnside by public transport is simply not possible at the moment and the report fails to acknowledge this.**

*"The Henbury Loop would provide quick and efficient public transport from North Bristol and the North Fringe where currently none exists".*

This report compares journey times to Severnside by public transport but fails to acknowledge that buses only serve Avonmouth or an hourly bus to Severn Beach, which does not run at times convenient for most shift workers. At the moment there is no public transport to most of the business parks at Severnside.

There is no acknowledgement that those without a private car have difficulty accessing the area and that only rail services on the Henbury Loop could provide an opportunity for this, particularly for those living in areas of significant deprivation in the inner city.

## **3) There is no acknowledgement or analysis of the impact of better journey times or more convenient public transport journeys on car use and congestion by Henbury Loop**

While the report notes that a Henbury Loop would provide faster journey times to Severnside destinations from North Bristol and the North Fringe in comparison to a Spur, the importance for this in terms of attractiveness of service or to encourage people to use public transport instead of their car is not considered.

There is no acknowledgement that current journey times by bus (or service timings) are unattractive and unacceptable to most potential users or that proposed journey times via the Henbury spur and Severn Beach line would be little better and unlikely to encourage use of public transport. It would take 65 minutes to travel from Henbury to Severn Beach or 56 minutes to Avonmouth via Henbury spur train, rather than 26 minutes or 11 minutes by the Henbury Loop. Such journey times via the spur would not encourage people to use public transport.

The Henbury Spur would only provide quick public transport into central Bristol. It would do nothing for people wanting to travel between Henbury and Avonmouth. We do not believe

that the long journey times by Henbury Spur would not make these journeys attractive by public transport or encourage people out of their cars. The report has not considered this at all."

#### **4) The importance of cost rather than quality of service:**

Having considered the different service options, since all four options exceed the current budget the consultants have proposed removing Constable Road (Horfield/Lockleaze) station from the cheaper option in order to stay within the budget. The impact of this is not considered in any detail.

The most important objective appears to be to provide a rail scheme at the minimum cost.

Rather than attempt to seek funding for better, more attractive options that maximise the potential of the whole network the report appears to value ensuring that any proposed scheme is within the current budget, over its effectiveness. This highlights everything that is wrong with the values of the consultants' report and of our local authorities: cheap is valued over ambition, attractiveness and effectiveness.

#### **5) Inadequate demand forecasts that do not consider the impact on the network as a whole, only the demand at new stations**

- there is no mention of journeys to/from Severnside and no forecast of demand travel to new stations, i.e. there is no recognition that people may want to travel between Avonmouth and Henbury, e.g. to access work at Severnside or North Fringe.
- there is no forecast of any impact of Metro Phase 2 on demand at existing stations, i.e. the potential for increases in passenger numbers due to more convenient and new journeys around the network as a whole.
- other stations are only mentioned in relation to the negative impact of new stations on existing ones, not any stimulation of demand.

#### **6) There is no consideration of the potential for rail improvements encouraging people to use public transport.**

Despite mentioning the large increases of passenger numbers on the Severn Beach line, it fails to consider that these have resulted from service improvements which made the service more attractive. We believe a more attractive rail network would have a similar but greater impact.

The report predicts minimal change to road congestion based on current "low" rail usage. As found throughout the report, it does not consider the potential for a more attractive service across the local network to encourage more people to use public transport rather than driving, as has been seen on the Severn Beach line where passenger numbers doubled when the service was improved.

#### **7) The report report predicts that only *four* more journeys would be made from Henbury and North Filton stations with a Loop compared to the spur. This seems highly unlikely!**

Do the consultants honestly think that *only four people* will take advantage of easy access to employment at Severnside from North Bristol and the North Fringe or travel in the

opposite direction to employment from Severnside?! As elsewhere this ignores the effect of convenience on people's willingness to take the train.

### **8) Poor assumptions of the growth of demand based on the use of incorrect and outdated Network Rail figures**

The use of old and incorrect figures illustrates a poor standard of analysis, shown throughout the report.

It is concerning to note that the figures used in the report for future growth are outdated ones from old Network Rail reports (3% p.a. to 2019 and 2.3% p.a. 2020-2023) and which have subsequently been revised upwards (5% p.a. 2012-2023). As it is Network Rail's future forecasts have been criticised as too low by the West of England authorities and Severnside Community Rail Partnership.

Despite highlighting and listing the large increases in passenger numbers on local rail lines in the last 10 years, the report refers to a lower regional average as the current rate of growth. It also makes the assumption that increases will reduce from 10-12% per annum at Bristol and South Glos local stations to only 3% by 2017 – in two years' time. There is no sign of this happening.

There is no mention of growth around the network due to the release of latent demand by service improvements.

9) Finally we see that the report notes that there has been **no passive provision made for construction of stations on Filton Bank** at Ashley Hill and Constable Road so the costs of building these stations include costs for resignalling and/or the movement of electrification equipment. This, despite the need having been highlighted by campaigners three years' ago.

## **PART TWO: Further information for the Bristol City Council West of England Scrutiny (Call-in) meeting, 7<sup>th</sup> August 2015**

### “CLARITY OF AIMS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES” – ACCESS TO SEVERNサイド

Peter Mann's '*Officer Response to Councillors*' in Appendix E of the documents prepared for this meeting that, “The Business Case has identified that the stated objectives for MetroWest can be achieved through the progression of Henbury Spur...” is disingenuous.

**Access between the North Fringe and Severnside is *not* an objective of MetroWest Phase Two. It has been considered only in terms of its impact on the economy. How to best serve this passenger demand has not been considered. This indicates a lack of strategic thinking.**

The stated objectives of MetroWest Phase Two (listed in Section 2.4 of the report) do *not* include access to and from Severnside and Avonmouth, i.e. between Severnside and the North Fringe. **Access to Severnside is considered an objective of MetroWest Phase One, the half hourly service on the Severn Beach line. As is repeatedly made clear in the CH2M Hill report, MetroWest Phase Two provides access to Severnside via the Severn Beach Line from Temple Meads or Stapleton Road, which is considered**

## sufficient.

Comparison timings are given for buses for journeys to Severnside but these are also inaccurate (see below) and only relate to journeys to Avonmouth. Such inaccuracies may have an impact on passenger demand predictions.

**Despite the Henbury Loop providing more attractive and quicker access to Severnside and around the over the network as a whole the report states that only *twelve* extra journeys a day would be made over the whole network with the Loop in comparison to the Spur in 2031 – which equates to about eight journeys (four returns) a day in 2021** after the report's (low) predicted increases in demand are taken into account. These figures seem highly unlikely in view of the West of England LEP's estimate of 6,000 to 12,000 new jobs in Severnside by 2026, in addition to the 14,200 employed there in 2010.

### FORECASTS OF INCREASE IN PASSENGER NUMBERS

Peter Mann is technically correct to say that “historic growth” levels have been considered. However they have only been used to show buoyant demand for rail as evidence of the need for MetroWest but that is all. **CH2M Hill report assumes that high levels of growth seen for the last 10 -15 years will suddenly cease, dropping from 10-12% in 2013-4 to 3% in 2017.**

As noted in my statement to the Leaders' Board, the figures used in Section 3.3.4 are outdated and/or misleading and lower than Network Rail's cautious predictions:

- Current and past increases in passenger numbers are assumed to suddenly taper off by 2017.
- Rather than taper the increase from figures for the area in which the new stations are located – Bristol (12%) and South Glos (10%) – the lower West of England average of 5.6% is used for 2014.
- The figure tapers down to reach “the RUS average rate” of 3.0% for 2018 and 2019. This figure was that proposed for 2009-19 in Network Rail's Rail Utilisation Strategy. These growth predictions were exceeded at most regional stations by 2013/4. Their predictions were superseded and twice revised upwards in the Great Western Route Strategy and its preparatory work (2013/2014), to 47% then 54% (for 2012-23), i.e. 4% per annum. These figures were also considered by many to be too cautious. This has been confirmed by growth of about 20% in Bristol & South Glos for 2012-14 (five years' predicted growth).
- **The MetroWest report uses irrelevant figures for 2023 to 2043.** Although Network Rail's Route Strategy gives four different economic scenarios with different growth rates (6%, 14%, 35% and 54% for 2012-23, and 22%, 52%, 64% and 121% for 2023-43), Network Rail focus on the highest figures (54% for 2012-23 or an average of 4% p.a. and 121% for 2012-2043 or an average of 1.8% after 2023). Their investment plans are made on those assumptions.

However the MetroWest report uses an average of Network Rail's scenario figures for 2020 onwards, despite two of these already having been exceeded for 2012-23. Instead of 4% p.a 2012-23 tapering to 1.8% p.a after 2023, they describe tapering from 3% in 2019 to 2.3% in 2023 reducing to 1.3% after this.

**To summarise, the figures in the CH2M Hill MetroWest report used are lower than Network Rail's (already cautious) figures and unlikely to give an accurate picture of passenger demand. CH2M Hill's figures assume growth of 29% to 2023, whereas Network Rail's are almost double at 54%. The figures after 2023 This weakens the business case and the Benefit Cost Ratio for both Loop and Spur.**

DEMAND FORECASTS – comparison with existing stations

**The CH2M Hill Report predicted passenger numbers for the new stations are unrealistically low.** They have 'paired' them with existing stations to which they are supposed to be similar. **The predicted use is much lower, lower in fact than any Bristol or South Glos station except Shirehampton and Sea Mills. For example the 2013/4 figure for Ashley Down (paired with Montpelier) is 63,295 (spur) / 63,331 (loop) compared to Montpelier's 121,294.**

CH2M Hill give figures for 2021. To compare them to existing stations' use in 2013/14 (for when most recent data is available), these have been reduced by 29.2% in line with CH2M Hill's own predicted passenger increases, (which we consider unrealistically low). This suggests the following:

Constable Road 26,692 (spur) / 26,727 (loop)  
Ashley Down 63,295 (spur) / 63,331 (loop)  
Montpelier (paired with Ashley Down) 121,294  
Henbury 69,986 (spur) / 70,800 (loop)  
Patchway (paired with Henbury) 90,404  
North Filton 65,348 / 65,986 (loop)  
Avonmouth 111,440  
Bedminster 83,242  
Redland 93,176  
Parson Street 102,654

Additionally, according to CH2M Hill's report, between 78,000 and 120,000 extra journeys will be made at existing stations in 2031. Reducing these figures to consider growth in passenger demand from 2014 to 2031, these equates only to between 44,600 and 68,200 journeys per annum. If we consider that Bristol and South Gloucestershire's local stations had 2,117,270 passengers in 2013/4, this assumes an increase of only 2 – 3%. Since the improved service on the Severn Beach line (from hourly to approximately every 45 minutes) resulted in an increase of 37% at those stations this appears low.

As noted previously, there are also low figures given for the impact of Henbury Loop in comparison to the spur, which appear unlikely in view of easier access to Severnside, which is largely inaccessible by bus at present.

**These low figures and poor growth assumptions will have impacted negatively on the assumptions about revenue support, the business case and the Benefit Cost Ratio for both Loop and Spur.**

WEST OF ENGLAND ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

Peter Mann states in the '*Officer Response to Councillors*' that a Loop option could not be chosen because it commits the West of England authorities to only approve schemes that have a BCR exceeding 2:1. This is not, as he suggests, because government insist on this, but because the authorities have chosen to do this. **Other authorities, such as**

**those in and around Manchester and Birmingham, have different rules that allow the building of strategically important schemes, (such as Docklands Light Railway), that do not meet BCR requirements.**

#### THE BUDGET

Much has been made of the current budget of £41.6 million. It should be noted that **this figure was arrived at in the study of the proposed costs of the Henbury Spur, not by any process to consider what was required.**

Due to the need for resignalling around Avonmouth and the Port of Bristol, which has not been included in Network Rail's resignalling programme, and issues of access to the port, **the budget for Henbury Loop is likely to unfairly include items for which the local councils should not be responsible. It is vital that the councils put continuous and active pressure on government and Network Rail to pay for these issues for which they are and should remain responsible.**

#### DUE CONSULTATION

A decision was made on July 10<sup>th</sup>, three days after the report was released. The media report a decision had been made and it had been announced to staff of one of the local authorities by their Chief Executive the previous month. There was no consultation whatsoever. Regular meetings with stakeholders about MetroWest have taken place over the last two years but these are of an 'information provision' nature, rather than to seek or encourage stakeholder views.

#### CONCLUSION

**In conclusion, FOSBR believes that the CH2M Hill report is of poor quality, fails to consider key issues, in particular access to Severnside, and includes poor predictions of passenger numbers and growth. It fails to adequately consider strategic objectives and needs. These factors mean that the the business case and the Benefit Cost Ratio for both Loop and Spur are inaccurate and the report is flawed.**