

Reaction to Joint Transport Study September 2017: FOSBR welcomes the determination of WECA to proceed with developing transport studies, but would challenge the assumption that the first of the schemes to be advanced should be MetroBus, bus-based Park and Ride and road bypass schemes ahead of rail schemes. We note there is still no regional rail strategy in the JTS. We note that the Joint Spatial Plan was only released on Friday 20 October so we cannot comment by the 12 noon Friday 20 October statement deadline for this advisory board.

1. MetroBus: We are alarmed at the proposed rolling-out of the MetroBus schemes to Thornbury, Severnside and Keynsham, when there are existing or unexploited freight lines for each of these destinations. We question the safety of the MetroBuses in the guided busways, especially when entering the flanges and mounting steep and curved bridges such as the one at Ashton Vale.

2. Rail element: We note that this study claims to have ambition and yet is only suggesting the same six new rail stations proposed in the December 2016 pre-consultation draft, and that the September 2017 version is now explicitly excluding the two rail schemes (Henbury Loop and the Thornbury Line) which are the most inspiring to the public. We note that the total budget for the Joint Transport Study is £8.9bn, of which only £1bn is allocated to rail. We note that the Rail 1 element for just six stations is £50-80m, and the Rail 2 element “improvements to existing stations” at £626 million should be covered by the GWR Franchise and not funded by WECA. Instead, this could fund the Portishead line at the £100m re-costing, the Henbury Loop at £48 million, the Port St Andrew’s Gate access bridge at £128 million, and the Thornbury Line at £38 million (costed in WEP 2012 Halcrow report).

3. Henbury Loop We note that the very low BCR for the Henbury Loop was arrived at by assuming a train subsidy for 30 years due to low ridership, whereas the Henbury Spur subsidy was assumed to be taken into the GWR franchise after 3 years due to higher ridership. If the projected Loop ridership is an underestimate as asserted at the time, then the 30 year trainset hire cannot be assumed. The Phase 1 BCR was calculated differently as it did not include trainset hire – for Phase 1 it was assumed that the trainset hire would come out of the four councils’ revenue funding of £1.1 million per year. We accept there is an issue with the 63 minute run-time, but suggest reversing the trains at Bristol Parkway to overcome the timetabling and low ridership issues. We would also want WECA to challenge the Port study £128m figure for creating a rail cutting at St Andrew’s Gate level crossing, and to investigate alternatives such as a bridge at St Andrew’s Rd Station north of the conveyor belt silo. Finally we note that Severnside industrial development is growing fast, and should give an even better business case for the Henbury Loop, especially if opening a station at Chittingen.

4. Portishead Line We would like to participate in the re-scoping discussions on Portishead line, chiefly our idea of implementing our proposal for long weekend closures, given the present lack of use by Portbury Dock of their purchased freight paths. We have presented data that shows that the Port make very little use of their purchased freight paths and that in winter 2017 the trains have been running only on Tuesdays and Thursdays, albeit more frequently in summer 2017. If the weekend possessions for works to the line were from Friday to Monday, this would double the length of time during the line closures, and more than halve the number of weekend closures needed.

5. Thornbury - We note that during October 2017, Network Rail have been clearing the line to Tytherington Quarry, and that a 2012 Halcrow report commissioned by WEP costed the Thornbury Line at £38 million for an extension as far as the old station site in the centre of the town. We propose that a site at Grosvenor Road Roundabout is optimal as it is adjacent to the majority of existing and proposed railway development and has an attractive prospect and entrance to the town. We have visited both rail tunnels under the A38 and M5 and can confirm they are in good condition. Rail capacity is much less an issue on a branch line and could eliminate the need for a turnback at Yate. The fourth platform at Bristol Parkway should also help with capacity at Westerleigh Junction.