

**Questions from Christina Biggs (Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways)**

**Subject: MetroWest / rail issues**

1. What proportion of the agreed Phase 1 full £1.1m subsidy per year will WECA be paying for the now-timetabled MetroWest Phase 1A half-hour service to Avonmouth, (hourly to Severn Beach), has this been committed to FirstGroup PLC operating as GWR, will the service be in the May 2020 timetable, and how much of this is dependent on a fare increase?
2. Will WECA intervene to prevent the proposed hostile takeover of FirstGroup PLC by American hedge fund Coast and Capital PLC and are there contingency plans in place to protect GWR, SW Rail and FirstBus passengers?
3. When will MetroWest Phase 2 (including services to Gloucester and a N Filton Arena station) complete GRIP 3, are costs projected to escalate as much as for MetroWest Phase 1 and how much funding will YTL be providing?

**REPLY:**

1. WECA has allocated £6m to the capital delivery of MetroWest Phase 1. The treatment of revenue subsidy and surplus is subject to ongoing commercial negotiation with GWR. Any revenue subsidy would be for a limited duration only, to bridge the gap to the start of the next franchise period. We anticipate we would be able to update the Joint Committee by the end of 2019, but we are dependent on the franchising process being managed by DfT. The timing of the opening of this service is dependent on the delivery programme which is currently being established with Network Rail. We will update once the technical work to confirm the programme is complete.
2. WECA cannot intervene in the operation of the financial business market. Rail franchisees are subject to statutory duties with regard to their passenger services. Any owner of GWR or SW Rail will be held to those responsibilities. We are not envisaging a short-term threat to existing commercial bus routes but will monitor the situation closely. Where a bus operator is operating a contracted service for a local authority, any new owner would be expected to continue to be held to those responsibilities.
3. MetroWest Phase 2 GRIP 3 costs were received in August 2018. These costs formed the basis of the Outline Business Case. We are currently awaiting the GRIP 4 Cost Estimate from Network Rail but are not expecting a significant cost escalation. The scheme currently being costed is for a base case including the development at Cribbs Patchway New Neighbourhood, but not a new arena. The potential new arena will be subject to planning approval during which an understanding of the transport impacts of the plans will be assessed. Any measures required to mitigate these impacts would be negotiated as part of the consideration of the planning application as with any other development.