

# Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways (FOSBR) statement MetroWest Phase 1 and 2: New Year Challenge to BCC Full Council

Tuesday 20 January 2015, City Hall, Bristol

*with reference to WEP Strategic Leaders' Board's response to FOSBR's questions of 9 January 2015*



**Preamble:** FOSBR is encouraged that both MetroWest Phase 1 and 2 are being progressed, and is delighted that top-up capital funding from the Local Growth Fund has been secured for both MetroWest Phase 1 (£8.5m) and Phase 2 (£3.2m).

***FOSBR calls on Bristol City Council to take up the following FOSBR New Year challenges:***

## **1. MetroWest Phase One**

FOSBR welcomes publication of the Preliminary Business Case for MetroWest Phase 1 (Portishead reopening and half-hourly service from Temple Meads to Avonmouth and Bath, to be delivered in 2019), but deplores the omission of Ashton Gate station from the Phase One plans. FOSBR notes that stops at Bedminster station are now to be considered as a favoured option.

***1.1 Phase One subsidy: FOSBR challenges BCC to lead the way by committing now to set aside the preliminary estimate of £275k p.a. (similar to the £220k Severn Beach Line subsidy released from the BCC budget in October 2013) in order to provide WEP with adequate staffing and resources to ensure delivery of MetroWest Phase 1 in 2019.***

FOSBR notes that an estimated total £1.1m subsidy per annum (for between 3 and 5 years) needs to be pledged by October 2015 from the four authorities (i.e. an average of £275k each p.a.) by October 2015. While that is not a final figure, since a formula will be devised for allocation of subsidy between the four authorities, commitment to the subsidy in principle is needed now.

***1.2 Ashton Gate station: FOSBR challenges BCC to insist now on provision to be made for a ghost stop at Ashton Gate station in the Phase 1 timetable, to be among the criteria used to determine whether the timetable is viable. FOSBR also challenges BCC to reallocate the 13-month delayed Halcrow study into Ashton Gate to another consultant, such as CH2MHill, with the task of gathering data for the business case for Ashton Gate.***

FOSBR considers that, in serving two iconic regional venues (the football ground and Ashton Court) and a busy commercial hub, Ashton Gate station should be viewed as key to the vision of Bristol as Green Capital 2015. It should be in MetroWest Phase 1. WEP has said, "*Until this [timetabling for Phase 1] work is completed we will not be able to determine whether the MetroWest Phase 1 train service could at some point in the future call at a station at Ashton Gate*", but we believe the timetabling should include provision for Ashton Gate from the start.

## **2. Metro West Phase Two**

***FOSBR challenges BCC to help WEP and S Glos to bring MetroWest Phase Two plans (Henbury Loop and Filton Bank New Stations) into tandem with Phase One now. This will ensure that passenger rail services are provided for the Cribbs Patchway New Neighbourhood Development (CPNN) before the 8,000 homes are built.***

FOSBR welcomes plans for new stations at North Filton and Henbury, Ashley Hill, and Horfield & Lockleaze as part of the Henbury Loop, but challenges WEP to stand by its original vision.

***2.1 Charlton Halt: FOSBR challenges BCC to request Network Rail now to carry out a comparative study of Haddenham & Thame Parkway station, which has a similar topography to Charlton Halt, to establish the likely cost of building and maintaining a station at Charlton Halt.***

FOSBR does not accept that a station at Charlton Halt should be “ruled out on drainage issues by Network Rail at an early stage of the work into the North Fringe Stations Study (March 2014)”. Charlton Halt is ideally situated to serve both the CPNN and Southmead Hospital; further, a station at Charlton would enable Henbury station to be sited at its original location on the B4055, to serve Henbury. BCC should follow up its request to South Glos to include Charlton Halt in the plans.

***2.2 Avonmouth station: FOSBR challenges BCC to support Avonmouth councillors Matthew Melias and Wayne Harvey by finding funding streams now for renovation of this attractive and historic building for its future as rail hub for the Severn Beach Line, Henbury Loop and the future Port of Avonmouth passenger terminal .***

FOSBR deplores Network Rail’s plans to demolish the station building at Avonmouth, despite its future as a rail hub for the Henbury Loop, and notes with dismay that planning permission for the demolition has now been given. FOSBR welcomes WEP’s statement that “[a]t the [WEP] Joint Transport Board on 12/12/14 Network Rail agreed to look into this issue”, but urges BCC to take the matter up with Network Rail directly as a matter of urgency.

***2.3 Filton Bank new stations: FOSBR challenges BCC to secure now concrete assurance from Network Rail of passive provision for stations at both Ashley Hill and Horfield & Lockleaze (at Constable Road).***

FOSBR notes that the CH2MHill study on Ashley Hill and Horfield & Lockleaze stations is due to be published in March 2015. We would disagree with WEP’s assertion that “The forecasts of patronage at [Ashley Hill and Horfield & Lockleaze] stations must . . . [be] primarily based on catchment area”. We would urge BCC (i) to supply postcode data for Southmead Hospital, Horfield Leisure Centre, Gloucester County Cricket Ground, the City of Bristol College and the Bristol Rovers football ground, and (ii) to ensure CHM2Hill properly investigates the possibility of derogation from gradient and curvature standards, so as to reduce costs.

### **3. Temple Meads station**

***FOSBR challenges BCC to insist now on a single-site bus–rail interchange on Plot Six and to secure extra funding if necessary.***

FOSBR is not reassured that the “Master Plan for Bristol Temple Meads station will include improved provision for public transport interchange”, since the plans published so far still indicate multiple sites for bus stops, including the bus stops on Temple Way which are impossible for disabled passengers.

### **4. Governance**

***FOSBR challenges the four partner authorities to help WEP to secure now the rail powers and democratic governance needed for WEP to act as a Combined Authority. This would avoid the present situation, exemplified above, where WEP has to beg for funds for MetroWest from the four councils, and to plead with Network Rail for station reopenings, rail infrastructure, and the preservation of strategic station buildings.***