

Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways (FOSBR) Response to Bristol Transport Strategy 2nd November 2018



Summary

We welcome the strategy and many of the elements in it but we note that these proposals sideline rail and light rail and are focused largely on road-based schemes including new roads. Only a handful of new rail stations are proposed, ignoring the potential to make the most of the existing network.

We recognise and agree with the importance of buses and new routes, particularly orbital and limited stop routes, but with the caveat that these should be on existing roads and not used as an excuse to build unnecessarily costly and over-engineered infrastructure for buses or to be shared with private vehicles as has occurred with much of MetroBus.

The draft strategy outcomes do not specifically include carbon reduction, and air quality improvement is included in Outcome 1 as an adjunct to “efficient movement of traffic around the city, with increased resilience of the network”. These omissions suggest that the Council is not focusing adequately on key aims.

FOSBR believe that the potential for rail and light rail to help with congestion, carbon reduction, air quality and achieving better health has been underestimated by the draft strategy.

Familiar excuses about narrow streets and the location of rail in relation to existing (road) corridors are used to justify decisions about rail and light rail. These do not bear serious examination and seem to be aimed to justify avoiding taking any serious action to reduce car use. These are written off as “extremely radical measures”. We would argue that restrictions (particularly on parking) are not radical but are necessary and without them the modal shift that is required to reduce congestion and encourage the use of public transport will not occur and success of the plan will be limited.

The argument that rail cannot provide an alternative mode of travel along key corridors is not a valid one. The corridors exist solely because of the long-standing presence of roads, and it is the locations between which people want to move that are important and the time taken to do so. Rail already goes to many key locations, such as the city centre and Severnside industrial area, and could (with the political will) be linked with locations such as Southmead hospital and UWE by the use of stations as rail-bus interchanges. There is also the opportunity to provide a Park and Rail scheme adjacent to some, such as at Pilning and North Filton. These opportunities continue to be ignored.

We particularly take issue with the continuing myth that a “lack of road space” (page 61) on road corridors prevents light rail schemes from going ahead. The current available width of the roads cited in the report is *only* restricted because of the unrestricted presence of parked cars. If selected shopping streets such as Gloucester Road, Broadmead, the Centre, Bristol Bridge and Park Street were pedestrianised with severe restrictions of on-street parking, even at their narrowest points there would be adequate

space for light rail services, as has been done in the narrow streets of Sheffield and numerous continental cities such as Bordeaux and Grenoble.

Rather than spending vast amounts of money on an underground mass transit on the three proposed routes of the A38, Kingswood and the airport, Bristol and its neighbouring local authorities should be focused on using and developing the existing rail network more effectively.

Bristol and its neighbouring local authorities should also review bus services to ensure they serve where people want to go; take on the bus and rail powers available to them; create effective interchanges at stations between bus and rail; restrict car parking to make the use of light rail on existing corridors a real possibility, such as along Gloucester Road or through East Bristol. New roads, such as Callington Road Link or extensions of the Avon Ring Road, should not be built and the money should be spent instead on new bus and rail routes and services, as well as further walking and cycling measures.

Levels of car use and consequent traffic congestion in the city and its surrounding areas are such that a comprehensive programme of sustained and ambitious investment is required that includes a broad range of interventions, not solely road building and new Metrobus routes.

We would support measures to raise funds for investment in public transport from schemes such as the proposed congestion charge, due to the positive impact it would have on quality of life for people throughout the city region, not just those living in areas blighted by traffic. However, we would caution that congestion charging that charges all vehicles equally will not necessarily resolve the issue of air quality, but that a congestion charge should penalize polluting vehicles more than more modern cleaner vehicles.

Additionally there are several issues that need to be addressed in order for the proposed transport plan to meet its aims. These have historically been ignored or avoided:

- The city needs to ensure that WECA takes the bus and rail powers that other core cities and ITAs have in order to enable an efficient and convenient transport network.
- There needs to be a comprehensive review of the bus networks in Bristol and the neighbouring West of England authorities, with attention given to cross-boundary issues.
- The city needs to ensure that WECA reviews the local rail network to identify where stations are technically possible that maximise opportunities for people to travel from outside and within Bristol.
- Cycling, walking and waterways should be included in a consideration of a comprehensive active transport and public transport network.

We propose the following rail measures:

- **Full Henbury Loop**, not a spur terminating at Henbury. This is required to enable travel between Severnside and North Bristol, including to link the Park and Ride at Shirehampton with the Northern Fringe, and to provide effective access to any future arena at Brabazon Hangar.

- **New or reopened stations** at Chittening (on Henbury Loop at Severnside), Coalpit Heath, Corsham, Long Ashton / Flax Bourton (for Bristol Airport), Uphill (south of Weston super Mare and adjacent to both the Weston General Hospital and Weston College campus) and Pilning station (rebuilt to allow travel to / from Severnside), and Portbury as a Park&Ride.

While some of these are not within the Bristol city boundary, they would have a positive impact on congestion and should be supported by the council (and WECA) and mentioned within the report, just as the Council's support for light rail transport to the airport is already recorded in the BTS consultation draft. These would be in addition to those already proposed by WECA in their September 2017 Joint Transport Study for Ashton Gate, Charfield, Constable Road, St Anne's and Salford.

FOSBR also recommends measures to incentivise a lifestyle of car-free travel:

- Exploring the reopening of the line to Thornbury for passengers. This is particularly urgent as Thornbury commuters currently use the car to commute to Bristol via the M32, where most of the Bristol air pollution is concentrated. As an interim measure, Pilning Park and Rail is recommended as FOSBR already knows of many Thornbury parents who drive their children to Severn Beach to catch the train to school.
- Creating bus-rail interchanges, with real-time bus information and signage at stations and on-street rail timetable information at bus stops adjacent to rail stations (such as Clifton Down and Lawrence Hill)
- Multi-modal smart ticketing to enable convenient multi-modal journeys by public transport
- Selective double tracking of the Severn Beach line – this will greatly improve the reliability of the current and future services and open the way to a 15- or 20-minute service.
- Exploring the use of reduced emission or light rail trains.

We have attached as Appendix the FOSBR Rail Plan 2018 that summarises the steps that FOSBR believe would be transformational in achieving modal shift of passengers towards local train services.

The FOSBR Rail Plan 2018 assumes the successful funding and delivery of stations currently in the WECA pipeline, at Portway P&R, MetroWest Phase 1 (Portishead, Pill) and MetroWest Phase 2 (Ashley Down, Filton North, Henbury).

Note on recent Portishead Light Rail offer: Whilst we welcome the offer of light rail for the Portishead line as a possibly less expensive option, we would point out that for a stand-alone line it would be better for the rolling stock to be interchangeable with the rest of the GWR fleet for ease of maintenance and in case of malfunction. It would also be problematic to provide overhead electricity for the Portishead Line in particular due to the presence of four tunnels, and to have an electric third rail would be problematic for the wildlife in the Gorge. However, we are happy to await the outcome of the WECA study

on this possibility, particularly if light rail is agreed for use on the Henbury Loop and on-street lines as suggested elsewhere in our response.

Note on Mass Transit underground proposal: One location with underground heavy-rail tunnels presents a good opportunity to pilot a project to investigate the practicability of an underground metro, namely Aztec West. This location has both considerable high-tech employment and residential housing, and would benefit from an underground station to access the existing Patchway tunnels, which in fact are on the main line from London Paddington to Cardiff and therefore would have good transport links wider afield than the proposed Mass Transit route. Such a station if successful would inform the logistics of an underground metro.

Outcomes for citywide movement:

Outcome 1: Efficient movement of traffic around the city, with increased resilience of the network and minimised impacts of congestion and air pollution

FOSBR encourage Bristol City Council to comply with government standards for air quality as soon as possible, informed by the recent Clean Air Zone consultation. Completion of the deferred electrification from Chippenham and Bristol Parkway to Temple Meads would make rail a cleaner and more attractive mode in the city.

Reduced emission trains should also be available for local lines such as Weston-super-Mare, Severn Beach, Portishead and Henbury. On lines that are not yet electrified, suitable rolling stock could include hydrogen trains, battery-powered bi-mode vehicles, or those that also use diesel engines. WECA and BCC should be encouraged to buy their own rolling stock to supplement the existing GWR fleet as there are acute rolling stock shortages across the West of England that have caused considerable delays and cancellations.

Opening stations, including and beyond those envisaged in the draft BTS, will benefit health generally by putting more residents within walking/cycling distance of a station, enabling them to give up personal cars and engage in a degree of exercise.

Introduction and revision of LRT, MetroBus and bus networks need to achieve a spatial distribution where residents can walk to a stop so that their entire journey is car-free. The vehicle fleets for these networks will also need to be low emission/electric. BCC and WECA should lobby the government to incentivise electrification of the bus fleet in particular as the current Bus Services Operator Grant subsidises diesel and therefore acts as a disincentive to electrify all bus vehicles.

Outcome 2: On and off street parking managed efficiently to encourage use of sustainable transport and tackle congestion, while providing options that support the city's 24 hour economy.

FOSBR agree with these outcomes, but would suggest better use of agile technological solutions than the low-tech systems currently used by Bristol City Council.

For instance, our members report that the current Bristol manually administrated RPZ system causes delays during permit application, delays in dispatch of visitor scratch cards, false issuance of fines to correctly permitted cars and slow response from overloaded staff to queries. Bath, in contrast, uses an online permit portal that allows residents to self-manage residents' permits and electronic visitor permits.

Outcome 3: Reduced excess lorry and van travel in the city (especially during peak hours), working with industry to find cleaner alternative for the movement of goods.

FOSBR campaign primarily for improvement of passenger rail services but would suggest that there are opportunities to use rail freight for delivery consolidation at Bristol East Depot which is within easy reach of the city centre to facilitate "onward connection by sustainable modes."

Avonmouth also has potential for more intensive use as a road and rail freight consolidation centre.

Outcome 4: Public transport will be visibly integrated, convenient and reliable to enable people to move around the city in a more efficient way.

There should be accurate real-time bus information at all local stations and multi-modal smart ticketing.

There should be rail/bus interchanges at Filton Abbey Wood for Southmead Hospital, at Nailsea & Backwell for Bristol Airport and at all other key road/rail intersections such as Stapleton Road, Lawrence Hill and, soon, Ashley Hill/Muller Road.

The BTS mentions the delivery and improvement of local rail services through the MetroWest project. It mentions Portway, Filton North and Henbury but omits Ashley Hill which is also a deliverable under MetroWest Phase 2, albeit included in the map.

FOSBR strongly support the MetroWest projects and ask the City Council to work with WECA to ensure the delivery of both phases, including MetroWest Phase 1B with stations in North Somerset at Pill and Portishead.

MetroWest Phase 1A (expected 2021) will increase the frequency of the Severn Beach Line to Avonmouth to every 30 minutes but for optimum running requires the remodeling of Bristol East Junction. Selective double-tracking of the line would make it possible to improve the frequency to every 15/20 minutes. BCC should lobby the government to ensure that Bristol East Junction is funded.

The City Council should ensure delivery of the 30 minute frequency commitment in the JLTP3 to every Bristol railway station, including Patchway, Parson Street and Bedminster and aspire to a 20 or 15 minute frequency in the future.

The draft BTS also mentions "exploring new stations" at Constable Road, Ashton Gate and St Annes which are the Bristol area stations in the WECA Joint Transport Strategy. A station at Ashton Gate would be well placed for rugby and football supporters at the

stadum. The stadium facilities are expanding as a conference centre, basketball venue and hotel complex so there is a compelling and urgent case for a transport hub with an interchange between rail and MetroBus at this site.

If the Bristol Arena is built at the Brabazon Hangar site, this strengthens the case for a Henbury Loop passenger service to link with west Bristol directly. It would also make sense for the passengerisation of the east-west link through the Filton Diamond to connect services with Bristol Parkway. This site will also be key rail/MetroBus interchange with or without the arena.

The draft BTS refers to delivery of strategic Park & Rides and multi-modal orbital transport interchanges.

FOSBR suggest that future MetroBus routes interchange more effectively with the rail network, for instance, a MetroBus through Portway Park & Rail, and the Severnside industrial zone could terminate at a Pilning Park & Rail station.

Orbital MetroBus routes joining park & rides at Long Ashton(A370) & A38 & A37 & Hicks Gate(A4) & M32 via radial corridors (eg, possibly at intersection of A420 and A4174) could also link to a new station at Long Ashton, a new station at Hicks Gate, Filton Abbey Wood station and the new Filton North station on the A38.

The proposed MetroBus routes to Thornbury would be usefully supplemented by re-opening to passengers the freight railway line to Thornbury to connect residents easily to the wider rail network. The re-opening of Charfield and Coalpit Heath stations would also have significant catchment areas in South Gloucestershire.

The case study mentioned in Outcome 4 “Accessing employment in Avonmouth” does not mention the potential of a station at Pilning for improving access to Avonmouth and Severnside Enterprise Area. Pilning sits on the northern boundary of the group of regional distribution centres and would enable employees to travel in from Wales. Pilning would function as a Park & Rail for onward train journeys and also as a destination with onward bus/cycle connectivity for those employed locally. Pilning is also close to Cribbs Mall who have indicated that they would consider funding a minibus to take shoppers and employees traveling by train.

Outcome 5: Walking to be safe, pleasant, accessible and the first choice for local journeys and combined with public transport for longer journeys.

FOSBR support the Bristol Walking Strategy as an important part of the infrastructure that contributes to a city-wide sustainable transport network, particularly “improving walking links to rail stations and bus stops”.

FOSBR suggest that better signage is important to encourage access on foot to local stations, such as on Stapleton Road itself indicating the proximity of Stapleton Road station and from Temple Meads to the Centre via a fast ferry route.

Accessibility at local stations needs to be improved. Lawrence Hill has only stepped access to its northbound platform. Stapleton Road lacks step-free access between platforms. Parson Street has only stepped access to both platforms.

Outcome 6: Cycling to be safe, simple, accessible and convenient, either as an option for the whole journey or as part of a journey combined with public transport.

FOSBR support the Bristol Cycle Strategy as an important part of the infrastructure that contributes to a city-wide sustainable transport network.

FOSBR suggest that better signage is important to encourage access by bicycle to local stations.

All local stations should have bicycle racks covered by CCTV and encourage the City Council to ensure that local train operators allow adequate space for bicycles on local trains (without needing to pre-book cycle slots). Trains should also have increased on-board space for cycles.

We would also suggest that increasing the segregated sections of cycle paths in general would make cycling more accessible for all, as lane sharing with buses can be intimidating for the cyclist and difficult for the bus driver.

Outcome 7: A resilient, safe and well-maintained network to enable continuous movement of people and goods, using smart technologies.

FOSBR support the increase in segregated cycle lanes, the improvement of walking links to stations and bus stops, and better enforcement of road speed limits, these being the interventions most likely to increase road safety, particularly amongst children.

Outcome 8: More people making sustainable and healthy transport choices by improving engagement with communities, schools and businesses.

FOSBR suggest that the work of Severnside Community Rail Partnership in taking primary school children for a trip on the local rail network, and arranging for scholars' train passes to be paid for via the school, is an excellent example of community engagement. SCRPs work in improving the appearance, attractiveness and safety of stations such as Avonmouth, Severn Beach, Redland, Sea Mills, Clifton Down station, Stapleton Rd and Parson Street is highly commended.

The council should actively engage with residents, businesses and networking organizations such as North Bristol SusCom, Business West, SevernNet, Bristol Green Capital Partnership and the two universities, to identify what journeys people make regularly, what their transport needs are, and what barriers they experience to using public transport or active travel. This would provide the council with better evidence to make decisions, including about bus routes.

Outcome 9: New developments to be innovative in their approach to prioritise sustainable transport options and address the impact on the existing network.

As FOSBR's response to the Joint Spatial Plan noted, we believe that new developments must be in areas where good public transport is available. For example, the Taylor Wimpey proposal for the Vale is already adjacent to MetroBus, near the

Airport and on the rail line. We would oppose developments outside the Green Belt which are poorly served by public transport, such as Buckover Village and Banwell, as this simply encourages car commuting into Bristol and exacerbating the air quality issues there.

How far do you agree with our approach for the city centre?

Outcome for city centre:

Outcome 10: A city centre that is accessible by active and sustainable transport and attractive to live, work and visit, enhancing its status as the foremost shopping and cultural centre in the South West.

FOSBR recommends extensive pedestrianisation of the centre (Lewins Mead, the Centre, Park Street and Bristol Bridge), utilization of the Floating Harbour with fast and frequent hydrogen ferry from Hotwells along the Avon to Temple Meads and Brislington, use of on-street light rail and red bus routes with heavily restricted parking on shopping streets.

Outcome 11: More efficient transport corridors to move the largest number of people in the space available.

The draft BTS focuses on road-based solutions whilst ignoring the potential of the local rail network which can serve the same communities.

Pressure on all corridors could be alleviated by park & ride or park & rail schemes around the city, particularly prioritising a park & ride on the M32 corridor and Park and Rail at Pilning to intercept Severn Bridge traffic from entering Greater Bristol.

FOSBR agree with the relocation of on-street parking on corridors to provide space for continuous public transport as Sustrans have demonstrated in a study of Gloucester Road that the majority of customers do not arrive by car but use public and active transport.

The draft BTS refers to underground options as potential solutions for all below-mentioned corridors. FOSBR believe that the time scales for such an underground system (20 years) are too long and the project too expensive. FOSBR suggest that a cheaper and quicker deliverable would use the existing rail network and on-street light rail with a combination of heavy rail and light rail/tram train systems.

Light rail or tram/train systems can work on the train lines that provide corridors to north, south and east, via on-street routes to those areas of the city not served by train lines and as a combination where routes comprise both running modes.

Trams have the flexibility to run fast on segregated tracks, at an appropriate speed on roads intermingling with road traffic and slowly in pedestrianised zones.

Orbital and local buses can provide feeder routes to interchanges on these main corridors.

City Centre to North Fringe:

A38 Gloucester Road is served at the southern end by Montpelier and Redland stations but bus/rail interchange information is not made available at either bus stop or railway station.

A38 Gloucester Road North will be served by Filton North station and the new station should be planned to maximise bus/rail interchange. The opportunity should also be taken to offer a Park & Ride near the site, possibly inside the Filton Diamond.

A LRT route directly down the Gloucester Road is also feasible without underground running. We refer again to the myth that a “lack of road space” on road corridors prevents light rail schemes from going ahead. Without parked cars, even at their narrowest points there would be adequate space for light rail services. For instance, the narrowest width of the A38 to the north of the city centre is 50ft by Hamilton House, this width exceeding the width for streets along which trams are routed in Sheffield.

City Centre to East Fringe:

The draft BTS suggests the A420/A4174 as a possible route alignment towards Emersons Green. Consideration should be given to LRT along this route and also to the feasibility of light rail running alongside the cycle path to Emersons Green via Fishponds and Mangotsfield.

A station at Coalpit Heath with Metro- or “classic” bus interchange could provide improved rail access for the East Fringe. Reopening a Park and Rail at Coalpit Heath would enable commuters from Emersons Green to commute by train. This requires passing loops at Coalpit Heath to enable fast trains to pass local services on the South Wales – Bristol Parkway – London main railway line and provide a way to increase service frequencies on a line that is heavily congested. There is room for passing loops at Coalpit Heath, less so at Winterbourne.

City Centre to Keynsham/Bath:

The Callington Road Link (between Sainsburys St Philips Causeway and Tesco Callington Road) is suggested as a traffic relief scheme for the A4 Bath Road.

FOSBR recommend this old railway trackbed should itself be safeguarded as a corridor for light rail or similar mass transit solution with either a bus interchange at Callington Road or on-street running from this point onwards.

Park & ride at Hicks Gate linking to both orbital and radial bus routes could substantially reduce A4 traffic. Keynsham Station close by should be provided with extra car parking.

Passing loops on the main Bath railway line would allow increased local stopping services on the corridor from both the Chippenham and Westbury travel-to-work areas. The re-opening of St Anne’s station would also provide an alternative transport option for Brislington/St Anne’s residents. Saltford station re-opening would also increase the rail catchment area. We oppose any scheme that seeks to combine Saltford station and Keynsham station as the mid-way site would discourage walking.

City Centre to Airport:

The draft BTS offers solutions of tram/underground along the A38 corridor a distance of 6 miles to the airport.

FOSBR note that the Bristol A1 airport bus now follows the MetroBus M2 corridor to Long Ashton, then the South Bristol Link road (A4174) and A38 to the airport. This route could be upgraded to LRT or similar operation.

An alternative option for passengers (eg, those travelling from south) would be the use of Nailsea & Backwell railway station as a rail-bus interchange, this being only 11 minutes by existing road from the airport. For this, a ramp needs to be installed and passenger waiting facilities improved.

New MetroBus routes:

FOSBR support new MetroBus routes, or the upgrade of existing routes to a MetroBus style, if this process does not involve new road infrastructure (other than provision of continuous bus lanes on existing roads) or the large unnecessary spending associated with previous MetroBus schemes.

FOSBR suggest that future MetroBus routes interchange more effectively with the rail network, for instance, a MetroBus through Portway Park & Rail, and the Severnside industrial zone could terminate at a Pilning Park & Rail station.

Orbital MetroBus routes joining park & rides at Long Ashton(A370) & A38 & A37 & Hicks Gate(A4) & M32 (new Park&Ride) via radial corridors (eg, possibly at intersection of A420 and A4174) could also link to a new station at Long Ashton/the Vale, Filton Abbey Wood station and the new Filton North station on the A38, which could also function as a Park&Ride. Such an orbital route could be equally provided by a LRT system.

New/improved MetroBus routes to Thornbury would be usefully supplemented by re-opening to passengers the freight railway line to Thornbury to connect residents easily to the wider rail network. The re-opening of Charfield and Coalpit Heath stations would also have significant catchment areas in South Gloucestershire.

Other orbital routes:

The passengerisation of the Henbury Loop would provide an effective outer orbital corridor for the north of the city from Avonmouth through to Filton. The Severn Beach Line already provides an inner orbital route between Clifton and Temple Meads and the through services planned as part of MetroWest extend that inner orbital route through to Parson Street (and eventually to Pill/Portishead).

How far do you agree with our approach for local centres?

Outcomes for local centres are:

Outcome 12: Supported and enhanced local centres and high streets, recognising that they provide key services and facilities, and can also be transport corridors and destination points for visitors.

Outcome 13: Reduced impact of motorised traffic on local centres, creating better public spaces that are more accessible by walking, cycling and reliable public transport.

Local centres and high streets provide community hubs and services/facilities that save residents from undertaking longer journeys (often by car) to out of town warehouses and shopping centres.

We agree with the relocation of on-street parking on corridors that also act as local centres, but recognise that some customers arrive by car as well as by public and active transport.

FOSBR support the Bristol Cycle Strategy and the Bristol Walking Strategy as important parts of infrastructure that contributes to a city-wide sustainable transport network, particularly with regard to access to local centres which are often co-located with rail/ bus routes and transport interchanges.

How far do you agree with our approach for neighbourhoods and residential streets?

Outcomes for neighbourhoods and residential streets are:

Outcome 14: Key facilities and services increasingly accessible to all citizens without the need to rely on a car.

Opening stations, including and beyond those envisaged in the draft BTS, will put more residents within walking/cycling distance of a station, enabling them to give up personal cars and engage in a degree of exercise.

Introduction and revision of LRT, MetroBus and bus networks need to achieve a spatial distribution where residents can walk to a stop so that their entire journey is car-free.

Outcome 15: Safer places to live by working with citizens to design and deliver measures to improve movement and liveability in our neighbourhoods.

No FOSBR comment

How far do you agree with the suggested funding options to help transform transport in Bristol?

FOSBR do not have the transport planning expertise to recommend the correct balance of funding options between:

- Workplace parking levies
- Road user charging/congestion charge
- Council tax increase
- Business rate increase

We note that a Workplace Parking Levy has been successfully implemented in Nottingham. We would support the introduction of workplace charging and road user charging in Bristol in order to finance the public transport improvements that are necessary to facilitate modal shift and reduce congestion.

ENDS