

# FOSBR Response to Western Gateway Rail Strategy Stakeholder Consultation, December 2019

This consultation was in the form of a surveymonkey questionnaire. The questions are shown in **bold type**; our responses are in plain text.

## **Strategic objectives:**

**What high level impacts would you or your organisation like to see incorporated and addressed as part of this Rail Strategy?**

Reduce carbon emissions by encouraging shift towards lower-carbon modes of transport.

Improve urban environments by reducing dependency on private motor cars, allowing space to be reallocated to improve public realm.

Improve connectivity between economic centres.

## **Strengths:**

**What do you think are the strengths of the rail network in the Western Gateway today?**

East-West route via Bristol Parkway now electrified with increased speed and capacity.

Local rail services, where they exist, are well-used.

## **Weaknesses:**

**What do you think are the weaknesses of the rail network in the Western Gateway today?**

Crucial parts of the network are running at full capacity, limiting opportunities for growth.

Ticketing and revenue collection on some local services is poor, leading to inaccurate usage statistics.

Local stations are often unattractive places to be.

## **Opportunities:**

**What opportunities do you think there are for rail in the Western Gateway?**

The two major economic centres in the Western Gateway area - Bristol/Bath and Bournemouth-Christchurch-Poole - are poorly connected both by road and by rail. There is a significant opportunity to provide a new strategic rail link between these centres, potentially using old rail corridors. This would require a major investment, similar to the East-West Rail scheme now being developed to connect Oxford and Cambridge.

In other places capacity could be increased without land acquisition, restoring capacity removed when the railways were perceived to be in decline. For example, service frequency on the Severn Beach line could be increased to every 15 minutes over the busy section of the line by re-doubling the track from Clifton Down to Narrowways Jct. Similarly, Platform 4 at Westbury could be recommissioned, allowing greater flexibility to terminate Bristol area local services there.

The MetroWest project should be accelerated and widened in scope, to include links to Thornbury, the full Henbury Loop service, and other new stations detailed in FOSBR's Plan for Rail (see <https://fosbr.org.uk/campaigns/fosbr-plan-for-rail/>)

Local stations should be developed as transport hubs (such as those being investigated by WECA's Future Mobility Living Lab) and retail centres; potentially these schemes could be funded by developers.

#### **Threats:**

**What do you think are the greatest threats for rail in the Western Gateway?**

Investment decisions are glacially slow; even schemes with high BCR take decades to deliver.

Adding rail capacity is perceived as expensive, even when the BCR suggests a very high return on investment.

Some potential routes for new services are still not protected from development, making re-use of old routes more expensive and difficult.

#### **Further comments:**

**Do you have any further comments - specific to your organisation or otherwise - regarding rail in the Western Gateway area?**

It is hard to understand how, in a time when global warming is recognised as an existential threat, an organisation such as Western Gateway is seriously considering a spend of in excess of £440 million on new road schemes. New roads should only be considered where it can be proven that

they will reduce GHG emissions. All road schemes currently being considered by Western Gateway should be halted and re-evaluated against this criterion.