

Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways (FoSBR)

Response to Call for Evidence: Union Connectivity Review

Assessing the need for cross-border connectivity

1. If you represent a place, what is your current strategy for growing the economy and improving the quality of life there?

Please provide a summary, but you are welcome to append or link to published strategies.

FoSBR are campaigning to accelerate and extend the West of England Combined Authority's MetroWest rail plan. We want half-hourly services to all local stations, leading to a future 15 minute frequency, together with new stations and new lines.

Our strategy is outlined in the FoSBR Plan for Rail, which is available at <https://fosbr.org.uk/campaigns/fosbr-plan-for-rail/>

a) What is necessary to achieve this strategy and what evidence do you have that improved connectivity is needed in this instance?

We expect that transport is not the only factor necessary to achieve regional strategies and would like to understand what else might need to be in place to see benefits from improvements in connectivity.

We believe that making better use of existing rail assets, opening new stations, increasing capacity and introducing new services can provide the essential backbone around which a sustainable, accessible transport network can be built.

Bristol is heavily congested. Much of this traffic, particularly on the northern fringe, comes from South Wales where housing is more affordable than on the Bristol side of the Severn. But the industrial area around Avonmouth and Chittening, and office parks around Aztec West, are poorly served by rail from South Wales. This leaves people with little choice but to use the private car. The South East Wales Transport Commission's proposed improvements to local rail services between Cardiff and Severn Tunnel Junction will throw this into stark relief.

We believe that stations on the Bristol side of the Severn should be developed to maximise the potential of frequent services covering all stations from Cardiff to Bristol Temple Meads. This would require the restoration of Pilning station to act as a hub for Severnside, improvements at Patchway Station, and a new station at Constable Road, Lockleaze.

Our campaign focuses on passenger rail services, but it is essential that stations integrate with buses, cycles, walking and, hopefully, light rail.

2. Please provide any information you hold about current multi-nation journeys within the United Kingdom.

In your answer, please provide information relating to:

- current journey volumes or levels
- assessments of future demand
- journey reliability
- locations or corridors of particular strategic importance
- the reasons for importance

The Severn Bridges are one of the busiest estuarial crossings in the UK. Since tolls were abolished in 2018, traffic levels have greatly increased, to the extent that WECA were recently reported to be considering introducing 'charging measures and controls' there in an attempt to curb traffic.

Post-COVID, it is likely traffic will resume its upward trajectory. People will still need to travel from South Wales to England for jobs and leisure.

A Cardiff – Bristol local rail service has the potential to shift a significant proportion of this traffic to more sustainable modes, relieving the load on the overheated north Bristol motorway network.

3. In general terms, is there a need for new or improved transport links between the nations of the United Kingdom?

If so, please:

explain why and provide evidence to support your view
ensure that your response relates specifically to multi-nation transport links and not to improvements in connectivity in general

FoSBR is a local campaign group. We have limited our evidence to specific local transport links in a Severnside context.

4. What are the main obstacles and challenges in improving transport connectivity between the nations of the UK?

Please provide evidence relating to any specific challenges that prevent or hinder the development of additional or improved transport links. Please consider socio-economic, political, organisational and practical issues.

In our area devolution may have led to a situation whereby neighbouring cities compete rather than co-operate. As an example, Cardiff Airport is often seen as being in competition with Bristol Airport.

We are not aware of any governmental cross-border organisation to oversee co-operation between Cardiff, Newport, Bristol and Bath. The Western Gateway Partnership is perhaps able to do this as a non-governmental organisation because

it is able to reflect the facts on the ground, of strong social and economic ties, which the English-Welsh border ignores.

With two motorway crossings and a rail tunnel, the Severn is still a barrier to commerce in the area. Better links, particularly rail, could improve this. As a Bristol-area campaign group we would support these.

5. What evidence exists to demonstrate the potential impacts of improved transport connectivity between the nations of the United Kingdom?

Please ensure that your answer:

relates directly to transport connectivity between the nations of the UK and not to transport connectivity in general

considers economic, social and cultural impacts

provides documents or links

highlights specific potential growth areas such as housing or wages

Initiatives such as the Northern Powerhouse show that clusters of well-connected cities have the potential to rebalance the economy by improving regional economic performance. Bristol, Bath, Newport and Cardiff have the potential to become a regional powerhouse, but to realise this they need better, more granular connections.

These arguments are probably better made by the Western Gateway Partnership, but clearly congested links across the Severn constrain growth potential.

6. When making transport investment decisions that aim to improve connectivity between the different nations of the UK, does the current appraisal framework capture all the potential impacts?

Please provide evidence such as links to existing reviews or analysis that may have already considered this.

Opportunities for improved transport connectivity between the nations of the UK

We have no view on these processes.

7. Which specific journeys would benefit from new or improved transport links?

In your answer, please:

identify 2 or more specific points within the UK for each journey

provide details as to why each journey has been identified

list these journeys in order of priority

ensure that these journeys traverse 2 or more nations of the UK.

If none then please go to question 8.

a) What would be the benefits of improvements to these specific journeys?

In your answer, please:

provide evidence of the benefit that these proposed improvements would deliver
consider wider economic, social and cultural benefits

consider specific areas such as potential improvements in housing and productivity

b) Are you aware of any work that has been done to assess the need or feasibility of improvements to all or part of these specific journeys?

Please provide evidence.

c) How would the costs and benefits of the identified improvements be distributed?

Please consider the economic, social and geographic distribution of these costs and benefits, and provide evidence to support this.

d) How will demand for these journeys change in the future?

In your answer, please consider the:

next 20 to 30 years in your response and set out the reasons why demand will change

potential impact of COVID-19

potential impact of the UK's departure from the EU

e) In your opinion, what is the preferred means by which to improve these journeys?

In your answer, please consider:

specific transport modes such as rail, road, air and maritime

details of any new infrastructure requirements

whether there is an opportunity to promote active travel, such as walking or cycling, or

environmentally friendly modes of transport

f) What would be the environmental impact of improving these journeys in the way that you have identified?

In your answer, please provide evidence and consider:

positive and negative impacts

possible mitigations of these

the context of the UK's domestic and international targets for greenhouse gas and carbon emissions

g) Are there any interdependencies with other policies that may impact the deliverability of the identified improvements?

In your answer, please:

consider all relevant national and regional policies, and those set by devolved administrations

provide your assessment as to how these policies may need to change to facilitate delivery of the identified improvements

Journeys between South East Wales and the Bristol area are throttled by lack of local access to the rail network. In South East Wales the only points of access are Cardiff, Newport and Severn Tunnel Junction; on the English side of the Severn, Pilning has a parliamentary service and other local stations fail to serve regionally important employment and leisure destinations.

Plans to open six new stations in South East Wales will put 90% of the population of Cardiff and Newport within 1 mile of a train station, but will not give these people easy access to employment in English Severnside or Aztec West, or to leisure activities around Cribbs Causeway. These journeys will continue to be made by car, using the heavily congested motorway crossings.

If rail and active travel developments west of the Severn were matched with similar development on the Bristol side, the potential for modal shift would be greatly increased, helping achieve greenhouse gas reductions. Investment would need to include integrating existing stations with active modes and bus services.

The question refers to links between specific points, but we suggest that these comments apply to any pair of stations between Bath and Cardiff.

8. Is there a need for the development of a national strategic transport network to replace the European Trans-European Transport (TEN-T) network following the end of the UK-EU transition period?

Please consider the specific strategic benefits of a replacement national network, which would connect strategically important regions and places in the UK in order to support economic growth and quality of life. View maps of the existing TEN-T inland waterways and ports and railways and airports network within the UK.

a) How should such a network be defined?

In your answer, please consider:

which criteria should be considered when identifying transport links for inclusion

how these criteria should be assessed

which specific transport modes should be included

b) What would be the potential impact of such a network?

In your answer, please consider possible economic, social and environmental impacts.

c) How should a network of this nature be managed or financed?

In your answer, please consider the role of:

UK government

devolved administrations

local transport authorities

d) Do you have any further comments on the development of a national strategic transport network?

Our interest is primarily regional rather than national.

In that context, we think a sub-national transport body with a boundary similar to the Western Gateway Partnership (as opposed to the Western Gateway STB, whose boundaries exclude South East Wales) would be well positioned to oversee transport links within this cross-border region.