

Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways (FoSBR)



**Statement to WECA Joint Committee
Friday 25th June 2021 at 11.15 am**

1. Welcome to Dan Norris

The Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways would like to congratulate Dan Norris on his recent election as WECA Mayor. We are pleased to see that, in his election manifesto, he attached importance to '*creating a transport system for the 21st century, to include green and reliable buses, trains, and walking and cycling options to connect our region*'. Transport is an important concern to many in this region and we are pleased that he will be taking an active interest in trying to improve the situation.

2. Road Building is not the answer

Along with other transport and environmental campaigners, we consider that there is still too much emphasis on the creation of more road space. A recent example is the plan by South Gloucestershire Council to 'improve' a 7km stretch of the A4174 between Emersons Green and Longwell Green. The plans would see five roundabouts widened or converted to 'throughabouts', with an estimated cost of £30 million. It is now well understood that increasing road capacity is only a temporary fix for congestion – and, after a short time, traffic will build up again to saturate the newly available road space. We strongly object to this proposal and will campaign for this money to be used instead to improve public transport, including rail services. We note that Mayor Norris has also criticised these plans.

3. We need an Integrated Transport Authority

Turning again to Mayor Norris's manifesto, he states that '*Access to public transport remains poor across the West of England. There has been a failure of leadership, resulting in an under-resourced and overly complex transport network that is not fit for purpose*'. Surely this points to the need for some kind of over-arching body to actively plan and deliver improvements and to integrate all the different modes of travel – an ITA. Authorities with such bodies, such as Greater Manchester, West Midlands and South Yorkshire have much improved public transport systems and are more able to acquire Government funding

4. The importance of Rail

FoSBR see rail as at the core of an integrated, sustainable transport system in Bristol. For this vision to succeed, we need more frequent services to more destinations. FoSBR's Plan for Rail shows the rail network that would support

this, and a fifteen minute frequency would provide the turn-up-and-go service that's needed to pull this all together. It is also important that railway stations are optimised as interchanges with other active travel modes and bus services that reach across the city. ***Nobody finishes their journey at a railway station*** (unless they are a train spotter or they work at the station!)

5. Rail Improvements

We welcome the forthcoming MetroWest improvements:

- Half-hourly service to Avonmouth due Dec 2021, after completion of Bristol East Junction remodelling
- Portway Park and Ride rail station due Dec 2021/Jan 202
- Half-hourly service to Yate or Gloucester due 2023, or earlier
- Ashley Down rail station due 2023
- Portishead service due 2024
- Hourly service to Henbury due 2023

However we will be actively campaigning for further improvements, including the following:

- Re-instatement of the Henbury Loop
- St Annes station re-opening, the emerging business case for this being funded by Restoring Your Railways
- Ashton Gate and Horfield/Lockleaze stations re-opening, these being the Bristol ex-stations that we believe demonstrate the best potential
- Four-tracking of Bristol Temple Meads to Parson Street, as recommended by Network Rail in its Bristol to Exeter Strategic Rail Study and by WECA for its Bristol West Capacity Enhancement project
- Double-tracking of the Severn Beach Line from Narrowways. WECA currently propose to double the line from Narrowways Junction to Montpellier to facilitate a 20-minute service to Avonmouth - whereas FoSBR are lobbying for re-doubling from Narrowways to Clifton Down to allow a 15-minute frequency.
- Completion of electrification to Bristol (Temple Meads) which was deferred by the previous administration. Network Rail's decarbonisation strategy identifies Chippenham - Bath - Bristol Temple Meads - Bristol Parkway as 'core electrification' routes.

6. Bedminster station

Bedminster Station has the potential to be a very useful transport hub, especially as passenger numbers are likely to increase greatly because (a) more trains will stop there when the new Portishead passenger service starts,

(b) up to 3,000 more people might be accommodated in the nearby Bedminster Green development, (c) development within the Whitehouse St regeneration area will also bring more people within reach of the station.

The station, however, is hindered by lack of facilities and, more importantly, by poor access. There is only one street access to the station – via Fraser Street at the junction with Windmill Hill which is connected to a subway in the station and then by ramps that are not Equality Act-compliant up to the platforms. The street access is on the south-east (Windmill Hill) side of the railway whereas the busier commercial and residential areas lie to the north-west (Bedminster) side. Passengers from Bedminster Green or East Street have to pass under the narrow Windmill Hill bridge to access the station.

This unsatisfactory situation could be resolved if, somehow, there could be direct access from the station to Whitehouse Lane on the Bedminster side. A report by Jacobs concluded that this would not be technically feasible but it did not take account of the fact that this stretch of railway will likely be soon recommended for four-tracking – a project known as the *Bristol West Capacity Enhancement*. This may require a re-design of Bedminster Station and offer the opportunity to extend Bedminster station underpass under the tracks to open onto Whitehouse Lane. FoSBR think that a northern entrance to Bedminster station would be transformative.

If businesses are to be displaced for new homes, then FoSBR would like to see further investigation of a northern entrance to better serve local rail users. Meanwhile, we argue that **the land between Whitehouse Lane and the railway must be protected** until Network Rail and WECA's four tracking plans are further advanced.

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