



Campaigning for rail at the core of an integrated transport network for Bristol, Bath and the West of England

Portishead Branch Line – MetroWest Phase 1 Response to Secretary of State’s request for comments, 24th November 2021

Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways (FoSBR) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Addendum to the Environmental Statement (Version 3) in support of North Somerset Council's application for a Development Consent Order for the Portishead Branch Line (MetroWest Phase 1).

The addendum shows that the scheme's carbon emissions, relative to the overall 4th, 5th and 6th carbon budgets, are negligible. It also makes it clear that the calculation is based on a worst-case scenario, in which the service is operated using unmodified existing diesel trains.

Network Rail's Traction Decarbonisation Network Study sets out plans to meet the DfT's challenge to remove all diesel-only trains from the network by 2040. The Interim Programme Business Case for this study points out that rail is "in the unique position of currently being the only transport mode capable of moving both people and heavy goods using a zero-carbon solution. As a result, rail has a huge potential role to play in decarbonisation of the UK economy by providing reliable, green transport for goods and people."

We assume that the emissions assessment was based on Class 158 and 166 diesel trains, which are currently widely used on similar GWR local services. These trains were introduced into service between 1989 and 1993. The average lifespan for similar trains is 25 to 30 years. It is therefore reasonably likely that these units will be replaced within the next 10 years, before the end of the 5th carbon budget. Whether the replacements are electric, battery-electric hybrid, diesel-electric hybrid or hydrogen-powered, it is certain that they will emit significantly less carbon and particulates than the current generation of rolling stock. This suggests that the carbon assessment for the fifth and sixth carbon budget periods may be greatly overestimated.

The Portishead Branch presents some challenges if it is to be electrified using 25kV overhead equipment. However Network Rail and its partners are rapidly developing innovative solutions to allow electrification in areas where clearances are tight such as under bridges and through tunnels.

The Portishead reopening has been delayed for far too long. We hope for a speedy, positive resolution to the DCO process.

Tim Weekes
FoSBR