

**West of England Partnership
Joint Transport Executive Committee
24 April 2009**

Responses to Questions

**Cllr John Whittock (Midsomer Norton Redfield),
Cllr Chris Watt (Midsomer Norton Redfield),
Cllr Barry Macrae (Midsomer Norton North),
Cllr Shirley Steel (Midsomer Norton North),
Conservative Group, Bath and North East Somerset Council, Guildhall, Bath, BA1
5AW**

Improving bus services to the Midsomer Norton and Radstock area is a longstanding and important issue. It is absolutely vital that timetable improvements, together with peak-time capacity improvements, are made to go alongside the investment in infrastructure that is currently taking place. A more frequent, high quality, direct bus service between Bristol and Midsomer Norton would benefit the area's economy and make bus travel more attractive for local residents.

The Greater Bristol Bus Network project is a partnership between the West of England councils and First Bus, with the aim of improving and encouraging bus travel in the region. With the partnership's councils currently investing in new bus lanes, bus stops, bus priority measures, information displays and raised-pavement access, it is right that we expect First to commit to improvements that keep to the spirit of the GBBN project.

With First Bus showing little sign of a willingness to be forthcoming with such timetable improvements, Bath and North East Somerset Council is to be congratulated for the proactive measures it is taking in inviting tenders from bus operators for a more frequent service to Norton-Radstock. While this is currently only an investigation of the cost to provide such a service, it is important that First Bus are held to account and asked to deliver the improvements expected of them.

What work is currently being undertaken on developing Quality Bus Partnership agreements with First Bus on all routes as part of the GBBN? In particular, what work is currently being undertaken on the 'Corridor 6' route and bus services between Norton-Radstock and Bristol?

Can Officers offer reassurance that when negotiations are taking place with First, a high level of importance will be placed on securing a more frequent bus service between Bristol and Midsomer Norton, and the focus will not only be on urban routes?

Response:

Appendix 4F of the Major Scheme Business Case (MSBC) for GBBN describes a draft Quality Bus Framework. This comprises three documents: a draft Memorandum of Understanding, a draft Statutory Quality Bus Partnership Scheme (QBPS) agreement for each corridor and a supporting Quality Bus Partnership Agreement (QBPA) for each

corridor. The QBPS as drafted is a statutory scheme made under the Transport Act 2000. The QBPA is a voluntary agreement between the Councils and the bus operator(s). The Local Transport Act 2008 has brought changes to the provisions of the 2000 Act by amending the scope of QBPSs and QBPA.

A Public Transport Advisory Sub-Group will be set up with representatives from the partner Councils and the bus operator(s) with input as required from legal representatives, GOSW, WEOP and HA. The Sub-Group will have three functions now that the scheme is being implemented on the ground:

- (i) to assess the impact of the 2008 Act on the provisions as set out in the draft QBPS and QBPA Agreements with a view to amending them to reflect the new legislation;
- (ii) to develop a robust procedure for establishing a QBPS and supporting QBPA for each corridor;
- (iii) to assess how the Bus Punctuality Improvement Partnership(PIP) Agreements that may or may not have been signed prior to a QBPS coming into force might impact on and interface with the QBPS and QBPA agreements.

No infrastructure work is currently being carried out on GBBN Corridor 6. Works are planned at A37/Staunton Lane junction to install bus priority measures, starting later this year. Works to install raised kerbs at all bus stops along the A37 that are not currently equipped are programmed for June to November 2009. Subsequently, new bus stop poles and bus shelters will be installed at some bus stops.

Tenders are about to be invited for the Real Time Information Contract for all GBBN corridors.

There are no plans to carry out work on the bus services between Norton-Radstock and Bristol other than the issue of an invitation to tender by the Council for an hourly all-day service later this year. First have indicated that they do not believe they can make a business case for a new service along this corridor. They already operate a half-hourly all-day service along the A37 from Bristol to Farrington Gurney, although this does not serve Midsomer Norton or Radstock. Other bus operators are free to register new bus services at eight weeks notice if they wish.

In discussions with bus operators over service provision, officers will stress the importance of a regular direct link bus service between Bristol and Midsomer Norton to build on the current peak hour facility that is provided with Council support. However, in the absence of an operator willing to run an all-day service on a commercial basis, the only way that one could be provided would be with financial support. That would require the provision of additional revenue funding or the transfer of support from other existing bus services.

The West of England Partnership has written to Moir Lockhead, Chief Executive of First Group to raise concerns with the current withdrawal of bus services in the sub-region. We will continue to press First to develop and extend services as the GBBN improvements are implemented. Moir Lockhead has indicated that he is keen to meet with the WoE when he is next in the sub-region later this year. At this time we will press for a greater long term commitment from First to extend bus services in line with the current improvement programme we are implementing.

Peter Goodwin, 11 Lanesborough Rise, Stockwood, Bristol BS14 8AJ

Questions regarding the OBC submitted for the major scheme bid for a BRT route from Ashton Vale to Temple Meads and Bristol City Centre:

Q1. Can you say how the OBC provides for use of Prince Street Bridge by:

- a) cyclists, and**
- b) cars and commercial vehicles?**

Response:

The Programme Entry Major Scheme Bid (Appendix 1C) shows draft plans for Prince Street Bridge. These plans are for the purposes of the Bid, and are indicative of works required to the bridge to address the current issues of width and vehicle weight to accommodate rapid transit vehicles.

The plan shows the retention of the existing bridge, with rapid transit services and cyclists on the eastern side of the bridge and pedestrians on the western side of the bridge. This indicates a single vehicle lane reserved for rapid transit which would give the appropriate degree of reliability for the new system. Cyclists are shown to use the eastern side of the bridge; they could also share the western side with pedestrians.

With regards to cars and commercial vehicle access, statutory public consultation will take place on the detail of the plans for the design and operation of the bridge, consequent impacts on the adjacent network and possible complementary measures. These will be developed through further design and engagement with stakeholders during 2009, prior to seeking the necessary powers to build the rapid transit scheme.

Potential provision for cars and commercial vehicles will need to take account of their impact on the overall scheme objectives, the capacity and operation of adjacent parts of the network, affordability, and additional or different engineering solutions at the bridge or in nearby locations. These will need to be considered and their impacts assessed. This further design work and impact assessments will include investigating local access issues and works that may be required to establish whether there would be sufficient capacity for car traffic to access Bristol City Centre.

Q2. Over what parts of the route does the OBC provide for fixed bus guidance infrastructure?

Response:

The Bid (Section 1) states that:

“The segregated corridor section consists of guided and non-guided sections (“the busway”). Guided sections are two concrete tracks (one in each direction) which the rapid transit vehicles are ‘guided’ along. Non-guided sections are effectively a bus-only road. The variation in the amount of guidance directly relates to the geometry, need for accuracy and constructability considerations. Guidance will be provided as a minimum at entrances/exits to the busway and at stops to ensure level boarding”.

The exact location of guided sections will be determined at detail design stage.

Q3. What works are anticipated to allow double decker buses (eg the X1 Weston-s-m service) to get under the Cumberland Road bridge?

Response:

The project's engineering consultants have advised that double-decker vehicles could be accommodated under Cumberland Road Bridge. This may require some minor surface level works.

With regards to vehicles, the Bid (Section 1) sets out that vehicles using the rapid transit infrastructure will be required to have high standards of passenger comfort and security, low emissions and level boarding. The Authorities will set quality standards for providers wishing to access the system and will be working with potential operators to ensure that vehicle fleets comply with these standards in order to maintain high quality passenger services.

Q4. a) Does the OBC allow flexibility for substantial future changes, e.g. to include BRT access to an interchange at Temple Meads that makes full use of the Plot 6 site and the amenities planned within the Digby Wyatt Shed?

Response:

The Bid sets out an outline design for the proposed Temple Meads Interchange. The project team is working with Network Rail, SWRDA and Bristol City Council officers on detailed plans for the interchange and how it fits with the development of Plot 6 and the wider area, and planned enhancement works at Temple Meads Station (which includes options for the Digby Wyatt Shed). The project is looking to take advantage of the opportunities an integrated interchange and development might offer in terms of improved interchange with the station, improved public realm for all users and provision of a high quality 'gateway' for Bristol.

Q4. b) has there been any discussion between West of England Partnership officers and Network Rail/First Great Western exploring the feasibility of this option?

Response:

The rapid transit project team has been liaising with Network Rail regarding the enhancement works at Temple Meads Station since March 2008. Network Rail has established a working group which includes officers from Bristol City Council and the rapid transit project team.