

Statement for West of England Joint Transport Executive Committee Meeting

**There is no rail item on the agenda for the meeting on Thursday, but Members may find useful an update on a number of rail issues.**

i. Network Rail recently issued a draft Route Utilisation Strategy for Great Western. While much of the RUS is to be welcomed, particularly proposals for new infrastructure and additional carriages for local services, there are some real concerns. In particular:-

- a likely reduction in cross Bristol services, because of electrification only as far as Bristol. The RUS future network diagram shows the current Cardiff – Taunton service being split into two at Temple Meads, thus reducing current cross Bristol journey opportunities
- the draft comes out against the Bristol Metro proposal for an increased service to Weston-super-Mare – on the grounds that this would require redoubling of Worle Junction (recently shelved) and re-opening the bay platform at Weston; it states the cost of this infrastructure improvement cannot be justified
- the RUS suggests that the service on the Severn Beach line (on which passenger numbers have increased by 30% following recent investment) should be reduced to hourly (from 3 trains very two hours at present) with an additional peak hours only service to Clifton Down.

It is important that comments on the draft are sent to Network Rail

ii. Rolling stock; next May FGW is due to lose 7 trains to Northern (they currently work local Devon services), and 4 trains (based in Bristol) go back to Arriva Wales. So FGW will be 11 units short. The plan was for trains from the Birmingham area (where they will be replaced by new trains) to be transferred to FGW. However I gather delivery of the new trains is running late, and other parts of the country are also making claims for these surplus trains. So we need to lobby DfT now for at least 11 (and preferably more to relieve overcrowding and provide for growth) to come to FGW. This needs to be done quickly before the DfT firms up its revised rolling stock strategy.

iii. Severnside Community Rail Partnership Work. A leaflet showing the Partnership's current station work is being circulated. The Partnership has just won second place at the National Community Rail Awards for our work with local schools on improving Weston Milton station. Of the 25 local stations in the Severnside area, at least 12 serve socially deprived communities. We have already made considerable improvements at 8 of these, with 3 of the remaining ( Lawrence Hill, Highbridge, and Bridgwater) to be tackled in the coming year or so (in addition to our work at the other stations) . This demonstrates our commitment to social inclusivity, and should enable inclusivity local authorities to quote this work when appropriate.

Keith Walton, Chairman, Severnside Community Rail Partnership