

West of England Partnership  
Joint Transport Executive Committee  
12 November 2009

## Joint Response to the Great Western Route Utilisation Strategy: Draft for Consultation

### Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members about the recent publication of the Great Western Route Utilisation Strategy, its issues for the West of England and a recommended response to the consultation.

### What is the Great Western Route Utilisation Strategy?

2. Network Rail is required to produce Route Utilisation Strategies (RUS) across the network for “the effective and efficient use and development of the capacity available on the network, consistent with funding that is, or is reasonably likely to become available”
3. The Great Western RUS covers the whole of the Great Western area including the West of England sub-region. It sets out the rail industry’s strategic vision up to 2019. In drawing up the Great Western RUS, Network Rail has identified 21 ‘gaps’ narrowed down from 128 issues raised through consultation with stakeholders. A ‘gap’ is defined as the difference between what the network can currently supply, in terms of infrastructure and train services, and what is likely to be demanded of the system.
4. Included in the list of 21 ‘gaps’ and of relevance to the West of England area are:
  - South Wales to South Coast all day capacity
  - Bristol peak capacity
  - Bristol performance – performance issues on the approaches to Bristol Temple Meads
  - Station crowding – including Bristol Temple Meads
5. It is important to stress that the emphasis in the Great Western RUS is on filling the ‘gaps.’ In short, it is looking for solutions for problems and not solutions in search of a problem. For this reason aspirational schemes, such as re-opening stations and disused railway lines, were filtered out at an early stage.
6. The RUS sets out what the rail industry want to see delivered. As such it has no specific funding allocated. Its recommendations inform the Government’s investment plan for the rail network, the High Level Output Specification (HLOS), expected in 2012. A Statement of Funding Available (SoFA) will accompany the HLOS and will be used to determine which schemes can be implemented. Just because a scheme is included in the RUS there is no guarantee that it, or indeed any RUS proposal, will ever be funded.

7. Comments are invited by 27 November 2009, with the Final Great Western RUS expected in early 2010.

### **What's in the Great Western RUS**

8. Having identified the 21 'gaps' the RUS tests a series of options. Options are appraised in accordance with Department for Transport guidance using Benefit Cost Ratios (BCR) to indicate value for money. The relevant options for the West of England area are:

#### *Option H: Lengthen services into Bristol Temple Meads*

9. Option H recommends lengthening 11 trains across the morning and evening peaks for services on the Cardiff to Portsmouth, Cardiff to Taunton and Gloucester to Westbury/Weymouth routes. All routes go via Bristol. This will increase the number of carriages on peak trains by 17 and will help to alleviate current overcrowding and short-formed train problems. 9 new carriages will be needed. Some stations, unspecified, may require lengthened platforms.

#### *Option I: Increase capacity and improve performance through infrastructure enhancements at Bristol*

- Three or four tracking from Dr Days Junction to Filton (Filton Bank).  
With the committed growth in train movements and the introduction the new Intercity Express (IEP) trains the RUS identifies that the current infrastructure cannot accommodate these additional services. A capacity and business study is being undertaken which will be included in the Final RUS.
- Extension and conversion of the carriage line from Bristol Temple Meads to Parson Street creating a four-track section between the two stations. This would improve performance on the approaches to and at Bristol Temple Meads and assist the re-opening of the Portishead line.

#### *Option J: Review service proposition across Bristol to provide additional capacity and improve performance*

10. This is a longer-term approach to address capacity and performance issues around Bristol and deliver an enhanced local rail network of services across the Greater Bristol area. It broadly follows the West of England's Greater Bristol Metro proposals and includes:

##### Bristol Temple Meads to Gloucester Corridor

11. This reviewed extending the hourly Weston-super-Mare to Bristol Parkway service to Yate, increasing service frequency at Yate from one train per hour to two. The scheme represents poor value for money with a Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of 0.6. With third party developer funding the BCR rises to 2.5. The RUS recommends this option subject to the provision of the third party funding.

##### Bristol Temple Meads to Chippenham Corridor

12. This tested additional hourly service between Bristol Temple Meads and Chippenham via Keynsham, Oldfield Park and Bath. It would require the construction of a bay platform at Chippenham so offers poor value for money and is not recommended by the RUS. Instead the RUS recommends the alternative of an additional hourly Bristol Temple Meads to Bath shuttle service. This requires no extra infrastructure and has a BCR of 2.4.

#### Bristol Temple Meads to Weston-super-Mare Corridor

13. This tested additional hourly service between Weston-super-Mare and Bristol Temple Meads. It would require substantial infrastructure (redoubling of Worle Junction and onto Weston Milton and the reinstatement of the bay platform at Weston-super-Mare) and additional rolling stock. Its BCR at between 0.4 and 0.7 showed poor value for money so it is not recommended by the RUS. Other cross Bristol opportunities were reviewed but were found to have low BCRs.
14. An option of extending the Bath to Bristol Temple Meads shuttle to Clifton Down showed a high BCR so the RUS recommends this subject to operational viability.
15. Whilst proposals to re-open the Portishead line to passengers are acknowledged, the RUS did not look at the business case so no BCR figures are available.

#### *Option M: Improve line speeds and changed calling patterns*

16. The RUS recommended increasing line speeds to 125mph between Bristol and Bridgwater. This will complement existing committed schemes to increase speeds from Westerleigh Junction (outside Bristol Parkway) and Barnt Green (towards Birmingham) and the Bath Spa capacity upgrade.
17. In summary the Great Western RUS recommends:

#### Capacity

- 9 extra carriages for Bristol, to address overcrowding on the Cardiff-Taunton, Cardiff-Portsmouth and Gloucester-Weymouth services.
- Enhanced services between Bristol and Yate (dependent on third party developer funding) and Bath and possible extension to Clifton Down.

#### Performance

- Re-instatement of the four tracks from Bristol Temple Meads to Parson Street.
- Re-instatement of the third and fourth tracks between Dr Days Junction and Filton subject to a business case.

#### Journey times

- Speeding up of one morning and one evening Cardiff to Portsmouth via Bristol limited stop service plus an all-stopping service.
- Line-speed improvements between Bristol and Bridgwater.

18. The Draft RUS offers an emerging strategy to 2019 that will be refined by Network Rail over the coming months in the light of consultation responses, further analysis

and option appraisal, to form a concluding strategy for recommendation in the final Great Western RUS in early 2010.

19. Figure 7.2 in Appendix One shows the RUS recommendations plus committed schemes.
20. As mentioned above a scheme's inclusion in the RUS is no guarantee it will ever receive funding or be implemented.

## **Issues for the West of England**

### Severn Beach Line

21. The Severnside Community Rail Partnership presented a statement to the Joint Transport Executive Committee on 1 October 2009 raising concerns over a reduction in services from three trains every two hours to hourly. Network Rail has indicated that this is no intention to reduce the existing service and the RUS does not limit options for continuing with it. Clarification of this in the RUS will be sought. The RUS proposes an additional peak hour service from Bath to Clifton Down and this is to be welcomed.

### Greater Bristol Metro

22. The RUS has separately tested elements of the Greater Bristol Metro proposals for enhanced, half hourly cross Bristol train services. Whilst the good business case for Bath to Bristol services is to be welcomed, greater clarification is sought over the costs of services and infrastructure for trains to Weston-super-Mare and Yate and ways to improve the business case. In particular it is puzzling that the concept of cross Bristol services has not been properly tested. Proposed services in the RUS begin and end at Bristol Temple Meads whereas the West of England Annual Rail Survey reveals considerable cross-city flows such as Bath and Oldfield Park to Filton Abbey Wood.
23. The Greater Bristol Metro, along with the Portishead line, was included in the South West Councils and South West Regional Development Agency list of Regional Funding Allocation 2 (RFA2) schemes submitted to the Department for Transport in February 2009. The Region's advice was accepted by the Department for Transport in July 2009. This importance, and with it the likelihood of funding and implementation, merits greater recognition in the RUS.

### Growth Forecasts

24. In the light of continued growth in passenger numbers the use of low growth forecasts by the rail industry has long been a concern of local authorities throughout the South West. For the West of England area the RUS uses revised forecasting methods producing higher than previously used forecasts.
25. The RUS predicts a 41% growth in passengers from 2008 to 2019, an annual rate of 3.2%. Nonetheless results from the annual West of England Rail Survey show a 15.05% growth from 2007 to 2008 and a 38.7% growth over the last five years (2004 to 2008).

26. Figures from the Office of Rail Regulation, based on ticket sales, for all stations in the West of England area showed a 7.07% increase in passengers from 2006/07 to 2007/08. These figures predate the three trains every two hours service introduced on the Severn Beach line in May 2008.
27. The benefits of electrification producing a “sparks effect” generating new passengers has not been factored into the RUS growth forecasts. Electrification will attract more passengers to high-speed services and to local services feeding into them.
28. We remain deeply concerned that the RUS underestimates future demand that will only lead to further overcrowding and undermine the attractiveness of local rail travel.

#### Electrification

29. The RUS process was already well underway before the Great Western Mainline electrification proposals were announced in July 2009. Whilst electrification of the lines to Bristol via Bath and Bristol Parkway are to be welcomed, reassurances should be sought that other schemes proposed in the RUS are not delayed. It is unclear whether electrification will include the re-signalling of Bristol Temple Meads or whether as Network Rail have previously indicated it will be a “wires first” approach.
30. Electrification will also see the introduction of the new Intercity Express (IEP) trains. These will be bi-mode trains able to use electric power where the line is electrified and diesel power where it is not. Figure 7.2 in the RUS shows the routes of the new IEP trains bypassing Weston-super-Mare. The case should be made through the RUS consultation to extend the IEP service to Weston-super-Mare to ensure the town is linked to the proposed electrified network.

#### Inconsistencies

31. There are inconsistencies between the list of proposals for enhanced local rail services and Figure 6.11 in the RUS. The list suggests a service specification of:
  - 1 tph Weston-super-Mare to Yate
  - 1 tph Weston-super-Mare to Chippenham
  - 1 tph Taunton to Cardiff via Weston
  - 1 tph Portishead to Gloucester
  - 1 tph Portishead to Clifton Down (peak only)
  - 1 tph Temple Meads to Severn Beach
  - 1 tph Bristol to Westbury (with extensions to Weymouth)
  - 1 tph Chippenham to Salisbury

Figure 6.11 proposes an entirely different structure including:

- Cardiff-Taunton service split at Temple Meads
- Yate-Portishead service
- Weston-super-Mare-Chippenham service
- Taunton-Bristol services going north bound to Westbury/Weymouth (via Bristol), but returning south bound from Cheltenham!
- Bedminster-Clifton-Down

Clarification on this will be sought from Network Rail.

## New infrastructure and services

32. The RUS proposals for new infrastructure (four lines from Bristol Temple Meads to Parson Street and Dr Days Junction to Filton) and enhanced Cardiff to Portsmouth via Bristol services and additional rolling stock are to be welcomed. Bristol City Council is keen to explore the possible use of the fourth line from Dr Days Junction to Filton used as a pedestrian and cycle way until the line is required for rail use. Formal safeguards to ensure future rail use would be required.
33. It is proposed to produce a joint response to the Great Western RUS based around the six points raised above. The deadline for responses is 27 November 2009.

## Recommendation

That members endorse a joint response to the Great Western Route Utilisation Strategy based around the six issues for the West of England.

## Appendices

Appendix One:       Figure 7.2 – Recommendations for emerging strategy plus committed schemes

Officer presenting the report:  
James White, West of England Partnership Office  
Tel. 0117 922 4924; james.white@westofengland.org

