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It's time to bite the bullet – Rapid transit will use Prince Street Bridge

Following a full public engagement exercise in November 2008, and a series of public engagement sessions with neighbourhood and community groups through September and October this year, Ashton Vale to Temple Meads Rapid Transit will propose a dedicated route for rapid transit vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians across Prince Street Bridge, with motor traffic diverted to other routes.

It is expected to form part of an application for a Transport and Works Act Order by Bristol and North Somerset Councils to be submitted in early 2010.

The proposal is:

- welcomed by English Heritage as it rules out rebuilding the listed bridge or undermining its historic setting. The current movement mechanism, using water hydraulics, can be retained unaltered.
- based on a clear understanding of the impact on motor traffic to be diverted to other routes. AM and PM peak period traffic modelling has been carried out which predicts manageable additional levels at other junctions, which will be offset by a significant predicted shift to rapid transit by many motorists on the route.
- Enhanced by urban design improvements around a proposed rapid transit stop by the Arnofini (illustrated).

Subject to agreement, the submission of the Transport and Works Act Order will bring the first line of rapid transit a significant step closer with operational services expected by 2013.

Councillor Jon Rogers, Bristol City Council Cabinet Member for Transport and Sustainability, said: "The levels of traffic using the bridge are not high, and predictions of traffic chaos following a trial reduction in traffic did not turn out to be at all accurate. The chaos was in fact non-existent and I don't expect to hear that word connected with this bridge any more.

"Motorists are keen that we provide the kind of high-quality public transport that will tempt them out of their cars and, well this is it!

"It's time to bite the bullet. We're opening the bridge to a high-quality fast and efficient mode of public transport never seen before in Bristol. I am confident that many people who currently drive over the bridge will use it."

Editors notes: In November 2008 the project carried out a pre-submission consultation exercise with a leaflet drop to over 36,000 households in wards along the potential route. A series of eight dates over seven locations public exhibitions were also held, public meetings attended (eg Greater Bedminster Partnership, Ashton Vale Heritage Group, Redcliffe Community Forum, Bristol Urban Design Forum, Business West, Greater Bristol Alliance,) some in conjunction with the South Bristol Link. Bristol City ward councillors along the route were offered briefings in March 2008 and October 2008 and North Somerset held briefings with their members.

The feedback influenced the major scheme bid to the Department for Transport in March 2009. The full bid submission can be seen at www.westofengland.org/rapid-transit .

TIMELINE

Summer 2010 – Public Inquiry (if required)

Mid 2011 – Approval of TWAO and planning application.

2010/2011– Procurement/tendering of contractors.

Autumn 2011– Award of funding from Department of Transport.

End 2011 – Commencement of construction.

2013 – Operational services.

The DfT's process for considering major schemes for funding is in three stages:

- Programme Entry – making an initial case for the scheme to DfT setting out what the scheme is, what the economic case for the scheme is and how the scheme is planned to be funded and delivered. The submission to DfT is formally referred to as a 'Major Scheme Business Case' or is known as a bid.
- Conditional Approval – is applied for once all the necessary statutory powers have been granted for a scheme. This involves obtaining planning permission and other legal consents (for example listed building consents) to build and operate the scheme. In the case of the Rapid Transit Scheme a Transport and Works Act Order application will be submitted. This is an application made by the Local Authorities to the Secretary of State for Transport, which, if approved, results in an Act of Parliament authorising the scheme.
- Final Approval – is applied for once contracts have been agreed to build and operate a scheme and works on the ground are ready to commence.