



Improving Transport in the West of England

Local Transport Powers

This paper outlines how the four Councils in the West of England work to deliver improvements in transport through the Joint Transport Committee. The Committee comprises the Cabinet Members for Transport from each of the Councils. It outlines the achievements and further action planned by the Committee. It explains how the Committee will continue to make the most of existing local transport powers, and seek further ones from government where this supports the delivery of the Area's transport needs and ambitions.

This paper also responds to calls for the Councils to use new powers to establish an Integrated Transport Authority. It sets out how the progressive use of existing local authority transport powers by the Joint Committee can achieve most of its objectives, without the drawbacks of setting up such a joint statutory body. The table appended to this paper outlines the close match in the powers of the two bodies.

The transport work that benefits from joint working by the Councils includes:

- Planning & implementing cross-boundary transport plans and investment.
- Working with bus operators to improve service quality.
- Working to obtain improvements in the quality of Rail Services & the strategic roads network
- Increasing local investment in transport.

Planning & implementing cross-boundary transport plans and investment

Through the work of the Joint Transport Committee, the Partnership Board and Councils already take collective action to develop the **Joint Local Transport Plan**. This is the basis on which the Councils obtain funding and support from government and implement the Major Transport Schemes and Policies.

The 2006-2011 Joint Local Transport Plan was an important step in collective working between the Councils. The Joint Committee secured a £450m investment in Major Transport Schemes for the period up to 2019/20, although this is now at risk because of planned public expenditure cuts. It is also successfully delivering various policies and other outcomes the Plan contains.

The Joint Transport Committee Members recognise the benefits and achievements of their current co-ordinated approach in planning and delivering major transport improvements. With the support of the Partnership Office and each Council's Head of Transport this approach integrates transport planning with the wider responsibilities of the Partnership including spatial planning, other infrastructure and economic competitiveness.

Each authority manages **local Highway matters** such as road safety, junction improvements and safer routes, separately. The Joint Committee envisages this will continue. In the case of strategic investment, the Cabinet Members for Transport on the Joint Committee plan and prioritise major investment to implement improvements. This is on the understanding that they will later be responsible for authorising the Traffic Regulation Orders essential to implementation. This means that strategic and local considerations are taken into account at the planning stage. Subsequently any planning permissions required for transport proposals are sought from the relevant Council(s).

Based on the success of this approach to joint transport planning, development and delivery, and the scope for further strengthening local powers, an ITA would not offer anything extra.

Working with bus operators to improve service quality

The Joint Transport Committee has given high priority to addressing the quality of public transport. It is taking a series of actions involving capital investment and negotiations with public transport operators including:

- Overseeing the completion of **Quality Partnership Schemes (QPS)** for the Greater Bristol Bus Network, following consultation with bus operators. The network comprises ten key bus corridors across the West of England; the schemes will secure high quality, frequency and reliability, and maximum fares. The statutory process to create the first QPS will start in 2010 and they will become operational over the period up to 2012.
- Formalising engagement and **negotiation with bus operators** on both commercial and supported routes to increase the quality, frequency and reliability of services, and to achieve better value for money. These arrangements are in place and a jointly agreed series of actions are being progressed.

Considerably stronger and wider powers of intervention, involving the setting up of a **Quality Contract Scheme** to bring the bus network into a franchise arrangement, are available to Councils. Through a quality contract the partnership or joint committee would be able to specify and tender local bus routes, frequencies and fares. Bus operators would bid to run services, which would be managed through contracts to provide consistently high standards across the sub region.

Through these formal contractual relationships it may only be possible to achieve effective action by making considerable public investment; at present the councils do not have such resources. Should financial circumstances change the Councils could delegate such powers to the Joint Committee. These powers would need to be accompanied by the management arrangements essential to dealing with the risks and finances involved, and ensuring service improvements are delivered

- Working with bus operators and the Department of Transport to put in place **smart card ticketing for public transport**. This will make it easier for passengers to pay for bus tickets, speed up boarding the bus and reduce congestion, and allow accurate monitoring of the use of supported routes and concessionary travel to aid planning. The financing and development of software to operate and manage smart card ticketing is underway and bus operators are planning investment in ticketing machines.
- Working with bus operators to agree a voluntary **Code of Conduct on Service Stability** that will consolidate changes to bus services and timetables on set dates each year and ensure that Councils are given advance notice of changes to services.
- Improving the quality, reliability and availability of transport information through the established **Travel+ brand**. This is designed to keep the public well informed, to give them more encouragement to use public transport, and to promote investment in schemes and initiatives in the West of England.
- **Building practical alliances with other areas** to increase learning, best practice and progress.

The Partnership has concluded that the actions currently underway, and the further scope available within existing local powers, mean that an ITA would not offer anything extra.

Working to obtain improvements in the quality of rail services & the strategic roads network

Various steps are being taken to ensure an improved strategic and operational relationship with the Rail Industry and the Highways Agency. Subsequent negotiations with these bodies, through the leadership of the Joint Transport Committee, have focussed on:

- Improving collaboration with **Network Rail** (a company limited by guarantee that is responsible for planning and investing in rail track, systems and stations) and the rail service operators, **First Great Western, Cross-Country Trains and South West Trains** to exercise more influence over investment in rail infrastructure and rolling stock and advance consultation on the frequency and timetabling of trains. The Department for Transport has confirmed that responsibility for rail track and stations will not be available to an ITA.
- Improving outcomes with the **Highways Agency**. This action is based on an agreed set of principles and actions designed to secure investment in the priority local transport infrastructure and strategic road network, and to ensure complementary working in the management and maintenance of local and strategic roads.

The responses of these bodies and the progress being made in setting joint priorities and action in the interests of the area will substantially improve outcomes for the West of England. The ITA would not offer anything extra.

Increasing local investment in transport

At present future significant reductions in public expenditure leave little or no room for local councils to increase public subsidies for public transport, or to step up investment in transport management and maintenance schemes. Whilst the authorities have provided substantial funding to underpin the development of the £450m Major Transport Schemes Programme through to 2019/20, this level of public investment is also likely to be affected by future public expenditure cuts.

When circumstances allow, priority could be given to resourcing the Joint Committee to take and exercise more powers. Additional revenue and capital requirements, and cash flow support for Schemes, could be raised through a combination of Council Tax, other existing sources used by local authorities and any new means that become available. A significant increase in funding would be required to match transport expenditure levels in metropolitan areas elsewhere in the country.

Should the Partnership take the formal steps required to establish an ITA these would include establishing arrangements to secure a levy by a per capita charge collected via council tax.

Promoting the interests and transport needs of the West of England

This brief paper demonstrates how the Joint Transport Committee and the Partnership Board, working with government, its agencies and other strategic partners is setting the direction and pursuing the actions essential to improving transport investment and outcomes. In this way it has established a stronger voice for the area, one that the Committee and the Board will further strengthen through more action and engagement with government, its agencies and transport operators.

Conclusions

The Joint Committee and the Partnership Board will continue to pursue the priorities described. In future Councils will consider allocating more existing local powers to the Joint Committee, where these are necessary to achieve their joint objectives.

Through the Joint Committee, transport work can best be integrated with the broader ambitions and outcomes of the West of England Partnership, especially its work in planning and investing in building new communities and homes, supporting the growth and competitiveness of the economy and attracting additional good quality local jobs. This co-ordinated approach is also effective in balancing strategic and local considerations and impact when setting policy and investment priorities.

During discussion of an ITA the Joint Transport Committee remained concerned about the lengthy, extensive and costly preparation and planning required to establish and to run an Integrated Transport Authority (ITA).

Comparison of Transport Powers

Function	Joint Transport Executive Committee	Integrated Transport Authority
A. <u>Planning & Implementing Major Transport Schemes</u>		
Joint Local Transport Plan: preparation and delivery.	✓	✓
Major Scheme Bids: preparation and delivery.	✓	✓
Local Highway Authority Executive Powers: local transport schemes and highway maintenance	Individual Executive Members	✓
Development Control - Powers of Direction	X	X
- Formal Consultee	X	✓
B. <u>Improving Bus Services</u>		
Supported Bus Services and Information	✓	✓
Bus Quality Partnerships	✓	✓
Bus Quality Contracts	✓	✓
Concessionary Travel and Integrated Ticketing	✓	✓
Travel Plans	✓	✓
C. <u>Strategic Road & Rail Powers</u>		
Strategic Highway Powers	✓	✓
Rail – Track	X	X
Rail – Funding Additional Services	✓	✓
D. <u>General Powers of an Integrated Transport Authority</u>		
More Transport Investment	Council Tax and other existing sources	Levy
Credibility/Clout/Impact	✓	✓