

**West of England Partnership
Partnership Board
31st August 2010**

Public Forum: Statement From SouthWest Transport Network

New Local Enterprise Partnerships and Transportation and Planning

This is one of the most important meetings of this partnership since it was set up, since the abolition of Avon County Council. With the abolition of the RDA and what appears to be no regional coordination bodies being left, the WoE Partnership must take a leadership role in planning, transport and regeneration.

We are aware that Bournemouth and Poole and Dorset have had a meeting in Dorchester to set up their Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and are working closely with Hampshire, Southampton and Portsmouth. They already have Solent Transport to further their joint transport aims and investment. Devon and Cornwall have been working through the South West RDA to set up a LEP for Devon, Cornwall, Torbay and Plymouth which may include parts of Somerset but these discussions are still on-going. It is clear that these LEPs will have housing, economic, and transportation powers.

Who will have transportation powers for the Greater Bristol Area? The other 11 city regions will in choose their transport powers under the ITA or under transport powers of the local authorities and will take over the RFA transport and regional powers. The risk is that there will be even more of an un-level playing field between Greater Bristol and the Northern Regional Cities for example. These already have ITAs and will benefit further by having the additional power as an LEP to allocate central government funds.

Whatever the outcome of the original RFA2 bids for the Greater Bristol Metro, the Portishead Railway line and the North-South Rapid Transit and Weston Super Mare package, we need to find a way of continuing to fund and operate and improve the existing bus, rail and ferry network.

A strong Local Enterprise Partnership may be able to use the new Growth Fund to assist with public transport infrastructure investment in tandem with regeneration and growth. But this kind of initiative needs commitment from all local authorities and a firm lead from the WoE.

RFA2 Projects

Meanwhile if the projects do not go forward we need to also build upon the success of the Greater Bristol bus network and improvements on the local rail services incrementally in the Greater Bristol Area including works to the stations, bus stations, (e.g. Bath, Keysham etc) and we must maintain the subsidies for the Greater Bristol Bus network that are about to go out to competitive tendering.

This includes the evenings and Sundays services, and some daytime services in the 4UAs being led by Bristol, the rail services especially the Severn Beach line and services extended to Taunton and Weston on Sunday and evenings, and the ferry services in Bristol Harbour.

Bus quality

So much work has been done by councillors and members alike through the WoE transport executive on the Greater Bristol Bus network to ensure low floor buses are operational. It would be contrary to the Disabled Discrimination Act and the Goods and Services section if all the work done jointly with First Group and Rotola Group plc (the parent company of Wessex Connect) is undermined by the awarding on contracts to companies with few low floor vehicles (such as Faresaver). This company for example has been awarded three mainline contracts the Bristol to Chippenham 634/635, the Bath to Marshfield (79) and the 271 272 X71 Bath to Devizes via Melksham. Before the buses were super-low floor 2-3 years old. These will be replaced by a mixture of vehicles, some operating from Bath bus station and some operating from the Guildhall. The Faresaver buses are often older vehicles, with some new buses only, these spread thinly on core routes, and the older buses are non-low floor and non-accessible.

Passenger representation

Within the new LEP partnership there still needs to be passenger representation. We are anxious that the transport forums are still available at the Greater Bristol level and at the local authority level. Passenger representation needs to be heard loud and clear not just the voice of the business community. The RDA for instance consisted of Social and Economic Partners and local passenger representation this kind of set-up needs to be replicated in each of the city region areas.

This will need discussing in the sense that the role of Passenger Focus and the Office of Rail Regulation and the Traffic Commission are still up for review.

WoE Core Strategies are hinged on the successful delivery of public transport the public transport policies are absolutely key. We need to safe-guard public transport in order to deliver housing and employment without congestion.

We are concerned about the Bath City Region which looks to both West Somerset and Wiltshire. How will the transport links in terms of running buses and trains with these adjacent authorities be taken on board?

Rail

The new Rail Franchises Consultation Regions mentions the need for localism in rail networks. This means taking some responsibility from central government for running the local rail network with a devolved budget from the DfT. Otherwise the budget will be controlled by the DfT itself and the SW will miss out. Southampton and Liverpool for example, has control as do many other city Bristol. Nottingham and Southampton/Portsmouth/Bournemouth Poole are already taking the powers. They for example are opening the Swanage line and also putting rapid transit on the Fareham Gosport. Meanwhile we are losing the Portishead Line. We must take action!

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