

**West of England Partnership
Joint Scrutiny Committee
10 October 2008**

Transport Major Scheme Bids

B) Rapid Transit – Ashton Vale to Temple Meads

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the proposed Rapid Transit (RT) route from Ashton Vale to Temple Meads, and to seek views.

Background

2. RT is part of the integrated major scheme package in the Joint Local Transport Plan and currently has £71 million of Central Government funding allocated in the South West Regional Funding Programme, subject to meeting Department for Transport appraisal criteria including value for money, risk and deliverability.
3. The vision for the RT system is a network of rapid, reliable services with an emphasis on segregation from traffic, new tram-style vehicles, high quality, accessible interchanges and clear information/marketing.

Scheme Development

4. Studies have been progressing towards the submission of a Major Scheme Bid to the Department for Transport for the first part of the network, a 7 kilometre route from Ashton Vale to Temple Meads via Bristol City Centre. The route will link the existing Long Ashton Park and Ride, potential Bristol City FC development site, Wapping Wharf development, the Cabot Circus shopping centre, Temple Quay and Temple Meads station. It will provide a high profile public transport corridor largely segregated from traffic ensuring a fast and reliable service.
5. Services from North Somerset will also be able to join the alignment for a delay-free route to the city centre, providing these vehicles also meet high quality standards. The route would also facilitate a future extension through the proposed South West urban extension area to Bristol International Airport.
6. A high quality parallel pedestrian and cycle facility will be provided the length of the route extending the existing cycle path and linking with Sustran's Connect2 proposals. It is intended that the existing heritage railway services will be retained for operation on Sundays.
7. Initial indications are that the route performs well in terms of predicted patronage, and is likely to robustly satisfy Department for Transport major scheme appraisal criteria.

8. In 2003 the Government Office for the South West (GOSW) in partnership with the Highways Agency (HA), South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) and the West of England authorities commissioned the Greater Bristol Strategic Transport Study (GBSTS) to look at how the scale of growth and proposed development for the area could be delivered sustainably. In 2006 GBSTS concluded that:
“further work is required to identify the type of vehicle used to operate the service but modern, low-floor, articulated buses are likely to be the most appropriate, flexible and cost effective vehicles to satisfy the requirements of the service”
9. A review of technologies was first undertaken in 2007 which looked at a wide range of options from monorail and light rail to conventional buses, as well as considering rubber-tyred RT technologies. A subsequent study was recently commissioned to specifically look at opportunities provided by newer RT technologies, focusing on Tramtrain, Light Weight Rail or Ultra Light Rail and rubber-tyred RT.
10. The report concluded that the rubber-tyred rapid transit mode, particularly if all elements of the system were delivered (segregation, fast/frequent services, direct access to destinations), met the scheme objectives, would meet DfT appraisal criteria and could be delivered within the current regional funding allocation programme. The risks associated with delivering rubber-tyred rapid transit were considered to be *‘considerably lower than the other two technologies’*. The report does not discount these technologies for possible future routes, but considers them unlikely to be deliverable within the regional funding programme for the Ashton Vale - Temple Meads route.

Programme

11. Public consultation for the scheme is planned in November 2008. This consultation is intended to include staffed and static exhibitions at a range of locations along the route, together with the production of leaflet and web-based material and presentations to stakeholder groups.
12. A Major Scheme Bid is required to be submitted in January 2009 in order to meet the requirements of the regional funding programme and access the allocated funding for the West of England.

Recommendation

13. That Members note the progress with the Ashton Vale to Temple Meads rapid transit route and provide comments.