

**West of England Partnership  
Joint Executive Member Meeting  
20 October 2008**

**Rail Update**

**Purpose of report**

1. To provide an update on current and upcoming rail issues in the West of England, and to seek views on priorities and how these can best be progressed.

**Background**

2. The Joint Local Transport Plan Rail Action Plan recognises the significant role the West of England's rail network has to play in reducing congestion. A full update on the Action Plan can be found in Appendix One. Some key issues are outlined below.

**Cardiff to Portsmouth New Trains Bid**

3. First Great Western is putting forward a business case to the Department for Transport for re-equipping the Cardiff to Portsmouth (via Bristol and Bath) service with a new fleet of 11 four-carriage trains. These new trains will add significant capacity, improve the quality and performance of services and be a major step towards delivering a 'Bristol Metro' network of half hourly cross Bristol services. Furthermore the new trains will allow existing Class 158 units to cascade down for use on other local services. The West of England Partnership Board on 19 September 2008 agreed that Councillor Helen Holland as Chair send a letter on behalf of the Partnership supporting First Great Western's bid for new trains.

**Portishead**

4. North Somerset Council has published a study into re-opening the rail link to Portishead (September 2008). The study examined several different options relaying the track between the Portbury Dock Spur and Portishead with new stations at Portishead, Ashton Gate and Pill. Infrastructure will cost between £7.5m and £15m whilst annual operating costs would be between £1.6m and £2.4m. The study identified that a subsidy in the range of £0.4m to £0.9m per annum would also be required. To safeguard the route North Somerset Council is purchasing three miles of disused trackbed for £75,000.

**Office of Rail Regulation and Network Rail Business Plan funding**

5. The Office of the Rail Regulation's (ORR) has been consulting on how much funding Network Rail should have for its Business Plan 2009 to

2014. The ORR proposed cutting a few schemes and reduce the budgets of others.

6. For the West of England area this only affects proposals to upgrade the line speed from Westerleigh Junction (outside Bristol) to Barnt Green (outside Cheltenham) to 110mph. A £30m+ scheme has been reduced to £8m but this still delivers a line speed of 100mph. Network Rail appears to have accepted this.
7. Reported in the press is the deletion of the scheme to double the line between Swindon and Kemble. As this is not on a direct route to the West of England it has very little impact on the West of England.
8. More importantly Network Rail has a discretionary fund to pay for smaller schemes such as Bristol Parkway 4th platform and Bath Spa resignalling. This remains at £234m nationally and our concern is there will be insufficient funding as schemes compete against each other. As part of the West of England Partnership's response to the ORR consultation we argued that we would like to see the fund increased to allow for schemes like Weston bay platform and Yate turnback to be funded.

### **Route Utilisation Strategy**

9. The Great Western Mainline Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS), managed by Network Rail, is looking at ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the network. For the first time it will consider schemes to develop the network. In June 2008 The West of England Partnership submitted evidence to the RUS process based around the Joint Local Transport Plan Rail Action Plan and highlighting the importance of the Growth Agenda and the Regional Spatial Strategy to rail.

### **Severn Beach Line**

10. Network Rail has agreed to fund a third of the cost of providing a turnback at Clifton Down station with Bristol City Council and First Great Western providing the remaining funding. The turnback will bring reliability benefits to services and help reduce the number of cancelled trains. Construction will commence in early 2009.

### **Sevenside Community Rail Partnership**

11. The Sevenside Community Rail Partnership entered a number of nominations for this year's National Community Rail Awards. At the awards ceremony on 19 September 2008 the Partnership took first place for "Outstanding Railway Staff Contribution" for the maintenance of Severn Beach Line Stations and third place for "Outstanding Community Rail Partnership Officer Contribution." Both

awards were well deserved and reflect the hard work the Partnership has put into improving services and stations.

## **Recommendation**

12. That Executive Members:

1) Endorse First Great Western's bid for new trains on the Cardiff to Portsmouth service.

2) Give their views on rail priorities and how these can best be progressed.

## Appendix One

### Joint Local Transport Plan Rail Action Plan Progress 2008

Action	Progress/Future actions
<b>Short term</b>	
Local station improvements	Successful bids for "Access for All Small Station scheme" funding 2008/09. Sevenside Community Rail Partnership schemes.
Third platform at Bristol Parkway	Opened by Network Rail in 2007.
Longer platforms and improved facilities at Worle.	Study identifying costed options is now complete.
Half hourly cross Bristol train services	Rail Project Group and evidence submitted to Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS).
Introduction of JLTP area bus/rail Travelcard.	First Great Western introduced new Freedom Traveypass in 2007.
Support Sevenside Community Rail Partnership	Ongoing support from the four councils.
<b>Medium tem</b>	
Half hourly service Bristol to Avonmouth	3 trains every 2 hour service introduced May 2008. Half hourly service included in RUS evidence.
Dualling line to Weston-super-Mare	Included in RUS evidence. Partial dualling now due in 2009
Fourth platform at Bristol Parkway	Included in Network Rail's Business Plan (April 2008) for implementation 2009/10. To be funded from Network Rail Discretionary Fund.
Yate turnback and half hourly services to Weston-super-Mare	Rail Project Group identified costs of £2.75m for Yate turnback and £2.95m for Weston-super-Mare bay platform. Included in Network Rail Business Plan (April 2008) for implementation in 2011/12 subject to third party funding. Included in RUS evidence.
<b>Long Term</b>	
Re-introduction of Portishead passenger services	North Somerset Council study (June 2008) identified ways forward with possible Transport Innovation Funding. Re-opening costs £7.5m – £15m with an annual subsidy of £0.4m - £0.9m. North Somerset Council have purchased 3 miles of disused trackbed to safeguard the alignment.
Resignalling Bristol Temple Meads	Under Secretary of State for Transport agreed to ask Network Rail for progress update. Included in RUS evidence.
Re-introduction of passenger services between Avonmouth and Filton.	Included in RUS evidence.
New stations at Charfield and Corsham	Included in RUS evidence. Corsham considered in Transport Innovation Fund work.