

## **CAMPAIGN for BETTER TRANSPORT**

Bristol & Bath Travel Area,  
35, Frome Road,  
Bradford on Avon, BA12 2EA

STATEMENT for the WoEP Scrutiny Committee Meeting  
to be held on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2009

Having read the Minutes of the meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> January we welcome

- confirmation that the Green Bank development will not affect the RTR.
- members' suggestion that a moratorium be introduced on the sale of railway land and be brought into effect pending discussions with the Partnership.
- the recognition that an introduction of a 20 mph speed limit would have beneficial effects on air pollution.

However, we were concerned at the reportage that "David Redgewell, on behalf of CfBT, had expressed concerns that double decker buses would not be able to use the Rapid Transit route due to limited headroom – and this would be investigated". This is the reverse of our position. CfBT supports the WoEP Package and has consistently pressed that the highest quality RTVs be used in order to win the greatest level of public support and usage. To us, double decker buses are accommodated within the Showcase bus routes – and we would appreciate it if the Minutes could be amended as at present we appear to be asking that the RT routes should accommodate double deckers, whereas the point being made by David was that due to bridge heights, etc. that would not be possible and anyway should not be countenanced on a RT route. Thank you.

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Campaign for Better Transport are saddened at the recent actions of the SWRA Officer Group, who appear to have failed utterly to observe the terms of the RSS and the advice contained in Baroness Andrew's letter, which advised them to adopt a transparent system for the appraisal of transport schemes. That the highway aspirations of the Shire counties have supplanted improved rail, rapid transit and public transport across the PUAs is a travesty, particularly when there was widespread community support for investment in public transport for the city regions. It was recognised that South Bristol was a top priority, taking into account the social deprivation, with emphasis on the need for good transport links between new housing and employment opportunities across the city region. The Portishead scheme, Greater Bristol Metro and Weston Package herald improvements across the entire Greater Bristol area but particularly perhaps for Bedminster and Parsons Street, linking them to employment areas at Temple Quay and the North Fringe, in line with that top priority of "Pathways out of Poverty". The RSS also supports the concept of public transport improvements for Trowbridge, Exeter and Swindon for instance.

Government Guidance to the Regions does allow schemes to be de-prioritised and Members would do well to recall that both the Kingskerswell and E. of Westbury bypass schemes sprang to the top of RFA1 under duress and within the aegis of the Officer Group. Were these now sliced from the top of RFA2 (they were after all originally shoe-horned into the second tranche of schemes in 1997) the funding of public transport in the City Regions would be the priority once more, in harmony with the Policies of the RSS.

Certainly the Package remained intact, and a top priority, when RFA2 was before the RDA – but has been dismembered since and put back into the mid-term with budget figures slashed - which sadly runs counter to the provision of higher quality RT vehicles. Indeed the Bath Package appears to have been cut by £7m, making it eventually harder to provide the quality of vehicles commensurate with a world heritage city. These packages were also a top priority

with the Housing and Land Agency. Greater Bristol, being the powerhouse of the SW, we have huge concerns that the WoEP is losing out. We were particularly perturbed to find that the Highways Agency had apparently exceeded its advisory role and encouraged RFA2 inclusion of highway schemes, such as A303, A30 and A31 around Bournemouth and Ringwood and the A477/419. Whilst safety schemes on these routes might pass unopposed, why so much of the original Bid should be diverted to fund these schemes must in our opinion be challenged. In what dimension do they meet the Government's priorities as regards deprivation, regeneration creating employment at a time when we have such severe economic problems in the region. The lack of democracy runs counter to Baroness Andrew's letter and guidance received from relevant Ministers, Geoff Hoon and Ben Bradshaw.

**Democracy:** Where is the democracy in decision making, when these are made by an unelected Transport Officer Group – unelected Environmental Directors – and now we have the SW Leaders Council or Board, which appears to have no provision for SEEPS and meets in private. It is noted, the RDA does have social and economic partners on their Transport Advisory Board. Also two "consultations" have been arranged by the SWRA and RDA with stakeholders, but no community events in SSCTs, particularly in South Bristol and Trowbridge.

There is a need for the City Region to claim more powers and keep various bodies based in Greater Bristol, such as a) Learning & Skills Council b) Economic Development c) the ITA formation and d) the formation of an Economic Development Board, so as many of these powers as are presently with the Regional Assembly are transferred to Bristol, not an unelected body in Exeter. This City Region to include Western Wiltshire, Mendip, Somerset and Gloucestershire.

We would urge the WoEP to bring the present situation to the attention of the Ministers, MPs (cross-party) to ensure that RFA2 monies are not diverted away from the Greater Bristol and Bath area. The promise was 27% of the RFA allocation

Government has recently given guidance on gaining more rail services – Geoff Hoon's announcement last Thursday – which could surely pump prime a rail service for Portishead, and could also allow the WoEP to evaluate an enhanced Westbury/Melksham/Swindon service extending to Radstock, thus taking it through a number of deprived areas. In the light of this announcement, may we request a further Rail Summit is organised for the Greater Bristol area – to include Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Mendip.

**Bus Subsidies:** The Greater Bristol Bus Network has won approval, although reduced in value, but there is an urgent need to discuss levels of subsidy between the four authorities for the network as it needs to maintain its evening and Sunday services. Similar discussions should take place between the WoEP and adjoining counties of Wiltshire, Somerset and Gloucestershire, to include Swindon, for subsidy of rail, rapid transit and bus provision.

Thank you,

Anne Lock for David Redgewell