

Public questions and replies

WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY COMMITTEE

3 DECEMBER 2021

PUBLIC QUESTIONS & REPLIES

The following questions were submitted by the deadline (full details of questions are set out in the following pages):

- Q 1 David Redgewell - Bus survey / consultation
- Q 2 David Redgewell - Rail services
- Q 3 Kim Hicks - Green belt review
- Q 4 David Saunders - Solar Together group purchase schemes

QUESTION 1

Question from: David Redgewell

Subject: Bus survey/consultation

Question:

In view of the concerns of stakeholder and passenger groups over effectiveness of marketing by the authority of West of England transport authority bus survey, and how many bus survey forms were made available on stagecoach west, Hct Group, Faresaver, First group, CTC and smaller operators' buses. How many forms were placed in Bath and North East Somerset, city and county of Bristol, and South Gloucestershire council libraries, Bus and coach stations in Bristol and Bath information points and in North Somerset on cross boundary services to Chew Valley; Or In Gloucestershire on the 69 620 Stroud bus station Tetbury, Chipping Sodbury, Yate bus station, Wick and Bath spa bus and coach station; UWE bus and coach station. Southmead hospital bus station, council one stop shops Railway stations - and did the Combined Authority consider some bus service consultation road show like South Gloucestershire county council did when it was responsible for public transport and support bus services?

Similar consultations were by the city and county of Bristol public transport unit and Bath and North East Somerset council and North Somerset council with 4000 responses from passengers. In view of the small number of consultation responses so far and the lack of West of England mayoral combined Authority Board meeting and joint committee meetings, will the mayor and leaders of the West of England mayoral combined Authority Board consider extending the consultation until the 20th December 2021, especially in view of the government National bus strategy and the need as part of the West of England mayoral combined and North Somerset council bus service improvements plan and the need for bus services advisory Board and passengers forum; for consultation on the enhanced quality partnership and the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority, please set up customer services helpline and social media contact point.

REPLY:

The West of England Combined Authority Supported Bus Service Survey was a focused survey to gather information on the bus services that the authority currently supports, in advance of an invitation to operators to tender for services in 2022. The survey was not intended to be a generic consultation on bus services across the region. This survey is one part of the information gathering process for the supported service review and was largely qualitative in nature, informing broadly what operators will be asked to price in their tender returns next year. This could include alternative routes, frequencies, hours of operation as well as potentially whole new services. Other information to be used includes what funding exists or may emerge, e.g. developer funding or Bus Transformation Fund; what has been learnt from earlier consultations; and critically what operators are saying about service viability, given the actual and forecast bus patronage situation.

Consideration was given to placing surveys in libraries; however, with the surveys being focused on the supported bus services themselves (rather than

generic) and being available online, the decision was made not to place any in libraries.

Information on the survey was available on bus, on Real Time Information, on Travelwest (Homepage, Bus main page, Supported bus service page, Park and Ride pages, Timetable pages for all supported services), on Social Media (Twitter and Facebook), Travelwest newsletter and stakeholder emails to all councillors, parish councils, bus operators, education providers, shopping centres, hospitals, transport user groups and community transport providers.

The survey ran for 6 weeks and closed on 28 November. The timeline to go out to tender, in order to meet the contract award and service start dates next year does not allow for a reopening of the survey period. We are committed to continue to consult on changes and improvements to public transport, with a big public engagement exercise launching in January.

QUESTION 2

Question from: David Redgewell

Subject: Rail services

Question:

While welcoming the Severn Beach and Avonmouth to Clifton Down Bristol Temple Meads and station to Weston super Mare in December 2021; the half hourly train services from Avonmouth Dock station.

What progress is being made with the Department for Transport, Network rail western route and Train contractor first group Great western railway:

1. To deliver Portway parkway at Shirehampton
2. The Delivery of Bristol Temple Meads to Bedminster Parson Street, Pill and Portishead, jointly with North Somerset council, railway line
3. Bristol Temple Meads to Lawrence Hill, Stapleton Road, Ashley Down new station, Filton Abbey Wood, Filton North and Henbury for Cribbs Causeway, Henbury loop
4. Bristol Temple Meads to Gloucester line with stations at Lawrence Hill, Stapleton Road, Ashley Down, Filton Abbey Wood
5. Bristol Parkway, Yate new station, Charfield, Cam and Dursley and Stonehouse Bristol Road. This route needs an half hourly train service.
6. Bristol Temple Meads to Keynsham, Oldfield Park, Bath spa, Freshford, Avoncliff, Bradford on Avon, Trowbridge, Westbury and Frome or Warminster .Has the contract been sorted out with the Department for transport on this route to Westbury from December 2022 .

Passengers group and stakeholder groups are looking for the construction of Metro west. Can the Mayor and West of England mayoral combined Authority and North Somerset council provide an up to date and costed delivery plan for the project?

REPLY:

The move to half hourly services on the Severn Beach line is great news for commuters. We continue to make progress with our partners at Network Rail, Great Western Railways and the Department for Transport. The timetable changes you note from December 2021 for Avonmouth include provision for the stop at Portway. We anticipate the station opening early 2022.

We continue to work hard with our colleagues at North Somerset Council as we work through the procurement phases to reopen the line to Portishead - this project remains on programme with an anticipated opening 2024.

MetroWest 2 includes new stations at Ashley Down, Henbury and North Filton. Subject to planning and value for money assessments, we anticipate bringing these stations into use in a phased approach 2023/24. Our plans for MetroWest phase 2 include services to Gloucester. Services for Charfield are currently being analysed by Great Western Railways while Stonehouse Bristol

Road remains subject to the Department for Transport's Restoring Your Railway programme outside of the Combined Authority region.

Enhanced services towards Westbury required enhanced level crossing safety requirements. These are being delivered by Network Rail ahead of the start of enhanced services.

It is not appropriate to publish costings for these transport improvements at this stage as they are pre-contract with the supply chain. All service and infrastructure enhancements need to comply with the Treasury Green Book for public investment.

QUESTION 3

Question from: Kim Hicks on behalf of South Bristol Wrong Road Group

Subject: Green Belt review

Question:

BACKGROUND: We understand that WECA has commissioned a review of Green Belt.

1. What are the parameters for the Green Belt review and will the local communities/the public have an opportunity to express their views?

REPLY:

The Combined Authority, in partnership with Bristol City Council, Bath and North East Somerset Council and South Gloucestershire Council, have commissioned a Green Belt assessment to support the preparation of the Spatial Development Strategy.

This is a technical study, which is not as a matter of course consulted on with the general public, but rather informs the Spatial Development Strategy which is then subject to formal public consultation. The Combined Authority would very much welcome your views during the consultation.

The assessment will identify broad variations in the role of land in relation to each of the five national Green Belt purposes and will inform the assessment of relevant scenarios relating to the distribution of growth and investment.

The Green Belt review itself and any changes to Green Belt will be a Local Plan remit, (and engagement will be part of that) but the principle of and need for development in the green belt is what the spatial strategy scenario appraisal is exploring as part of the Spatial Development Strategy.

A method statement consultation provided an opportunity for duty to cooperate partners to review and comment on the proposed approach to the study, prior to the assessment being undertaken.

This is a proportionate, objective and consistent assessment of the strategic role and function of the Bristol and Bath Green Belt within the administrative areas of the Combined Authority councils.

2. When will the review be completed and will you publish the findings, of the Green Belt review, in full?

REPLY:

The Green Belt assessment will be published in full in Spring 2022.

QUESTION 4

Question from: David Saunders

Subject: Solar Together group purchase scheme

Question:

Some friends have asked me about the [Solar Together](#) group purchase solar scheme being promoted by WECA and Bristol City Council. They ask if it is good value for money? Solar Together quotes seem to be around £1500 per kilowatt – i.e. £6,000 for a 4kW system. Frome council had a scheme, [Solar Streets](#) a year or so back with prices closer to £1100/kW – £4100 for a 3.6kW system. That's quite a difference and Frome clearly had a better offer at around a quarter less – and prices should be getting better over time, not worse! The danger is that people will lose trust in our councils if they feel they are offered a bad deal. Surely we want to offer good deals, and be working towards local, participative, climate change solutions. Can we explore this, and check out what would be a really good deal? Maybe we can even create a community energy solution that offers better for money, as well as job creation for installers in the local economy? How to go about this?

REPLY:

The West of England Combined Authority has partnered with iChoosr who are running the West of England scheme alongside Solar Together schemes across the country for example in London, Manchester and Devon. The scheme is run commercially and not subsidised by the Combined Authority or any of the constituent Local Authorities and is aimed at those who are able to pay for their own PV installation. The role of the West of England Combined Authority is to highlight the opportunity for homeowners in the region to participate in a group-buying scheme, with a view to securing a below market rate for solar PV or battery storage systems i.e. below what you would typically expect to pay for the same system installation, outside of the Solar Together scheme. The Combined Authority would be happy to consider other options for increasing access to clean energy, including community energy solutions.

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