

## **Comments from Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

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# Agenda Item 8

## **COMMENTS FROM CHAIR OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **COMMENTS TO BE SUBMITTED TO: WEST OF ENGLAND JOINT COMMITTEE 17 DECEMBER 2021**

I wish to present the following comments to the 17 December Joint Committee on behalf of scrutiny members:

#### **1. Discussion with Metro Mayor:**

We were pleased that the Metro Mayor again attended our meeting.

We had a wide-ranging discussion including the following points:

- \* We flagged the importance of progressing the collaborative work across the authorities to meet the envisaged timeline for delivering the Spatial Development Strategy (SDS). The next phase of release of documents that support the SDS including a new Memorandum of Understanding is January 2022. As we understand it, an essential decision that needs to be recorded in January is moving the formal decisions regarding the SDS process to April 2022, as this recording will be looked at by the government inspector.
- \* We discussed the issues faced right across the region in relation to bus services. We appreciate the financial constraints that the Combined Authority is operating within, and the very real challenges faced by bus operators - this though also highlights the importance of maximising opportunities through the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership. We also flagged that where services must change in the current situation and given the ongoing constraints, it is essential to provide prompt and timely information to service users.
- \* We discussed the award of £540m to the region through the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement and the need to focus on delivery in the next 5 years. We also flagged that our Transport Sub-group would like to see more information about the transport "hubs" and a clearer, user-centred definition of their features and benefits. In the longer term, we would like to see maintenance support the improvement programmes by integrating with them in terms of timing and, where possible, using maintenance to support improvements.
- \* We also flagged with the Metro Mayor a number of issues raised by the Transport sub-group in relation to rail - these included support for the approach of "sweating" existing assets as far as possible given the expense, long timescales and complexity of rail construction projects. There is also strong

support for improving the accessibility of stations, including the new eastern entrance to Temple Meads.

\* In relation to the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, members feel a key next step is the development of a network map, both a tube-style map and a more detailed alignment map. The walking network also needs to be linked in and aligned with the High Streets work and Liveable Neighbourhoods work, so that we encourage walking to the local high street as the norm.

## **2. Comments on the 17 December Joint Committee reports:**

### **a. Agenda item 9 - West of England Joint Committee governance and voting arrangements**

We noted the legal update, clarifying the voting arrangements as they apply to the Joint Committee

### **b. Agenda item 10 - Joint Committee governance review**

We noted that this report was submitted by the four unitary authorities.

In terms of the governance review that is proposed, we would request that an appropriate officer or officers from the unitary authorities attend our next meeting on 24 January to provide an update on the review and to respond to any specific questions we may have.

We note that under the current governance arrangements, it has been advantageous to all authorities to follow a 'single pot' approach, allowing flexibility in supporting projects across funding programmes such as the Local Growth Fund, Economic Development Fund and Revolving Infrastructure Fund. We hope that the benefits of this approach are given full and due consideration as part of this review, as this will help to continue to assist cashflow across projects and address issues around what can be arbitrary deadlines for using funds.

### **c. Agenda item 11 – Local Enterprise Partnership & Invest Bristol and Bath budget outturn, April - October 2021**

We noted this report, on the basis that it is essentially the same report as was prepared for the October meeting.

**d. Agenda item 12 - Local Growth/Getting Building Funds, Economic Development Fund and Revolving Infrastructure Fund change requests**

We support these proposals, again noting that they largely replicate the original October report.

**e. Agenda item 13 - Metrowest phase 1B – Portishead line update**

We noted this update and are appreciative of the urgent work taking place to resolve the issues around the Development Consent Order. That said, scrutiny members are disappointed that the Portishead line will be an hourly service – whilst we understand the reasons for this, to be truly transformational, Portishead we feel needs a 30 minute service.

**f. Agenda item 14 - West of England investment priorities**

Again, we noted that this report has been produced by the unitary authorities.

It is clear that important discussions need to take place about investment prioritisation, recognising that it will not be possible to fund all unitary authority and Metro Mayor priorities.

It is essential that we demonstrate our willingness and ability to agree on and deliver the priorities, outcomes and optimised return on investment our residents need and deserve. We are supportive of the approach that these need to be based on as wide a set of criteria as possible

**g. Agenda item 15 - Western Gateway update**

We noted this update and we will be interested to see how the Western Gateway will develop, particularly in the context of the forthcoming White Paper on levelling-up.

**Councillor Winston Duguid**

Chair

West of England Combined Authority Overview & Scrutiny Committee

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