

## QUESTIONS AND MAYOR'S RESPONSES

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## West of England Combined Authority Committee meeting on 27 January 2023

### Questions received from the public with the Metro Mayor's responses:

#### 1. David Redgewell, South West Transport Network and Railfuture Severnside

##### Question 1

What discussion are now taking place about the withdrawing of the support bus Network on services 85 84 between yate railway station park and ride railway station and wootton under edge with KLB school.

On the withdrawn of service 10 from Avonmouth to Thornbury on the section being withdrawn between.

Bristol parkway station and Thornbury

With with the NHS North Bristol hospital Trust and castle school and Marwood school.

Similarly with service 622 Cribbs causeway to Thornbury and chipping sodbury service with Marwood school.

Along withdraw of bus service 17 keynsham to kingswood and Southmead hospital via corsham hospital.

506 Bristol city centre to Easton Eastville Horfield Southmead hospital bus station.

and discussion with university Hospitals trust Bristol and Weston.

Over the withdrawn on Bus service 96 Hartcliffe Hengrove knowle and Bristlington link to the Hospital.

And service 516 from whitchurch Hengrove knowle via hospital service.

With regards the westlink bus services

On vehicles carrying 9 16 and 30 customers to replace 30 seater single Decker buses and Double Decker buses with west link fleet.

**Response from Mayor Dan Norris:** Supported bus services are paid for via the transport levy. It is the responsibility of the three local councils to provide funding for these socially necessary services. Last year these councils' leaders indicated they would increase the levy by up to 10%, but in the event, no increase was forthcoming. This year the councils have again decided to freeze the amount of levy they are paying, which equates to an 11% real terms decrease – in reality arguably much higher given the extremely high inflation rate being experienced by the UK transport industry. In addition the amount spent on levy services (rather than other items the levy funds) is being reduced in cash terms by £1.8m at a time when costs to run buses (because of rising fuel, maintenance and staff costs) has significantly risen. This means there will be fewer bus services. Once again less is being invested in West of England transport services than elsewhere.

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### Transport levy spend per head of population

Combined Authority	Levy £000's	Population 000's	Investment per head £
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough*	3,794	216	17.59
Greater Manchester*	105,773	2,868	36.88
Liverpool City Region*	99,352	1,564	63.52
South Yorkshire*	54,360	1,800	30.20
West Midlands*	114,700	3,000	38.23
West Yorkshire*	93,200	2,300	40.52
Average per authority	78,530	1,958	37.82
West of England	19,443	956	20.33
<i>*As per latest published figures</i>			

Short term, I unfortunately, cannot stop this but long term I have asked the Government for tax raising powers so that instead of the councils paying a levy, I can instead raise the money directly – in a similar way that our region's Police and Crime Commissioner currently charges council tax payers to help fund policing. Alongside this I would also need the power to spend the money directly too.

In addition, this would allow a genuine discussion with the public on the level that people think is appropriate to invest on local transport.

The procurement exercise for the services unitary councils decided to provide money for is now within the 10-day standstill period between the contract award and the signing of the contracts. Award decision notices have been sent to all tenderers who submitted a tender.

While most of the services you mention are part of the supported bus service procurement exercise and part of the award decision notices, service 17 between Southmead Hospital and Kingswood is operated on a commercial basis (apart from the last two trips each day). As such, the majority of journeys are unaffected by the outcome of the procurement exercise and the main service is not due to be withdrawn by the operator.

With regards to **WESTlink**, it was a great success to get the second highest amount of funding in the country. That is why I have been able to reduce bus fares with more to come and why I am introducing **WEST link**, the new on demand service. However, people should not think of **WEST link** as a replacement for supported buses and it would be a mistake to do so. Indeed, as mentioned the money secured for this specifically cannot be spent on supported services. Instead

it is a new system designed to get people to main transport corridors.

The West of England Combined Authority is working with suppliers and operators to finalise the detailed operational details of WESTlink, but early conversations indicate that they say they will supply enough 18 passenger mini buses to ensure waiting times for passengers are not too long.

## Question 2

With westlink replacing some support bus services. What work is going on to look at the following Towns services to look at 30 seater buses similarly to west wales and Wiltshire council with fixed timing points to cover keynsham, Bristlington Radstock Westfield midsomer Norton paulton Town service.

And on service 178 between Bristlington park and ride to keynsham marksbury

Timbury paulton, Midsomer Norton.

and Bath spa bus and coach to Paulton via Timbury and Farmborough

And letting the bus improve plan bus services

517 chew valley to wells bus and coach.

518 midsomer Norton to Radstock

519 keynsham chocolate quarter Town service

520 keynsham Longwell green to Southmead hospital

521 Hengrove to Brislington

522 Bristlington park and ride via paulton and Timbury to Odd Down park and ride.

523 Brislington Town service.

524 long Ashton park and ride to Hengrove park Hospital bus station.

525 E merson green to yate .

525 chew valley link

527 Bristol Anchor Road to chew valley.

These are vital new bus services.

**Response from Mayor Dan Norris: WEST link** is not a replacement for supported buses. Indeed, as mentioned the money secured for this specifically cannot be spent on supported services. Instead it is a new system designed to get people to main transport corridors.

It will cover all of the areas that you mention (Yate, Keynsham, Brislington, Westfield, Radstock, Midsomer Norton and Paulton).

The West of England Combined Authority is working with suppliers and operators to finalise the detailed operational details of WESTlink, including bus size. One of the benefits of smaller minibuses is that it is hoped it will attract more drivers, to help address the severe driver

shortage.

With regards to additional bus services, the 522 and 525 have been awarded and the operators have been informed. There are always big choices to be made to ensure value for money for taxpayers. Crucially the services need to have a good chance of becoming commercially viable. Those chosen score highly on KPMG's Evaluation framework and do not compete with other BSIP funded services. Others remain under discussion.

## 2. Jerome Thomas, Bristol BS8

Question 1

### On-street bike hangar funding

Safe on-street cycle parking in the form of bike hangars can play an important and visible role in the growth of cycling in our cities and towns. The report for this meeting (p142) details the welcome funding for bike hangars in Bristol and in social housing settings. I note the unusual requirements of Bristol Council for concrete bases under street located bike hangars - unlike almost anywhere else in the country. This is significantly increasing the cost and limiting the potential number of sites for their implementation, even though there is widespread demand for these hangars throughout the city. What plans, if any, does the combined authority have to remove this requirement for concrete bases for bike hangars thus allowing a significant increase in their numbers?'

**Response from Mayor Dan Norris:** Bristol City Council as the highways authority currently requires concrete bases for on-highways hangars. The West of England Combined Authority cannot over-rule this.

However, West of England officers have been instructed by the Metro Mayor to look at best practice elsewhere in the county to see if it might be possible to speed up delivery of cycle hangers, and address Bristol City Council's important safety concerns, to help meet our highly ambitious 2030 net zero targets.

## 3. Councillor Mark Weston, Bristol City Council

Question 1

Can the Mayor give an assurance that the four media/communications roles advertised for the Combined Authority are not newly created positions?

**Response from Mayor Dan Norris:** These roles fill vacancies in the communications team to bring it back to its previous strength as established by Metro Mayor Bowles. All the roles being advertised are existing, established posts rather than newly created roles. As noted in the budget paper, the total number of established Communications posts (13) has not changed since the previous budget (2022/23), and has reduced since 2021/22.

## Question 2

If not, or even so, how does the Mayor justify allocating £250k for this rather secondary function, essentially one of spin or self-promotion, in the middle of a bus service crisis?

**Response from Mayor Dan Norris:** Please see above

## 4. Rob Dixon, Chair, Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways

WECA has recently reviewed bus interchange opportunities at rail stations, which Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways (FoSBR) welcomes. As FoSBR has previously identified, it found that infrastructure is currently often inadequate and enables few stations to function as effective interchanges. The report shows, and we agree, that there are stations and their stops that could be prioritised where easy action could be taken.

## Question 1

Will WECA commit to the general principal of bus interchanges at rail stations where possible and commission a study of what would be required at each local station to enable interchange, in order to then prioritise improvements?

**Response from Mayor Dan Norris:** Thank you for your positive comments about the recent review of “bus interchange opportunities” at railway stations. More needs to be done to help and encourage passengers to change between buses and trains. A group including representatives from the rail and bus teams and operators across the West of England region is looking at possible improvements. Passengers need clear signs and announcements about onward travel options and want timetables that link together. A bus or train that leaves 5 minutes before the connecting transport arrives is not just unhelpful, it is a real annoyance to passengers! Once new proposals have been developed, the West of England Combined Authority looks forward to engaging again with FOSBR and others to discuss future steps.

## Question 2

Will WECA pursue the quick wins of starting to install signage to link local stations and their stops, together with maps and real time service information at both? We note from officers that this is a relatively cheap and straightforward intervention.

**Response from Mayor Dan Norris:** The West of England Combined Authority is keen to move at pace to improve signs and information at stops and stations. The Metro Mayor is keen to gain additional powers over bus stops which are important places to share transport information.

## 5. Cllr Heather Mack, Councillor for Lockleaze

### Question 1

When will the Ashley Down, North Filton and Henbury stations open and trains start running on the Henbury spur? What are the risks of these timelines being pushed back?

**Response from Mayor Dan Norris:** The current programme shows a target date for Ashley Down Station to open in 2024 and North Filton and Henbury in 2026. As we know from local experience of building new railways over the decades, that delays are always possible and indeed likely in projects of this size and complexity. Passenger services on the Henbury Spur are planned to be introduced as soon as North Filton and Henbury stations have been built and are ready for operation. Once ready to open, Ashley Down station has been timetabled as a stop on the existing Bristol Temple Meads to Filton Abbey Wood hourly service. This service will subsequently be extended to Henbury.

It is essential that funding is agreed in January 2023 for Ashley Down Station so there is time to secure key materials which are on specific lead-times, such as station platform units, in time for them to be installed during a 16-day “blockade” of the railway in June 2023. Here we really are at spade in the ground stage!

North Filton and Henbury station projects, are only at outline design stage and remain subject to planning approval (which the West of England Combined Authority has no powers to speed up). Officers continue to work closely with adjacent developers to ensure that respective designs and construction programmes are integrated, so as to try to minimise delays.

### Question 2

Many of the main roads in Bristol are in a poor state of repair and need to be re-surfaced in totality, rather than simply having the biggest and most dangerous potholes periodically filled in. What steps is the combined authority taking to put in place with the local authorities a systematic program of resurfacing to ensure that acceptable levels of road surface are achieved on an ongoing basis, particularly on major routes.

**Response from Mayor Dan Norris:** Road resurfacing responsibility lies with the local Highways Authority not the West of England Combined Authority.

## 6. Councillor Tristan Clark, Frampton Cotterell, South Gloucestershire

### Question 1

**Phase 5 of the Yate Spur** After years of campaigning by Cllr Claire Young for the completion of the Yate Spur it is good news that progress is finally being made. The Business Case Assessment Summary for Phases 5 and 6 states that **“there is potential for the scheme to achieve a substantially higher Value for Money if the predicted uplift in cycle demand is higher than assumed in the core scenario”**. For this potential to be realised, however, the Yate Spur must be suitable for experienced



and inexperienced cyclists alike. The Westerleigh Rd – Nibley Lane junction gets exceedingly busy during the morning and evening rush hour. At the public consultation phase Westerleigh Parish Council suggested the need for some form of light controlled crossing at this junction to allow the cycle route to be used by cyclists of all abilities. Have officers examined this possibility whilst working on the Full Business Case?

**Response from Mayor Dan Norris:** As designs are still in process and going through the technical assurance process, it is not possible to confirm immediately whether this is appropriate. Officers at the West of England Combined Authority will raise this with the South Gloucestershire project team for discussion and ensure the Councillor is updated.

## Question 2

A432 Multi Modal Corridor - The current work on the A432 Multi Modal Corridor, installing raised cycle lanes between Nibley and Ox Bridge, has been significantly delayed and required remedial work as the curbs are difficult to differentiate from the road surface at night and in wet weather. This has caused significant disruption to road users. The Full Business Case for the next stages of the project has now been delayed by 6 months. The sections going through Coalpit Heath and the Kendleshire junction will be exceptionally challenging from an engineering perspective and it is not yet clear whether the underlying problems can be successfully solved. Are officers confident that the revised delivery milestones will be achievable?

**Response from Mayor Dan Norris:** The project faced technical process delays through the funding cycle. These were predominately through assuring the case for investment. This process took longer than expected impacting on the milestones described in the business case submission. Actions were taken to avoid this type of incident reoccurring on projects of this value in the future

- The 3 stage project development life-cycle has been curtailed to one single stage, Final Business Case, and
- July 2022 Combined Authority Committee, resolved to delegate approval for those projects within the CRSTS programme that are £6m and below to the Director of Infrastructure of the Combined Authority in consultation with the Unitary Authorities Directors of Infrastructure. In the absence of unanimous agreement, the delegation reverts to the Combined Authority Chief Executive in consultation with the Unitary Authority CEO's.

The West of England Combined Authority has interrogated Unitary Authorities delivery programme, and subject to public consultation, feel the current proposed programme is sufficiently robust. The Full Business Case for the A432 Multi-Modal Corridor is due to be completed by January 2024. Public consultation on this project will commence shortly. The West of England Combined Authority will continue to monitor the progress of this project post consultation to assess the health of the project, within the existing governance process of the region.

## 7. Cllr David Wilcox, Councillor for Lockleaze

### Question 1

Transport Paper: On page 143 It talks about mandates from BCC Highways Teams that require both a concrete plinth and bollards. Can this be explained? No other council in the UK makes this mandate and it dramatically increases the costs for both the council and residents.

**Response from Mayor Dan Norris:** Bristol City Council as the highways authority currently requires concrete bases for on-highways hangars. The West of England Combined Authority cannot over-rule this.

However, West of England officers have been instructed by the Metro Mayor to look at best practice elsewhere in the county to see if it might be possible to speed up delivery of cycle hangers, and address Bristol City Council's important safety concerns, to help meet our highly ambitious 2030 net zero targets.

### Question 2

Transforming Cities Fund: A 12% underspend of a £103m fund that has existed since March 2018 – even allowing for a £23m transfer to CRSTS, is an enormous red flag for any organisation. Can I have some more detail as to how this situation will be averted for CRSTS? Paragraphs 10 - 14 do not inspire me with confidence that same will not happen again.

**Response from Mayor Dan Norris:** The £23m was not transferred to City Region Sustainable Transport (CRSTS). For regions with CRSTS funding, the Department for Transport determined that with last year of Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) and the first year of CRSTS overlapping, the funds would merge, reallocating TCF into CRSTS programme funding across England. This meant that the £23m which was the Combined Authorities final year of TCF was subsumed into the CRSTS Programme. Consequently this has resulted in a reprofile of funding for CRSTS, as the reallocation by the Department for Transport has meant a reduction in the proposed CRSTS allocation by £23m.

The Metro Mayor has asked for serious lessons to be learned. There are now new arrangements in place for MORE rigorous forecasting and reporting of milestones and spending. The new Programme Review Board and Unitary Authority directors meetings take place monthly to review forecasts and provide timely challenge to any slippage.

End