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QUESTIONS AND MAYOR'S RESPONSES

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

Questions received from the public with answers from Mayor Dan Norris

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On the withdrawn of service 10 from Avonmouth to Thornbury on the section being withdrawn between.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 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Over the withdrawn on Bus service 96 Hartcliffe Hengrove knowle and Bristlington link to the Hospital.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.

Continued/...

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.

David Redgewell South west transport Network and Railfuture Severnside

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. Rob Dixon, Chair, Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways

David Jarman notes in his report that "1.3 million people are expected to use the Phase 2 services each year, this will increase if MetroWest expansion continues and the connectivity of the new Phase 2 stations is further expanded". Since Bristol City Council have been reviewing bus lanes along Muller Road where there is already a southbound bus stop under the railway bridge, please would the West of England Combined Authority advise:

Question 1

What simple and immediate actions do the West of England Combined Authority consider would be appropriate at and near Ashley Down station to improve connectivity through enabling bus-rail interchange?

Response from Mayor Dan Norris: The proposed station site is close to bus corridors on Ashley Down Road and Muller Road, both with existing bus stops located within 5 minutes' walk (less than 400 meters). Ashley Down Road is served by the route 70 service and Muller Road is served by routes 17, 24 and 506.

As part of the station works, improvements will be made to the pedestrian routes in the immediate vicinity of the station, such as dropped kerbs, making it easier to cross the roads and connect with the nearby bus stops. The pedestrian environment on Station Lane, which will connect the station to Muller Road, has also recently been improved. Wayfinding signage will also be installed as part of the station works on key routes to the station, and this will include consideration of bus / rail interchange connections.

Local to the site, Bristol City Council are completing Muller Road Highway Improvement works to improve bus, cycling and walking journeys through Lockleaze. Works consists of:

- A 24hr inbound bus lane between the junctions with Downend and Springfield Road, necessitating works to Lidl retaining wall as covered in planning agreement.

- 5 bus stop upgrades, including new shelters and waiting areas.
- A point closure to motor through-traffic of Springfield Avenue, Draycott Road, and Brent Road at Muller Road ends, with a modal filter for cycles.
- Signalisation of the junction with Ralph Road.

As part of the West of England Combined Authority's wider work looking at bus-rail interchange we will look to adopt any other good practices that will improve the plan for Ashley Down station.

Question 2

How are the West of England Combined Authority working with BCC, Network Rail and other partners to achieve this?

FoSBR look forward to action by the West of England Combined Authority, Bristol City Council and Network Rail to ensure that opportunities for bus-rail interchange are maximised when the station opens."

Response from Mayor Dan Norris: Designs for the planned highways improvement works are being developed by Bristol City Council, taking cognisance of the need to maximise connectivity. Specific forums facilitated by the West of England Combined Authority are taking place to integrate these works with the main station design, which is being managed by Network Rail, to ensure that access to and from the station properly considered.

Away from the specific station project, the West of England Combined Authority are chairing a working group, attended by Network Rail and Bristol City Council (amongst other organisations), which is looking more broadly at improving rail-bus interchange and information provision at stations. Good practices from this working group will be considered for adoption at Ashley Down.

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