

QUESTIONS AND MAYOR'S RESPONSES

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West of England Combined Authority Committee meeting on 17 March 2023

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

1. Jackie Head, CVAF C&NE (ST) WG

Question 1

Can you explain why your Authority Transport officers scoped and put out to tender the x5 BSIP routes as hourly services if they were seen as competing with WESTlink and this was unrealistic in terms of delivery? Why did you not include lower frequency options? Why has this reduction not been considered in relation to these routes when tenders came in higher than anticipated?

Response from Metro Mayor Dan Norris:

It was never the assumption that all routes tendered for in November would be procured. Gathering information on a wide range of services allowed evidence-based decisions to be made.

Question 2

Can the Mayor explain how the DRT is being explained as an alternative to the fixed bus route of 672 in his letter to Sarah Warren, given that in his response to our question on 18th January he said WESTlink was 'not designed to replace fixed route services' ? Will he now reconsider the idea of a fixed route service within the Chew Valley to support DRT in the Chew Valley?

Response from Metro Mayor Dan Norris:

WESTlink is not, and has never intended to be, a replacement for fixed route bus services.

The 672 is a supported bus service, which was 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.

It was a great success to get the second highest amount of funding in the country through the bus services improvement plan which is for new and innovative transport solutions like WESTlink, WESTlocal and other services which have the potential to become profit making over a two year period. The Mayor urges Chew Valley Area Forum to consider applying to WESTlocal.

2. David Redgewell, South West Transport Network and Railfuture Severnside

Question 1

With the West of England Mayoral Combined Transport Authority being with Mayor Dan Norris being a universal Transport Authority. Funded by Transport levys from Bristol city council, Bath & North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire county council.

What progress is being made on a West of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council?

Universal public transport plan for Mayor Dan Norris, Mayor Marvin Rees, council leaders and local councillors showing the bus, coach, rail Demand responsive bus services and ferry Networks showing the part of the Greater Bristol and Bath city region South Gloucestershire Bath & North East Somerset city and county of Bristol and North Somerset council area with no public transport services or no universal bus services that can take people to work school colleges health food shopping and leisure facilities.

Demand responsive bus services.

But are very limited taking children to school and colleges with 16 seater buses.

From April 2023 and June 2023.

Response from Metro Mayor Dan Norris:

AssessWEST is looking at public transport across the region for ways to make the network more efficient and affordable. Unlike Metro Mayors in the rest of the country the West of England Metro Mayor is unable to raise a precept and would like to have the power to do so, alongside powers to spend this money effectively.

Question 2

What progress is being made on the Development of a light rail mass transit system in the Greater Bristol and Bath city region by Mayor Dan Norris?

What discussions have taken place with light rail system operators such as First group plc or stagecoach group Network rail western Bristol Airport plc?

Nottingham supertram or The mayor of Greater Manchester metro link, Tyne and wear metro, about building and operating such a mass transit network.

Greater Bristol and Bath city region is one of the largest cities Region without a mass transit light rail system.

This is not about building a London transport style full underground Network.

But building a mass transit system to work alongside metro west railway Network, metro bus, buses coach and ferry services for fully accessible integrated transport Network.

Response from Metro Mayor Dan Norris:

Work continues on the Future4WEST SOC so a proposition that conforms to the requirements of the West of England Local Growth Assurance Framework can be presented to committee. This includes Atkins reviewing work recently carried out by WSP. I continue to talk to Metro Mayor colleagues in other areas and transport experts.

3. Jerome Thomas

Question 1

Carbon Savings from projects funded by the West of England Green Recovery Fund

I welcome the West of England Climate and Ecological Strategy and Action Plan 2023. I think it is accessible and well thought through with a wealth of useful information.

I am also pleased to see the update on the Green Recovery Fund.

What are the anticipated carbon savings from the projects that have been given funding, or have been approved for funding, by the Green Recovery Fund*?

*p35-p36 of the Public Reports pack

Response from Metro Mayor Dan Norris:

There is a climate and biodiversity emergency and we will need to move much further and faster as we strive to meet our ambitious 2030 net zero targets. When the Metro Mayor took office he created the Green Recovery Fund with an aim to reduce the region's carbon emissions from buildings and transport, and improve enhance our natural habitats. This fund has been so successful Committee will today be asked to increase it. All the projects funded by the Green Recovery Fund under the low carbon, energy and transport themes, and many of the nature recovery projects, will contribute to carbon savings directly or indirectly. There are data estimates for carbon savings across a majority of these projects when they are developed to a Full Business Case, and when assessing grant funding bids. These decisions are published on the West of England Combined Authority website. For instance, the Full Business Case for the Retrofit Accelerator assessed the carbon savings of this project as 16,335 tonnes (see page 16): <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Retrofit-Accelerator-Full-Business-Case.pdf>

The newly established environment directorate has been tasked to improve the consistency and understanding of the carbon impacts of projects and is developing capability and capacity. The work of a new analyst will consider the environmental metrics of Green Recovery and other projects most notably transport schemes.

4. Ian Beckey, Gloucestershire catch the bus campaign and Somerset catch the bus service campaign

Question 1

With the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council being transport Authorities working in partnership in the Greater Bristol and Bath city region.

We would to know if staff of both transport Authorities and senior Directors and the mayor Dan Norris

And councillors and mayor Rees and council leader in Bristol city council North Somerset, Bath & North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire council involved in west of England mayoral combined Authorities committee are issue with travel passes to travel on the city region bus rail ferry and coach Network.

Like the staff at west Midlands transport combined Authority and mayor Andy street.

The Greater Manchester combined transport Authority where mayor Andy Burnham is seen with his staff travelling on the Greater Manchester Manchester public transport Network.

Devon county council also issue councillors and staff with public transport travel passes

In our view as passenger groups that the politicians staff should use the public transport Network the Authority manages.

Response from Metro Mayor Dan Norris:

The West of England Combined Authority like many other organisations is a member of the [FirstBus Commuter Travel Club](#), which gives staff discounted travel. The Metro Mayor has reduced fares across the West of England thanks to his success in securing the second highest amount of money in the country through the Bus Services Improvement Plan. A further package of exciting bus fare offers will happen later this year.

Question 2

What progress is being made transferring public transport Network and Transport staff to the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and with key bus and public transport infrastructure from Bristol city council South Gloucestershire

council and Bath & North East Somerset council to work in partnership North Somerset council.

Response from Metro Mayor Dan Norris:

The Metro Mayor supports transferring transport staff to the West of England Combined Authority as it is the transport authority. Any such moves must be accompanied with transfer of powers and a proper process including full regard to pension liabilities.

5. Cllr David Wilcox, Bristol City Council (on behalf of the entire Green Councillor groups of Bristol City Council and Bath & North East Somerset)

Question 1

Two Unitary Authorities in the West of England Combined Authority have expressed an interest in moving to a Bus Franchising Model. Bristol has passed a motion at Full Council, and Bath & North East Somerset has made a cabinet recommendation.

We, the undersigned, feel it is essential for the People of Bristol, Bath and South Gloucestershire to have franchise lead bus services so that the Combined Authority acting on the advice of the unitary authorities, can have direct control over routes, timetables and prices of tickets. The West of England is the only combined authority controlled by a Labour Mayor not to have a franchise deal for public transport in place.

We would also like to remind the Mayor that the manifesto in 2021 that he was elected upon included a statement that Bus Franchising would be investigated.

Can the Mayor of the West of England detail what steps the Combined Authority is taking to investigate the Franchising Model and how it could be implemented in the region?

Response from Metro Mayor Dan Norris:

Franchising has very many upsides to set the routes, frequencies and running hours and control the fare box but it is not public ownership and it would not solve issues such as the bus driver shortage that we face today. Neither does the Metro Mayor have an income stream as Andy Burnham does from his trams. It should be noted that Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are considering a congestion charge as they have the same challenge of a lack of an income stream.

The Metro Mayor is watching carefully what is happening in other mayoral combined authority regions and is talking to his fellow Metro Mayors, as they all work to address the national issue with bus service provision. The Metro Mayor is getting opinions from external experts who have worked within the London bus model as well as legal advice.

Franchising remains under active consideration along with all other suggestions that come forward including precepting.

6. Cllr Heather Mack, Bristol City Council

Question 1

CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2023

Point 2.7.

What has the West of England Combined Authority been told about Bristol City Council's decision to not proceed with on street electric vehicle charging points?

What will the Authority do to support EV charging in Bristol?

Response from Metro Mayor Dan Norris:

No explanation has been provided by Bristol City Council.

7. Brendon Taylor and Gordon Richardson, Bristol Disability Equalities Forum and South Gloucestershire Council Equalities Network

Question 1

Will the Mayor of the West of England Mayoral Combined Transport Authority and leader of North Somerset councillors Steve Bridger or Steve Hogg join disabled and access groups for Bristol, Bath & North East Somerset, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset council areas for a trip on the public transport Network by bus coach train and ferry?

In same way Mayor Andy Burnham has travelled on the public transport Network with passenger with reduced mobility.

Response from Metro Mayor Dan Norris:

The Metro Mayor would welcome the opportunity to travel on public transport alongside people with disabilities to see at first hand the accessibility issues they face, in the hope that together we can make practical improvements where possible.

Question 2

With urgently need to improve bus stop and interchanges facilities maintenance.

Will the Mayor of the West of England Dan Norris with North Somerset Council set up a roadside information and maintenance team.

With Van's and staff in west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council.

Transport branded coats and uniforms to be the face of the transport Authority.

Especially when the transport operations staff transfer soon we hope from Bristol city council Bath & North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire council.

We high profile transport Authority staff

On the public transport Network.

Response from Metro Mayor Dan Norris:

Bus stops are currently maintained by the Unitary Authorities. The Metro Mayor is keen to take responsibility for bus stops.

8. Ian Downey

Question 1

It is now c. 2 months since the announced cuts to many supported bus services in the Chew Valley and more widely. There is a high degree of concern over this decision. The West of England Combined Authority's own audit committee has identified high levels of risk and uncertainty in the planning of alternatives. What exactly is the current status and plans for the existing bus services and the proposed implementation of WestLink Demand Responsive Transport so that people can decide whether to use it or not?

Response from Metro Mayor Dan Norris:

Supported 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.

The first WESTlinks will run from April and build up until there is a 30 strong fleet. Residents will be able to book a bright green minibus by phone, online or with a dedicated app.

An information campaign to explain how WESTlink works has commenced. WESTlink is a new stop-to-stop service that will link people into the region's key routes, so they can pick up another bus or train.

The service will roll out and improve gradually over time looking carefully at what works in practice and what needs further improvement.

People's needs are at the heart of WESTlink's design. The technology behind WESTlink's app will continually improve as it "learns" the type of journeys that are most popular right across the West of England.

In the first instance passengers will need to consult a bus or train timetable to

check the best way to make an onward journey. Once the service has matured, the *WESTlink* app will be able to advise users on their whole journey from door-to-door. For people who prefer to use the phone, the booking phone service will provide them with the same level of detail.

On board, *WESTlink* will feature comfortable seats with headrests, have wheelchair access and spaces for passengers with prams or buggies.

Question 2

When and where will the West of England Combined Authority publish definitive public information on the current status and plans for the existing bus services and the proposed implementation of WestLink Demand Responsive Transport?

Response from Metro Mayor Dan Norris:

Information on changes to the bus network is available at <https://travelwest.info/bus/bus-service-changes>

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