

QUESTIONS AND METRO MAYOR'S RESPONSES ARE
ATTACHED

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Q1. Councillor Tim Rippington

At a recent meeting of the WECA Audit Committee I challenged the Combined Authority regarding the risk to its climate targets of not being ambitious enough. In particular, I was referring to the proposals for the A4 corridor through Brislington, whose primary goal of achieving a 10 minute reduction in bus journeys between Bristol and Bath by 2030 seems to be nothing short of woeful.

If we are to cut transport emissions in the region significantly and also improve connectivity for our citizens we must be much more ambitious. Only an extensive mass-transit system will achieve the kind of modal shift that is required to get enough people out of their cars and onto other forms of more sustainable transport.

Any mass transit solution would have to be fully segregated to deliver the modal shift we need. Full segregation means faster journey times, better reliability, more passengers, and therefore a stronger business case. If any 'mass transit' solution has to share road space, we will be missing a massive opportunity.

Do the Mayor and representatives of the Unitary Authorities now recognise and support the need for a *fully segregated* Mass Transit system for Bristol and the Greater Bristol area?

Metro Mayor's Response:

Councillors who have asked questions are always welcome to raise their concerns with me at the regular councillor surgeries I hold for them. I very much value the opportunity to discuss ward issues and to thank councillors in person for the important work they do for our communities.

We all want to see better public transport in the region, and my job as Metro Mayor is to make sure that our solutions are realistic and affordable.

A report will be put to the committee with the following options:

1. Carrying on working on all options including underground for another seven months
2. Work on overground only and progress project with detailed work
3. Work on a mixture

I will vote ONLY for overground options because I believe an underground to be unaffordable and unrealistic.

We need a credible, affordable, realistic option to put to Government.

I support overground - buses and one day possibly trams or another new technology like the system I saw in Coventry just recently.

The Strategic Outline Business Case was developed over the last 3 years at considerable cost (over £2m), was delivered 8 months ago and is a robust and substantive piece of work. It confirms the need for such a project and tests the viability different options.

No amount of further analysis is going to change the basic facts. We need to start being honest with people and stop pretending that a project that everyone knows is not going to happen is somehow still a viable option.

I also believe that we owe it to residents to focus all our energies and resources on delivering projects that will make a difference to their lives. The overground options offer a really exciting

opportunity to make that actual difference – whether as a guided busway (rubber wheeled) or tramway (steel wheeled).

It is realistic and offers the chance of providing initial tangible benefits to residents in timescales that will actually help our carbon reduction ambitions.

If we duck making this decision now - given everything that the Strategic Outline Business Case has told us – we will be prioritising false hope and bureaucratic processes over getting on with the delivery of a really important project that could deliver tangible outcomes for our residents.

Q2. Peter Davis

Mayor Norris has made it clear to me directly that subsidised bus services such as the 94 operating between Trowbridge and Bath are allocated funding by B&NES and not by the Combined Authority (and it is therefore not in his power to support this essential service).

B&NES council leader Kevin Guy advises that, whilst it is true that funding for such subsidised bus services is allocated by B&NES, the money for such routes is now given by central government straight to the Combined Authority. He further explained that those local areas which are not part of the Combined Authority such as Wiltshire, Somerset County Council and North Somerset Council are paid BSIP funds from central government directly into their bank accounts.

Wiltshire, who share the cost of the 94 bus, support the continuation of the service, but only for as long as their share of the funding lasts. Cllr. Guy has confirmed his willingness to support the 94 service if the Combined Authority were to transfer the appropriate BSIP funding to B&NES.

My questions are then:

Who (Mayor Norris or Cllr. Guy) is telling the truth?

If Cllr. Guy is correct, then why is Mayor Norris not willing to release the BSIP funding to B&NES?

Metro Mayor's Response:

Local councils are responsible for funding supported buses – buses with a social need which are not commercially viable. They make funding available to the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority for this purpose via the Transport Levy. I do not have a vote on this or, unlike other mayors, the ability to raise additional revenue through a precept.

In January 2023 councils decided to freeze the Transport Levy despite massive increases in costs caused by inflation. This meant fewer buses could be subsidised.

BSIP funding was bid for and won by our region for use for a wide range of initiatives. The government specifically said at the time we won this funding it was for “new and innovative” initiatives only.

We have invested in many ways including the £2 flat fare for adults and £1 for children, which I am proud we implemented in Bristol and Bath ahead of the national initiative; in enhancing services to create turn up and go frequencies in part of Bristol; and 15 minute frequencies in more of our market towns. The key idea is to grow passenger numbers, not continuing services that need ongoing financial support; this is what the Transport Levy is provided for.

Late in the day the government introduced some flexibility in the use of BSIP funding. The committee report shows the expert work carried out on what is an effective way to spend the cash. This shows that:

- Fares initiatives are ranked 1st.
- Enhanced services are ranked 2nd.
- DRT is ranked 3rd.
- Passenger experience is ranked 4th.
- New services are ranked 5th.

That is why I believe it to be so vital that we concern on initiatives to grow passenger numbers, as the only way to have a long term sustainable network.

I know councils have challenges with buses they support. The report also outlines an extra £1.1m for supported services. This is money for supported buses only.

I am proposing a new formula to choose where the money is best spent to be informed by a Citizens Panel.

I am proposing an additional £0.5m for additional new services which could go on to become profitable and would welcome evidence-based suggestions on where they would be

Q.3 Seth Morgan

There is an obvious appetite within the West of England for control over commercial bus services to taken out of the hands of private companies and given to the public. This has been demonstrated by a [recent petition](#) with over 2,400 signatories, and most of all by the future of bus usage, as young people recently occupied the West of England Combined Authority building and organised a march in support of this cause. Will you listen to people and seriously consider bringing buses into public control?

Metro Mayor's Response:

Only Metro Mayors have the power to franchise buses through the Bus Services Act. In a franchised system, private bus operators can be required to run certain services, at certain frequencies, for an agreed price.

As I have said on many occasions since 2021 franchising is definitely on the table. In fact it was a key topic of conversation with Mayor Andy Burnham when I met him last week.

There are key differences between Greater Manchester and the West of England – not least that Manchester has a successful profit-making tram system it can use to cross-subsidise buses.

I have also had talks with other Metro Mayors and Mayoral transport teams. It is important to learn from other cities and regions while taking into account the unique circumstances of the West of England.

One of the first challenges the West of England needs to overcome is the lack of a 'Transport for London' style board as historically we did not have a Passenger Transport Executive.

West of England Sustainable Transport (WEST) - a fully funded delivery body led by the Metro Mayor with the powers and resources to run an efficient and effective regional public transport service, needs to be set up first, for franchising to be a success.

We need a better bus service. Franchising could be a great solution - but it also brings significant financial risk to taxpayers which will have to be very carefully assessed and considered. One thing is clear that a lot of change is necessary with big choices, and reaching agreement on issues from the amount of capital funding the Government provides, to who manages every bus stop. I have had some important discussions which need to continue.

I have asked West of England Mayoral Combined Authority officers to be ready to present a report to Committee on franchising in the new year.

Q.4 David Redgewell, Bristol Disability Equalities Forum Trustees

Gordon Richardson, Bristol Disability Equalities Forum Chair

What consultation has the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and Bristol city council had with bus passengers groups and disability organisations about the plan to remove bus service from Bristol main Shopping culture and Tourism Quarter.

In Broadmead and Cabot Circus.

Unlike Birmingham, Plymouth Manchester and London where Public transport buses coaches and light rail services operate to heart of the shopping district.

In Bristol disability and people with reduced mobility and residents partly sighted passengers will be dropped on the ring road around the centre.

Blue badger holders will no longer have closed access to the shops.

Is there an equalities impact assessment for these proposals under the public sector equalities act 2010 and under the public equalities duty on Bristol city council and the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority.

Will the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority mayor Dan Norris and Bristol city council as Highway Authority only meet with Bristol equalities forum to discuss the concerns of Disabled bus passengers.

Metro Mayor's Response:

This is a Bristol City Council led scheme.

Q.5 David Redgewell, Bristol Disability Equalities Forum Trustee

Gordon Richardson, Bristol Disability Equalities Forum Chair

Both members of Bristol city council one city Transport board.

With the importance of investment in public transport interchanges examples Like Portway park and ride interchange and Bath spa bus coach and Railway station.

Both of which are due to be upgraded

In Portway case with a bus interchange

And new bus links to Avonmouth Dock sevenside and Lawrence weston Westbury, Southmead hospital bus station uwe bus station, Bristol Parkway station Bradley stoke, Aztec west Hortham, Alverston, Thornbury.

Where a new Terminal building is required with passengers waiting room accessible toilets cafe are required

Or Bath spa bus and coach station interchange where work is required at the booking office and booking hall

Stairs plaster Emergency disabled lifts from Glazzers Restaurant to platform no1 replacement of the clock in the Tower reGlazing of the Station Canopy

Cleaning and seat replacement in the bus and coach station and Dorchester Street reopening the Travel centre in the bus and coach station for bus rail and coach inquiries. and new toilets including disability facilities. Changing places.

Or passengers facilities on new railway station that require planning permission at Henbury Bristol.

Is their a west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council.

Interchange design brief like Transport for London ,Greater Manchester combined transport Authority mayor Andy Burnham and West Midlands combined Authority major Andy street

It must be noted that rebranding of interchanges and buses and public transport is not coasting £ 4 million pounds for stickers on the Beeline bus network in Greater Manchester.

Metro Mayor's Response:

Accessibility is important. I understand the concerns that have been raised specifically about Bath Spa rail and bus stations, which Officers are raising directly with managing bodies. I meet regularly with Network Rail and regional train operators, including GWR, so will continue to raise concerns as they arise.

6. Andy Watt

With increased levels of walking and cycling being critical to meeting our climate goals and improving the health of our population, as well as providing high value for money, why have most of the cuts to the CRSTS programme been to walking and cycling infrastructure?

Metro Mayor's Response:

Walking, cycling and wheeling are crucial – especially for every day shorter journeys. I support high-quality segregated infrastructure.

Unfortunately sky high levels of inflation has meant we have less money to spend in real terms.

Over £35m of funding is allocated to delivering walking and cycling improvements. For example, residents are currently being asked to identify where they may want a cycle hangar.

Q7. Toby Wells

The “Transport Infrastructure Projects” report presented at today’s meeting describes the re-scoping of CRSTS schemes due to inflationary pressures. Whilst I acknowledge that such pressures exist, and there was a need to remove some elements to fit within the available budget, I do not believe that this has been done in a fair and sensible manner.

Walking and cycling schemes provide high value for money, with huge environmental and health benefits. They form the cornerstone of a good transport network, including increasing accessibility to other modes such as bus and rail.

However, it seems that rather than de-scoping one of the larger schemes with highly questionable deliverability by 2027, such as the M32 scheme, all schemes have been watered down, often removing or reducing walking and cycling elements. In particular, the change of the A4 Portway scheme to “shared use” walking and cycling, an outdated and poor quality measure, is a significant downgrade.

The report suggests that shared use on the A4 Portway is acceptable based on usage numbers, which is no surprise given the poor quality provision in place today. Why has this justification been made based on current usage rather than the huge potential on this corridor from a high quality scheme?

Metro Mayor’s Response:

It is a tough reality, but sky high levels of inflation mean less money in real terms to deliver projects.

A4 Portway is being delivered by Bristol City Council and the public consultation started on 2 October. I would encourage everyone with an interest in these proposals to take part in that consultation process.

Q8. Toby Wells

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deliverability by 2027, such as the M32 scheme, all schemes have been watered down, often removing or reducing walking and cycling elements. In particular, the change of the A4 Portway scheme to “shared use” walking and cycling, an outdated and poor quality measure, is a significant downgrade.

What measures is WECA taking to ensure that it is capable of delivering the design and construction of so many large projects in parallel, before the 2027 cut-off date?

Metro Mayor’s Response:

This is an ambitious set of projects to be delivered. There will undoubtedly be challenges with cost and speed of delivery. It is likely there will be slippages. However, we owe it to people in our region to try to deliver transport improvements at pace.

The programme is being delivered jointly with a number of regional bodies, and governance arrangements are in place to ensure a focus on delivery. However I would always encourage these to be strengthened and for people to keep a relentless pressure on this subject.

The West of England Combined Authority is taking steps, including improving our skills capacity, ensuring proper reporting and oversight of the progress of projects, engaging the market early to secure the best value for money in a timely manner, to give the best chance of delivering on time.

Q9. Councillor Joanna Wright

In Agenda Item 16 TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME & REGIONAL STRATEGY UPDATE, it mentions in the appendix that the Grant Thornton audit recommendations that:

"The Mayor and members of the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority represented by the Council Leaders, must commit to improving their working relationship and demonstrate that significant progress has been made within a reasonable timeframe to be determined by the Mayor and the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority. This should include a role for independent mediation and the constructive consideration of advice arising from this process"

Please can you let us know what actions have taken place that demonstrate that the Council Leaders are working to improve their relationships to ensure that the 1.1 million residents in the West of England are properly served by a functioning Combined Authority?

Metro Mayor’s Response:

Councillors who have asked questions are always welcome to raise their concerns with me at the regular councillor surgeries I hold for them. I very much value the opportunity to discuss ward issues and to thank councillors in person for the important work they do for our communities.

As noted in the report discussions are ongoing. An independent facilitator has been appointed to support this work and has met with the Mayor and Council leaders.

Q.10 Councillor Joanna Wright

Can you confirm that the workings of the Combined Authority is in accordance with the constitutional governance set out in its constitution and why there is no Deputy Mayor in place?

Metro Mayor's Response:

Councillors who have asked questions are always welcome to raise their concerns with me at the regular councillor surgeries I hold for them. I very much value the opportunity to discuss ward issues and to thank councillors in person for the important work they do for our communities.

The Metro Mayor has not currently appointed a deputy mayor.

Q.11 Rob Dixon, Chair of Bristol Rail Campaign

Questions about the A4 Bath - Bristol consultation

As noted in our statement, Bristol Rail Campaign (FoSBR) is concerned by both of the proposed options for longer term changes between Brislington and Totterdown, as outlined in this WECA consultation.

Bristol Rail Campaign is interested to know how the mayor and combined authority equates WECA's commitment to a mass transit system, with making it much harder to put this in place by converting Brislington railway to road and choosing Bath Road as a public transport road, mixing with local traffic.

Does the combined authority agree that the Bath Road is inferior as a mass transit route, as it would still carry local traffic and be more expensive to install a rail-based system? And therefore agree that the old railway alignment would be more able to provide a high-quality segregated route from the centre of Bristol for two of the mass transit corridors proposed in the Joint Local Transport Plan (JLTP4) – Bristol to Bath, and Bristol to the Airport?

Metro Mayor's Response:

No decisions have been taken about the type of system that will deliver an enhanced public transport network for the region. However, I only back overground systems.

Q12. Rob Dixon, Chair of Bristol Rail Campaign

Questions about the A4 Bath - Bristol consultation

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Bristol Rail Campaign is interested to know how the mayor and combined authority equates WECA's commitment to a mass transit system, with making it much harder to put this in place by converting Brislington railway to road and choosing Bath Road as a public transport road, mixing with local traffic.

What action will the combined authority take to ensure the former railway is retained as a segregated route for a future mass transit system?

Metro Mayor's Response:

As a former councillor for Brislington many years ago, I know very well the problems of too much traffic causing pollution and congestion.

Personally, I would very much like to see the direct route made into a fantastic space for walking, cycling, buses and scooters (with overground options for trams or very light rail in the future) and the former railway used for other traffic.

The West of England Mayoral Combined Authority recently conducted a public engagement exercise for the A4 transport corridor between Bath and Bristol, this included options for transport movements through Brislington, inclusive of options for the re-use of the redundant railway route.

No decision has been made about the potential future use of the former railway line but people are urged to make big choices.

Q.13 Councillor David Wilcox

Item 10. Investment Fund Programme

On page 39 there is a list of Unallocated Funds, one of which is Lockleaze Sustainable Transport. This fund was first specified in 2018 <https://westofengland-ca.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=141&MID=129>.

Why in a ward that is getting 1000+ extra homes being built in it, has this £3 million not been urgently utilised to enhance active travel where there is both the scope to build and the need to help residents move around?

Metro Mayor's Response:

This is a matter for Bristol City Council.

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Q.14 Councillor David Wilcox

Item 14. Transport Infrastructure Projects

I am extremely concerned that the carbon costs of mass transit are not being factored into the budget calculations. Some projections for the carbon usage for tunnelling are here: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0886779820306581?cmdf=carbon+costs+of+building+tunnels>

Can this committee be equipped with all the relevant information before we commit to using our entire carbon budget for decades to come at exactly the same time as when we need to be reducing our carbon impact?

Metro Mayor's Response:

I fully agree that proper accounting of environmental impact is an important part of any major transport project.

Providing an improved public transport system is vital to our overall strategy of reducing carbon emissions from transport. We will only encourage people out of their cars if there are high-quality and reliable alternatives, which will require new infrastructure and investment.

Calculating the carbon cost of any proposed Future4West projects is part of the Outline Business Case.

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Q.15 Councillor Martin Fodor

Item 12. Climate and Ecological Strategy and Action Plan Update

I welcome the 6-monthly progress update on actions for this year contained within the WECA Climate and Ecological Strategy and Action Plan (CESAP). The region's ambition on sustainability and efforts to tackle the combined climate and ecological emergencies while delivering a just transition for workers and communities impacted by the cost of living crisis and austerity is essential. It's especially critical that as a fast growing region these issues get resolved.

Delivering on the declared goals in WECA strategies means resolving the contradictions inherent in promising action to every business sector. Recommendation 2 in fact asks members to note "the increasing likelihood that the West of England's ambitions for achieving carbon neutrality and nature in recovery by 2030 are unachievable without substantial national and international changes in approach." In addition the budgets allocated to them are limited and action needs to be delivered at an increasing pace.

How will WECA now respond to the ever-rising evidence about climate and ecological breakdown to ensure adequate action to curb dependence on fossil fuels and the ecological destruction inherent in rapid economic development?

Metro Mayor's Response:

Tackling the climate emergency is a top regional priority for me. However, recent Government announcements on net zero make our task much harder.

It is important to make it easier for people and business across our region to take climate action and we need to provide them the resources and evidence they need to make informed decisions.

The West of England Mayoral Combined Authority is strengthening the embedding of environmental considerations in all we do. This includes being evidence-driven in our prioritisation and responses to the ecological and climate emergencies and in our economic development roles and influences. A Senior Environment Analyst, has been appointed who is improving our understanding of the ever-rising evidence.

Responding to the urgency, complexity and scale these emergencies represent – we are embedding climate and nature more robustly within our decision making, both now and in the future (detailed in paragraph 4.9 of the Committee Paper); engaging, supporting and calling for action from people and organisations across our region to amplify activity (detailed in paragraphs 4.33-4.35 of the Committee Paper); and calling for support from Government in addressing systemic changes needed (detailed in paragraph 4.10 of the Committee Paper) to ensure economic development is aligned to curbing dependence on fossil fuels and recovery of nature.

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Q.16 Councillor Martin Fodor

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What is the timescale for progress on a large scale roll out to homes of the regional retrofit strategy?

Metro Mayor’s Response:

In the West of England, a total of 250,000 homes will need retrofitting with insulation and low-carbon heating. Retrofit West is a key part of my long-term plan to save families money on their energy bills and to support the shift to net zero. I established a Green Recovery Fund of which I allocated £10m to “Retrofit West” which is in three parts:

The Home Owner Advice Service.

The issue is that home owners have no clear advice on what to do to retrofit their home even when they have the resources and the desire to do so. To rise to this important challenge, funding for the

Centre for Sustainable Energy (national leaders in the UK) has been made available to provide home owners (and landlords) with free advice, including home surveys and plans and with help to access suppliers and qualified builders to put the project in place.

Supply side

This is focused on skills. The aim is to increase the number and quality of retrofit businesses by making funding available to businesses starting this spring. This builds on schemes the West of England MCA is already running to upskill workers, for example, to become trained retrofit assessors.

Funding support

The final piece of the jigsaw is funding for families who need support and finance. A fund will launch next year so more people can access support to retrofit.

None of this is enough – but it does mean a future Government serious about tackling the climate emergency and prepared to provide additional support will find us in a strong position to act at pace – not least because we will have established a pipeline of skilled workers.

Councillors who have asked questions are always welcome to raise their concerns with me at the regular councillor surgeries I hold for them. I very much value the opportunity to discuss ward issues and to thank councillors in person for the important work they do for our communities.

Q.17 Councillor Lisa Stone

Item 12. Climate and Ecological Strategy and Action Plan Update

Nowhere in the action tracker is the part that explains how many skilled retrofitters have been trained up to deliver the application target, could you provide these details?

Metro Mayor's Response:

As per my election manifesto, I have a target of 27,000 green jobs for the West of England. Many of these will need to be in retrofit, if we are to deliver the energy upgrades our homes and buildings need.

Retrofit skills are a key focus of Green Skill Bootcamps. I have also been delighted to meet people being trained in retrofit skills including Ukrainian refugees.

The West of England Mayoral Combined Authority commissioned studies to baseline the existing retrofit skills, published in June 2021. These can be found here: <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/employment-skills/green-skills/>

The South West Net Zero Hub, which is hosted by the MCA, commissioned and recently published a southwest-wide study into retrofit skills – evidencing the skills gap and challenge facing retrofit across our wider region. This is referenced within the Report's appendix (Business and Skills theme; reference BS15) and is available here: <https://www.swnetzerohub.org.uk/new-research-finds-rapid-growth-in-skills-needed-to-achieve-net-zero-targets/>

The CESAP is updated each year, with the next update due for Committee in March 2024. This will incorporate work in improving indicators and evidence, including those underpinning how many

skilled retrofitters there are in the West of England. This will necessitate reviewing and providing the regional context for green jobs – the experimental data for which was first published by ONS on 27 September 2023:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/experimentalestimatesofgreenjobsuk/2023>

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Q.18 Councillor Lisa Stone

Item 12. Climate and Ecological Strategy and Action Plan Update

The introduction of a green skills “bootcamp” is somewhat insulting and needs to be reframed. Can you tell me how many of these schemes have been created and the uptake of them?

Metro Mayor’s Response:

I am very pleased with the record of our skills bootcamps. They provide free, hands-on training of up to 16 weeks for people who are looking to upskill and retrain.

However, while I set their priorities, I didn’t choose their names, the term ‘bootcamp’ has been set by Government.

Green skills bootcamps specifically refer to training that supports our Net Zero objectives and reflect the very real and urgent shifts that we need in some of the biggest sectors of our economy including transport, energy, industry, and the environment.

For example we are training 62 people in organisational sustainability to have additional responsibilities within their organisations advising on greener working practices.

To date 267 people have taken part in 16 green skills bootcamps.

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Q.19 Councillor Christine Townsend

Item 13. Adult Education and Skills

How do these programmes ensure effective pathways from the SEN registers in schools and/or colleges are cohesively managed and understood such that all the identified students have progressive and fulfilling pathways of continued study and/or workplace training?

Metro Mayor’s Response:

Thank you for this important question. The West of England MCA is addressing this issue in a number of ways through the devolved Adult Education Budget, additional funding has been provided for learners aged 19+ identified with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This aligns with national support provided directly to the region's FE Colleges for individuals aged 16-18 until they leave this provision.

The West of England Careers Hub, also managed by the Mayoral Combined Authority, works collaboratively with all 97 Schools and Colleges across the West of England region to offer the best opportunity for meaningful transitions for SEND learners. This can be to mainstream education, apprenticeships, or community-based settings.

In addition, there is further support for adults with SEND, through the regional WE Work for Everyone programme, which promotes opportunities for adults with SEND to progress their careers.

The region's new universal access and support service, Skills Connect, has dedicated resources for SEND adults to help ensure access to support is both clear and easily sourced.

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Q.20 Councillor Christine Townsend

Item 13. Adult Education and Skills

How is WECA helping private businesses reconfigure their workplaces and training schemes to cater for those with Learning Disabilities and what support and incentives already/need to exist to ensure more employment representation from residents with Learning Disabilities can be seen across the local economic environment?

Metro Mayor's Response:

Thank you for this important question. Launched last year, the West of England Good Employment Charter includes a range of criteria aimed at helping employers improve equality and diversity in the workplace. Accredited members need to be able to demonstrate how they have recruitment practices that are accredited to a minimum Disability Confident level 2, how those practices are appropriate to the role, and that they are adaptable to the candidate in terms of methods of communication and assessment.

In addition, the Workforce for the Future programme, a project in partnership with Leonard Cheshire, offers a range of training and workshops to small businesses (with tailored 121 support) to help them become Disability Confident and consider their practices and how to make adaptations to their business to widen their recruitment pool.

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Q.21 Councillor Patrick McAllister

Bus franchising: The media has reported that a report will be published in the New Year about Bus Franchising, but there is no provision for this: in any of the current paperwork for WECA and no real detail about the scope of the report: Will the report advance the move towards franchising or is it just another discussion document about the potential benefits?

Metro Mayor's Response:

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Only Metro Mayors have the power to franchise buses through the Bus Services Act. In a franchised system, private bus operators can be required to run certain services, at certain frequencies, for an agreed price.

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I have also had talks with other Metro Mayors and Mayoral transport teams. It is important to learn from other cities and regions while taking into account the unique circumstances of the West of England.

One of the first challenges the West of England needs to overcome is the lack of a 'Transport for London' style board as historically we did not have a Passenger Transport Executive.

West of England Sustainable Transport (WEST) - a fully funded delivery body led by the Metro Mayor with the powers and resources to run an efficient and effective regional public transport service, needs to be set up first, for franchising to be a success.

We need a better bus service. Franchising could be a great solution but it's clear it also brings significant financial risk too for taxpayers. This will need to be very carefully assessed and considered. One thing is clear - significant change is necessary. Big choices will need to be made on a range of issues - from the amount of capital funding the Government provides, to who manages every bus stop. I have had some important discussions which need to continue.

I have asked West of England Mayoral Combined Authority officers to be ready to present a report to Committee on franchising in the new year.

Q.22 Councillor Patrick McAllister

As a councillor I am getting a lot of feedback as to the problems with our current public transport system, and people know we need fixes now instead of a sole focus on large scale, long term programmes. What near term interventions can be put in place that will improve the situation in the immediate future.

Metro Mayor's Response:

Councillors who have asked questions are always welcome to raise their concerns with me at the regular councillor surgeries I hold for them. I very much value the opportunity to discuss ward issues and to thank councillors in person for the important work they do for our communities.

I fully agree that we need to focus on improving transport in the here and now as well as the future. We are in the midst of a frightening cost-of-living crisis and everyone needs a helping hand. We also need to tackle the climate emergency and a staggering 44% of our carbon emissions come from transport. Currently, fewer than one in ten regional commutes are made on public transport, and the economic impact of congestion costs in our area alone reach £300 million annually. Worse, there are a shocking 300 preventable premature deaths due to air pollution year on year.

Like many regions, our public transport network is struggling to match its pre-pandemic performance. This is in part because while most people who used to use buses are doing so again, they are travelling less. Delve in and this makes sense. It reflects changing demand, as working from home practices displace commuting patterns and many face-to-face meetings, like GP appointments, move online. But with people making fewer journeys we must reach new potential passengers.

That is why a key focus for me is increasing passenger numbers through initiatives like the West of England £2 fare, creating turn up and go frequencies in some parts of Bristol and 15 minutes frequencies in some of our market towns. Birthday Buses means you can get a whole month of transport for free. That's one twelfth off your annual transport bills and with the hope that once people try our buses they will want to stick with them. We are also trying new ideas like WESTlink. Some will work and others won't – but new and innovative must be the way forward as the same old ideas are not working and will only see the current challenges get worse.

On top of this is our CRSTS building work. I am proud of this investment in new infrastructure. A consultation has just ended on the A4 corridor. But change does involve people making big choices, and that means trade offs and compromises for the wider good.

Q.23 Councillor Tessa Fitzjohn

The Westlink service does not serve Ashton Vale and its boundaries are very tightly drawn meaning a lot of destinations within Bristol are excluded. What is WECA doing to keep the whole service under review and its operating boundaries?

Metro Mayor's Response:

We are continually reviewing and learning lessons as we go with WESTlink, including the size and geography of the zones

Councillors who have asked questions are always welcome to raise their concerns with me at the regular councillor surgeries I hold for them. I very much value the opportunity to discuss ward issues and to thank councillors in person for the important work they do for our communities.

Q.24 Councillor Tessa Fitzjohn

Now that the bridge in Ashton Vale that restricted double decker's has been removed, what is the Metro Mayor doing to encourage First Bus to serve Ashton Vale given that is no longer served by any bus?

Metro Mayor's Response:

Questions around the specific day-to-day commercial decisions made by private bus operators should be directed to those companies. I meet regularly with First Bus and the other operators in our region to discuss how our more remote communities can be better served by our public transport system.

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Q.25 Councillor Emma Edwards

The proposal recommended for Future4West is to continue to explore all the options. Given that some of them have a very low rate of return and no realistic chances of being funded, is this a good use of public funds?

Metro Mayor's Response:

In my opinion – no. I will therefore only be voting for overground options.

Q.26 Councillor Emma Edwards

It looks like work is being taken forward on one of the corridors, with the Bristol to Bath consultation recently concluded. What work is being proposed in the short term on the other corridors where the overground solution is already accepted?

Metro Mayor's Response:

The West of England Mayoral Combined Authority secured funding from Government through the City Region Sustainable Travel Settlement (CRSTS), including funding for transport corridor improvements prioritising bus and other sustainable transport modes. The A4 corridor between Bristol and Bath was one of those corridors.

Other schemes are being progressed as part of the CRSTS programme which also overlap with potential corridors identified for Future4WEST.

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Q.27 Councillor Tom Hathaway

There appears to be a lack of ambitions in the bus targets that look like they have been set by KPMG - a 2% improvement in bus journey times by 2025 and a 10% improvement by 2030. Is this compatible with any sensible carbon reduction ambition.

Metro Mayor's Response:

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The 2% reduction by 2025 was in recognition that a majority of the CRSTS construction work will take place from 2025 to 2027. However, the BSIP will continue to be reviewed annually and be updated as and when more recent information about usage becomes available. It is essential that we grow public transport use as quickly as possible while recognising that large scale changes in travel behaviour require infrastructure investment and time for behaviour change to bed in.

Q.28 Councillor Tom Hathaway

There is a swathe of cuts to proposed cycle routes in CRSTS; what kind of decision making criteria have been used to take these decisions when the whole programme is working to right deadlines and these are quick and effective ways of investing time limited funds

Metro Mayor's Response:

There were strict conditions from central government attached to the CRSTS funding. Inflationary pressures meant that savings needed to be made. The re-baselining was driven by deliverability within the set timescales and costs.

Councillors who have asked questions are always welcome to raise their concerns with me at the regular councillor surgeries I hold for them. I very much value the opportunity to discuss ward issues and to thank councillors in person for the important work they do for our communities.

Q.29 Maria Carvalho

We are aware that Dan Norris sent his apologies to the WECA scrutiny meeting. We were wondering if the committee could provide more information on why he was unable to attend the scrutiny meeting?

Metro Mayor's Response:

I broke a tooth requiring treatment. This did not allow me to attend the scrutiny meeting as I like to do. The chair of the committee was informed in advance of my absence and the reason.

Q.30 Maria Carvalho

It was recently announced that WECA officers will be preparing a report on franchising to be brought to committee in early 2024 - what will the remit of this report be and will it prepare the committee to take a vote on starting the formal process of franchising by release a 'notice of intent'?

Metro Mayor's Response:

Only Metro Mayors have the power to franchise buses through the Bus Services Act. In a franchised system, private bus operators can be required to run certain services, at certain frequencies, for an agreed price.

As I have said on many occasions since 2021 franchising is definitely on the table. In fact it was a key topic of conversation with Mayor Andy Burnham when I met him last week.

There are key differences between Greater Manchester and the West of England – not least that Manchester has a successful profit-making tram system it can use to cross-subsidise buses.

I have also had talks with other Metro Mayors and Mayoral transport teams. It is important to learn from other cities and regions while taking into account the unique circumstances of the West of England.

One of the first challenges the West of England needs to overcome is the lack of a 'Transport for London' style board as historically we did not have a Passenger Transport Executive.

West of England Sustainable Transport (WEST) - a fully funded delivery body led by the Metro Mayor with the powers and resources to run an efficient and effective regional public transport service, needs to be set up first, for franchising to be a success.

We need a better bus service. Franchising could be a great solution - but it also brings significant financial risk to taxpayers which will have to be very carefully assessed and considered. One thing is clear that a lot of change is necessary with big choices, and reaching agreement on issues from the amount of capital funding the Government provides, to who manages every bus stop. I have had some important discussions which need to continue.

I have asked West of England Mayoral Combined Authority officers to be ready to present a report to Committee on franchising in the new year.

Q.31 Tina Willshire

I have experienced countless problems with the Westlink service and I want to know please what is going to be done to improve it, and review its boundaries and stopping points. Specifically to allow residents South of the river to access Broadmead and Clifton both of which are classed as "out of zone" and therefore unavailable.

Metro Mayor's Response:

We are continually reviewing and learning lessons as we go with WESTlink, including the size and geography of the zones. WESTlink never was meant to be a dial a ride service, a taxi service, or a bus service. It is designed to link people from their local bus stop to a bus route with a higher frequency main bus service or to a railway station within their zone.

Q.32 Tina Willshire

I have experienced countless problems with the Westlink service and I want to know please Is anyone doing any mystery shopping to assess the quality and customer focus of drivers, which in my experience is often poor. Drivers have no local knowledge of the area and the sat nav they are using is unreliable.

Metro Mayor's Response:

From the outset WESTlink has unfortunately been hampered by the national and local shortage of bus drivers. We are continually reviewing and learning lessons as we go with WESTlink. WESTlink drivers now have access to a real time sat nav system.

Q.33 Dan Ackroyd

In 2017 when were YTL proposing converting the Brabazon Hangars into an Arena, they had been told by the Mayor of Bristol that "Bristol will have a £4bn underground rail network 'within 10 years'".

Given that it seems somewhat unlikely that Bristol will have an underground within the next four years, or even 20, what discussions have taken place between West of England and YTL about the financial viability of the proposed YTL arena?

If there haven't been any discussions already, please could the West of England Combined Authority start that discussion? I believe the aim should be to seek a guarantee from YTL that the Arena will still happen, and be operated for at least a decade, otherwise WECA and BCC should stop spending infrastructure money on projects with an assumption that there is no risk that the YTL arena will not actually happen.

Metro Mayor's Response:

I agree Bristol will not have an underground in the next 20 years.

The West of England MCA meets regularly with representatives of YTL.

Regardless of what happens with the Arena, it is important to improve connectivity to the communities in the north of Bristol and into South Gloucestershire and this is why a new railway station is planned for North Filton in 2026/27. There have also been increased frequency of rail services north of the city.

Q.34 Brian Blestowe

Re the Proposed Urban Transport System Future-4WEST for Bristol

The latest proposals for a new urban transport system for Bristol seem to me a very poor solution to the need for a 21 st century facilities for the city and its surrounding attachments. It also highlights the need for some new local government arrangements for the area i.e. a true Greater Bristol, something like the old Avon County Council less Bath and Weston super Mare.

The proposal is based on the public transport system developed by the rail and tram facilities from the late 19th century with all routes radiating out from the city centre. The advent and mass use of the motor car in the latter part of the 20th century and the distribution of retail shopping to the outer areas of the Bristol area has very much changed the needs of public transport. The very rapid decline of the Broadmead shopping area is a result of these changes. Many journeys are now of a circumferential nature, most of mine are and have been for some time. The development of the Avon Ring Road in the 1980s and growth of significant residential conurbations along it since, has amplified the situation, particularly in the North/East of the area. With the proposed system how is anyone going to make trips of this nature?

Technology has come a long way since 1890, particularly in recent years, in the use of electricity as the source of powered transport vehicles and the need to de-carbonise our environment has provided much greater emphasis on this use of energy. In addition the motor car has changed the way we live now, in particular on our sources of food, gone are all the local grocer shops that have now been replaced by large supermarkets that require the use, for most, of some form of powered transport, the proposed new system will not be of much use to them.

Would the Mayor agree that there needs to be some other means meeting the needs of local transport and technology is on the brink of it with the autonomous electric vehicle? Where the size of vehicle used is proportional to the task to be undertaken i.e. number of passengers, load to be carried and range. This variation requirement obviates the concept of private ownership of vehicles so consequently this will require the commercial sector to provide these devices rather like they do at present with electric scooters.

It will take some years to plan finance and construct any of the proposals of Future4WEST and furthermore, does the Mayor agree that a much better system could be devised using the technology of the 21st century.

Metro Mayor's Response:

Our region deserves a high-quality enhanced public transport network.

While autonomous vehicles may be a potential solution, these are also some way in the future, as they require Central Government to create the framework and regulatory conditions to make autonomous vehicles a reality. I would like us to explore innovative overground solutions for Future4WEST solutions, for example the Very Light Rail system I recently saw in Coventry.

I believe that we owe it to residents to focus all our energies and resources on realistic projects that offer the chance of providing initial tangible benefits to residents in timescales that will actually help our carbon reduction ambitions.

Q.35 Rosa Kell

What discussion are taking place between the West of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council bus service improvement plan area and Somerset council bus service improvement plan

Over the bus service 126 Between Wells bus and coach station station , Easton Draycott ,Cheddar Axbridge winscombe Banwell ,locking, Hutton ,Weston super mare bus and coach station.

Have discussed now taken place between Mayor Dan Norris Leader of North Somerset council Transport executive councillor Hannah young and leader of North Somerset council

Councillor Mike Bell and councillor Mike Rigby Transport executive of Somerset council and officers to put this service out to Tender to start this service to weston super mare Hospital Weston super mare Hospital Railway stations bus and coach station.

Is there a date for the service to start?

Metro Mayor's Response:

This is the responsibility of Somerset County council and North Somerset Council.

Q.36 Rosa Kell

What discussion are the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council Having with Somerset council on a joint Zebra funding bid in the Rural area around the cheddar valley, Chew valley and weston super mare and Bridgwater for a Electrification or hydrogen fuel bid with First group plc South buses & Wales and West buses and big lemon buses.

Metro Mayor's Response:

The West of England Combined Authority is currently reviewing the Zebra 2 bid requirements.