

QUESTIONS AND METRO MAYOR'S RESPONSES ARE
ATTACHED

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Q1. From Chris Lamb

Given metro-mayor Dan Norris's statement concerning an interest in pursuing tidal lagoon power in the Severn Estuary, I enquire whether:

- i) WECA is serious about pursuing this as a policy
- ii) WECA has new evidence which supersedes findings of the Tidal Lagoon Programme Fact Sheet issued by the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
- iii) specifically in that fact sheet, tidal lagoon power generation is significantly more costly than wind power and nuclear
- iv) tidal lagoon power is thus not cost effective
- v) the finding that 'a full programme of tidal lagoons would increase power system costs by up to £20 billion to 2050 in 2012 prices in net present value terms' is still relevant.

What is the evidence behind the metro-mayors advocacy of tidal lagoon power in the Severn Estuary which would make it cost effective against wind power and nuclear?

Metro Mayor's Response:

From 'heat from mines' to tidal power, as part of the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority's Climate and Ecological Strategy, I am committed to exploring the full range of energy options in our region.

The potential for significant energy generation in the Severn Estuary is something I have discussed with the Welsh Government.

Given the climate emergency, soaring energy bills and a need for energy security so we do not have to rely on tyrants like Putin, this is something I am keen to work on, ideally with a Government treating these issues with the seriousness they deserve.

Q2. From Gordon Wadsworth

The impact on residents in the Cam and Somer Valley on losing a regular timetabled bus service continues to be of huge concern to everyone and very hard to understand how elected representatives of the area are still not taking these concerns seriously and working towards an inexpensive resolve, there has been detailed put forward on how the 522 service could be rerouted at little or no extra cost, so why has not an officer been given the task to grasp this and run with it so as to give thousands of residents proper access to public transport in the areas in which they reside.

One cannot help thinking is it a case that our elected Metro Mayor is not prepared to do a mini 'U' turn and make some minor amendments to the bus operators contract to route the service through parts of the Somer Valley which would have such a great impact on so many lives, does that not seem to be a truly socialist approach!

Metro Mayor's Response:

The route of the 522 has not changed. It has been funded through the Bus Service Improvement Plan and the route was chosen specifically to give it the best chance of becoming commercially viable and so sustainable long term.

WESTlink also serves the area.

You may be interested to know about WESTlocal which provides funding for community-led transport schemes. Any community group in the area can put forward a bid for funding, so long as the proposed service is community-led, a new transport provision, and does not replicate an existing bus service. You may wish to get in contact with a local community group or parish council to discuss the potential uses of this scheme in your local area. Applications for the scheme close on 30th April 2024.

Q3. From Clive Turner

It was understood that the 522 original bus route would incorporate the villages of Camerton, Meadgate and Tunley.

However, without any consultation, these villages were actually omitted to enable the 522 to continue its journey to Bath on the A367 thus providing Peasedown St John, (PSJ) which along with the 172, 173 and 174, a bus every 11 minutes 18 hours a day 7 days a week; but leaving some 1500 villagers of Camerton, Meadgate and Tunley with no buses at all.

This omission has had a profoundly negative affect on those villagers lives as the newly introduced WESTlink has proven itself to be unfit for purpose.

Once realised a campaign was launched to redirect the 522 which would have incurred no additional cost to WECA or loss of revenue to First bus (who already run the 172, 173 and 174 services through Peasedown). On the contrary, it actually provides an additional market of some 1500 people.

Could you therefore please provide answers to:

- why the route was changed without consultation with those affected parishes.
- why this obvious cost effective, simple redirect solution has not been implemented already?
and
- why because of delay in doing so, it's believed, that due to certain criteria, this 522 redirection is now being threatened by a much reduced and unsatisfactory bus service proposal latterly submitted by Paulton Parish Council through the Westlocal bus fund?
- why the parishes potentially affected by the Paulton PC proposal have not been consulted, especially as it could cause restrictions on any future, more beneficial and cost effective bus service proposals?

Metro Mayor's Response:

The route of the 522 has not changed. It has been funded through the Bus Service Improvement Plan and the route was chosen specifically to give it the best chance of becoming commercially viable and so sustainable long term.

WESTlink also serves the area.

You may be interested to know about WESTlocal which provides funding for community-led transport schemes. Any community group in the area can put forward a bid for funding, so long as the proposed service is community-led, a new transport provision, and does not replicate an existing bus service. You may wish to get in contact with a local community group or parish council to discuss the potential uses of this scheme in your local area. Applications for the scheme close on 30th April 2024.

Q4. From Jean Fossaceco

Not having access to all running costs, could you please clarify how the daily 'on demand' service offered (even though it isn't always efficiently delivered) can be more cost effective than the weekly 757 service that ran from Combe Hay via Wellow and Shoscombe to Midsomer Norton not only providing transport but a community, social and well being service to our elderly and sometimes isolated residents?

Metro Mayor's Response:

WESTlink is a non-timetabled minibus service designed to link communities for onward travel using the existing commercial bus network and trains.

When WESTlink first launched I said this was very much a learning process as we were trying something new. We continue to look at ways to change and improve the service so your comments are welcome.

I do not have tax raising powers – only local councils do. In January 2023 councils decided to freeze the Transport Levy which pays for supported buses despite massive increases in costs caused by inflation. This meant fewer buses could be subsidised and led to cuts. I understand that this was disappointing.

I have now set in motion a process so that an agreed formula can be published informed by a Citizens Panel, so it is not communities that shout the loudest who get buses, but is a fair plan.

Q5. From David Redgewell

In view of the Department for Transport instructions to Review the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council

Plan and the Transport Authority's

Having to Resubmit its plan to the Department for Transport and Secretary of state Mark Harper MP by 12 th June 2024

What plans does the metro mayor Dan Norris and councillors Mike Bell leader of North Somerset council and councillor Hannah Young transport executive have to consult on the revised plans with the passengers and stakeholders but especially bus and regional coach passengers.

The Department for Transport make it clear that the revised plan,

Has to consultation with the bus service improvement plan advisory panel and Bus advisory Board Bus and coach operators and other key public Transport stakeholders in Avon and Somerset police,

With the Department for Transport putting

Integrated Transport at the top of agenda

Main line bus services link to supported Bus services network and Demand responsive bus services and Railway services,

Including issues of passengers safety CCTV cameras system and lighting at Bus stop and interchanges.

Bus priority measures,

Details of revised bus service and supported services,

Details from First Group plc Wales and West buses and stagecoach west Big Lemon and other bus operators on the level of Drivers Engineers Supervisors and cleaners to run the service in the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council Plan are

At Bus Depots at weston super mare, Wells Somerset
Bath western island, Bristol Lawrence hill, Bristol Hengrove bus Depot
Stagecoach west Depots at Bristol Patchway and Stroud,
Big lemon buses Depot at Bristol Parson street station,
So the Department of work and pensions and understand the shortage of bus drivers and
other staff ,
Cleaning standards on buses.
Improvement in facilities for passengers with reduced mobility and partly sighted at bus and
coach station
Stops and interchanges,
Branding of the bus coach and Public Transport Network,
Fares offers that are not extended by the Department for transport funding beyond 2025
Improvement to Bus and coach station and Transport interchanges .
What is the timetable for passengers consultation including on cross boundary services, in
Somerset council, Gloucestershire county council Swindon and Wiltshire bus services
improvement plan areas
And especially passengers groups and residents from the social excluded communities and
working class estates and disabled and older people.
Under the public equities duty 22 10 .

Metro Mayor's Response:

As with all such plans across the country, the updated version of the Bus Service
Improvement Plan will be taken through the Enhanced Partnership Advisory Panel as part of
the engagement process.

Q6. From David Redgewell

What progress is taking place with the western Traffic commissioner Kevin Rooney to put in
place the 20 minutes
Western link Demand responsive bus services to comply with UK government law,
With Westlink Demand responsive bus services improvement of connections to main line
bus and coach services and the support bus network to be funded by Bristol city council,
South Gloucestershire county council Bath and North East Somerset and North Somerset
council, through the Transport levy 2024 2025 budget,
and integration with railway and Ferry services such as metro west railway Network station
such as Bristol parkway station, Filton Abbey wood station Patchway station, Bristol Temple
meads station, keynsham Yate Nalisea and Backwell Yatton for clevedon worle parkway
weston millon weston super mare, portway park and ride Avonmouth and seven Beach ,
When will the new Westlink Demand responsive part fixed link network by launched.

Metro Mayor's Response:

When WESTlink first launched I said this was very much a learning process as we were
trying something new. We continue to look at ways to change and improve the service so
your comments are welcome and important. I agree on your point about the 20 minutes
waiting time. Smaller zones are planned to be introduced later this year.

Q7. From Louise Gow

Given that we're in urgent need of improved bus services, that there's huge public support for franchising; and that all three of the Unitary Authorities support franchising, why is bus franchising not on the agenda for this WECA committee meeting?

Metro Mayor's Response:

Franchising is under active consideration.

We have a unique set of circumstances in the West of England that present particular challenges when it comes to franchising, and it is not a simple matter of copying what other parts of the country have done.

As promised a report to Committee on franchising will be brought forward later this year.

Q8. From Emilia Melville

Given that there is such strong public support for bus franchising (3595+ petition signatures to date); that all three of the Unitary Authorities in WECA support franchising, and that it is over 3 months since Dan Norris discussed bus franchising with Andy Burnham in Manchester, why is bus franchising not on the agenda for this WECA committee meeting?

Metro Mayor's Response:

Franchising is under active consideration.

We have a unique set of circumstances in the West of England that present particular challenges when it comes to franchising, and it is not a simple matter of copying what other parts of the country have done.

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Q9. Ian Quaife, Bristol Old People's Forum

Can you ensure that the bus service in Ashton Vale is reinstated as soon as possible to meet the needs of the local community.

Metro Mayor's Response:

I understand the frustration that residents in Ashton Vale feel at the loss of local bus services. The decision to withdraw this service was a commercial decision by the bus operator. They can do this as they see fit under the Transport Act 1985 and the West of England Combined Authority does not have any powers to stop them from amending or withdrawing a service.

Q10. From Shanthie Wild

Please can the Mayor explain why he hasn't made more progress sorting out the mess of public transport in the region in two and a half years? Seeing as it's one of the metro mayor's main powers and responsibilities.

Transport is responsible for 26% of UK carbon emissions. An affordable and efficient public transport system would be a massive win for averting the catastrophic rise above 1.5° we are on course for. We are already at 1.5°.

Do you understand that even at 1.5° there are huge threats to life and we are on the brink of uncontrollable tipping points as the polar ice sheets melt. Climate change above 1.5° will mean frequent or permanent extreme weather events, the food chain collapses, one third of the planet becomes uninhabitable, mass migration, economic collapse, political chaos and wars.

Politicians hot air isn't helping, we need fast determined action now.

The birthday pass gimmick doesn't change the fact that the buses are too expensive all the rest of the year, they are unreliable and there aren't enough routes that meet people's needs. First Bus are run for shareholders profits, not in the interests of ordinary people. So many routes have been cut leaving Elders and disabled people stranded, making women unsafe at night, cutting people off from their jobs, college, voluntary work, let alone family, friends and leisure. The new number 25 route has been a wonderful alternative amongst all the cuts, big thanks to Transpora.

£4 to go anywhere or £6 dayrider might not worry many but there are a lot of people who are scraping by and that is too much, even £9.70 for families (the same cost for families of 4 as 2) is a lot and there are so many families who rarely take their kids out because of the cost. Of course it's also a loss to the economy if people don't go out because the bus will cost so much they've got less to spend out.

I know there's a lot of talk of franchising and that's probably a good way forward. My idea would be more ambitious; take the buses back into public ownership with a new Bristol Bus Company, do a crowdfunder, add an ongoing percentage of perhaps 5-8% onto the council tax and make the fares super cheap - £3 dayrider, 60p short journeys/£1 long, free for kids. If its clean and efficient people will use it because it's cheap and they're paying their tax for it, it belongs to them.

Look at Manchester, it's time to get the buses back under public control. (Trains next). Please sort it out Dan!

Metro Mayor's Response:

I share your enthusiasm and impatience for us to go further in improving our public transport system, and protecting the environment.

Growing passenger numbers is the key to building a thriving, reliable local public transport network in the West of England that residents need and deserve.

While more individual passengers are travelling by bus, on average residents are making fewer journeys post pandemic. Stats show people are taking an average of 8 trips vs 11 before the Covid pandemic.

That is why I introduced Birthday Buses. Early data suggests Birthday Buses is being successful in attracting new passengers onto the region's buses. It is also why I have increased frequency on certain routes – to create turn up and go frequencies on some routes in Bristol and 15 minute frequency in many market towns. This is to encourage more people to use the buses as they will wait less time. It is also the aim of WESTlink, to link new people into the transport network.

Franchising is under active consideration.

We have a unique set of circumstances in the West of England that present particular challenges when it comes to franchising, and it is not a simple matter of copying what other parts of the country have done.

As promised a report to Committee on franchising will be brought forward later this year.

Q11. From Barbara Segal

According to the Public Reports Package for the meeting, a sum of £10,600,000 has been approved to cover the cost of the Birthday bus travel offer and free travel for care leavers. The package also states that 25,000 passes for the former have already been applied for.

Please can you tell me:

- 1) The number of Birthday Bus Passes issued to date
- 2) The number of passes used to date (or according to the most recent statistics)
- 3) The number of bus journeys made using the passes to the same date
- 4) The plans that are in place to evaluate the effects of the scheme once it ends in July 2024.

Metro Mayor's Response:

Birthday Buses is a serious plan to get new passengers using our buses to help tackle the climate crisis, and create a more sustainable bus network.

To date, there have been more than 449,000 Birthday Bus journeys and 40,000 applications received.

Early data shows that just under half (48%) of Birthday Bus users say they have used the bus instead of driving during their birthday month.

Importantly close to half (44%) of passengers say Birthday Buses had made them more likely to use public transport in future.

This is crucial as the key success metric of the scheme is encouraging new passengers to make a long-term switch.

Q12. Cllr Joanna Wright (B&NES, Green)

Given that there is such strong support for bus franchising (3595plus petition to date); that all the three Unitary Authorities in WECA support franchising, and that it is over 3 months since Dan Norris discussed bus franchising with Andy Burnham in Manchester, why is bus franchising not on the agenda for the WECA committee meeting?

Metro Mayor's Response:

Franchising is under active consideration.

We have a unique set of circumstances in the West of England that present particular challenges when it comes to franchising, and it is not a simple matter of copying what other parts of the country have done.

As promised a report to Committee on franchising will be brought forward later this year.

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.

Q13. Cllr Joanna Wright (B&NES, Green)

Regarding the Birthday Bus Offer, how many number of passes have been issued and will there be an evaluation of this scheme?

Metro Mayor's Response:

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Q14. From Cllr Eleanor Jackson (B&NES, Lab)

What is happening to the 522 route, the question the WECA mayor failed to answer today [at Scrutiny], which will not benefit the people marooned on the old 82 route like Mrs Harrington on Westfield waterside, who deserve subsidised service also. One severely disabled Westfield waterside resident needs to get to Radstock Foodbank at St Nicholas Church, but cannot afford Dial a ride.

Metro Mayor's Response:

The route of the 522 is as tendered and has not changed. The 522 is funded through the Bus Service Improvement Plan. The route has been established specifically to give it the best chance of becoming commercially viable.

You may be interested to know about WESTlocal which provides funding for community-led transport schemes. Any community group in the area can put forward a bid for funding, so long as the proposed service is community-led, a new transport provision, and does not replicate an existing bus service. You may wish to get in contact with a local community group or parish council to discuss the potential uses of this scheme in your local area. Applications for the scheme close on 30th April 2024.

The 82 is a former service that was cut after the levy was frozen. I do not have tax raising powers – only local councils do. In January 2023 councils decided to freeze the Transport Levy which pays for supported buses despite massive increases in costs caused by inflation. This meant fewer buses could be subsidised and led to cuts. I understand that this was disappointing. I have now set in motion a process so that an agreed formula can be published informed by a Citizens Panel, so it is not communities that shout the loudest who get buses, but is a fair plan.

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.

Q15. From Cllr Eleanor Jackson (B&NES, Lab)

Mrs Harrington would want to know, after today's response to the Ashton Vale Suffragists [at Scrutiny 22.1.24], why her invitation to the WECA Mayor and Angel to tea and biscuits to discuss Westfield's public transport received no response

Metro Mayor's Response:

This constituent was contacted by phone by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority last Summer.

Q16. From Cllr James Crawford (BCC, Green)

EV Charging Action Plan (pg144 – Item 15)

The Local Electric Vehicle Infra Fund (LEVI) noted in point 14 notes an allocation of £6.64m for WECA, with point 15 noting that an agreed EV action plan is expected. Point 17. notes that Bristol City Council doesn't yet have a locally focused strategy for EV charging. Does this mean that Bristol City Council will not be eligible for LEVI funding as it doesn't currently have an agreed strategy?

Metro Mayor's Response:

The draft regional Electric Vehicle Charging Action Plan fulfils the requirements of the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure funding. As a result, all unitary authorities would be able to access the funding.

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.

Q17. From Cllr James Crawford (BCC,)

ZEBRA 2 Bid (pg171 – item 15)

Residents in my ward have raised concerns about the diesel emissions of buses so I

welcome the submission of the bid. I note that First will provide a contribution of £37.4m with £6.7m provided by ZEBRA 2. Can you confirm that if the bid fails, First will still commit £37.4m to electrification of their fleet in the WECA area?

Metro Mayor's Response:

I very much hope the bid is successful and I believe the West of England has made a strong submission to win funding for zero emission bus services. It is for First to determine the nature and scale of its investment if the funding bid is successful. I will continue to work with First Bus, and all other operators in the region, to work towards all buses becoming zero-emission.

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.

Q18. From Ellie Freeman

The residents of Ashton Vale, BS3, no longer have a bus running through the estate, meaning many residents face a 20-30 minute walk to the nearest bus stop and a very limited service. As a significant proportion have mobility issues and do not drive, this has created a barrier for them getting into and around the city.

How will the team reviewing Westlink assess whether to extend its operations into Ashton Vale and who will they work with to consult on any such proposals?

Metro Mayor's Response:

WESTlink is a non-timetabled minibus service designed to link communities for onward travel using the existing commercial bus network and trains.

When WESTlink first launched I said this was very much a learning process as we were trying something new. We continue to look at ways to change and improve the service so your comments are welcome. WESTlink zones are under regular review and will be amended again later this year.

Q19. From Ellie Freeman

What work is being done to encourage First Bus to reinstate a bus service in the area, especially as one of the bridges has been removed so a double decker route could be designed around this prior constraint

Metro Mayor's Response:

While commercial decisions around which bus routes to operate are taken by companies like First, I engage with them regularly to raise resident concerns and to make improvements to our bus network that serves as many communities as possible. I will continue to do so, including raising the specific concerns about Ashton Vale services

Q20. From Brendon Taylor

Access to metro west railway Network

Trains .

In Answer given to combined Authority and North Somerset council scrutiny Committee, It's was stated that passengers would be directed to the appropriate carriage by members of First Group plc Great Western Railway company staff

When an inter city Express trains

5 car trains is used at Yate Station, New station at Charfield being built by the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and south Gloucestershire county council, cam and Dursley or Ashchurch for Tewkesbury on Bristol Temple meads station, Filton Abbey wood station, Bristol parkway station, Yate cam and the Dursley Gloucester central Cheltenham spa Ashchurch for Tewkesbury Worcester Shrub Hill and Worcester Forgeate Street,

But as the Inter city Express trains is off the platform with the wheelchair accessible space in the first class

The Train manager are told to put wheelchair users in the corridor next the accessible toilet and Transfer the Passenger with partly sighted passengers or reduced mobility to the wheelchair accessible coach at Bristol parkway, Gloucester central Cheltenham spa or Worcester Shrub Hill,

Leaving the passenger in the corridor

Without any safety wall or seat back to Dock onto .

Was the procedure discussed with the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council how are paying £35 million pounds for theses metro west Railway service or with the Department for transport and office of Road and rail as a permission for this procedure must have been granted,

Will Mayor Dan Norris discuss the issues of passengers with reduced mobility and partly sighted needs travelling for theses station with the Department for transport and First group plc Great Western Railway company and ORR and meet passengers at Yate railway station.

With local Transport Executive councillors ,

Metro Mayor's Response:

It is important that passengers with reduced mobility or who are partially sighted, and indeed those with hidden disabilities, can access our rail network.

All of the new stations my Mayoral Combined Authority is designing and delivering are fully accessible as well as undertaking development work on a project to make Lawrence Hill Station fully accessible.

I have received assurances from GWR who say that they are complying with rail industry accessibility standards. If a customer is travelling with a wheelchair then GWR's station team or the guard should help them onto the train, and so be able to make sure that passengers are in the right place. GWR say that there is always a member of the station team on the platform at Bristol Temple Meads station before the train can leave. All GWR's services around Bristol have a Train Manager on board. This will also be something to monitor closely if the railways are brought back into public ownership under a new Government.

Q21. From Brendon Taylor

Will the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council,

Discuss with the Department for transport and First group plc Great Western Railway company and ORR

The new to hire appropriate trains 3 car Dmus on local Train services

Run for metro west railway Network

On Bristol Temple meads station, Filton Abbey wood station, Bristol parkway station, Yate, Charfield new station Cam and the Dursley stonehouse Bristol Road, Gloucester central Cheltenham spa Ashchurch for Tewkesbury Worcester Shrub Hill and Worcester Forgate Street,

And other metro west railway Network routes Like Bristol Temple meads to Bedminster, Parson street Pill Portishead Ashton Gate new station

Bristol Temple meads station Bristol Lawrence hill Bristol Stapleton Road Ashley Down station. Filton Abbey wood station Filton North and Henbury for cribs causeway and Bristol zoo,

On the Bristol Temple meads station to Bedminster parson Street, Nalisea and Backwell Yatton for clevedon, Worle parkway, Weston million, Weston super mare, Highbridge and Burnham on sea Bridgwater and Taunton routes

We need a local train unit for theses services.

Metro Mayor's Response:

It is important to engage with the Department for Transport, GWR, and other organisations to ensure we have a rail system fit for purpose that serves the needs of all our communities. The recent opening of Portway Park & Ride Station and the many more new stations that will be opened in the next few years is testament to that and will help connect thousands more residents to our rail network.

Mayoral Combined Authority Officers met regularly with the Rail Safety Standards Board (RSSB) and Great British Railways transition team to better understand the national allocation of rolling stock. These conversations will be used to better understand how our region may be prioritised.

GWR and Cross Country Trains attend a number of Mayoral Combined Authority rail governance forums. These sessions are used to explore what opportunities exist to improve rail service provision on local networks.
