

Minutes of the West of England Combined Authority Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 13 December 2021

Members present:

Cllr Winston Duguid, Bath and North East Somerset Council (Chair)
Cllr Hal MacFie, Bath and North East Somerset Council
Cllr Ed Plowden, Bristol City Council
Cllr Andrew Varney, Bristol City Council
Cllr Tim Rippington, Bristol City Council (substituting for Cllr Brenda Massey)
Cllr James Arrowsmith, South Gloucestershire Council
Cllr John Ashe, South Gloucestershire Council

Also in attendance:

Cllr Mike Bird, North Somerset Council

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Brian Allinson, Councillor Geoff Gollop, Councillor Gary Hopkins, Councillor Brenda Massey, Councillor Steve Pearce, Councillor Peter Crew and Councillor Huw James.

DISCUSSION WITH METRO MAYOR

The Chair welcomed Metro Mayor Dan Norris to the meeting, noting that the Metro Mayor was able to attend for the first 30 minutes of this meeting.

Points raised / noted in discussion with the Metro Mayor:

a. Spatial Development Strategy: Scrutiny members flagged the importance of progressing collaborative work across the authorities to meet the envisaged timeline for delivering the Spatial Development Strategy.

b. Bus service cutbacks by operators: following concerns expressed by members, the Metro Mayor commented that there was a risk of irreparable damage to the region's bus network due to the potential loss of Bus Recovery Grant to the region from April next year. Earlier that month, he had written a joint letter with Councillor Donald Davies (Leader of North Somerset Council) to Baroness Vere, the Minister responsible for buses, setting out a clear message that this cliff-edge funding cut was pushing bus operators to plan for the cancellation of services. It was essential that this did not happen and he would press the government hard to confirm their continued funding support before irreversible decisions were taken by bus companies. He was acutely aware of the negative and serious impact that any such decisions would have for many residents, especially those who were vulnerable.

Whilst appreciating the financial constraints that the Combined Authority was operating within, and the very real challenges faced by bus operators, scrutiny members agreed that this also highlighted the importance of maximising opportunities through the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership. Members also flagged that where operators take decisions that services must change in the current situation and given the ongoing constraints, it was essential to provide prompt and timely information to service users. The Metro Mayor stressed that he was determined to push for a London-style service; crucially, this should be a service used regularly by commuters across all sectors of the region's workforce; it would also be critical to secure an improved rural bus services offer.

c. Scrutiny Transport Sub-Group: The Metro Mayor welcomed feedback arising from the recent meeting of the Scrutiny Transport Sub-Group, noting that the sub-group had flagged:

- * their support for the approach of "sweating" existing assets as far as possible given the expense, long timescales and complexity of rail construction projects.
- * their strong support for improving the accessibility of stations, including the new eastern entrance to Temple Meads.
- * that in relation to the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, a key next step should be the development of a network map, both a tube-style map and a more detailed alignment map. The walking network also needed to be linked in and aligned with the High Streets work and Liveable Neighbourhoods work, so that walking to the local high street is encouraged as the norm.

d. City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement: The award of £540m to the region through the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement was discussed together with the need to focus on delivery in the next 5 years. It was also flagged that the Transport Sub-group had identified that they would like to see more information about the transport "hubs" and a

	<p>clearer, user-centred definition of their features and benefits; in the longer term, members would like to see maintenance support the improvement programmes by integrating with them in terms of timing and, where possible, using maintenance to support improvements. The Metro Mayor thanked scrutiny members for their positive and constructive input and reminded the committee that the £540m secured through the Settlement represented the highest level of investment secured per head of population when compared with the other funding awards.</p> <p>e. In relation to issues raised around governance and voting arrangements at recent Combined Authority and West of England Joint Committee meetings, the Metro Mayor stated that whilst he made no apologies for being a conviction politician and would always be guided in his voting by what he believed to be the best interests of the region, he also had deep regard for ensuring that all relevant procedures and voting requirements were adhered to strictly.</p> <p>At the conclusion of the discussion, the Chair thanked the Metro Mayor for his attendance.</p>
2	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>
3	<p>MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the West of England Combined Authority Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 11 October 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.</p> <p>In relation to these minutes, as an update, Councillor Varney advised that through a question asked at a Bristol Full Council meeting, he had received an assurance that securing a solution to the Brislington A4 transport corridor would not involve building a new road on the Brislington railway path.</p>
4	<p>ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC (QUESTIONS; STATEMENTS)</p> <p>It was noted that 2 statements had been received in advance of the meeting. The statements had been circulated to committee members and were available to view on the Combined Authority web site.</p> <p>The statements received were on the following subjects: 1. David Redgewell - Transport issues (this statement was also presented at the meeting). 2. Graham Ellis - Rail issues</p>
5	<p>CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS / BUSINESS</p> <p>With the agreement of the Chair, and with reference to a feedback note (see Appendix 2), Councillor Ed Plowden provided an update following the 6 December meeting of the Transport sub-group, which he chaired.</p>
6	<p>UPDATE ON AND REVIEW OF 17 DECEMBER WEST OF ENGLAND JOINT COMMITTEE REPORTS</p> <p>Committee members reviewed and commented as follows on the 17 December Joint Committee reports:</p>

a. West of England Joint Committee governance and voting arrangements

* It was noted that this report clarified that the Metro Mayor does not have a right of veto on matters relating to the Joint Committee and that all voting at Joint Committee meetings is by way of a simple majority of those present and voting.

b. Joint Committee governance review

* It was noted that this report set out the following recommendations:

1. To commission the Monitoring Officers of the Unitary Authorities which constitute the Joint Committee to review the Joint Committee's current constitutional arrangements and to make recommendations which will be considered by the Joint Committee by March 2022.
2. To implement a review into the governance and administration of the Joint Committee's funding streams and to commission the Chief Executives and Monitoring Officers of the four Unitary Authorities to review the administrative arrangements for Joint Committee's investment sources including the Local Growth Fund (LGF), Economic Development Fund (EDF), Revolving Infrastructure Fund (RIF).
3. To requisition a meeting of the Joint Committee by March 2022 at Weston-Super-Mare's Town Hall to consider the next steps.

* Members noted that this report had been submitted by the four unitary authorities and felt it would be appropriate for the scrutiny committee to be kept informed as this review is progressed.

* Members also noted that under the current governance arrangements, it had been advantageous to all authorities to follow a 'single pot' approach, allowing flexibility in supporting projects across funding programmes such as the Local Growth Fund, Economic Development Fund and Revolving Infrastructure Fund. Members expressed the hope that the benefits of this approach would be given full and due consideration as part of this review, as this would help to continue to assist cashflow across projects and address issues around what could be arbitrary deadlines for using funds.

c. Local Enterprise Partnership & Invest Bristol and Bath budget outturn, April-October 2021

* It was noted that this was the latest budget monitor report; also including the latest update on inward investment performance.

d. Local Growth/Getting Building Funds, Economic Development Fund and Revolving Infrastructure Fund change requests

* It was noted that this report sought approval of the latest scheme change requests in relation to the above and approval of the West of England Local Growth Assurance Framework, updated to reflect national guidance.

* Members indicated their general support for these proposals, noting that they largely replicated the proposals contained in the original October 2021 report.

* With regard to Appendix 1, the Chair pointed out that there seemed to be a reasonably significant gap/underspend of £1,230,000 between the actual spend on project staff compared with the forecast figure.

e. MetroWest phase 1b – Portishead line update

* It was noted that this report provided an update on progress on the delivery of MetroWest phase1b – the Portishead line, the delay to the Development Consent Order, and steps taken to mitigate that delay.

* Members noted this update and expressed their appreciation of the urgent work taking place to resolve the issues around the Development Consent Order. Members also expressed

disappointment, however, that the Portishead line would be an hourly service – whilst understanding the reasons for this, to be truly transformational, members felt that Portishead needed a 30 minute service.

f. West of England investment priorities

* It was noted that this report had been produced by the unitary authorities, to prompt discussion on the principles around regional investment priorities.

* Members also noted that it was clear that important discussions needed to take place about investment prioritisation, recognising that it would not be possible to fund all individual unitary authority and Metro Mayor priorities.

* Members felt it was essential, in taking forward these discussions, for all the authorities to demonstrate a willingness and ability to agree on and deliver the priorities, outcomes and optimised return on investment that the region’s residents need and deserve. Members were supportive of the approach that these need to be based on as wide a set of criteria as possible. It was also felt that determining a clear way forward and demonstrating a collaborative approach to delivering agreed priorities will be critical in attracting further government resources to the region.

g. Western Gateway update

* It was noted that this report provided a progress update on the Western Gateway, a cross-border economic partnership of local authorities, city regions, local enterprise partnerships and governments in Wales and Westminister.

* Members indicated they would be interested to see how the Western Gateway would develop, particularly in the context of the forthcoming government White Paper on levelling-up. It was noted that the partnership is likely to have a key role in taking forward major infrastructure projects that will bring benefits across that extended geographical area, noting that identified priority workstreams include tidal energy, the hydrogen ecosystem / capabilities and STEP fusion (noting that the the Western Gateway ‘Severn Edge’ nomination had been successful in being selected into the last five contenders for a UK first prototype fusion power plant).

Note: following the meeting, the Chair (on behalf of the committee) submitted the comments (as set out in Appendix 1 below) to the 17 December 2021 meeting of the West of England Joint Committee:

APPENDIX 1

COMMENTS FROM CHAIR OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**COMMENTS TO BE SUBMITTED TO:
WEST OF ENGLAND JOINT COMMITTEE
17 DECEMBER 2021**

I wish to present the following comments to the 17 December Joint Committee on behalf of scrutiny members:

1. Discussion with Metro Mayor:

We were pleased that the Metro Mayor again attended our meeting.

We had a wide-ranging discussion including the following points:

* We flagged the importance of progressing the collaborative work across the authorities to meet the envisaged timeline for delivering the Spatial Development Strategy (SDS). The next phase of release of documents that support the SDS including a new Memorandum of Understanding is January 2022. As we understand it, an essential decision that needs to be recorded in January is moving the formal decisions regarding the SDS process to April 2022, as this recording will be looked at by the government inspector.

* We discussed the issues faced right across the region in relation to bus services. We appreciate the financial constraints that the Combined Authority is operating within, and the very real challenges faced by bus operators - this though also highlights the importance of maximising opportunities through the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership. We also flagged that where services must change in the current situation and given the ongoing constraints, it is essential to provide prompt and timely information to service users.

* We discussed the award of £540m to the region through the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement and the need to focus on delivery in the next 5 years. We also flagged that our Transport Sub-group would like to see more information about the transport “hubs” and a clearer, user-centred definition of their features and benefits. In the longer term, we would like to see maintenance support the improvement programmes by integrating with them in terms of timing and, where possible, using maintenance to support improvements.

* We also flagged with the Metro Mayor a number of issues raised by the Transport sub-group in relation to rail - these included support for the approach of “sweating” existing assets as far as possible given the expense, long timescales and complexity of rail construction projects. There is also strong support for improving the accessibility of stations, including the new eastern entrance to Temple Meads.

* In relation to the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, members feel a key next step is the development of a network map, both a tube-style map and a more detailed alignment map. The walking network also needs to be linked in and aligned with the High Streets work and Liveable Neighbourhoods work, so that we encourage walking to the local high street as the norm.

2. Comments on the 17 December Joint Committee reports:

a. Agenda item 9 - West of England Joint Committee governance and voting arrangements

We noted the legal update, clarifying the voting arrangements as they apply to the Joint Committee

b. Agenda item 10 - Joint Committee governance review

We noted that this report was submitted by the four unitary authorities.

In terms of the governance review that is proposed, we would request that an appropriate officer or officers from the unitary authorities attend our next meeting on 24 January to provide an update on the review and to respond to any specific questions we may have.

We note that under the current governance arrangements, it has been advantageous to all

authorities to follow a 'single pot' approach, allowing flexibility in supporting projects across funding programmes such as the Local Growth Fund, Economic Development Fund and Revolving Infrastructure Fund. We hope that the benefits of this approach are given full and due consideration as part of this review, as this will help to continue to assist cashflow across projects and address issues around what can be arbitrary deadlines for using funds.

c. Agenda item 11 – Local Enterprise Partnership & Invest Bristol and Bath budget outturn, April - October 2021

We noted this report, on the basis that it is essentially the same report as was prepared for the October meeting.

d. Agenda item 12 - Local Growth/Getting Building Funds, Economic Development Fund and Revolving Infrastructure Fund change requests

We support these proposals, again noting that they largely replicate the original October report.

e. Agenda item 13 - Metrowest phase 1B – Portishead line update

We noted this update and are appreciative of the urgent work taking place to resolve the issues around the Development Consent Order. That said, scrutiny members are disappointed that the Portishead line will be an hourly service – whilst we understand the reasons for this, to be truly transformational, Portishead we feel needs a 30 minute service.

f. Agenda item 14 - West of England investment priorities

Again, we noted that this report has been produced by the unitary authorities.

It is clear that important discussions need to take place about investment prioritisation, recognising that it will not be possible to fund all unitary authority and Metro Mayor priorities.

It is essential that we demonstrate our willingness and ability to agree on and deliver the priorities, outcomes and optimised return on investment our residents need and deserve. We are supportive of the approach that these need to be based on as wide a set of criteria as possible.

g. Agenda item 15 - Western Gateway update

We noted this update and we will be interested to see how the Western Gateway will develop, particularly in the context of the forthcoming White Paper on levelling-up.

APPENDIX 2

KEY FEEDBACK POINTS TO WECA SCRUTINY FROM TRANSPORT SUB-GROUP

We did not discuss the very current issues about cutbacks in Bus services – but we have agreed to have two more themed meetings looking at Buses and then the big picture strategies

Transport Delivery Plan

Overall

- A useful list of projects with their key milestones was provided.
- It would be useful to have a more detailed overview of all projects currently being undertaken, at all stages of delivery, that includes financial information about the size of each element of the programme, and ideally a RAG risk assessment of each.
- It would also be useful to see a list of the projects that are no longer being

taken forward as we understand the DfT priorities have shifted.

- We understand and support the mass transit option for Bristol to Bath currently being a rapid bus-based approach. Increasing the mode share by public transport along this corridor is the best near-term approach to developing a business case for other potential future approaches and keeps our options open as new transit options, technologies and fuel options emerge.
- A briefing is to be re-arranged to discuss the Bristol end of the A4 project.

Rail

- A high-level overview was provided of the MetroWest programme.
- We support the approach of “sweating” existing assets as far as possible given the expense, long timescales and complexity of rail construction projects. This includes improving accessibility of stations, including a new entrance to Temple Meads.
- It may also include work to improve capacity of signals and track from the South of Temple Meads. The team are working with Network Rail to fund this, not our local programme
- Portishead Line – await FBC, disappointed that only one train per hour.
- Severn Beach – hoping that this will be covid-proof.
- Keenly awaiting 2023 and plans coming to fruition. Also concerned that there should be significant contingency built into all rail projects.

City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS)

This is a £540m fund over 5 years, which comprises new funding and the maintenance and integrated block funding from Government that previously went to individual Councils. The existing funding does not need to be matched.

The key aims of the new funds, which do need a minimum of additional 15% local match funds, are to drive growth and productivity through infrastructure investment; level up services towards the standards of the best; and decarbonise transport, especially promoting shift from cars to public transport, walking and cycling.

In summary:

- We support using the Investment Fund to prepare “pipeline” bids for other funding such as this.
- The match broadly needs to be matched by each Council according to their share of the allocation, which is pragmatic and it seems we are on track to deliver this.
- We would like to see more information about the “hubs” and a clearer, user-centred definition of their features and benefits.
- In the longer term we would like to see maintenance support the improvement programmes by integrating with them in timing and, where possible, to use them to support improvements rather than simply replacing “like for like”.
- There may be implications in the longer term to try and harmonise maintenance standards/approaches.
- In the short term we agree to continue what is already “in flight”.

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

Another Active travel Fund Bid is being prepared and the LCWIP is a key enabler of making a successful funding bid. We await news of current funding bids, including GP social prescribing.

Key issues:

- It is good to see the ATF and LCWIP in place and their potential to be

transformational.

- It is essential that they are integrated into a corridor approach and with public transport interchanges (rail and bus).
- The national standards (LTN1/20) are entirely appropriate as a local quality standard, and we will need to ensure that any deviation from them is agreed up front with Active Travel England.
- This is a live document and there is an urgent need to complete the actions identified in the consultation report that are outstanding, especially to define a vision and priorities for investment.
- Currently the LCWIP appears more as a feasibility study for various individual routes, which has been successful in attracting funding in the short term. We need a Network map, both a tube map (asap) and a more detailed alignment map.
 - This will help to guide developers, major corridor schemes and minor/maintenance works to all support putting the network together piece by piece.
 - It will ensure that cross boundary routes are aligned properly.
 - It should aid prioritisation of routes and the ability to join with other complementary funding streams.
- There is concern that the walking network needs to be aligned with High Street work and Liveable Neighbourhoods work, and this will be dependent on progress and political will in individual Unitary Authorities.

Future Meetings

We are suggesting themed meetings, partly to help officers plan for them. We welcome ideas for specific agenda items, suggesting that the themes would usefully be:

New Year: Focus on buses

Easter: Focus on the big picture strategies

Signed:

Date: