

DRAFT

Minutes of the West of England Combined Authority Committee , Wednesday, 18 January 2023

Members:

Metro Mayor Dan Norris, West of England Combined Authority
Cllr Kevin Guy, Bath & North East Somerset Council
Cllr Toby Savage, South Gloucestershire Council
Cllr Don Alexander, Bristol City Council (as substitute for Mayor Marvin Rees)

1	<p>EVACUATION PROCEDURE</p> <p>The evacuation procedure was noted.</p>
2	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</p> <p>Apologies for absence had been received from Mayor Marvin Rees (Bristol City Council). Cllr Don Alexander attended as substitute in his place.</p>
3	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE LOCALISM ACTION 2011</p> <p>There were no Declarations of Interest declared in respect of the Localism Act 2011.</p>
4	<p>MINUTES</p> <p>The minutes from the meetings held on 14 June 2022 (adjourned from 26 May 2022), 23 September 2022, 14 October 2022 and 12 December 2022 were agreed as correct records and signed by the Chair.</p>
5	<p>CHAIR ANNOUNCEMENTS</p> <p>There were no Chair's announcements.</p>
6	<p>ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC (QUESTIONS, STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS)</p> <p>Ten questions had been received from six members of the public. The responses from Metro Mayor Dan Norris had been circulated and published.</p> <p>In addition, fifty-seven statements had been received in advance of the meeting. The following persons who were present at the meeting were given the opportunity to address the meeting for up to three minutes each on the topic of their statement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cllr Claire Young, South Gloucestershire Council; • Dave Redgewell; • Cllr Tim Rippington, Bristol City Council; • Jackie Head; • Jevon Smith (on behalf of Brendan Taylor); • Cllr Tim Kent, Bristol City Council; • Cllr Hal McFie, Bath & North East Somerset Council; <p>All the statements received had been circulated and published on the Authority's website.</p> <p>Metro Mayor Dan Norris reiterated that the DRT plan was not designed to be a substitute for supported bus services but was designed to get passengers onto the commercial bus routes.</p>
7	<p>COMMENTS FROM CHAIR OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP</p> <p>We recognise that having an effective transport system is critical to the economic functioning of the region, connect our residents to jobs, to educational institutions, health and leisure is critical. We recognise however, that there are difficult issues that we face as outlined in the paper, but these issues are not unique to the West of England.</p>

I think we should acknowledge the engagement that Mayor Norris has led engagement with communities across the West of England, and would like to thank him, colleagues and officers for their community engagement.

Whilst there are difficult decisions to make, we support the overall approach set out in the committee paper to settle on a transport levy for bus services across the region, including supported services.

A rise in fuel prices and wages, set against a shortfall in driver numbers has created a challenging economic environment for operators and our region needs to embrace the transport offer changes which will be implemented from April if we are to succeed with a more cost efficient transport offer beyond 2025.

Finally these measures form a part of our wider approach to our regional transport network, and we are looking forward to the wider consultation on the 'Mass Transit / Future 4 West network, and this should sit alongside the measures and community engagement that is required to transition towards measures such as the Demand Responsive Transport. One of the issues that we face in the region compared to others, is the lack of fund raising at the WECA level, and other CA's have these powers, and such consultation provides us with the opportunity to look at other ways in which we can support and fund the networks and much needed improvements in our transport infrastructure.

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

Councillor Duguid, the Chair of the Authority's Overview and Scrutiny Committee attended the meeting and submitted comments on behalf of that Committee. The West of England Combined Authority's Overview & Scrutiny Committee had met informally two days before the meeting and the comments from that committee had been circulated and published in advance of the meeting.

9 SUPPORTED BUS SERVICES: CONTRACT DECISIONS

The Committee considered a report setting out the overall approach to buses, bringing together supported bus services, funded by the Transport Levy, to be taken in the context of regional bus network investment, primarily funded through the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The region had secured significant funding through BSIP which would enable change and a move from traditional to transformative solutions for the region.

The report set out a raft of bus network investment interventions including, fare packages, revenue support to enhance services, rural (DRT), feeder services, additional services, and driver recruitment campaigns.

The investment precedes future capital investment in bus priority measures and passenger facilities through the City Region Sustainable Travel Settlement (CRSTS) aimed at ensuring longer term public transport sustainability.

Through BSIP the Authority had also created meaningful partnerships with operators, including revenue share opportunities through Enhanced Partnerships (EP) scheme.

In introducing the item Metro Mayor Dan Norris thanked all the officers and councillors across the region for the enormous amount of work that had gone into enabling and preparing the report.

He reminded those present that the West of England Combined Authority Committee had

made a decision in July 2023 to extend the supported bus services network until early April 2023. This gave the opportunity to reassess an optimum way forward to provide a supported network, in light of the opportunities afforded by the award of the Bus Service Improvement Plan - as well as other Transport solutions being trialled through the Future Transport Zone programme.

With Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding, the Authority had contracted to introduce a Demand Responsive Transport platform across the region to increase connectivity into the region's commercial network. This funding had also enabled the Authority to enhance a number of existing supported bus services. These would become operational in early April 2023.

This funding would help to provide a new and transformative platform on which to build the region's Transport network for the future and to establish a more sustainable longer-term solution at a time when all were experiencing inflationary pressures and bus patronage was below pre-Covid levels. The Bus Service Improvement Plan funding would also help to reduce the pressure on the calls for increased levy funding in the medium term but it has to be noted that this has not been without consequence for some existing supported services.

Councillor Savage asked whether it could be confirmed if enough information was contained in the report in order that a decision could be made, especially in relation to the Equalities Impact Assessment. It was confirmed that an independent assessment was carried out and shared with the officers of the constituent authorities. The Interim Monitoring Officer confirmed that sufficient information was available in the report to enable a lawful decision to be made.

Councillor Kevin Guy stated that the rising costs and mix of commercial and supported services was confusing to customers and welcomed the bold measures being put forward but was wary of the implementation across such a large area and wished that a smaller area had been used to trial the system first. He asked that sufficient resources be put into promoting the new scheme and asked that areas/zones be tweaked as necessary. He also felt that there had been no meaningful consultation with local communities and parishes. He asked that the Local Transport Board meet in public so that there could be meaningful dialogue with the community. In Bath the DRT monies would be used to continue the supported bus services.

Cllr Don Alexander stated that public transport was struggling in a number of areas in the country and thanked officers for their work in coming up with this proposal. Much of the government money had gone to private operators. He looked forward to the next stage of BSIP. The key to making DRT a success would be lots of communication and promotion. He stated that he would support the proposals.

Councillor Savage asked about recommendation (3) of the meeting held on 14 June 2022 as follows:

“That governance arrangements and a media protocol are developed to oversee and support this area of work going forward and to delegate to the Combined Authority Chief Executive in consultation with the UA Chief Executives, the development and implementation of these arrangements.”

and asked the Interim Chief Executive what the latest position was on implementing this recommendation.

The Interim Chief Executive stated that the Authority was committed to these recommendations and a report would be taken to the next meeting of the UA Chief

Executives. The focus on supported services and BSIP had meant that the Authority had had to move quickly on providing services. He confirmed that the work was likely to be completed in stages and would involve residents, councillors and user groups to gather information. The work would continue after the DRT start date in April 2023.

Councillor Savage asked why there was no reference to the public consultation sessions held during the summer of 2022. In response Metro Mayor Dan Norris stated that there was both a formal and informal consultation process. Letters and correspondence that arose from the public consultation sessions were passed on to the transport team. The Head of Capital Delivery confirmed that the responses from the public consultations had been fed into production of the report.

Councillor Savage further stated that he believed that the situation was better now than before Christmas 2022 and those extra weeks had been useful to mitigate the worst impacts. He felt that DRT was an important part of the solution but one part of an integrated system. He thought that DRT would be especially important to rural communities. He wanted focus on areas that may be digitally marginalised especially around communications. He thought there were examples of some value for money savings that could be made in certain areas.

Councillor Steve Bridger, Leader, North Somerset Council was invited to speak by the Chair. He thanked the Metro Mayor for his engagement with North Somerset officers. He would like a franchising model to be investigated in the future. In North Somerset he stated that some key bus services had been lost and welcomed the report. Data collection and analysis would be key in assessing the service.

Councillor Guy stated that the communications should reflect the work going on throughout the region. Metro Mayor Dan Norris stated that the main issue currently was around drivers' shortages.

[Voting arrangements: A decision on the [levy] requires a unanimous vote in favour at a full meeting of the Combined Authority by all members appointed by the constituent councils, or substitute members acting in place of those members, present and voting

Other decisions must be carried by a majority of the Mayor and members appointed by the constituent councils, or substitute members acting in place of those members, present and voting].

There was a slight clarification made to recommendation 2 which was agreed.

It was moved by Councillor Kevin Guy and seconded by Councillor Toby Savage and unanimously

Resolved:

To:

- a) Note award of DRT services across the region funded through BSIP.
- b) To agree that a Levy for 2023/2024 of an amount set out in table 1, section 11, with additional contributions included within the table, Appendix E, table 'LEVY contribution by budget line', to be issued by the Combined Authority (the "Transport Levy") to the constituent councils under 74 of the Local Government Act and in accordance with the Transport Levying Bodies Regulations 1992.
- c) To delegate to the Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the infrastructure

Directors in the CA constituent councils, the award of contracts to the bus operators in accordance with supported bus service contract option set out in Appendix A against the funding envelope available from the Transport Levy.

The decision was urgent as set out in paragraph 5 of the report, because any delay in implementation would mean that the statutory timetable for ensuring continuation of service of any let services would not be met. Therefore this decision was not subject to call-in.

Signed:

Date: