

COMMENTS FROM WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

COMMENTS TO BE SUBMITTED TO: JOINT MEETING OF WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY COMMITTEE AND WEST OF ENGLAND JOINT COMMITTEE – 15 OCTOBER 2021

Following our meeting held on 11 October, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee wishes to present the following comments:

a. Metro Mayor's attendance at Scrutiny

We were pleased to again welcome Metro Mayor Dan Norris to our meeting and had a useful discussion around his key priorities. We look forward to continuing this constructive engagement.

We fully support the Mayor's stated ambition to attract significantly more government resources to our region, especially in relation to transport and delivering net zero by our ambitious 2030 target; we also need to ensure we are using current resources as effectively as possible, for example in tackling the significant pockets of deprivation across the geography of the Combined Authority area.

In terms of climate action, we stressed there must be a strong and sustained focus on retrofitting the region's properties.

b. General comment - amendments to reports at committee meetings

We appreciate that sometimes it may be necessary for amendments to committee report recommendations to be moved and discussed at Combined Authority and Joint Committee meetings. We feel strongly, however, that the starting point should be that this is kept to a minimum; in particular, amendments that are submitted at or only just before meetings pose potential difficulties as scrutiny members will not have received any opportunity to scrutinise or even see such amendments in advance.

c. Supporting the decarbonisation of aviation (item 9)

We noted this report and look forward to the more detailed report that will come back in January on developing a joint plan with industry.

We felt that the following factors should be taken into account in developing this work:

- * Some of the many thousands of jobs currently employed across the aerospace sector may need to adjust / transition into supporting and driving wider carbon reduction initiatives.
- * Identifying new funding opportunities should be a key part of developing the joint plan with industry, including any match funding opportunities.
- * The planning / regulatory implications for authorities of new aviation innovations must be considered carefully, for example in relation to electric 'air taxis' or drones that may carry small numbers of passengers operating at relatively low heights.
- * Given the time it is likely to take realistically to decarbonise aviation, there is perhaps a case for lobbying the government to take incentivisation action through aviation fuel tax measures.
- * A stronger vision is needed for developing and then delivering hydrogen-based opportunities and solutions.
- * It will be imperative for the plan with industry to be backed up with key performance indicators so that progress can be tracked effectively.

d. Investment Fund (item 10)

- * We generally support the proposed update of the Local Growth Assurance Framework, noting that this takes account of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement.
- * We note that it is now proposed to set up a Green Recovery Fund that will leverage £50m on priority projects to tackle the climate emergency. It will be important to robustly track and challenge delivery on this.
- * We noted that action is being taken to carefully assess the implications for investing in infrastructure linked to the current national issues around the economic supply chain and rising construction / materials / labour costs.
- * We feel there is merit in Scrutiny and Audit committee members jointly reviewing the outcomes from the recent Gateway Review of the Investment Fund.

e. City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (item 11)

We generally welcomed this report and look forward to the allocation to be confirmed through the government's spending review.

We flagged the following particular issues:

- * The ongoing importance of securing a north Bristol Park and Ride, noting the need to take every step we can to increase public transport use given the continued traffic problems in this part of Bristol, not helped by the 'ripple effect' of commuters parking in residential streets since the introduction of residents parking zones in the more inner city areas of Bristol.
- * Securing a solution to the Brislington A4 transport corridor that does not involve building a new road on the Brislington railway path.
- * Recognising the A38 as a key transport corridor within Bristol.

* Securing a more sustainable transport solution for the M32 and adjacent communities.

f. Bus Service Improvement Plan (item 12)

We welcomed the latest working draft of the plan.

We raised a number of issues, noting that they will be addressed through the plan and the enhanced partnership. These include:

* The need to enhance and upgrade significantly the specific infrastructure around bus stops, including the quality of passenger shelters, waste bins, and real time information for passengers; and mobile phone charging points. There is a case for implementing this on a 'tackling the worst first' basis.

* Routing of services – we should look to introduce orbital routes into the network of routes that connect communities to city centres; and also factor in the need to better connect important work locations to bus services, for example Avonmouth.

* Delivering an enhanced bus passenger experience through cashless payments and through ticketing.

g. Supported bus services procurement (item 13)

We welcomed this report. Noting that the issue of procuring a Cribbs Patchway Metrobus Extension will be taken forward, it was suggested that the option of a Metrobus route serving the South Bristol Link should also be considered again.

h. Proposed future leadership structure (item 18)

We noted the Chief Executive's proposed leadership structure for the Combined Authority.

We note that inevitably it will take time to recruit the right people to take up the permanent senior leadership roles. Given this, we recognise some interim arrangements may be necessary, especially for the Environment Director role given we are in a climate emergency.

Councillor Winston Duguid

Chair

West of England Combined Authority Overview & Scrutiny Committee.