

WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY COMMITTEE
8th April 2022

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The following questions were submitted by the deadline:

Q1 – Councillor Mark Weston (Leader of the Conservative Group on Bristol City Council)

We are aware that the WECA Mayor uses a private email address dannorris@mayorofthewest.co.uk for correspondence linked to his position. Is this communication subject to the Freedom of Information Act to ensure transparency?

All correspondence relating to the Metro Mayor's role is subject to Freedom of Information requests regardless of which email address is used.

Q2 – Suzanne Audrey

It is my understanding that North Somerset Council had hoped to join the West of England Combined Authority but their request to join was vetoed by Bristol's elected Mayor in 2020.

Please can you give an update on whether there are any plans for, or discussions about, North Somerset Council joining the West of England Combined Authority?

There are no current discussions about North Somerset Council joining the West of England Combined Authority. The Combined Authority continues to work with North Somerset Council on a number of strategic issues such as the recent highly successful Bus Service Improvement Plan bringing in £105million.

Q3 – Colin Gardner: Co-chair TRAPP'D (Thornbury Residents Against Poorly Planned Development)

The Climate Emergency paper sets out a 3-point plan to achieve the goal of carbon neutrality, the third of which is to “drastically reduce the number of car journeys, facilitating a modal shift from private cars and reducing car mileage by 40% by 2030”. The need for this in the context of the binding carbon neutrality goal is both welcome and unarguable, but the test of WECA's resolve will be the willingness to enforce that principle as a priority, including in the Local Plans that are shown in the papers as being within scope of consideration for this policy.

My question is therefore, firstly, does WECA agree that spatial choices for major housing development may have a significant influence on the quantity of private car mileage? Secondly, if so, will WECA require that the forthcoming

SDS and Local Plans expressly evaluate the impact of the spatial alternatives on private car mileage on a uniform basis, and afford great weight to avoiding transport carbon.?

If we are to meet our ambitious net zero targets there will need to be big reductions in the number of car journeys. This will not happen overnight and people will need to have reliable, affordable and convenient public transport alternatives if they are to make this change. We will also need much, much more financial support and powers from the government to make our ambitions a reality.

The aim of a Spatial Development Strategy is to set out broadly where and how growth will be located over the next twenty years. Its intention would be for homes, jobs and infrastructure growth to be organised around sustainable transport to meet the plan's objectives for healthy, resilient and low carbon communities.

The Spatial Development Strategy evidence base is evaluating the impact of alternatives to using cars as well as public transport accessibility. This work informs the Spatial Strategy and includes a Carbon Impact Assessment and Infrastructure and Investment Plan topic paper(s). The evidence base documents are published to support a Spatial Development Strategy when it is consulted on.

Q4 – David Redgewell Southwest transport Network and Rail future Severnside

In view of level of noncommercial bus service now operating in the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council.

with 60 plus service reductions and 5 service withdrawals from 24th April 2022 including socially necessary services like the Y2 Bristol bus and coach station Eastville park, Fishponds, Downend, Bromley Heath, winterbourne, and Coalpit heath to Yate park and ride, Railway station, Yate bus station and chipping sodbury. T2 Bristol bus and coach station, Montpellier railway station approach Gloucester Road ,Bishopton, Horfield, Filton, Patchway, cribbs causeway bus and coach station Aztec west, Almondbury, Hortham, Rudgeway, Alverston, and Thornbury. Y 3 Bristol bus and coach station to Stapleton Road, Eastville park, Stapleton, winterbourne, Frampton cotterell, Coalpit heath and yate Park and ride. no longer serving the Railway station, and Yate Town centre bus station and a 90 minute frequencies. These services had financial support from South Gloucestershire council before being transferred to the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority service x2 only operating Bristol bus and coach station to long Ashton, Backwell and Yatton and no longer serving Worle and Weston super mare.

Weston super mare to the chew valley service what action is the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council doing to review the Noncommercial bus Network from August 2020.

This would be in line with 1985 Transport act and the Transport act of 2000 to produce a bus and coach Network the support the social needs of communities to access Work, Education, shopping, Health care and hospitals leisure and Tourism. needs within the bus service improvements plan n including mobility hubs and Transport interchanges, within the enhanced quality partnership with bus and coach operators within the city region.?

Bus passenger numbers have not recovered from pre-pandemic levels and currently stand at around 76%, with concessionary travel at around 58%. This has clearly had a knock-on impact on fare revenue.

Commercial bus companies run routes where there is a profit and they have taken the decision to withdraw some services such as the T2 and Y2 due to long-standing low passenger numbers. Alternative services are available for passengers to reach to destinations in those areas.

There have been driver shortages due to sickness and an overall lack of drivers in the workforce. Training more drivers and some of the latest timetable changes should help improve reliability.

The Government have made clear that their latest (very late in the day) support package will be the last one. The Combined Authority will continue to support bus services where possible, within financial means, but it will not be possible to save all services. The Combined Authority will work to encourage bus use.

Longer term the Combined Authority is working with bus operators on building a more sustainable and reliable network. This will be helped by the highly successful award of £105m funding won by the Combined Authority and North Somerset for bus improvements. Franchising remains on the table as an option.

Q5 – David Redgewell Southwest transport Network and Rail future Severnside

In view Government white paper on leaving up in England and role of Regional mayoral combined Authorities. known as level 3 Authorities. with plans to make the local Enterprise partnerships a committee of the west of England mayoral combined Authority.

What progress is being made to setting up proper integrated Transport Authority with precept Powers to transfer the transport and planning staff from the unity councils to the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority to run the Planning and Transport functions of the Mayoral Authority and to set a fully integrated transport Authority.

For North Somerset council which is part of the local Enterprise partnership. But not part of the west of England mayoral combined Authority.

To fully join the west of England mayoral combined Authority as part of a governance review in time for the 2025 metro mayor Elections.

The Levelling Up White Paper raises a number of issues, but the direction of travel is very clear – the Government want to ‘fold in’ Local Enterprise Partnerships into Combined Authorities. The issues arising in relation to North Somerset will be considered over the next few months. Transferring transport staff to the Combined Authority is a sensible move.

Q6 – Leslie Forrest, Chairman South Gloucestershire District of CPRE Avon and Bristol

According to the information made available for comment on the South Gloucestershire Local Plan, as of Monday 4th April no decisions have been made on the housing numbers to be demanded of the three authorities and the location of strategic sites to meet the totals. Which WECA committee or other decision-making entity, will adjudicate on this topic, when will it meet, and can you confirm it will conduct the debate in open forum?

The Spatial Development Strategy is intended to be an item on the July Committee and will be a public item for discussion.

Q7 – Cllr Vic Pritchard, Leader of the Conservative Group on B&NES Council

How many members of staff have left the employment of WECA since May 2021?

As the Combined Authority has sought to ensure it has the necessary skills to deliver for the region in this next phase of its development, some staff have decided to leave the organisation. In the period of 1st May 2021 until 31st March 2022, 35 staff have left the combined authority, representing a rolling turnover rate of 15.5%. This is against an average turnover rate in local government of 13.4%.

Q8 – Cllr Vic Pritchard, Leader of the Conservative Group on B&NES Council

Can you please list the job titles of all members of staff that have left the employment of WECA since May 2021?

As the Combined Authority is a small organisation, a list of job titles would be identifiable to individuals. It is in the public domain that the Director of Infrastructure, Director of Investment and Corporate Services and Director of Legal Services have left the organisation. The remaining leavers are spread across all directorates and levels of seniority.

Q9 – David Worskett, Chair, CPRE Avon and Bristol

Will WECA explain the process for developing a strategy for the rural areas as part of the overall Spatial Development Strategy and who is being consulted about it?

Spatial Development Strategies are prepared in accordance with the statutory regulations for Spatial Plans. This requires it to be published and formally consulted on with the public for 12 weeks.