

## West of England Committee meeting on Friday, 23 September 2022

### Questions received from the public

**Item 1 – David Redgewell on behalf of South west transport Network and Railfuture Severnside. Somerset catch the bus campaign. And Gloucestershire catch the bus campaign.**

#### Question 1:

What progress is the mayor or Councillor Don Alexander making with the metro mayor Dan Norris and west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council.

to make sure that the key gaps in the Bristol city Region bus Network.

Following the Beeching style bus cuts from the 9th October 2022 .

The deepest bus cuts in any city region

In England.

By first group plc west of England buses.

And the Ending of services operated by HCT group of London. Including community transport and Dial ride .

Only 511,512 Bristol local services

62 Thornbury, Berkeley, sharpness, cam Dursey may lane bus station.

Are being filled.

le the following Routes such as

Bristol city centre, st Anne's park Bristlington, knowle ,Hengrove hospital

Services 36 ,96 .

178 Bristol bus and coach station , Bristol Temple meads station,Arnos vale Bristlington, keynsham ,Timsbury Markbury ,Paulton,midsomer,Norton,

Westfield and Radstock.

Services y4/y4 Bristol bus and coach station,Eastville park Stapleton Frenchay winterbourne Frampton cotterell Coalpit heath yate park and ride and yate railway station and bus station.

Services 515 Stockwood whitchurch Hengrove hospital imperial park .

505 long Ashton park and ride, Clifton Down ,cotham Horfield and Southmead hospital bus station

506 Southmead hospital bus station

Horfield Eastville park ,Easton Lawrence hill,Oid market Bristol city centre.

516 whitchurch estate, Hengrove, knowle

52 South Bristol to Bristol city centre.

Now has a new operator

Transporta

82 Radstock, Westfield, midsomer Norton paulton.

Services 11 Bath bus and coach to Bathampton.

Services 12 Bath bus and coach station to whiteway

Jointly with North Somerset council and Somerset county council.

126 wells bus and coach station, cheddar,Axbridge ,winscombe, Banwell locking Weston bus and coach station

D2 Bath bus and coach station to Midford Norton st Phillips Rode Beckington and Frome.

Evening service.

Bath spa to Frome has a time service.

But not the villages

This route are key orbital socially important routes serving some of Bristol poorest communities.

The Metro Mayor responds as follows:

As you know Firstbus announced cuts and changes to commercial services and Bristol Community Transport stopped running all their services. At the same time the West of England Combined Authority was looking to renew contracts with operators on supported services that were coming to an end.

There are a toxic mix of challenges on the buses at the moment. Overall, about 95% of people who used to travel by bus pre pandemic are back travelling again. But they are making fewer journeys – currently around 75% of pre pandemic levels. Important to note is also that there is a severe bus driver shortage meaning some bus companies are reluctant to take on extra work that they cannot staff. Indeed the bus driver shortage has also led to unreliability issues on current routes - not just in our region but nationally too.

There has been money on the table for supported services throughout this period - and no stone has been left unturned in the search for different bus operators. Even at this stage if other operators can be found to run supported services this can happen.

I am pleased two new bus operators are now starting to provide services including the important buses to Southmead and South Bristol hospitals. We have managed to find different operators to run the 12, 622, 22, 82, 96, 52, 505, 506, 515, 516, 511 and 512 bus services which otherwise would have been cut. David, thank you for your help with this.

Of course it is not in any way perfect and I really sympathise with anyone who faces losing a bus. It is tough at the moment, really tough. I do hope that when we can

introduce new services next Spring, thanks to the securing the second best bus funding package in the whole country, passengers will begin to see a better service that they need and deserve.

### **Question 2:**

What progress is being made with the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and North Somerset council by the city council to recruit more bus and coach drivers for First group stagecoach group and the smaller bus and coach companies.

The Metro Mayor responds as follows:

A new West of England driver training scheme will launch next month. The West of England Combined Authority has been working closely with local bus operators across the region for some months on bus driver recruitment campaigns. You may have recently seen posters at bus stops about switching to a career as a bus driver or seen the leaflets delivered to many homes. We are pursuing new ideas including teaching people to drive a car ahead of driving a bus. If you have any ideas too, please let me know.

### **Item 2 – Penny Sykes**

#### **Question 1:**

Regarding: Progress towards Climate and Ecological Strategy. Thank you for the opportunity to see the Update on Progress towards Climate and Ecological Strategy. Please note that I consider the word ‘progress’ to indicate a move towards the delivery of the end goals by the date identified, and not just a report on where the thematic activities have got to. Therefore if ‘progress’ is not happening that the report should clearly and transparently identify that fact, and then set out the plan to get back on track. Risks to delivery should be clearly set out with mitigation plans. I note from the report that risks are included in Annex 1; sadly, this was not available via the link provided therefore it is not clear whether risks have been clearly identified and mitigated.

Looking specifically at the Low Carbon Transport Theme: two of the actions are:

1. Reduce number of car trips and freight journeys, and
2. Increase uptake of public transport use

My question is this:

As one of the actions is to increase the uptake of public transport use, I think we can safely say that it is a generally accepted view that public transport is a key element in the reduction of reliance on cars and therefore transport decarbonisation. How can a combined authority such as WECA, with aims to reduce car usage and achieve Net Zero by 2030 allow the current situation whereby First are completely withdrawing bus services from a number of areas? This leaves residents, and those working in these areas, with no choice other than to use cars. This now increases the number of car trips, going against your declared aim of reducing trips. At the same time this discriminates against those with no car, whether they have no licence due to age (both young and old), due to a disability,

or cannot afford a car/fuel, or have made a choice to move away from having a car to play their part in supporting Net Zero aspirations. For those without access to a car they are being prevented from continuing with activities outside their immediate neighbourhood – preventing young people accessing jobs and education, preventing those less able from leaving their neighbourhoods at all, ending many peoples' work opportunities, chances of social engagement, and access to shops and facilities.

We can acknowledge that there are economic stresses on the suppliers of public transport, and I am specifically referring to WECA's First bus operator. But I would like to know what WECA plans to do to either encourage First to reverse its decisions or to provide an alternative for those who will now be disadvantaged.

What is the point in you having an action to deliver tap on tap off facilities on buses if there are no buses? And why improve key infrastructure if there are no buses? Maybe now is the time to review the actual usefulness of the planned activities in the Strategy; how about one that delivers improved frequency and accessibility of buses by providing buses themselves? The cynic in me feels it will be that much easier for you to declare you have met your current goals if there are not actually any buses to improve or any need for updated infrastructure.

The Metro Mayor responds as follows:

Thank you for your feedback on the Climate and Ecological Strategy. This is the first such update. After the super-hot temperatures this Summer it is clearer than ever that we face a climate emergency. It is vital that we both monitor and look at what more can be done. Very many of the actions required are not something that the West of England Combined Authority can do alone, but requires efforts from national government, our unitary authority partners and the wider community.

You are absolutely right that we need a great bus network if we are to reach our ambitious net zero targets. I don't have any powers to compel private companies to run buses. Where buses have been or were due to be cut, subject to competition rules, I have looked for alternative operators. This has had some partial success.

Bus companies face many challenges. Overall, about 95% of people who used to travel by bus pre pandemic are back travelling again. But they are making fewer journeys – so bus fare income is about 75% of what it was. The costs of running buses are up substantially – with an over 40% annual inflation rate. Very significantly there is a severe shortage of bus drivers. Rest assured the West of England Combined Authority is taking practical steps to recruit more drivers at pace.

We also have cheaper single fares starting this weekend - £2 for adults in Bath and Bristol plus sizeable reductions in other areas. Children will now travel for just £1. The investment in tap-on, tap-off is also designed to make bus travel more attractive, grow passenger numbers, reduce operating costs and ultimately put public transport on a more stable footing for the long term, precisely to address the climate and ecological challenges we face.

**Item 3 – Emilia Melville on behalf of West of England Shared Transport & Active Travel Steering Group (WESTACT)**

**Question 1:**

1. Is it the opinion of WECA that it is possible to deliver a fully integrated bus network with the Enhanced Partnership rather than with Franchising? If so please explain how the limitations of the Enhanced Partnership will be addressed.

The Metro Mayor responds as follows:

The limitations of an Enhanced Partnership include that I cannot set the routes, frequencies and running hours of a stable bus network nor control the fare revenue. I also cannot set standards for bus vehicles, emissions, seating or design. I therefore want to keep franchising as an option on the table but in order to progress this we need time and the West of England Combined Authority would need a brand new team with the capabilities to run the bus network. I also remain concerned that we don't have another income stream to cross subsidise with such as a tram system that other Metro Mayors have. The current Enhanced Partnership is working well and will include legally binding commitments by all partners to make best use of the large amount of funding that we have been super successful in securing.

**Question 2:**

Does WECA have plans to set up a West of England wide integrated transport forum for public discussion and input from civil society to strategic transport planning?

The Metro Mayor responds as follows:

The West of England Combined Authority regularly listens and carries out formal engagement with the public in the lead up to producing strategic plans. After all this is where many great ideas come from.

End