

Comments of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 12 December 2022

The Committee welcomed the Metro Mayor for a 45 minute wide ranging question and answer session. Subjects included the current bus situation, taking on the bus stop responsibility, the current energy marketing campaign that features a photograph of the Metro Mayor and a discussion about when the Metro Mayor will make the long awaited appointment of a deputy.

The other general observation is the role of the Unitaries and the role of WECA. Members did not feel that there was a clear approach to whom is responsible for delivery and strategy, with Bristol CC wanting to hand over staff to WECA whilst the Unitaries are still recruiting. It would be helpful if the WECA committee could clarify who is the strategic transport authority and who will do what in the future.

Item 9 Supported Bus Services

The Committee scrutinised the report that sets out the overall response to buses bringing together supported bus services, funded by the transport levy. The committee overall thought the rationale looked sensible but some members still had concerns about the more rural communities where transport economics are very different, due to less usage. In some of these communities anecdotal information suggests that car usage is going up as rural bus services decline, which is the contra of the objectives.

The committee noted the very tight time schedules on this piece of work which has put a lot of pressure on the process. Fuller details will be available after Wednesday, so that a considered decision can be made at Friday's committee meeting.

The officers confirmed to Cllr Plowden that all the services that had been included in the invitation to tender had a response.

Councillors noted that previous initiatives had not been well enough communicated to the public. Officers were very aware of this and explained that with this campaign the intention was to communicate through wider media coverage to reach as many local residents as possible.

The officers explained that Covid in particular had changed demand. The DRT initiative will give us a lot of new data that will be helpful in planning new routes going forward. It was noted that suppliers were proposing to bring their own IT solutions as part of the package, but that the Combined Authority will still own the data and that this would be made available to Community Transport providers, as part of the overall approach.

Councillors requested that the information provided on the 14 DRT maps be consolidated also into one large map.

The officers explained in greater detail about the Demand Response Transport (DRT) process. In essence, you will book via telephone, app or via a website and will be able to request a bus to arrive at a bus stop or a virtual bus stop within an hour. In time, a dynamic derivative of DRT would probably be able to reduce the time frame. It was noted that this is not competition for existing commercial bus services and the importance was that residents would either have a virtual bus stop

or an existing actual stop. The plan is that it enhances use of the commercial services. It was noted that there was very little coverage in the centre of Bristol.

Much of this new service would be on 18 seater minibuses which means that the normal licensing arrangements for drivers on bigger buses will not apply. Councillor Burchell raised concern about possible safety aspects of the vehicles and drivers.

Independent analysis provided an indicative cost per passenger subsidy which was shown to be more competitive than conventional bus journeys. The fares would be in line with the existing fares packages.

Councillor MacFie questioned where else this is operating on the British mainland. Examples were given of South Wales, Lincolnshire and a small company near Ilminster in Somerset.

Overall, the committee believed DRT looked a worthwhile initiative but it was recognised that the overall approach to the bus network is only funded until 2024/2025. However successful these initiatives are in DRT and BSIP, future funding commitment will be necessary beyond that date.

Item 10 Transforming Cities Fund

The committee welcomed this report and spent some time questioning the Cycle hangers full business case and just what that entailed. It was explained that the cycle hangers which are specifically located in residential areas, really did just cover bicycles and that there was a separate project that would be looking at multi modal storage of cycles, scooters and cargo bikes. Cllr Burchell commented that the sites for the cycle hangers and the transport hubs had yet to be scoped out.

The committee noted that West of England Combined Authority had identified up to £20m of opportunities which could absorb the current £10m underspend.

Some Councillors felt the lessons learned summary hard to read and officers confirmed this was a condensed version and the fuller version would be made available.